



The Industrial Revolutionaries: The Making of the Modern World 1776-1914

Gavin Weightman

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In this vivid, sweeping history of the industrial revolution, Gavin Weightman shows how, in less than one hundred and fifty years, an unlikely band of scientists, spies, entrepreneurs, and political refugees took a world made of wood, powered by animals, wind, and water, and made it into something entirely new, forged of steel and iron, and powered by steam and fossil fuels. Weightman weaves together the dramatic stories of giants such as Edison, Watt, Wedgwood, and Daimler, with lesser-known or entirely forgotten characters, including a group of Japanese samurai who risked their lives to learn the secrets of the West, and John “Iron Mad” Wilkinson, who didn’t let war between England and France stop him from plumbing Paris. Distilling complex technical achievements, outlandish figures, and daring adventures into an accessible narrative that spans the globe as industrialism spreads, *The Industrial Revolutionaries* is a remarkable work of original, engaging history.

The Industrial Revolutionaries: The Making of the Modern World 1776-1914 Details

Date : Published April 7th 2009 by Grove Press (first published 2007)

ISBN : 9780802118998

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Format : Hardcover 422 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Economics, Business, World History

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Nick says

Only the sheer scope of the industrial revolution prevents this book from being a 5-star read in the end. The author tries to cover too many inventors, too many failed inventions, and too many false starts, in the effort to explode the myths (Edison wasn't much of an inventor, James Watt didn't invent the steam engine after seeing a tea kettle boil, and so on) and celebrate the victories of Victorian invention. But what is here is marvelous, if chaotic, and you come away with an appreciation of the incredible leap forward that Europe and the US made from about 1750 to 1850, especially. in creating both the wonders and the mess of modern life. One real surprise for me: the first microdots used by spies were -- wait for it -- during the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870. Miniature cameras? In Dickens' lifetime? Who knew?

Sarah Smith says

This book did a great job of showing me how the Industrial Revolution was actually a series of people thinking, "How could I improve this? How I could I make this aspect of life easier?" It was very interesting, especially the part of how Japan opened up its borders to trade again.

C.H. Cobb says

Weightman has written an interesting account of the genesis of the modern industrial world. I enjoy history, and this book did not disappoint. I was reading it as research for book two of my Outlander Chronicles series, and I was looking for the kinds of problems and setbacks experienced in the world of steam. It was helpful for that, and also for the advances and issues in smelting iron ore, and processing iron and steel.

I'm not going to attempt a thorough review here, but some of the pros of the book include the human element. Weightman introduces the reader to the inventors and their fascinating personalities. He humanizes technological advance. He demonstrates how the profit motive drives the inventor, as it also drives society's acceptance of an innovation.

As for the cons, I wish the book had gotten a little more technical, with more drawings and diagrams. I would have enjoyed a bit more of the science. This is why the book is only three stars in my rating; I should hasten to add that the quality of the writing is definitely five stars.

If history is an interest for you, you'll enjoy this book. If the history of discovery is an interest, you'll love it.

Bruce says

Gavin Weightman is no James Burke. This is no smoothly flowing history presentation. Having said that it suffers from few syntax errors, rather mostly clumsiness of expression, and a certain inability to moderate tone of importance. Hence the value of the information presented, which is significant, must be dug out with

care and diligence rather like carrying on a conversation with a talking computer or one who suffers from some forms of autism. I should be tempted to say I have read better written data bases although that would be a cruel exaggeration. I have however read more readable data bases.

Jim says

Gavin is referred to as a Social Historian. Although I think of him more of a technology historian. this is the type of history that I am enjoying most of late.

<https://www.goodreads.com/genres/soci...>

<https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/1...>

Rena says

Some points were very interesting while others were pretty bland. I'm not much of a history person. This entire book is minibiographies of people who were prominent in the advancement of technology. Some were great because they talked about things that I personally found very interesting. Others were for things that I either already knew about or did not particularly found intriguing. Allinall, it rounded itself out in the end.

