Working and Living Conditions

The Industrial Revolution took place over more than a century, as production of goods moved from home businesses where products were generally crafted by hand, to machine-aided production in factories. This revolution, which involved major changes in transportation, manufacturing, and communications, transformed the daily lives of Americans as much as—and arguably more than—any single event in U.S. history.

Working Conditions

Simply, the working conditions were terrible during the Industrial Revolution. As factories were being built, businesses were in need of workers. With a long line of people willing to work, employers could set wages as low as they wanted because people were willing to do work as long as they got paid. When they took factory jobs, they were working for a large company. The repetitive work often involved only one small step in the manufacturing process, so the worker did not see or appreciate what was being made; the work was often dangerous and performed in unsanitary conditions. People worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day for six days a week. However, the majority were unskilled workers, who only received about $8-$10 dollars a week, working approximately 10 cents an hour. Skilled workers earned a little more, but not significantly more. Women received one-third or sometimes one-half the pay that men received. Children received even less. Owners, who were only concerned with making a profit, were satisfied because labor cost less.

Factories were not the best places to work. The only light present was the sunlight that came through the windows. Machines spit out smoke and in some factories, workers came out covered in black soot by the end of the day. There were a plethora of machines with not many safety precautions. This resulted in many accidents. The workers only received a break for lunch and a break for dinner.

Children were paid less than 10 cents an hour for fourteen hour days of work. They were used for simpler, unskilled jobs. Many children had physical deformities because of the lack of exercise and sunlight. The use of children as labor for such long hours with little pay led to the formation of labor unions.
Labor unions organized strikes and protests. However, as more immigrants came to the United States, drawn by the industrial jobs, more workers became available. These workers were willing to work, even if others were not because of unfair treatment. This lessened the effect of the labor unions since businesses had no shortage of workers.

A Typical Work Week
- Steel mills demanded a 7 day work week
- Factory workers – 12 hours a day, 6 days a week
- No vacation, sick leave, unemployment compensation or reimbursement for injuries
- By 1882, 675 workers died each week
- Everybody had to work even as young as 5 years old
- 27 cents a day for children
- $267 per year for women
- $498 per year for men

Living Conditions
As business began to boom and the national markets grew, more people began to move to the Northeast because they wanted jobs. Most people lived in the "slum". Five to nine people lived in a single room which was as big as an apartment. Not only was there not enough room, but more people got sick as well. There was horse manure in the streets, sewage in the gutters, garbage everywhere and factories spewed foul smoke into the air. Because everyone lived in terrible conditions and so close to one another, diseases spread rapidly and lack of medicine and medical care resulted in many deaths. At the time, population was increasing rapidly because of more people moving in, so apartments became more crowded and in worse condition. There was inadequate housing, poor transportation, lack of clean water and an increase in crime. The majority of the people living in industrialized areas lived in terrible, harsh conditions because of the lack of money and the overwhelming population.