

History
UNFOLDING

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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The Industrial Revolution in the Early Republic

Introduction

America's Industrial Revolution

In 1800, the United States of America was a sparsely populated young republic. Nearly everyone in that republic lived in a rural area and farmed or depended directly on farming for survival. Only a handful of towns had more than 10,000 people living in them. Land was plentiful. Labor was in short supply.

The Industrial Revolution would transform this rural society. And yet these features of the young republic—its huge size, its agrarian nature, its constant need for labor and labor-saving technology—would shape that industrial transformation throughout the 1800s. By 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, the young republic was still mainly agricultural. Yet this nation of 31 million was filling up rapidly. And industrialization had already changed it in significant ways. East of the Mississippi, the country was tied together by a rapidly growing system of canals, roads and rails. It had several cities with populations of more than 100,000 each. And a steadily increasing standard of living was becoming the norm.

The twelve illustrations in this booklet focus on a number of central themes in the early history of the industrial transformation of American society. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

A Growing National Marketplace

The illustrations for this lesson focus attention on the role of innovation in transportation and communication as an essential spur to economic development in the large and widely dispersed early American republic.

Mechanical Power and Factory Production

America was an agrarian society in the early 1800s. And it was constantly short of labor. These were two additional factors that had major effects on the way the nation industrialized. Industrialization depended heavily on agricultural production—and, tragically, on plantation slavery as well.

Labor and Labor Unrest

A shortage of labor in America actually gave workers here an advantage over their European counterparts. But industrialization still created new pressures and uncertainties for workers. The three illustrations here focus on a number of these pressures and uncertainties, and on the response of American workers to them.

Industry and Social Change

While it is true that industrialization meant low wages and miserable working conditions for some, it also meant a better and steadily rising standard of living for most. And this prosperity attracted millions of immigrants—despite the fact that their reception was not always friendly. Tensions about immigration, about family life, and about many other aspects of life reflected the disruptive force of industrial growth.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*The Industrial Revolution in the Early Republic***OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will better understand the central role played by new modes of transportation in the early industrialization of the United States in the mid-1800s.

A Growing National Marketplace

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

the Industrial Revolution began in England with the use of steam power to drive machinery in mining and textiles. The biggest need there was for faster and cheaper ways to make basic goods for a large population. England was already the master of the seas, and its land area was small. So transportation was not a big problem. In the United States, however, a vast territory was just being settled in the early 1800s. High transportation costs made it hard to ship goods from one part of this territory to another. That's why many early mechanical inventions in America had to do with transportation. The steamboat, for example, made it far easier to carry goods up the Mississippi and many other rivers. Canals were also vital, especially the Erie Canal, shown in the bottom drawing here. Roads, canals, and steamboats made the nation a huge single market for the products of farms and factory.

Illustration 2

Economic hard times after 1837 brought an end to the canal building frenzy. But by then the railroad era had already begun. In fact, by 1840 there were as many miles of rail lines as canals. By 1860, rail lines had increased ten times more, to 30,626 miles. All settled parts of the nation were linked. It was now easy for farmers in Illinois to ship produce to New York, for northern textile mills to get cheap cotton from Mississippi, or for Massachusetts shoe makers to send shoes to Kentucky or Missouri. After the Civil War, the building of transcontinental railroads, shown here, tied the nation together from coast to coast.

