

Example Descriptive Essay

Locomotion

The nineteenth century was a time of unprecedented technological growth and expansion. Innovators developed dozens of new exciting technologies like the battery, the microphone, the typewriter, and the photograph (Bellis, 2006). The spread of these inventions to other countries was not only motivated by the inventions, but in many ways, it was also facilitated by them. Some countries used these inventions to further their own empire, like England, which cemented itself as a dominant cultural power by sending English innovations to other countries. Many new technologies influenced the spread of the European empire; however, the invention of the steam engine locomotive and the concomitant railway system had the greatest impact on many aspects of the imperial system.

Military Impact

The railway system had a strong military impact as its popularity spread. The railroad allowed for fast transportation of both supplies and troops to areas in need of food or reinforcements. Previous to the railroad, food and ammunition were delivered in slow, vulnerable supply wagons. It took longer for new recruits to arrive as well, and mass transportation was virtually impossible. With the advent of the railroad, men and supplies could arrive to an area in need in a fraction of the time (Gerace, 2004). This meant both that men in reserve could be utilized more fully and that a smaller army could hold greater amounts of territory, sending reinforcements where needed. Railroads were important enough that even the building of a large railroad could be seen as a sign of preparation for an attack (Van Evera, 1986). One place the English used railroads militarily was the Indian Rebellion of 1857. After a widespread rebellion broke out against the British imperial rule, the British used railroads to move troops and supplies quickly and outmaneuver the rebels and could contain the rebellion in Delhi (Alavi, 1996). Even though the native Indian population outnumbered the Imperial British colonizers, having control of an advanced infrastructure, including railroads, helped the British come out victorious.

Cultural Impact

Railroads were also important because they strengthen the cultural connectedness of a nation. Previous to the railroad, distant communities within a country were separated culturally because people from one area could not easily visit or interact with people in a different area. Each area had distinct customs, fashion, food, music, and even language. Interaction was no longer limited in the same way once the innovation of the railway system was in place. People could travel from one area to another easily and quickly. Once people began interacting more with people in distant cities and sharing their ideas, the differences between cities were diminished (Prasad, 2016). They shared foods, fashions in one area influenced another, they listened to each type of music, and they shared their vocabulary. The uncompleted Cape-to-Cairo railway was one British Railroad that was built simply to unify territory from South Africa up through Egypt (Merrington, 2001). While it was never completed, the Cape-to-Cairo railway shows that people in the mid-nineteenth century believed a railroad was important to establishing cultural unity. Other railways that were successfully completed like the Union Pacific in the United States served to unite the nation. This ability to connect a nation culturally is one reason that railways are so important.

Economic Impact

In addition, railroad construction had a significant impact on the economy of many industries within the empire because of the materials that were required to build it. These materials generated jobs and strengthened the economy as people used the railway system to travel themselves, or to purchase things that were available via the railway systems. Some of the industries that were required were labor industries that could mine or manufacture the materials needed. Iron, glass, and rock were needed to construct railways, stations, and bridges. Many workers were needed for railway projects from many different skills. Many countries saw these benefits. For example, "the railway age was an enormous boost to the economy of Britain, and would provide the country with one of the most efficient infrastructures for the remainder of the century" ("Railways," n.d., para. 4). The jobs that it generated didn't end once the infrastructure was in place, however. Once in operation, railways required engineers and many different types of employees to keep the trains and the tracks in good repair, operating on time, and serving the needs of the public. The economy was bolstered by the train industry itself, but it was also bolstered by the commerce that it brought with it. It is clear that railways

Commercial Impact

The biggest way railways affected imperialism was by opening up previously unfeasible markets. This came from its ability to move goods quickly from inland sources that were inefficient before. In many areas, reliable road transport was slow, dangerous, and impractical. That made many products expensive to trade simply because of their location as some products had to be transported longer distances. Products like porcelain, silk, spices, and tea were more profitable historically because they were able to be traded and protected along traditional coastal trade routes without travel to inland trade posts (Reid, 1993). Products that were not found near established trade ports needed to be taken to these ports and the transportation was expensive, thus making the products less lucrative. However, with the invention of the railway system, historically less lucrative products could now be used to make a profit. Products like bamboo, rice, and tin (all of which are inland resources) could be brought to the coast safely and efficiently to trade (Reid, 1993). This innovation changed the face of the Empire. While previous rounds of imperialism focused more on securing favorable trade routes and port cities, now imperialists shifted the focus from small islands and the coastal fringes of continents to also include their vast, untamed interior.

In sum, the technology that had the greatest impact on the establishment of empire in the 19th and 20th centuries was the railroad. It allowed for the effective transport of troops and supplies to maintain power. It created culturally and economically connected territories. It lowered the costs of shipping from colonies significantly. It opened up the interiors of continents to trade. While other technologies also affected New Imperialism, the railroad was the only one with clear military, social, and economic benefits. It spread people, goods, and ideas faster, cheaper, and further than ever before. In every way, the iron horse was an imperial game-changer.

Exercises

Exercise: Analyze an essay

1. Does the introduction provide the general information a reader needs in order to understand the topic?
2. Does the introduction end with an effective thesis? Does it match the style of the essay?
3. Do each of the body paragraphs begin with an effective topic sentence?
4. Are the body paragraphs sequenced in a logical order?
5. Look at each body paragraph. Do the supporting sentences support the topic sentence?
6. Look at each body paragraph. Are the supporting sentences sequenced in a logical order?
7. Look at each body paragraph. Is there enough development? Are there more details or examples that would help the reader?
8. Look at each body paragraph. Does the concluding sentence close the paragraph logically?
9. Does the conclusion paragraph start by restating the thesis?
10. Does the conclusion paragraph have a suggestion, prediction, or opinion at the end?
11. Look at the specific words used in the essay. Do you notice any particular words that are very descriptive? Do any of the words give you a very specific idea or picture about the topic?

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