

History of the American Worker

Script for SkillsUSA Video #1

“Of the people, for the people, by the people.

America has always been what we, the people, have made it.

For years, this statue has sparked hope of a better life in the hearts of millions who've come to these shores, and it's been the American worker who has shaped that hope into reality.

The roots of the American worker are entwined around the origins of American democracy itself, first evidenced by the numerous working craftsmen who were aboard the mayflower.

During the revolutionary war, carpenters disguised as Mohawk Indians were the host group at the Boston tea party, and the developing printing industry helped strengthen the independence efforts through the distribution of the printed word.

As our fledgling country entered the 19th century, the advent of the steam engine and the growing use of waterpower to operate machinery led to the factory system, which accounted for an ever-growing share of American production.

During the late 1800s, the developments of the transcontinental railroad was an American milestone that would have been impossible without the thousands of American and immigrant workers who bridged the distance across our continent, one length of track at a time, under often perilous conditions. The railroads made interstate travel a feasible reality, and the American economy gathered the same momentum as the engines that now roared across once lonely prairies.

As the 20th century dawned, so did revolutionary means of production within American factories, such as Henry Ford's development of an assembly line, where each worker was responsible for one specific step in the production process. These new methods of production transformed a wide variety of American industries, and, from a global economic perspective, America was fast becoming the gem of the west.

But when that gem was shown to be tarnished by worker exploitation, American workers reclaimed their rights through the formation of labor unions, organizations that fought for the fair treatment of our working men, women, and even children. The unions restored the dignity of the American worker, helped create the American middle class, upon which America's prosperity continues to depend, and reaffirmed the place of the worker as the heart of the American economy.

In the years of the Great Depression, that heart beat faintly, as economic hardship spread like a dust cloud across the country.

But still, we survived. And during the second great war, revitalized American workmanship, now characterized by new roles for women, spurred us to victory and economic prosperity in a patriotic flurry of frenzied production.

And America forged ahead, into new decades that saw laws designed to guarantee equality for all workers, that saw American breakthroughs in science lead to breakthroughs into space, that have seen the most tremendous strides in technology that history has ever recorded.

But throughout all the changes, throughout all the technological advances, one thing has remained constant: the inestimable value of the American worker to the American way of life.

Today, the role of America in the face of a changing world is more prominent than ever. And the Role of our skilled workers, whatever the profession, has never been more important.

The America of today is indebted to the American worker of yesterday.

The America of tomorrow will be indebted to you...”