

LIFE IN THE BIG CITY



Industrial Image of Great Britain

Unit Overview

The Industrial Revolution not only changed how people lived but where they lived. For centuries, most Europeans had resided in rural regions, but the growing factory system brought large numbers of people to towns and cities. Urban areas had difficulty coping with the ever-increasing populace, and a variety of problems arose. This proved to be challenging for governments as well as industries and citizens. Let's see how it all happened.

STOP: Answer Section A Questions

More and More People

The nineteenth century was an era of massive population growth. The amount of people living in many countries doubled and, in some cases, tripled. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the nations of Western Europe had experienced high birth rates, but death rates were high as well. However, this picture began to change. Improvements in the availability of food, sanitation and medicine resulted in lower death rates. In other words, people were living longer. At the same time, birth rates continued to be stable, and the world population quickly increased. For example the population of Western Europe numbered 266 million in 1850. By 1900, the amount of people had expanded to 400 million.



Some countries also experienced an influx of people inspired by the hope of finding greater opportunities in a new place. This practice became known as **immigration**. **Emigration**, on the other hand, was the departure of people from a particular area. Poverty and poor living conditions frequently motivated individuals to make this major change. For instance, a large number of Irish citizens left their homeland for the United States and Great Britain due to repeated crop failures; many residents of Poland emigrated for political reasons. It soon became apparent that the expanding population was to have both positive and negative effects.



Map of British Cities

STOP: Answer Section B Questions

From the Country to the City

As a result of the Industrial Revolution, the world's population not only shifted in size but location. More and more people left the countryside for the city. Although it gave industry the advantage of having a large labor force, cities and towns were simply unprepared for the large wave of new inhabitants. Use the following chart listing several British industrial cities to see how rapidly urban areas grew.

Population Growth in Selected British Cities		
City	Population in 1780	Population in 1880
Manchester	45,000	393,676
Liverpool	35,000	555,425
Sheffield	20,000	284,410
Birmingham	30,000	400,757

While wealthy factory owners built opulent homes on the outskirts, the concentration of large clusters of people in cities, known as **urbanization**, soon produced a variety of problems. There was almost no advanced planning for housing and sanitation which brought about unhealthy and overcrowded conditions. Smoke and soot from nearby factories powered by coal clogged the air and blackened everything. In most cases, streets were unpaved and did not include drains. Industrial waste polluted the waters of nearby rivers and streams; this put untainted drinking water in short supply. Government officials were accustomed to managing with minimal regulations and police officers. The upsurge in population brought about an increase in crime which made better law enforcement a necessity. The rising population caught everyone unprepared.

It was not surprising that frequent epidemics occurred. Severe outbreaks of **cholera** developed in Asia and Europe from 1830 to 1832 and again from 1847 to 1851. The United States also lost large numbers to this disease in 1850. No one at the time understood the cause, but everyone feared its consequences. Rumors surrounding the origin of cholera became the focus of attention. In France, some believed the disease was a government conspiracy to do away with the poorer segments of society by poisoning them. It was relatively easy to make this assumption since the lower class was much more susceptible to illness. The upper and middle class had the advantage of living in spacious houses and apartments with adequate air, light and water. **Tuberculosis** was also a serious threat and became the cause most attributed to death in Western Europe.

STOP: Answer Section C Questions

The Bacterial Revolution

The long-term effects of the Scientific Revolution coupled with the Enlightenment concept that man could manipulate the universe for progress encouraged research

to improve sanitation in cities. **Louis Pasteur**, a French chemist, promoted the idea that microscopic organisms called germs caused disease. Their growth could be repressed by heating a beverage through a process which became known as **pasteurization**. Researchers such as Germany's **Robert Koch** isolated certain bacteria which caused specific illnesses. This led to the development of medicines to combat these diseases. Based on the work of **Joseph Lister**, surgeons applied the germ theory to hospitals and doctors' offices, and the sterilization of hands and medical equipment became common practice. The success of the bacterial revolution is credited for saving millions of lives and is considered the greatest single achievement in the world of medicine.

STOP: Answer Section D Questions

The Role of Government

As problems in urban areas continued to worsen, people began to put their faith in the state and to look to government to resolve these issues. In 1848, Great Britain became the first industrialized nation to create a **National Board of Health** which gave cities the authority to build sewage and sanitation systems. **Sir Edwin Chadwick**, one of the nineteenth century's most dedicated social reformers, made public health improvement his main concern. Chadwick traveled to British industrial cities where he documented unsafe and unhealthy living conditions. When he presented this data to Parliament, his work resulted in the passage of the **Public Health Acts** which required local authorities in Great Britain to appoint medical examiners, to construct paved roads, and to improve housing. Towns and cities also created zoning boards and wrote codes to establish building policies. By 1870, cities in Europe and the United States had made real progress in establishing efficient sewage systems and streets with adequate drainage. The French government ordered certain Parisian slums to be torn down and to be replaced with parks and new structures.



A Horse-drawn Streetcar

The Changing Environment

The growth of industrial cities in Europe and the United States also had a major impact on the environment as well. Rapidly expanding industrial complexes required the removal of forest areas and the consumption of a large amount of natural resources. The factories relied on coal as their primary energy source. This created a dramatic rise in carbon emissions which negatively impacted human health. Water supplies were also endangered, and cities were forced to make plans to improve the quality of nearby rivers and streams.



The British City of Manchester Today

However, advancements in public transportation actually helped to improve the urban environment. In the 1870's, cities began to authorize private companies to operate horse-drawn street cars. By the 1890's, the electric version of this vehicle offered city residents cleaner and faster mobility. Workers no longer had to live within walking distance of the factories. Therefore, cities were able to expand and become a little less congested. On weekends and holidays, the trolleys carried city dwellers to the countryside, the seashore and the race tracks. However, not all workers could afford this form of transportation. In many cases, the inner city became the home of those who earned the least. Neighborhoods were soon segregated by race, nationality or ethnicity.

STOP: Answer Section E Questions

What Does It All Mean?

The movement toward increasing urbanization in the nineteenth century brought about economic development and environmental change. As population continued to increase from both natural causes and immigration, industry also expanded the opportunities available to workers. The new jobs, however, required training and education. The emphasis on providing this preparation for children delayed independence and full maturity.



As a result, adolescence became a recognized phase of life. It also eventually encouraged lower birth rates in industrialized countries. In many cases, urbanization led to urban sprawl and additional environmental concerns. What obligation does industry have to assure clean air and clean water? What role should government play in securing appropriate living conditions in urban areas? These questions continue to be as relevant today as they were in the nineteenth century.

Additional Resources and Activities



[Main Points Worksheet](#)

[Great Cities: Barcelona's Unloved Planner Invents Science of Urbanization Article with Quiz](#)

Pasteurization