

Examining the Spread of Industrialization Using Statistics

The Industrial Revolution occurred first in Great Britain, and that simple fact goes a long way toward explaining why Britain became the single most powerful European country of the nineteenth century. Britain was well positioned to serve as the cradle of industrialism. One of the background causes of the Industrial Revolution was the combination of rapidly increasing populations and more efficient agriculture providing more calories to feed that population. Even fairly rudimentary improvements in sanitation in the first half of the eighteenth century resulted in lower infant mortality rates and lower disease rates in general. The Little Ice Age of the early modern period ended in the eighteenth century as well, increasing crop yields. Despite the fact that more commercially-oriented agriculture, something that was well underway in Britain by the middle of the eighteenth century, was often experienced as a disaster by peasants and farmers, the fact is that it did increase the total caloric output of crops at the same time. In short, agriculture definitively left the subsistence model behind and became a commercial enterprise in Britain by 1800. Thus, there was a “surplus population” (to quote Ebenezer Scrooge of *A Christmas Carol*, speaking of the urban poor) of peasants who were available to work in the first generations of factories.

In addition, Britain has abundant coal deposits concentrated in northern England. In a very lucky coincidence for British industry, northern England in the eighteenth century was the heart of the existing British textile industry, which became the key commercial force in the early period of industrialization. The northern English coal deposits are part of an underground band of coal that reaches across to Belgium, eastern France, and western Germany. This stretch of land would become the industrial heartland of Europe - one can draw a line down a map of Western Europe from England stretching across the English Channel toward the Alps and trace most of the industrial centers of Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In its first century, the areas in Europe that benefited the most from the Industrial Revolution were the ones closest to coal. Besides access to coal, the other major factors driving industrial expansion in Britain were political and cultural. The reason that Britain was far and away the leading industrial power is that its parliament was full of believers in the principles of free trade, which meant that commercial enterprises were not hampered by archaic restrictions or cultural prejudices. Britain was also the richest society in Europe in terms of available capital: money was available through reliable, trustworthy banking institutions. Thus, investors could build up a factory after securing loans with fair interest rates and they knew that they had a legal system that favored their enterprise. Finally, taxes were not arbitrary or extremely high (as they were in most parts of Spain and Italy, for example). (Western Civilization: a Concise History. Accessed on 11.28.21 at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EBnW_EGvY6s-WZpEb4WZlwG1i9ELTAoCzfarNx1pdeM/edit#)

What factors led Britain to early industrialization according to the reading above?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

For the remaining questions, use the resources found at the [Fordham Modern World History site](#) Examine table one, which describes the output of industrial production between 1870-1913.

What were the most significant changes in the distribution of world industrial output between 1870 and 1913
List two changes and explain why they were the most significant.

1. Statistic showing change

Explanation of why this change was significant

2. Statistic showing change

Explanation of why this change was significant.

For the following question, examine table 3 dealing with the output of coal and lignite (a form of coal)

How much did coal production increase between 1781 and 1914 in the six countries listed?

To answer the following question, use data from tables 3, 4, 5, 6

Use the data from these four charts to predict which countries would be the dominant nations in Europe in the twentieth century. Explain your answer in a brief paragraph using at least five statistics. Remember to explain why the statistics you choose would lead to the dominance of the two nations you chose.