

THE HISTORY CHANNEL CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDES

Empires of Industry

Empires of Industry is a mini-series which explores the cornerstones of America's economic might that established the United States as a world leader. Each of the one hour programs in this remarkable series focuses on an industry which played a unique role in America's rise to world economic dominance. The stories of changing fortunes in the Steel, Coal, Brewing, Ship Building and Textile industries reveal much about our country's past and present.

Empires of Industry would be useful for classes on American History, History of Science and Technology, Economics and American Culture. It is appropriate for middle school and high school.

Shipbuilding

This episode of *Empires of Industry* examines the revolution in ship building necessitated by World War II. As the demand for more ships, at a faster rate, than ever before increased, American shipbuilders, most notably Henry Kaiser, revolutionized the way America built ships. What Henry Ford did for the car industry, Henry Kaiser did for the shipbuilding industry. Kaiser's innovations enabled American war workers to produce great ships at an unheard of pace, contributing to the American victory against the Japanese in the Pacific theater of World War II.

- [commandeer](#)
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- [genteel](#)
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- [underscore](#)
- [unrelenting](#)
- [vengeance](#)

Discussion Questions

1. Before World War II, ships were built in the same manner for centuries. But when war came in the mid-20th century, it changed the process of ship building forever. How and why did World War II change the ancient art of ship building?
2. Ship building is but one example of how manufacturing changed in the 20th century. What other industries underwent the same transformation in the 20th century?
3. Henry Kaiser was one of the largest ship builders in the country during World War II. How did he get his nickname, "Hurry Up Harry?"
4. Henry Kaiser was a firm believer in new technology. How did Kaiser's faith in technology, and his willingness to use new technology contribute to his business success?

5. How did Henry Kaiser's ship building process illustrate the old adage "necessity is the mother of invention?"
6. Although the press and President Franklin D. Roosevelt believed in Henry Kaiser and his work, other ship builders did not. They were leery of the man and his methods. Why were other ship builders suspicious of Kaiser and his methods? How can Kaiser be seen as a maverick or an upstart?
7. Compare Henry Kaiser's Liberty Ships with Henry Ford's Model T. What are their similarities? How did they both revolutionize their respective industries?
8. Discuss how Henry Kaiser's method of welding ships together instead of using rivets contributed to the expansion of women in the ship building industry during World War II.
9. How is an aircraft carrier a ship that is completely a product of the 20th century?
10. How did the aircraft carrier contribute to the United States victory in World War II?

Extended Activities

1. Create a poster that illustrates Henry Kaiser's method of ship building. Can you apply this method to any other manufactured item? How could Kaiser's method be used to build housing?
2. Create a World War II poster encouraging workers at the Kaiser ship building yards to increase production. What would you use to make your appeal? Competition? Patriotism?