



7 Ways that Studying US History 1877 to Modern Times Shapes the Way You Think About the American Economy, Employment, and Consumerism

Your job may suck, but it could be worse without America's rich history full of mistakes.

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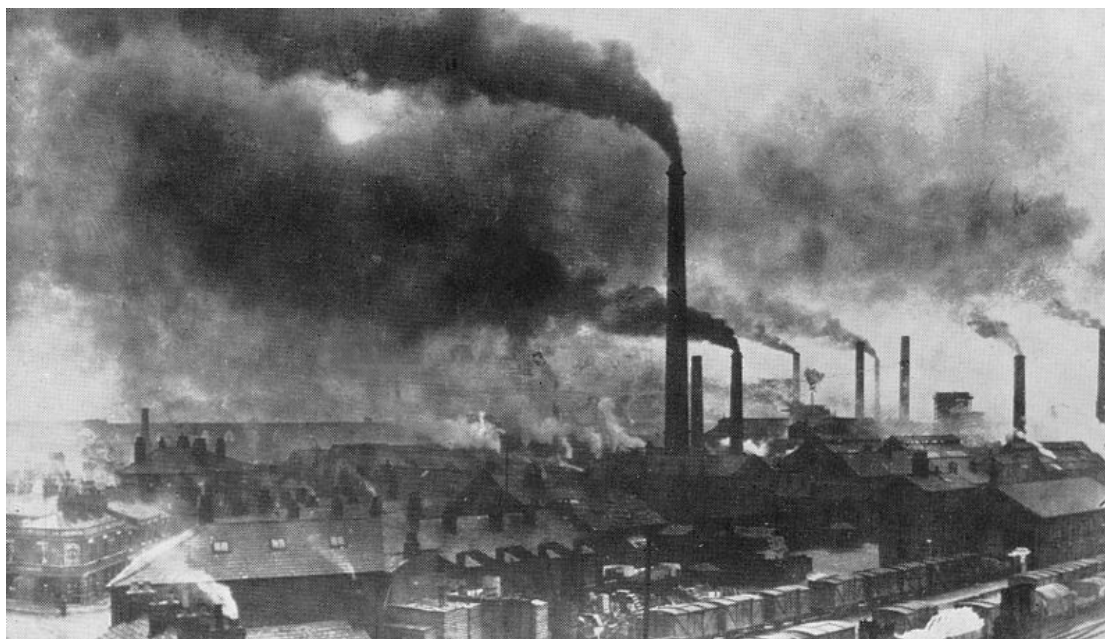
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1. The Industrial Revolution changed the way workers were valued.

[Industrialization](#), Jan. 25, 2019



[Industrial Factory Fumes](#)

After the end of the Civil War, America began to industrialize ([Industrialization, Jan. 25, 2019](#)). Factories like the one pictured above were built in the northern United States which created many new jobs for the lower and working classes ([Industrialization, Jan. 25, 2019](#)). Railroads also aided in the growing economy, allowing products to be shipped across the country ([Crash Course #23: The Industrial Economy](#)). With the assembly line concept being applied to factories, production speed was able to increase drastically ([Crash Course #23: The Industrial Economy](#)). This growth also brought down the price of products and therefore the skilled craftsmen were not valued as highly. Instead of having to learn how to make a product from start to finish, factory workers only had to learn one step in the assembly process and repeat it hundreds of times ([NY Labor Union, The Decline of the Independent Craftsman, 1882](#)). Joseph T. Finnerty, a brass worker, was interviewed by the New York Labor Union about his experience working in a factory ([NY Labor Union, The Decline of the Independent Craftsman, 1882](#)). He explained how the assembly line negatively impacted his wage by his pay decreasing significantly despite his brass working experience ([NY Labor Union, The Decline of the Independent Craftsman, 1882](#)). Women at the time were paid less as well because their work was not valued the same as men ([Industrialization, Jan. 25, 2019](#)). Married women, in particular, were paid less because they were thought of as having more money since their husbands also contributed to their income ([Industrialization, Jan. 25, 2019](#)). Thus began the suppression of working and lower class families.

2. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire caused a nationwide push for workplace safety laws.

