

CHAPTER 11

The Modernizing North, 1815–1860

CHAPTER SUMMARY

During the period from 1815 to 1860, the North (New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Old Northwest) began to develop more clearly into a market society, a process that began during the War of 1812. In doing so, the North became distinctly different from the South which, as we saw in Chapter 10, developed more clearly into a slave society during the same period. In the section “Or Is It the North That Was Distinctive?” we first look at the characteristics of a market society and then turn to a discussion of the features that characterized life on pre-industrial farms and the features that characterized the lives of pre-industrial artisans. As the North began the transition from a society with markets to a market society, the lives of farmers and artisans began to change. For example, it was during this transition period that the “putting-out” system developed in the Northeast, a system that offered an opportunity for farm women to acquire the money necessary to buy more fertile farmland in the West. We also find that the first factories, such as Samuel Slater’s spinning mill, emerged along with the advent of the putting-out system. Therefore, the production of goods for the larger marketplace rather than for one’s family, one of the major characteristics of a market society, began to alter people’s lives and the nature of work.

The shift from a subsistence economy to an industrialized, market-oriented economy was also made possible by a “transportation revolution” that was encouraged and made possible by state governments that provided economic aid for such internal improvements as turnpikes, canals, and railroads. However, the unification brought about by these internal improvements was regional, for while the North and the West were evolving in the same economic direction, the “Cotton South” was not. The result was an economic shift from South to North and the solidification of economic links between the Northeast and the Old Northwest. Although many Northerners viewed these internal improvements as a sign of progress, others worried not only about the urban growth these improvements fostered but also about the destruction of the natural environment.

Industrial innovations and an available labor force for emerging factories also helped transform the Northern economy. In the section “Factories and Industrialization,” we see the advent of the American system of manufacturing (consisting of mass production and interchangeable parts and dependent on the development of a precision machine-tool industry) and its application to the cotton textile industry. However, growth and development in the economic sphere brought changes to the workplace and to the worker. The reality of the Waltham system never matched the ideal, for the emphasis shifted from providing decent working conditions, decent wages, and other amenities for workers to building an industrial empire and maximizing profits. Resulting changes in the workplace, in the nature of the work, in the relationship between owner and worker, and in relationships among workers led the New England mill women to organize and strike in the 1830s. Factory owners then began to search for a more compliant labor force. Irish women, whose work was a necessity and not merely a stage in their lives, provided the answer. Some male workers attempted to regain control over their lives by becoming more active in reform politics and by becoming involved in organized labor. But unsettled economic conditions, hostility by employers, and divisions among workers kept organized labor weak during the period. As a result, organized labor’s most notable achievement during the period came when the courts relieved workers from the threat of conspiracy laws being used against them if they organized or engaged in strikes.

The emergence of the textile industry was also accompanied by an increased demand for ready-made clothing, the invention of the sewing machine, and the emergence of the garment industry. With the expansion of manufacturing came the emergence of specialists in commercial transactions. Specialization, another of the major characteristics of a market economy, is also seen in the emergence of commercial farming in the North as many farm families shifted from the mixed agriculture of pre-industrial times to specialization in cash crops. Although economic expansion accompanied the emergence of a market economy in the North, economic growth was uneven during the period from 1815 to 1860 and was characterized by cycles of boom and bust, which had differing effects on people's lives. In general, ordinary working people faced increasing insecurity, and the lives of farm women were altered as many began to contribute more to the family income.

The family and the gender roles within it are usually affected by economic changes within society. With the shift toward job specialization in a market economy, the work of men and women diverged. In the urban environment, men left home to go to work. When women were gainfully employed, they usually sold their domestic skills rather than working in the new shops and factories. As work assumed more gender identification, the concept of the separate-sphere ideology emerged. It was held that women, by their nature, were more moral, virtuous, and nurturing than men. Therefore, it was believed, they should play a special role in the building of a moral, self-sacrificing, virtuous republic. Except for teaching, paid work was believed to conflict with this domestic ideal.

