

1200 UNIT 5:

Industrialization

1750 to 1914 CE



Unit 5 Overview

In 1750, many people did things in ways that would have been recognizable to their ancestors. Most everything was made in the home, farm, or small artisanal shops, and mostly by hand. The Industrial Revolution began when people learned to harness new fossil fuels and machines to do work. It transformed the way we worked, the places we lived, our sense of families and identities, our relationships to our food and to each other, and much more. The results weren't the same for everyone, but they helped to shape the modern world.

0:01

Kim Lochner and Colby Burnett are filmed in a video chat. Colby is dressed in a hat and scarf.

Hey Kim!

Hi Colby! Oh wow you look cold! Is there snow on the ground?

Yeah, we got five inches of snow yesterday.

Shame you're not here in Australia with me. It's summer here.

Seriously? But you guys, you're only 18 hours ahead.

Oh no, well I guess thanks to industrialization climate change is moving faster than we thought.

Ahh hemisphere humor, never gets old.

Hi I'm Kim Lochner.

And I'm Colby Burnett. We're introducing Unit 5: Industrialization 1750-1914.

0:41

A painting of a group of men taking part in a formal, democratic meeting; a photograph of constitutions that were drawn up in the long 19th century.

Political transformations shook the world in the long 19th century, ushering in new ideas about sovereignty and the rights of citizens. As if that wasn't enough, another dramatic transformation was taking place after 1750 but, more gradually. In this unit we'll look through the production and distribution frame to explore the story of that transformation: the birth of the industrialized world.

Montage of artworks that depict early industrialized cities, with factories where houses might have been.

Political revolutions changed who was allowed to participate in government. But the Industrial Revolution changed everything about how humans lived and worked. It sounds like I'm exaggerating, but really in terms of production and distribution the only thing in history as transformative as industrialization was the advent of farming thousands of years earlier.

1:31

Artworks from around the world show pre-industrialization production and distribution, like farming, and weaving on large hand looms.

Most people living before industrialization did many things just like their ancestors had. The majority were farmers or herders. What they produced was for themselves and for local consumption. And it was made in the home or in small workshops. Most of the energy to do all this work came from their own muscles, from animals, or in some cases from water or wind. The Industrial Revolution changed all of this, pretty quickly in some places and slowly in others.

Drawings of early industrial factories and machinery, such as steamships

It began with the discovery of how to use fossil fuels like coal and later oil to power machines to do work. Industrialization allowed humans to produce more goods and to transport them faster than ever before. With factories, steamships, and railroads shifts in how the economy distributed wealth within and between different communities were already underway and these new systems of production sped up those changes.

2:33

A painting of a wealthy class of people conversing in an elegant courtyard is contrasted with paintings depicting factory workers

Wealth was now concentrated in the hands of a few business leaders in industrial nations. In those nations, people moved from rural regions to cities in search of factory work as wage laborers. The model of an extended family living in the same large village broke down and was replaced by a nuclear family in a small apartment. While parents worked all day, schools emerged to train children to become workers.

In this unit we focus on the diverse impacts of industrialization from 1750 to 1914. We investigate, “How did industrialization transform societies around the world?”, “How did it change the way people worked, lived, and learned in the long 19th century?”, “How did people react to these changes?”, “How did all these changes contribute to creating the world we live in today?”

3:32

Chart shows trade per capita for England and Wales, Spain, the Netherlands, and France. Around 1750, exports from Britain increased dramatically while the other regions decreased or leveled off.

One way to take on these questions is with data. Of course, we don’t have all the numerical data for this era but we can combine the pieces we do have to get a picture of how things were changing. For example, countries that were industrialized could now make stuff quicker and cheaper than countries that weren’t. This meant that they had more goods to export to other countries and they could sell those goods much cheaper than local merchants and producers could.

In this chart we see how exports from Britain rose dramatically as it industrialized. Before about 1750, exports from all parts of Britain, including the regions of England and Wales, weren’t that high. Sure they were slowly growing, but then in 1750 as Britain industrialized exports suddenly skyrocketed. We can contrast that with Spain, the Netherlands, and France which by 1800 hadn’t really industrialized. None of these countries saw a big growth in exports like Britain.

4:37

Chart shows the number of people employed as farmers dropping dramatically across all regions between 1750-1900.

Then around 1800 we can also look at the dramatic decrease in the percentage of people working as farmers. This drop occurred in several European countries, including Britain and others that industrialized after it.

This chart shows how quickly the percentage of people employed as farmers dropped in Britain around 1750 when their Industrial Revolution began. We can see the same change happening a little later in the Netherlands, Italy, and France as they industrialized. The change happened even later in Poland which industrialized last among these countries.