Social Reform, Feb. 4, 2019



BODIES FROM WASHINGTON PLACE FIRE 3/25/11

["Bodies from Washington Place Fire", March 25, 1911.](#)

In 1911, a shirtwaist factory in New York caught on fire ([The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, film](#)). The women who worked there were trapped inside due to a lack of functional fire escapes and locked exits ([The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, film](#)). Over 200 women ended up dying either in the fire or from jumping out of windows as a last ditch effort to escape the flames ([The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, film](#)). The image above shows how some of the dead women were placed in their wooden coffins on the streets for everyone to see. Without this tragic event, though, the government would not have known how bad the work conditions were actually like in the factory and many others. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire is well known for opening up the conversation of labor safety laws and beginning the Labor Movement ([Social Reform, Feb. 4, 2019](#)). As a result, things such as the Wagner Act were passed to limit the number of hours one can work in a week to only 54 ([Social Reform, Feb. 4, 2019](#)). Before the Wagner Act, for example, many women would have to work from 7:30 am to 9 pm most days; that's 13.5 hours a day for sometimes six days a week; that's 81 hours a week ([Pauline Newman et al., Conditions at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, 1911](#))!!! Frances Perkins would also have never been elected the first Secretary of Labor and the first female cabinet member by FDR ([The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, film](#)). Overall, the horrific fire at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in 1911 helped America grow more social welfare agencies to help protect its citizens ([The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, film](#)).

3. The Roaring 20's roared in the Great the Depression with the invention of credit and a new American Standard of Living.

[The Modern 1920s, Feb. 11, 2019](#)

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10 Days' Free Trial
Remember, you don't even have to buy the machine until you get it and have used it on 10 days' free trial so that you can see for yourself how new it is and how well it writes. You must be satisfied or else the entire transaction will not cost you a single penny.

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Send for return mail. Reply to Office 211, 212, or 213 of a Standard Writing Underwood. This is not an order and does not obligate you to buy.

Name.....
Street or R. F. D. No.....
City.....
State.....

TYPEWRITER EMPORIUM
Shipman-Ward Mfg. Co.
"THE REGULATORS OF THE UNDERWOOD"
Mootrose and Ravenswood Aves. Chicago

[Typewriter Emporium Ad, 1920s](#)

In the 1920s, ads like the one shown above pushed consumers to buy in excess using credit. As you can see, all you need is \$3 up front to pay for the typewriter, and there is a payment plan so you do not have to pay as much up front. The problem, of course, was that many people went into debt from this new credit concept. Debt became normalized, though, because it was used to meet the new American standard of living ([Crash Course #32: The Roaring 20s](#)). Some other products people bought included cars, leisure products, labor-saving devices, and tickets to the movie theater ([The Modern 1920s, Feb. 11, 2019](#) and [Crash Course #32: The Roaring 20s](#)). Entertainment grew so much that Hollywood was considered the greatest studio in the world ([Crash Course #32: The Roaring 20s](#)). Many of the ads of the 1920s also targeted women and persuaded them to buy new technology by convincing them they needed it (see [Might-have-been-hours ad, 1920s](#)). This new American standard of living and Consumerism also got out of hand because of the Laissez Faire economy ideal. The American government let private businesses charge whatever they wanted with little to no intervention or standardization in hopes that it would allow for economic growth ([The Modern 1920s, Feb. 11, 2019](#) and [Crash Course #32: The Roaring 20s](#)). Instead, it favored big businesses and killed smaller ones ([Crash Course #32: The Roaring 20s](#)). By 1929, 40% of Americans were living in poverty and the country was in what is now called the Great Depression ([Crash Course #32: The Roaring 20s](#)).

4. FDR's New Deal provided Americans with much needed income and brought America out of the Great Depression.

The Great Depression and the New Deal, Feb. 18, 2019



“Just in Case They Ever Wanted to Slow Down”, 1936. Uploaded by [Granger](#).

About 25% of Americans were unemployed during the Great Depression ([Crash Course #34 The New Deal](#)). Not only did unemployment affect families' incomes, but it also lowered fertility rates and increased suicide rates ([The Great Depression and the New Deal, Feb. 18, 2019](#)). The decrease in births and increase in suicide rates is attributed to the high unemployment rates and low wages ([The Great Depression and the New Deal, Feb. 18, 2019](#)). Despite the horrible economy and overall morale of the country, many people still had hope that FDR would continue to work to turn the economy around. In fact, some of the many unemployed sent letters to Eleanor Roosevelt, the first lady at the time, to thank her for her continuing to push for New Deal policies ([The New Deal and the 'Common Man', 1934-1936](#)). The New Deal was able to create many new

government jobs for people across the country in order to provide them with an income and skills for a future job ([The Great Depression and the New Deal, Feb. 18, 2019](#)). By 1940, unemployment had dropped to 15% thanks to the New Deal ([Crash Course #34 The New Deal](#)). Many people, though, believe that the New Deal did more harm than good. The political cartoon above shows how the government had to spend a lot of money, and go into debt, in order to fund the New Deal. Spending for the New Deal could not be stopped or America risked going back into another economic depression with increased unemployment rates.

