



Filiere: English Studies

Semester 3

Module: 19

British Culture/ US Culture

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Lecture 10: The American industrial revolution

-The Rise of Big Business, 1860-1920

-The great westward movement coincided with a tremendous industrial revolution in the northeastern and mid-western states of America. The new world was transformed in a few decades from a rural land of small farmers and tradesmen to a modern industrial state dominated by vast sprawling cities, big companies and multimillionaire businessmen. By the year 1913, America produced 36 percent of the world's total industrial out-put.

I-The main features of the industrial revolution in America between the years 1860 and 1920 were as follows:

1-The center of the American industrial revolution resided in the dirty coal mines, the smoking chimneys, the glowing furnaces and forges and the smelly coking plants in and

around the cities of Pittsburg, Chicago, Cleveland and Toledo. Before 1860, the main forms of power for industry and transport were water, wind and muscle. By 1900, coal in the form of steam or electricity supplied 90 percent of all the power used in America. In addition to this, petroleum, natural gas and hydroelectric power grew significantly. In the year 1920, coal gave 80 percent of the country's power needs. It basically powered the great American industrial revolution. It further fed America's greatest single industry, mainly iron and steel. In addition to this, iron and steel rails linked the various parts of the country even more tightly together.

2-Another important feature of the industrial revolution was the rise of the oil industry which was actually one of the American's main source of domestic heating and lighting. Later on, the introduction of the motor vehicle after the year 1900 provided another fast growing market for the oil industry.

3-By the year 1920, America became the most mechanized country in the world. Locomotives, blast furnaces, windmills, typewriters and motor cars are all obvious examples of machines. At that time in history, machines were everywhere and were used to saw timber and cut coal. At the same time, these machines processed food and tinned it.

4- The other two striking and important features of the industrial revolution were the rise of trusts and the growing power and control of very rich businessmen. The trusts were big and giant firms or groups of firms working and cooperating with each other in order to fix prices and outputs and, hence, to control a particular industry. These trusts were very strong. The standard oil company controlled 90 percent of the total output of the American petroleum industry in 1879.

5-Big fortunes were made from trusts. Individuals each made millions of dollars out of timber, milling, meat- packing, mining, railways, steel, copper and oil. Before the year 1860, America's biggest fortune was that of John Jacob Astor who gathered about twenty million dollars from the fur trade and the sale of property on Manhattan Island. Only about one hundred men had become millionaires. By the year 1900, there were over 4000 millionaires, mostly merchants, railway operators, manufacturers and mine owners.

6-Another important feature of the American industrial revolution was the growth of towns and cities. Between 1860 and 1890, for example, Philadelphia and Baltimore doubled their populations. This was essentially due to the growing number of factories, mills, banks and railway stations which were in urban centers and which were crammed and crowded with skilled workers from the entire European continent.

II- The Reasons for the Industrial Revolution in America:

-There were different reasons for the industrial revolution in America:

1-One of the obvious and fundamental reasons for the American industrial revolution was the country's fabulous wealth as well as the diversity of its natural resources. The Americans managed to conquer a huge land mass with vast lowland areas enjoying a diversity of soils and climates. These features gave them many farms as well as extensive forests which not

only provided them directly with many foods but helped industries with an expanding flow of raw materials for processing-wheat, maize, fruit, cotton, timber, furs and skins.

2-The other reason for the industrial revolution in America was the expansion of the American market together with a growing number of skilled immigrants who settled in America and who worked in different companies and factories.

3-The other important reason for the industrial revolution in America was the increasing of individual enterprise. In fact, businessmen took it upon themselves to encourage inventions and discoveries, to raise capital, to introduce machinery, to recruit labor, to find and to develop raw materials as well as markets to meet the competition of rivals.