Economic changes and urbanization also led to more family planning and a reduction in family size. Yet even with fewer children, the new domestic ideal placed increased demands on women. Working-class women had to work in order to provide additional income for their families. As a result, they did not have the option of staying home. Therefore, middle-class reformers often condemned them as being morally inferior because, seemingly, they did not aspire to fulfill the domestic ideal. Even though most middle-class women could stay home, new standards of cleanliness placed many new demands on their time. This meant that they could not devote the time expected of them by adherents to the separate-sphere ideology to the upbringing of their children. Therefore, even middle-class women found that they could not attain the ideals of the cult of domesticity.

In the section "The Growth of the Cities," we find that urban growth brought not only changes in commerce and trade but transformed cities into teeming metropolises. This led to the urban problems of overcrowding, lack of adequate housing and sanitation, and pollution. In an effort to deal with such problems, cities began to offer the services associated with modern urban governments—garbage collection, water service, and sewer service.

Although America, built on the ideal of equality, did offer opportunity to many within the market society of the North, equality of opportunity was not available to all. In early nineteenth-century America, class, ethnic, and religious divisions remained. Such divisions led to increased urban tensions and riots, which often had an ethnic or religious base. The starkness of class divisions may be seen in the contrasts between the lives of the working classes and the urban poor on the one hand and the lives of the urban elite on the other.

The heterogeneity that had been a distinctive characteristic of American society since colonial times became more pronounced as some five million immigrants poured into the nation between 1830 and 1860. The Irish and Germans were numerically the two major immigrant groups during this period. After considering the reasons for immigration, we look at the lives of immigrants and the prejudice they often faced in American society. A second group, free blacks, was allowed, unlike Native Americans, to remain within American society but was not

allowed equality of economic, political, or social opportunity within that society. As they faced the daily assaults of white racism, African Americans, like Native Americans, struggled in various ways to maintain their dignity, self-respect, and cultural identity. Though a great source of strength, the ethnic and cultural diversity of the North was also a source of tension and division. Such tension and division are natural components of a society that is a mix of ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic groups with divergent belief systems and value systems.

Life in an urban environment led to new uses of leisure time. Furthermore, leisure time and recreational activities became more organized within the urban environment. People became spectators of entertainment and sporting events rather than participants in such events. Again, in response to the mix of peoples within the urban environment, exclusive clubs and associations emerged, allowing like-minded people a way to find and associate with each other.

Many saw the growth of Northern urban areas as a sign of progress. Yet many, especially middle-class reformers, saw the disease, poverty, and crime in urban areas as evidence of moral decay that they feared would eventually blight the entire nation. In addition, such reformers tended to blame such things on the depravity and immorality of immigrants and the urban poor, not as the consequence of cramped living conditions and poverty. In other words, such reformers blamed the victim and believed that such conditions could be alleviated if the poor simply worked hard and led virtuous lives. This was, therefore, a moral expression of the free-labor ideology, an ideology eventually accepted by most Northerners, and an ideology that convinced many Northerners that they were morally superior to what they perceived to be the backward slave society found in the South.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the characteristics of a market economy, and discuss how the change from a subsistence economy to a market economy affected people's lives.
2. Discuss the characteristics of the lives of yeomen farmers on pre-industrial farms.
3. Discuss the characteristics of the lives of pre-industrial artisans.
4. Explain the ways in which early industrialization in the United States changed daily work routines and market relationships.
5. Examine the impact of the transportation revolution on the economic development of American society.
6. Examine the promotion of economic growth by government from 1815 to 1860.
7. Describe the American system of manufacturing, and discuss the factors that contributed to industrial development in the United States between 1815 and 1860.
8. Discuss the development of the cotton textile industry in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century.
9. Discuss the changes that occurred in the workplace and in the nature of work in the period from 1815 to 1860, and explain the impact of those changes on
 - a. workers' attitudes,

- b. the relationship between employer and employee,
- c. relationships among workers, and
- d. gender and work.

10. Examine the responses of workers to changes in the workplace and in the nature of work, the means by which they tried to achieve their aims and objectives, and the extent to which they were successful.

11. Discuss the emergence of the ready-made clothing industry from the 1820s to 1860.

12. Examine the development of commercial specialization in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century and discuss its consequences.

