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Introduction

The period from 1750 to 1914 was a pivotal moment in human history. Historians have named it the era of the “modern revolution.” Over the course of Big Era Seven, change in human society became “autocatalytic.” Scientists use this term to describe a chemical process, but it is also a useful historical concept. A catalyst is a person or thing that precipitates a change. Autocatalysis occurs when one kind of change precipitates by itself the need for yet more changes. Since about 1750, a steadily unfolding sequence of changes has transformed human life. Moreover, the dynamic interactions among changes in many different areas—political, economic, technological, cultural, environmental—have, by the very process of interaction, generated the need for even more changes. Once autocatalytic processes got going, they tended to speed up. Overall, global changes have become self-perpetuating and ever accelerating.

The modern revolution involved numerous interacting developments. Six interrelated factors were particularly important:

First, a revolutionary transformation occurred in human use of energy. Until the nineteenth century, the energy basis of human society had been biomass energy, mainly the burning of wood to produce heat, plus human and animal muscle-power. With Big Era Seven the world entered the age of coal and steam power. The fossil fuel era had begun, and this is the era we still live in today. By the early nineteenth century the harnessing of steam power enabled humans to vastly multiply the energy generated from burning coal, thereby greatly expanding the amount of energy available to humans per capita, that is, to each individual. By 1914, petroleum, a second major fossil fuel, began to be extensively used as well. Natural gas is the third important fossil fuel.

Second, unprecedented global population growth accompanied the fossil fuel revolution. In Big Era Seven the world’s population more than doubled, definitively piercing the previous limits on growth. In 1800 the global population stood at around 900 million. By 1914 it stood at around 1.75 billion people. The great increase in human numbers is a sign that major changes were at work.

Third, an industrial transformation got under way. In the Industrial Revolution, humans—western Europeans at first—learned to exploit coal and steam energy to mass produce goods with machines and sell them worldwide. The Industrial Revolution began with production of textiles and eventually spread to other areas of manufacturing, as well as to farming and food processing. In the later nineteenth century, industrialization occurred on a large scale in metallurgical, chemical, and electrical industries. Once begun, it could not be stopped. The Industrial Revolution greatly altered the distribution of wealth and poverty around the world and also engendered new attitudes toward nature and society.

Fourth, a revolution took place in communications and transport. Unprecedented numbers of people in this era took advantage of steamships and railroads to migrate long distances within continental spaces, as well as across oceans. European migrants were especially attracted to areas such as North America and the southern cone of South America, where the climate was reasonably familiar. Asian migrants, especially South Asians and Chinese, settled in many parts of the tropical world, as well as in the Americas.

Fifth, the modern revolution was partly a democratic revolution. Popular revolutionary movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries dramatically reshaped ideas about government and political power. While these movements were initially centered on countries around the rim of the Atlantic, their ideas proved contagious, provoking movements for the abolition of slavery and for representative government, constitutions, universal suffrage, workers' rights, gender equality, and national self-determination, first in Europe and the Americas and later all across Afroeurasia.

Finally, the era witnessed the rise of new colonial empires. Using new technologies of warfare and political control that came out of the Industrial Revolution, the empires of several European states greatly increased in size during this era. The United States, Russia, and Japan also drew on these new capabilities to expand their own empires. All of the imperial states adopted elaborate racial justifications for dominance over other peoples.

LESSON 2

What Was So Hot about Industrialization in Great Britain?

Preparation

Ask students to discuss which of their pieces of clothing are made of cotton. In what area of the world with tropical climates do students think that cotton was grown? Ask students to check the labels in their cotton or cotton-blend shirts or tops to identify where they were made. Ask students if they ever eat sugar or foods with added sugar. Where do they think that sugar is grown? How does that sugar get to them? What makes growing and harvesting of cotton and sugar difficult?

Introduction

The British Industrial Revolution depended on cotton grown in other places because the climate in England could not support cotton plants. In this lesson, students will learn where the British purchased the cotton and how cotton was harvested in those other places. They will also learn about the links between sugar and cotton plantations over time and their influence on the cotton factories that made the British Industrial Revolution so successful.

Activities

1. Distribute copies of Student Handout 1.2.1 (Spread of the Sugar Industry). Have students map the spread of sugar plantations run by Europeans.
2. Referring to the information in Student Handout 1.2.2, ask students to analyze similarities and differences between production on a Caribbean or Brazilian sugar mill and cotton production in an English textile factory in the late eighteenth century. Students may design a diagram or chart to document these similarities and differences.