5. The spending that put America into an economic depression ironically got America out of an economic depression.

[The Cold War, Mar. 11, 2019](#) and [The Postwar Boom, Mar. 13, 2019](#)



[Levittown Homes](#) in 1957

Beginning around 1945, was the Cold War ([Crash Course #37: The Cold War](#)). With the constant threat of Communism spreading to America, the red scare infected many Americans ([The Cold War, Mar. 11, 2019](#)). Overall, though, the economy and morale in America improved with the ending of WWII. The most notable about the 1950s is the baby boom. Due to men coming home from the war, the population grew about 20% and they started families in the suddenly prosperous economy ([The Postwar Boom, Mar. 13, 2019](#)). The large growth in family sizes led to the mass production of homes in what's now called suburbs ([The Postwar Boom, Mar. 13, 2019](#) and [A Journalist Describes Levittown, 1948](#)). Pictured above is the first mass-produced suburbs called Levittowns, named after the owners of the construction company ([A Journalist Describes Levittown, 1948](#)). The government also aided in the production of suburbs by funding

highways and passing the GI Bill which granted veterans homeownership among other things ([The Postwar Boom, Mar. 13, 2019](#)). Many of these suburbs were racially segregated based on culture, otherwise known as “de facto segregation” ([The Postwar Boom, Mar. 13, 2019](#)). When public schools began zoning these new populous areas, they automatically grouped black neighborhoods together for one school and white neighborhoods for another school ([The Postwar Boom, Mar. 13, 2019](#)).

6. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 opened up more job opportunities for women and people of color.

[The Black Freedom Movement and more, Mar. 18, 2019](#)



[“Give my Mom a Job”](#)

In the 1960s, there was a rise in protests and liberation movements. Many protests began peacefully, but once protesters realized peace did not cause change, they resorted to more militant tactics ([Cmiel, Sixties Liberalism and Revolution in Manners](#)). After years of protests ending in violence, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was finally passed by President LBJ ([Crash Course #40: The 1960s in America](#)). The new legislation prohibited discrimination of people based on race and sex in public, which included the workplace ([Crash Course #40: The 1960s in America](#)). Although the Civil Rights Act did not solve racism in America, it was a huge step in the right direction. Movements such as The Black Power Movement was a countercultural group that celebrated African Americans and criticized White’s suppression ([Crash Course #40: The 1960s in America](#)). Many women also began to publish their view of the sex caste system to raise awareness. One that is noted to be one of the first of many is [Casey Hayden and Mary King’s “Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo” \(1965\)](#). In the memo, two women go in-depth as to how and why women are oppressed. In doing so, they opened the dialogue up to women across America to do the same and join the liberation movement.

7. Air Jordan I shoes kick-started America's globalizing economy and made Nike the empire it is today.

Globalization, Apr. 15, 2019



[Air Jordan I](#)

Near the end of the Cold War, many political relations cooled down and trade opened up in the world ([Globalization, Apr. 15, 2019](#)). Companies like Nike grew a global empire with their Michael Jordan Air I shoes (pictured above)([LaFeber, Michael Jordan and the New Capitalism: America on Top of its Game](#)). The Jordan Air commercial ([Original commercial for Air Jordans](#)) could be seen across the world by the late 1980s ([LaFeber, Michael Jordan and the New Capitalism: America on Top of its Game](#)). Without the computer revolution, none of which would have happened ([Globalization, Apr. 15, 2019](#)). In the 1960s, the microchip was invented and the computer revolution grew exponentially ([Globalization, Apr. 15, 2019](#)). By 2000, nearly half of all Americans had a computer ([Globalization, Apr. 15, 2019](#)). The computer revolution also allowed for companies like Nike to outsource their labor to other countries, which usually cost less than to have a factory in America ([Globalization, Apr. 15, 2019](#)). Similar to the Industrial Revolution, this caused wages in the US to lower because of the newfound labor overseas creating competition ([Globalization, Apr. 15, 2019](#)). It is still an ongoing problem today with how ethical it is to outsource labor in America. In fact, some products will have a label stating that it was "Made in America" to prove the company's patriotism for America and increase sales.