Illustration 3

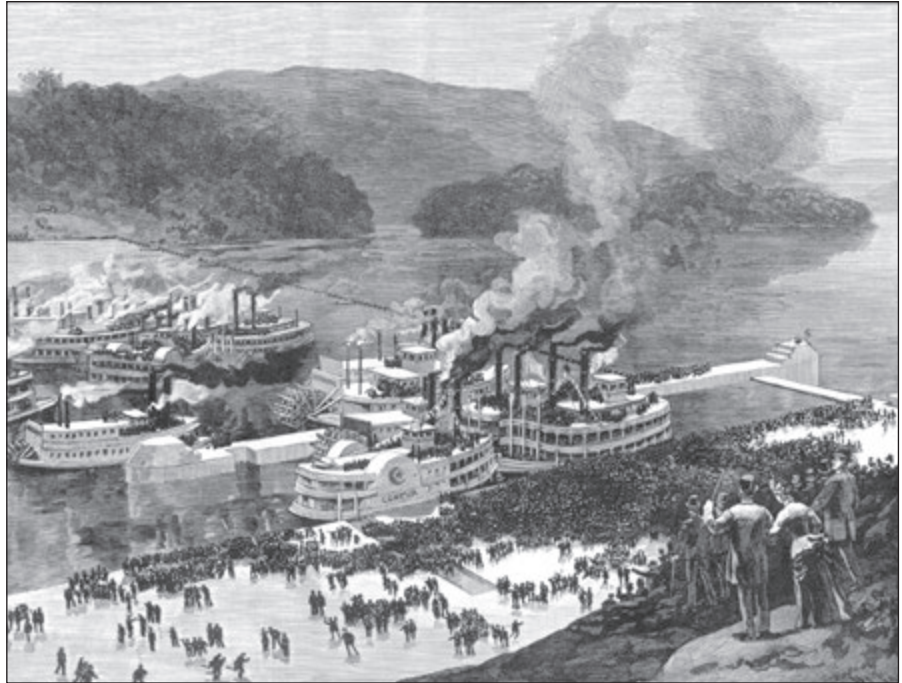
Another important device was the one invented by Samuel B. Morse, shown here with his invention. Morse was actually a painter. But in the 1830s, he began to perfect the telegraph. In 1844, he proved its value by sending the words "What hath God wrought" from Washington to Baltimore. The telegraph quickly became a necessity for companies doing business across long distances. It was a prime example of how American ingenuity was meeting the challenge of America's huge, wide open spaces. And it began a process, still under way today, in which information transfer is instantaneous and no longer depends on the transporting of any physical object.

Lesson 1—A Growing National Marketplace

Illustration 1

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The boats in the top picture were important in the early Industrial Revolution in America. What form of power moved these boats?
2. What do historians mean by the phrase “Industrial Revolution?”
3. In the early 1800s, a number of key transportation inventions helped to link all parts of the U.S. as never before. For example, steamboats were able to sail upstream on their own power. From what you know about U.S. geography, why would this have been important in linking the nation together more?
4. The drawing below is of the Erie Canal, which opened in 1825. Why was this canal so important in linking the nation economically?
5. What transportation advantages did steamboats have over canals? What advantages did canals have over steamboats?



Courtesy of Dover Publications

Follow-up Activity

1. **Small-group activity:** Pretend you are merchants in Boston in 1840. You have a huge supply of new John Deere steel plows. They are in demand in Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. You want to sell the plows there. But you first have to send an agent to Cincinnati and St. Louis to find wholesalers who will buy large amounts of your plows. Use your library to find out what kinds of transportation were available in 1840. Create a map of the U.S., and plot a route for your agent to take to the two cities mentioned. Then plot a route you would use to ship the plows to the wholesalers. Explain and defend your choice of routes in a brief talk to the class.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Industry and Social Change Illustration 3

AMERICAN SOAP COMPANY
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 284 Washington-street,
 Between Warren and Chambers Street,
 NEW YORK.

LOOK ON THIS PICTURE! THEN ON THIS!



THE OLD WASHING DAY

The tub is full of water, and the woman is washing clothes. A child is sitting on the floor, and another child is playing with a dog. The scene is cluttered and laborious.



THE NEW WASHING DAY

The tub is full of water, and the woman is washing clothes. A child is sitting on the floor, and another child is playing with a dog. The scene is clean and efficient.

AMERICAN LAUNDRY SOAP, MANUFACTURER'S SOAP, CREAM SOAP, PREPARATION.

MANUFACTURERS OF AMERICAN CREAM SOAP!

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