



Pros and Cons of the Factory System

The 19th Century Factory System

During the Industrial Revolution, many technological advances and breakthroughs were made. One of the most notable advances was the introduction of the factory system. The factory system revolutionized manufacturing because it allowed products to be made faster than ever. However, there was also a negative side to factories, because many companies didn't care about the safety of their workers. Throughout the Industrial Revolution, both critics and champions of the factory system debated over the safety of factories.

Pros: Mass Production and Employment



Workers labeling jars in a pickle packaging company.

The introduction of factories was the beginning of mass production. Before the Industrial Revolution, most families had to produce their own food and clothes. Factories made things easier, because families could now buy all their goods instead of making them. Another pro of the factory system was the creation of thousands of jobs. Although several of the jobs created were not very desirable positions, workers still went home with a paycheck. Even though there were many obvious disadvantages to the factory system of the 1800s, factories did make a lot of things easier.

Cons: Dangerous Working Conditions and Low Pay



The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911.

The two biggest problems with the factory system were dangerous working conditions and very low pay. Women and children would routinely work 50 hours a week, earning about 10 cents an hour. Some companies wouldn't let their workers leave until they were searched for stolen goods. To keep the workers from sneaking out, employers would lock all the exits. These conditions proved dangerous when a fire started in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, a company in New York City. The only fire precaution was three buckets of water in one corner of the building. The workers, mostly women and girls between the ages of 16 and 23, were unable to get out, and 146 people perished in the disaster.