William Gibson says

A completely different perspective on the period

MarcosKtulu says

Gavin Weightman follows the development of several technologies through biographical portraying of the inventors, entrepreneurs, scientists, innovators and businessmen who worked with them. These men gave life to new processes and uses for materials, and the stories of how they came to a practical idea, sometimes they are interesting, sometimes really not. The stories and minibiographies are filled with so much details of success and failures that can make casual reading a sluggish, suffering exercise. The book proposes to be a history of technology-spreading, yet, except for the first chapters and the ones on Japan and Germany, it falls short on that premise.

Catchability will all depend on reader's interests: for me, the most remarkable aspects were, so to speak, the history of british industrial primacy and french race behind it, resorting to industrial espionage.

The introduction of industrial technologies has a problem in a history book like this: it's very technical, perhaps boring thing to explain, but in order to be roughly understood, it must be explained a bit further. I found technical underpinnings somehow shallow and lacking, contributing to the eventual boredom. Not long enough, but not short enough either, as the author indeed attempts at giving some technical details (ie, many differences in coal and charcoal processing, or how the furnaces worked, but these are not crystal

clear). Also there is no clear reason one person after another is named, or why their antecedents are relevant. I see detail where it is overabundant, and holes where detail is needed.

Other sections that caught my interest are the story of Japan's opening to foreign influence, though at least schematic take on it's ultimate industrial development is not provided. Another interesting topic is the Russo-japanese war, told by the incumbence of torpedos and emergence of Japan from feudal to an industrialized international power (by then, most of it's weaponry was bought outside, by the way).

The ending and postscript bring some enticing conclusions and thoughts, of how british headstart was lost and caught on by other, rising powers, most notably USA and Germany, with their mass consumer products and chemicals.

Lots of information, should have been worked in some other way.

Converse says

Well written overview of American, European, and Japanese economic and industrial development, starting with British history. The accomplishments of the various business people and inventors can however blur together sometimes, as there as so many of them.

Upom says

Took me long enough, but I finished this book. This book is probably the best general history of the Industrial Revolution I have read. With a particular emphasis on the development of technology by individuals and the spread of industry around the world, Weightman looks at the rise of industry in Great Britain, the United States, Japan, and Germany, and how various political, economic, and social reasons for the spread of industry. Extremely well researched and detailed, the book covers everything from the invention of the steam engine, to the rise of the chemical industry in Germany. Weightman ultimately concludes that the big driver of industrialism was the need for a paycheck, Adam Smith's engine of self-interest. The only criticism I would make is that Weightman, though a thorough researcher, did not make any strong insights on the industrial revolution, other than its extremely mobile nature, and how in time industry begets industry through a few individual. Though not dripping with insight, "Industrial Revolutionaries" is a great starting point for learning about the industrial revolution.

Patrick Andersen says

Good high level overview of the industrial revolution. Doesn't burrow down into specifics of how any particular innovation works which is frustrating to the technically minded but might be better for the casual reader. The flow was challenging; a particular individual would be followed about until he bumped into another important individual, then we get to learn his life story up until the junction, then the narrative goes forward.

More than a half dozen typos, which looks poorly on the editor more than the author.

Matt Erickson says

I already love this book. Very well researched. this is the authoritative work on the industrial revolution. It gives names and ties them to today, "Promoters of railways.. were just as important to their establishment as the people who built them." As the book states, the narrative stops in 1914, "all the essentials are by then in place." I feel transported to some machine museum in Britain by reading.

Daniel Kukwa says

I very much enjoyed this work's writing style...it's a smooth, fascinating & pleasant read. It also assumes some reader knowledge of the industrial revolution, and therefore dispenses with what could be long & tedious exposition for beginners. However, its organization & structure tends to be very loose. It tries for a vague, chronological order, but it does tend to go off on tangents a bit too often for my taste.

Jose says

Good source of information.

J.M. Hushour says

To me, a welcome non-academic, jargoncrap work of history, this one focusing on how "inventors" of things (Watt, Edison, etc.) were actually full of crap and were merely innovators on ideas that other people had had. The Industrial Revolution was about the creative spirit? Hogwash, says Weightman. These assholes just wanted to make some cash! That aside, this is an entertaining and light look at how things like steel, light bulbs, and bicycles (that part was great!) came about. There are some good sections on the industrialization of Japan, too. Lots of enterprising young samurai apparently snuck off the island to learn the tricks and trades of the Europeans.
