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Critical Argument Paper #2 Option #1

The beginning stages of beauty within the early 20th century was known as “The Belle Epoque Period”. An important factor that contributed to this boost of modernity was the American Industrial Revolution. The American Industrial Revolution otherwise known as the second Industrial Revolution had begun around the 1870s and lasted up until the end of the second world war. “This era saw the mechanization of agriculture and manufacturing and also the introduction of new modes of transportation which included steamships, the automobile, and airplanes”. (Chen, 2022). One notable contribution to beauty during this time period was the making of the first-ever western movie “The Great Train Robbery” in 1903. This was instrumental in terms of shaping the dynamics of fashion and beauty during this time. It is important to note that this concept of being able to see movement on a screen for the first time was certainly a great innovation in the early 20th century and played a crucial role in this concept of “being modern”. The development of the automobile was another transformative innovation that contributed to this consumer culture during the 20th century. In 1908 the Model T was introduced to the market as the first car that was affordable by the masses with a price tag of only \$850. “ The Industrial Revolution really transformed Europe and America from an agrarian society into a modern and urban society which ultimately had strong implications for the development of art, design, consumer and beauty culture” (Sutton, 2023).

This concept of being modern was used by the beauty industry in ways that leaned heavily on the influence of European style and fashion. The most elegant and fashionable people of the time were known to be from Europe. The wealthy and elite became the celebrities of the age and had a tremendous influence on what was considered to be desirable in terms of fashion and beauty. One notable name during this time period was Charles Fredrick Worth who was an English fashion designer that had set up shop in Paris during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. “Worth till this day is deemed the father of Haute Couture and was said to be the first to develop a ready-to-made business with seasonal styles from which clients would choose from different styles and trimmings” (Sutton, 2023). Many of Worth’s clients were members of the rich elite as well as members from different royal families. In the United States, notable names of wealth and influence came from families like the Astors, the Vanderbilts, and the Carnegies. These notable names certainly played a significant role in terms of what was considered modern during this time. One example of an influencer of beauty during this time was Consuelo Vanderbilt, who was the daughter of the family who married the Duke of Marlborough. This movement of beauty as modernity being seen within only the rich families within the United States had sparked a new wave of beauty entrepreneurs that were not necessarily among the richest or wealthiest in the nation but rather had a passion for their craft. Moreover, this concept of modernity in the early 1900’s specifically for women meant that they were able to be visible. Prior to this the majority of women were kept at home to take care of their families but in the early 1900’s more than ever women were seen outside of the home and actively in the workforce as well as taking part in more leisurely activities within society. This tied into how the beauty

industry was significantly impacted by this now mass visibility of women within society so there was a newfound demand for beauty and all that the industry entails.

Transitioning from the early 20th century to the current 21st century we can certainly see this shift in what it means to be modern. Nowadays especially in the United States popular culture is certainly reliant upon mainstream media, this includes music, television, social media networks, celebrities/influencers, etc. There are a lot of similarities and differences when it comes to how people view what it means to be modern in these two time periods. Much like in the 20th century how individuals viewed people with wealth and status as the “gold standard” of beauty and modernity nowadays people see influencers and celebrities as the trendsetters of the modern era. These two periods in time differ in the fact that the late 1800’s-early 1900s it was the age of newfound industrialization and modernization so this meant that many innovations were still in their beginning stages and society was learning how to adjust to this shift in machinery, technology, and manufacturing like never before. On the other hand in today's society we are all sort of engulfed in this new era of advanced technology and advancements so it seems like we are basically reaping the benefits of how far industrialization has come. When it comes to beauty culture in the 21st century a lot of it has to do with body image standards that have been set by society. Now more than ever everyone pays attention to how they look and ultimately how that serves as a reflection of oneself. Social Media definitely plays a dominant role in shaping the standards of beauty because everyone is able to view others at the palm of their hands every single day which leaves room for individuals to compare themselves to others. I feel as if today's beauty industry doesn't only encompass the world of makeup and cosmetics but also ties into many other industries as well and it serves as almost a lifestyle industry. Beauty plays a role

within the fitness industry, the fashion industry, the music industry, the film industry, and even in the medical world. The beauty industry shapes what it means to be modern by suggesting what it means to be beautiful and in today's modern world it seems there are a multitude of factors that play a role in what it means to be beautiful and what it means to be modern. These factors include not only physical appearance but also wealth, status, possessions, and overall lifestyle.

References

Sutton, D. (2023, March 8-11) *Lecture 3: The Belle Epoque* [Video Presentation] New York, NY, United States

Industrial Revolution Definition: History, Pros, and Cons. (2022, October 2). Investopedia.

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