13. Explain the emergence of commercial farming in the first half of the nineteenth century and the impact of this development on the Northeast and the Old Northwest.

14. Discuss the characteristics of rural life in American society from 1830 to 1860.

15. Examine the impact of economic change and urbanization during the first half of the nineteenth century on the family, gender roles, and women.

16. Discuss the expansion of urban areas in early nineteenth-century American society, the problems associated with that expansion, and the attempts to solve those problems.

17. Contrast the lives of the urban poor with the lives of the urban elite.

18. Indicate the nature, extent, and causes of urban conflict in American society during the first half of the nineteenth century.

19. Discuss the similarities and differences between Irish and German immigrants' reasons for immigration, explain the differences in the way in which these two immigrant groups were received by Anglo-Americans, and examine the characteristics of the early nineteenth-century immigrants and their lives.

20. Examine the lives of free blacks within nineteenth-century American society, and discuss the ways in which they attempted to deal with their status.

21. Explain the changes in leisure time and in recreational activities in the urban environment of early nineteenth-century American society.

IDENTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE

After studying Chapter 10 of *A People and a Nation*, you should be able to identify *and* explain fully the historical significance of each item listed below.

- Identify each item in the space provided. Give an explanation or description of the item. Answer the questions *who*, *what*, *where*, and *when*.
- Explain the historical significance of each item in the space provided. Establish the historical context in which the item exists. Establish the item as the result of or as the cause

of other factors existing in the society under study. Answer this question: *What were the political, social, economic, and/or cultural consequences of this item?*

1. Promotion of economic growth by federal and state governments

2. The telegraph

3. The Erie Canal

4. Railroad construction

5. the steamboat

6. the American system of manufacturing

7. the characteristics of factory work

8. The pre-Civil War cotton textile industry

9. *Commonwealth v. Hunt*

10. boom and bust cycles

11. The Panic of 1837

12. urban growth

13. the ideology of free labor

14. 19th century immigration

15. Nativism

16. anti-Irish protests

17. characteristics of artisans in pre-industrial America

18. characteristics of a market society

IDEAS AND DETAILS

Objective 3

1. Which of the following words best describes the relationship between a master craftsman and his workers in pre-industrial artisan shops?

- a. Competitive.
- b. Contentious.
- c. Familiar.
- d. Hostile.

Objectives 5 and 6

2. Which of the following is a reason that the South built fewer railroads than the North?
- a. Southerners saw the industrial and transportation revolutions as threats to republican ideology.
 - b. Research clearly indicated that such investments would be of no economic benefit to the South.
 - c. The southern states believed that such construction should be the responsibility of the federal government.
 - d. The southern states had a smaller free population, which resulted in less tax revenue.

Objectives 8 and 9

3. The New England farm daughters recruited to work in the textile mills in Waltham
- a. often used their wages to help their families.
 - b. lived in extremely unsanitary conditions.
 - c. were often hired when they were 16 and usually worked in the mills for the rest of their lives.
 - d. had little chance to socialize and were offered no cultural opportunities by resident managers.

Objectives 8 and 9

4. The paternalism of the Lowell system gave way to exploitation largely as a result of
- a. the change in the type of worker.
 - b. a shift in emphasis by management from the worker and working conditions to profits.
 - c. the increase in the number of spindles and looms used in textile mills.
 - d. the introduction of water powered looms.

Objectives 12 and 13

5. In a market economy
- a. the quality of the merchandise is emphasized above all else.
 - b. the growth of small, self-sufficient productive units is encouraged.
 - c. the gap between rich and poor is narrowed as income is equalized.
 - d. specialization is encouraged in commerce and in agriculture.

Objectives 18 and 19

6. Irish immigrants coming to America in the early to mid 19th century
 - a. came mainly from the Irish middle class.
 - b. came mainly from urban areas of Ireland.
 - c. found work easily in the urban areas of the North.
 - d. were subjected to anti-Catholic prejudice.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Objective 1

1. Define the term *market economy* and indicate the characteristics of such an economy.

Objectives 16, 17 and 18

2. Discuss the expansion of urban areas during the 19th century. What problems were associated with the expansion? How were these problems handled?

