

Industrialization: Urban Impact

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Industrialization forever changed the face and structure of cities. As demands for labor increased, the agrarian economy was gradually replaced by a shift to an industrial economy that required high concentrations of workers in dense population centers. This impact can be seen in the change in the physical structure of cities, with the resulting need for large factories and housing complexes that brought more people into every available portion of a city.

Demographically, this tended to concentrate the members of the lower social and financial levels in smaller, densely concentrated urban centers comprised of workers who came to cities seeking employment. As immigration began to supply these workers, various regions would become magnets for others who had come from their native countries or rural areas in order to find work. Thus, industrialization fueled ethnic concentrations in cities.

The social dynamics of industrialization can also be traced to the initial transformation of cities into high density population centers built to accommodate the new economy. Those who owned the factories living in larger homes and those who worked in the factories lived in smaller homes, or apartments. In New York City, for example, the most expensive real estate is centered around financial centers and other areas where the affluent purchase properties, rather than the traditional “working class” areas of the city. As well, areas of New York, such as Chinatown, owe their ethnic identity to the initial immigration influx that concentrated segments of the population into certain parts of the city and the resulting proliferation of restaurants and shops that were built to accommodate the desires of a population hungry to something to remind them of the homes that they had left behind. While industrialization has brought prosperity to many and helped to propel countries like the United States into global superpower status, less positive

elements such as poorer neighborhoods built to house the first workers are a reminder that not all profited equally.