Spread of the Sugar Industry



1. Use the following facts to map the spread of sugar plantations from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic islands to the Western Hemisphere.
 - European demand for sugar continually increased from the Crusades up to the fifteenth century as profits from revived regional trade and increased connections to Afroeurasian trade routes encouraged more participation from European merchants.
 - During the thirteenth century, sugar plantation owners on Cyprus, which was then under European crusader control, purchased slaves from the Caucasus and prisoners of war to plant, harvest, and process the sugarcane. The creation of the Ottoman Empire ended that source of slaves in the fifteenth century.
 - Sugar plantations on the islands of the eastern Atlantic (Madeira and Canary Islands) used prisoners from the Iberian peninsula, indigenous people of the Canaries (the Guanches), and then slaves imported from West Africa for their supply of coerced labor.
 - In the fifteenth century, Christopher Columbus brought sugarcane plants from a Madeira plantation to the Caribbean region.
 - By 1540 the Spanish and Portuguese established sugar plantations in the Caribbean and Brazil, and depended on West African slaves to plant, harvest, and produce crystallized sugar for export to European markets.
2. Draw lines, arrows, and dots to map the spread of sugar plantations from Afroeurasia to the Americas.

Were Sugar Plantations Early Factories?

Sugar

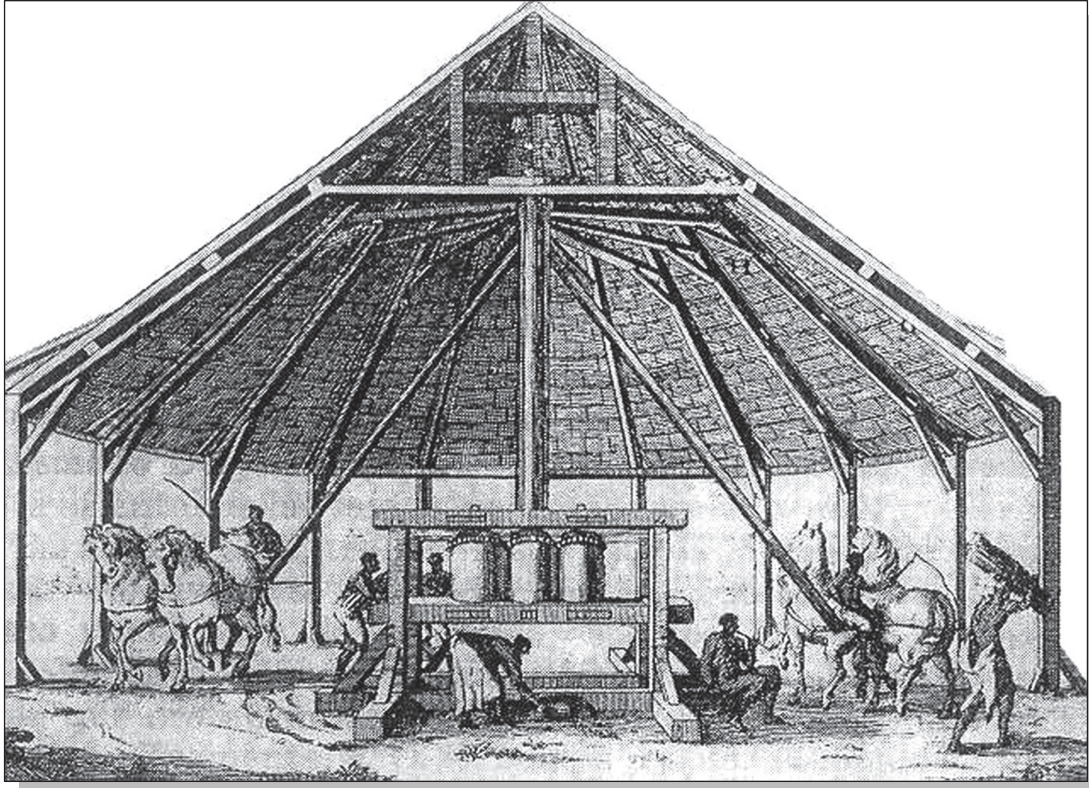
Production of sugar required plentiful rain or irrigation, supervision and organization of planting and cutting, cutting and gathering of wood to boil sugar juice, and directed production to get crushing, boiling, and crystallization done before the cut cane spoiled. There was clear division of specialized jobs to maximize the production of crystallized sugar in a strictly disciplined environment.

Textiles

Production of textiles required the purchase of raw cotton from overseas, the spinning of the raw cotton into thread, the weaving of the thread into cloth, the supply of tools and steam power to make machines run, simple and repetitive sequences of tasks, semi-skilled labor, large buildings to accommodate large-size machines, the location of factories near coal supply, and a strictly disciplined environment to keep the flow of production going.

Much has been made of the impact of textile machinery inventions in the eighteenth century, but it will be apparent that up to the 1760s the machines actually used in the textile industry—like the cane-crushing mills . . . on Caribbean sugar plantations—were of a very traditional kind with several centuries of history behind them. What was really new was the approach to work discipline and organization, which had parallels on plantations also. . . .

Source: Arnold Pacey, *Technology in World Civilization* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 107.



Old animal-powered trapiche from the colonial days

Aspects of Work on a Caribbean or Brazilian Sugar Plantation

- Sugarcane field and sugar mill both essential elements of the plantation
- Slave laborers regarded as interchangeable units
- Labor divided by age and gender
- Labor organized into crews, gangs, and shifts
- Planting, harvesting, and milling scheduled in a time-conscious way
- Rigorous discipline and punctuality maintained
- Fields and mills places of heat, danger, and noise