Objective 7

3. Explain the role of both the national government and state governments in the technological and industrial growth of the United States from 1816–1845.

Objectives 8, 9 and 10

3. Discuss the changes in the New England textile mills in the years after the introduction of the Waltham system, and explain the reaction of millworkers to those changes.

ANSWERS

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. c. Correct. In pre-industrial artisan shops, apprentices and journeymen worked for the master craftsman who owned the shop. Apprentices usually lived with the master craftsman and his family until they became wage earning journeymen. Work was usually unregimented and the relationship between the master craftsman and his workers tended to be familial in nature.

a. No. From the choices given, “competitive” is not the best word.

b. No. From the choices given, “contentious” is not the best word.

d. No. From the choices given, “hostile” is not the best word.

2. d. Correct. In the first place, the South was less populous than the North. In addition, slaves constituted a major portion of the southern population. Therefore, because the free population in the South was considerably smaller than in the North, southern state governments had less to spend on internal improvements than the North because they collected less tax revenue.

a. No. Southerners did not see the industrial and transportation revolutions as threats to republican ideology

b. No. Southern capitalists believed that railroads would be a poor investment because they realized that the South did not have the consumer base to make railroads profitable. However it would be a mistake to assume that research (in the modern sense of systematically gathering data and then analyzing and drawing conclusions from that data) “clearly indicated” that such investments would be of no economic benefit to the South.

c. No. Southerners, who usually preached the ideology of states’ rights, did not believe that the construction of railroads should be the responsibility of the federal government.

3. a. Correct. The New England farm daughters who, under the Waltham Plan, were the major employees in Francis Cabot Lowell’s textile mills, usually sent a portion of their wages back to help their families.

b. No. Under the Waltham Plan, New England farm daughters lived in dormitories and boarding houses and did not live under unsanitary conditions.

c. No. Although New England farm daughters were usually hired around the age of 16, factory work was merely a stage of their lives. On average, girls worked in the factories for about five years.

d. No. The Waltham Plan usually offered New England farm daughters chances to socialize with other women their age. Also, they often attended compulsory educational lectures.

4. b. Correct. The exploitive nature of the mills by the 1830’s and 1840’s, characterized by such things as lower wages and tightened discipline resulted from a “race for profits” on the part of the mill owners.

a. No. To say that the paternalism of the original Lowell system changed because of a change in the type of worker puts the cart before the horse. Furthermore, what is meant by the “type” of worker? To say that the worker changed the system implies that immigrant laborers caused the system to become more exploitive, which is not the case.

c. No. Between 1836 and 1850 the number of spindles at Lowell mills increased 150% and the number of looms 140%. Although it is reasonable to infer that this growth caused changes in the Lowell system, one must look deeper to find the primary reason for the change from paternalism to exploitation.

d. No. The introduction of powered looms, both steam-powered and water-powered, undoubtedly changed the nature of the workplace and working conditions. However, this was not the reason for the changes that took place in Lowell.

5. d. Correct. As people began to concentrate on producing for the marketplace, they bought more items produced by other people. Therefore, as they became less self-sufficient, money became more of a necessity. This in turn led to specialization for the purpose of maximizing profits.

a. No. Although there must be some concern about quality, this is not the most important factor in a market economy.

b. No. In a market economy, crops are grown and goods are produced for the marketplace rather than for the producers’ own basic needs. Not only does such an economy encourage movement away from self-sufficient productive units, it encourages the growth of larger productive units as well.

c. No. The information about boom and bust cycles, and the impact of depressions on working-class families and information about the extremes of wealth in 1840’s and 1850’s America do not support the contention that a market economy closes the gap between rich and poor.

6. d. Correct. Through an examination of the experience of Irish immigrants, one can see the ethnic and religious divisions that were part of American society in the 19th century.

a. No. Ireland in the early 19th century was one of the most impoverished European countries, and the potato blight of 1845-46 caused widespread starvation. Most Irish immigrants left their homeland to escape desperate conditions and were not of the middle class.

b. No. Most came from rural areas where conditions were desperate because of the potato blight.

c. No. Although many young Irish women were able to find employment in American factories and households, the evidence indicates that finding such work was not always easy.