



Unit 6 Essay Outline

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Analyze the impact of immigration and labor unions on the American industrial worker between 1865 and 1900

Thesis

- The period from 1865 to 1900 was an era of drastic changes in the fabric of American society; it was an era that especially shaped the lives of the American industrial worker due to the influx of "new immigrants" that flooded the country and the increasing popularity of organized labor unions.

Body Paragraph 1a

During the 1860's through the 1900's immigration rates rose drastically. Several thousand unskilled workers poured into America from poor European countries each year. Unlike the "old immigrants" from Germany and the British Isles who were relatively educated and skilled workers that oftentimes established self-sufficient farms and small businesses, these "new immigrants" from Eastern and Southern Europe were largely unskilled and much poorer. Most of these new immigrants flocked to the cities and settled in large immigrant communities.

Body Paragraph 1b

As a result, they ended up taking most of the wage earning jobs at industrial centers across the nation, in which they were preferred by American bosses because they were cheap, disposable, and came in by the thousands. Moreover, many big “bosses” like Boss Tweed took advantage of this influx of immigrants: they traded jobs and services for votes. This inflamed many of the “old immigrants” and American workers. Thus, antagonism and anti-foreign organizations arose, even going so far as to persuade congress to pass the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The overall impact of this influx of new immigration was a redefinition of what it meant to be an “American Industrial Worker”.

Body Paragraph 2a

Labor organizations also began to arise at the end of the Civil War due to increased living costs and a drain on human resources. The arrival of the depersonalized factories that replaced the small family plants had little regard for worker wellbeing and health, new machines displaced thousands of manual laborers, and the flood of cheap immigrant labor also factored in the development of unions. The typical factory worker worked ten hours a day, six days a week; accidents in the factories were common and employers rarely paid for compensation (which led many labor unions to support each other).

Body Paragraph 2b

One of the earliest labor unions was the National Labor Union, organized in 1866, which advocated for eight hour work days, but did not support strikes to reach their goal. Another influential union that arose out of the 1877 crisis was the Knights of Labor: the first one to allow women and children in, but also did not support strikes. The American Federation of Labor wanted to promise labor legislation and supported strikes. Most strikes ended badly with no benefits for the workers. The most famous was known as the Haymarket Square riot in 1886. Bombs were thrown and several died. It led to increased animosity towards labor unions. However, overall, labor unions mostly benefited the American wage worker and some even succeed in getting wages raised and shorter work days.

Conclusion

In the time between 1865-1900, the life of the American Industrial worker changed due to immigration and labor unions, as well as governmental interference and technological advances. The exponential immigration rates gutted the labor market, upsetting many stock American workers, and the formation of labor unions established a means to positively help the likes of many industrial wage earners.