5:15

Map shows gradual, and then rapid increase in emissions as countries industrialized.

Finally, we can look at the growth of CO₂ emissions from 1750 on. These emissions came mostly from factories and other industrial sources. This map shows that emissions rose first in Western and Central Europe, especially in Britain, but it started slowly. Even in Britain industrialization was still quite limited between 1750 and 1800 compared to later decades, then it began to rise more rapidly and other parts of Europe and the United States began to industrialize. Other regions followed more gradually.

A painting of presumably enslaved people working in a field; a montage of photographs showing the cramped and dirty conditions as people, including children, work in industrial factories

6:39

A map zooms in on the British Caribbean colonies; a montage of artworks depict enslaved people working on plantations, making money for the ruling class.

7:27

A photo of a flyer announcing the abolishment of slavery in Britain

Kim interrupts and the camera cuts to the video chat showing Kim and Colby

The rapid industrialization of countries like Britain was made possible by free labor and cheap labor as well as colonial resources. In colonies abroad it was the exploitation of resources and enslaved workers. At home it was the exploitation of wage laborers. Industrialization turned more and more women, men, and children into wage laborers. They worked in factories, farms, or offices for a weekly or hourly wage. Much of the world's population now formed a working class or proletariat: people who sold their labor because they had nothing else to sell. They were paid for their work and used that pay to buy consumer goods made by others. In other words wage laborers helped stimulate the free market economic system: the capitalist system.

This transformation to paid work helped eliminate the legal status of slavery in much of the world. But the capitalist, free market economy also often featured low pay and terrible working conditions. Many formerly enslaved people now found themselves working for meager wages.

The impact of industrialization was uneven and we can see evidence of this by zooming in on the British Caribbean colonies. In 1750 this was a society based on the labor of enslaved Africans. A middle class of overseers ran things for a ruling class of plantation owners. The enslaved workers experienced racism, danger, and violence. All the while, they harvested and processed sugar that was in high demand in Europe and around the world.

While political rights in Britain gradually expanded in the 19th century they were almost completely absent from Britain's colonial societies. But pressure for reform grew both from the enslaved people and from political liberals in Britain.

Less than a century later in 1834 Britain abolished slavery and its colonies. Of course, the plantation owners still needed laborers. But formerly enslaved people wanted to grow food on their own land or start businesses. In response, plantation owners...

Plantation owners actually imported workers from other regions especially India.

You're early.

Well, I just want to make sure we tell them that even though these Indian workers were not legally enslaved, they were indentured.

Yes, they were contractually obligated to work for their employer for a period of years. Enslavement and indentured servitude often looked pretty similar though. The workers were treated terribly...

They were treated terribly. They were confined to estates, brutally punished for any infraction, and paid pitiful amounts. Sorry go ahead.

This is when you jump in.

8:35

A black and white photograph of Indian workers standing crowded together; another photo shows young enslaved people working on a plantation

Photographs of more modern industrial machinery that would process sugarcane

Oh okay. So then, by the late 1840s Indian workers started to demand reforms. They wanted better treatment and better pay. Conditions improved only gradually. Plantation owners often tried to pit the formerly enslaved African workers against newly conscripted workers from India by offering one group advantages over the other. Eventually, workers united across the color line.

Slowly, they achieved reforms. But labor in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean remained a difficult and underpaid job well into the 20th century when machines took over much of the work.

9:15

A painting of a wealthy man sitting at a desk is contrasted with artworks and photos of people working in dangerous and crowded working conditions.

Photographs of people protesting for better wages and working conditions.

The situation in the British Caribbean is one of many examples of the uneven effects of industrialization across different regions. As you will see in this unit. Egyptian industrialization took off and then stalled. Japanese industrialization was slow to start but it eventually propelled the country to great power status. Some regions, like India, saw a decline in production during the Industrial Revolution.

Imperialism, which we discuss in the next unit, played a big role in these regional differences. People living in the same place also experienced the Industrial Revolution differently. The wealthy generally benefited from it. But workers and enslaved people often paid the costs. Many workers lived in crowded conditions and labored in filthy, dangerous jobs. Women's experiences were different from men's and the lives of rural people were very different from those living in cities. In each case, reformers rose to challenge the negative impacts of industrialization.

But reform and change only came through prolonged struggles. Those struggles, as much as anything, help to create the world in which we live.

10:37

So, modern humans have existed for over 200,000 years, agricultural societies have been around for more than 12,000, but every aspect of modern life was from a change in production and distribution only two and a half centuries ago?

It's like one of those makeover shows where the ugly duckling becomes a swan.

Ahh but in this unit we'll ask, is a swan better than a duckling?

Actually, they're both delicious.

What? I'm kidding. (music playing)