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[Review of the book *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution*]

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[Review of the book *The Economics of the Industrial Revolution*]

Abstract
[Excerpt] This book contains a collection of papers on the causes and impact of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. The authors are, with perhaps one exception, practitioners of the New Economic History, which relies on economic theory and statistical testing of hypotheses. The papers cover three topics: the causes of the Industrial Revolution; the role of agriculture; and the impact of industrialization on the standard of living of British workers.

Keywords
Britain, Industrial Revolution, labor economics, employment, labor market

Disciplines
Economic History | Industrial Organization | Labor Economics | Labor History | Labor Relations

Comments
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The Economics of the Industrial Revolution. Edited by Joel Mokyr. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985. $34.50 cloth, $15.95 paper.

This book contains a collection of papers on the causes and impact of the Industrial Revolution in Britain. The authors are, with perhaps one exception, practitioners of the New Economic History, which relies on economic theory and statistical testing of hypotheses. The papers cover three topics: the causes of the Industrial Revolution; the role of agriculture; and the impact of industrialization on the standard of living of British workers.

Readers of this journal should find the essays on the standard of living debate to be of particular interest. Lindert and Williamson's analysis of trends in workers' earnings supersedes all previous work in the field. Their conclusion that the earnings of blue-collar workers nearly doubled between 1781 and 1851, even after adjusting for upward trends in unemployment and urban disamenities, supports a surprisingly optimistic view of the consequences of the Industrial Revolution. On the other hand, the opposing "pessimistic view" is given new life by von Tunzelmann's essay. Using dynamic programming to solve an optimal growth model, von Tunzelmann finds that "a more interventionist government could have raised real wages without endangering long-term growth" (pp. 223-24). Although his conclusions must be considered tentative, von Tunzelmann has succeeded in redefining the issues of the standard of living debate.

Although each of the papers represents an important contribution to our understanding of the Industrial Revolution, let me single out three others for comment. The two opening essays, by Mokyr and McCloskey, represent the best available introduction to the causes of the first Industrial Revolution. I also highly recommend Crafts' comparative essay on England and France, which warns us that the question "Why was England first?" is both unanswerable and misconceived.

The book is an excellent introduction to the study of British industrialization and to the field of economic history. As such, it should be required reading for students of economics, history, and surely, one could argue, industrial relations.

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