

CHAPTER 8

The Emergence of a Market Economy, 1815–1850

This chapter traces the economic and social developments from about 1815 to 1850 that placed the United States in a position to grow into a successful nation and industrial power. Particular attention is paid to the corollary developments of providing necessary transportation, improvements in communication, and the nature of labor in the early nineteenth century. The chapter also explores immigration during the time period and the ways in which it was a response to increased opportunities in the United States. At the same time, the prejudice, political backlash, and other challenges various immigrant groups often faced take a central place in the narrative. The last sections of the chapter examine labor organization, including that of early unions, as well as the rise of new professions such as law, medicine, and engineering. The chapter closes by noting that although the desire for equal opportunity had risen to new heights in the United States, progress was far from immediate, with political efforts primarily directed toward the rights of white men.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. How did changes in transportation and communication alter the economic landscape during the first half of the nineteenth century?
2. How did industrial development impact the way people worked and lived?
3. In what ways did immigration alter the nation's population and shape its politics?
4. How did the expanding "market-based economy" impact the lives of workers, professionals, and

women?

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- I. The Market Revolution
 - A. Better Roads
 - B. Waterways
 - C. Railroads
 - D. Ocean Transportation
 - E. Communications
 - F. The Role of Government
- II. Industrial Development
 - A. American Technology
 - B. The Impact of the Cotton Gin
 - C. King Cotton
 - D. The Expansion of Slavery
 - E. Farming the Midwest
 - F. Early Textile Manufacturers
 - G. The Lowell System
 - H. Industrialization, Cities, and the Environment
- III. Popular Culture
 - A. Urban Recreation
 - B. Popular Entertainment
- IV. Immigration
 - A. The Irish
 - B. The Germans
 - C. The British, Scandinavians, and Chinese
 - D. Nativism
- V. Organized Labor and New Professions
 - A. Early Unions
 - B. The Rise of the Professions

- i. Teaching
 - ii. Law, Medicine, and Engineering
 - iii. “Women’s Work”
- C. Equal Opportunities

LECTURE IDEAS

1. A good introductory lecture on the agricultural, industrial, and transportation revolutions will serve the students well in understanding this era. Useful resources include:
 - Thomas C. Cochran’s *Frontiers of Change: Early Industrialization in America* (1981)
 - George R. Taylor’s *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (1951)
 - Wilbur Cash’s *The Mind of the South* (1941)
 - Paul W. Gates’s *The Farmer’s Age of Agriculture, 1815–1860* (1966)
2. Use the biographical approach to examine the origins of American industrialization with a lecture on one of the most profoundly important figures in the history of American technology: Eli Whitney. Responsible not only for the cotton gin but also for popularizing the concept of interchangeable parts, Whitney had a crucial impact on the emergence of a factory system. See Constance Green’s *Eli Whitney and the Birth of American Technology* (1956) and the chapter “The New Economy” in Daniel Walker Howe’s *What Hath God Wrought* (2007) for the full context of Whitney’s contribution.
3. The following three works provide excellent reading in preparation for a lecture centering on the construction and impact of the Erie Canal. Julius Rubin’s “Canal or Railroad?” (*Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Nov. 1961) describes how three cities—Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia—reacted to New York’s Erie Canal. Paul Johnson’s *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium* (1978) follows the growth and changes that the Erie Canal brought to Rochester and how the “Second Great Awakening” (Chapter 13) can be seen in part as a response to that growth. For a general overview, see Carol Sheriff’s *The Artificial River: The Erie Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817–1862* (1996).
4. Write a lecture that elaborates on the environmental consequences of antebellum industrialization. For key sources that focus upon New England, see Diana Muir’s *Reflections in Bullough’s Pond: Economy and Ecosystem in New England* (2002) and David R. Foster’s *Thoreau’s Country: Journey through a Transformed Landscape* (1999). For the response of writers and intellectuals to industrial transformation, see Leo Marx’s classic *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the*

Pastoral Ideal in America (1964).

5. Ask students to trace their family roots to determine from where their ancestors came. As an alternative, you might ask them to research the ancestors of a particular American historical figure and the ways in which the immigrant experience shaped their lives. Famous immigrants featured in the chapter include Heinrich Steinweg, Levi Strauss, Elizabeth Blackwell, Alexander T. Stewart, and Victor Herbert. You can then give an introductory lecture on the issue of immigration prior to the Civil War in America, integrating some of your students' backgrounds and those of various historical figures into the lecture if possible. See John Bodnar's *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in America* (1985) and Maldwyn A. Jones's *American Immigration* (1960).
6. Write a lecture that looks at dramatic changes in levels of alcoholic consumption between roughly 1820 and 1840 to illustrate the profound social and economic developments transforming American life. See W. J. Rorabaugh's *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (1979) and Jack Larkin's *The Reshaping of Everyday Life: 1790–1840* (1988) for their coverage of taverns as vital local institutions.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES

1. The Erie Canal was one of the most successful internal improvement projects in early American history. Divide your class into local New York farmers who might oppose the canal and New York City businessmen who would support the venture and have them discuss the pros and cons of the canal from the perspective of the farmers and businessmen. The best modern treatment of the canal is Carol Sheriff's *The Artificial River* (1997), which offers a wide-ranging analysis of the project.
2. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to research the history of patents in America. Have each group find and discuss two patents—the most useful item and the most outlandish patent they can find. Sources that might be helpful include:
 - “Why There Are Too Many Patents in America”: <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/07/why-there-are-too-many-patents-in-america/259725/>
 - “United States Patent and Trade Office”: <https://www.uspto.gov/>
 - “Six significant moments in patent history”: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-moments-patent-idUSKBN0IN1Y120141104>

3. Clips from films such as *Gangs of New York* (2002) can be helpful in class. This film addresses issues such as immigration, nativism, anti-Catholicism, and urbanism. A broad discussion can be had examining these elements of American history. Books such as Sean Wilentz's *Chants Democratic* (1984) and Paul Gilje's *The Road to Mobocracy* (1987) can provide more information about this diverse era of American history.
4. Ask students to research the background and working conditions of women who worked in the Lowell textile mills from the 1820s to the 1830s. Divide the class into small groups in which they will share their findings with one another and compile a joint list. Each group should then refer to this list to create a slogan or phrase it can imagine a Lowell mill worker using during one of the 1830s strikes described in the textbook chapter.

Next, ask each group to share its slogan with the class and describe why it chose the slogan. After each group has participated, use the questions below to guide a larger class discussion:

- In what ways were the Lowell mills—especially in the beginning—beneficial to women workers? Why did the mill owners prefer women laborers at this stage?
- Describe the social and cultural life at the mills. What made them communities, not just workplaces?
- What conditions led women laborers to go on strike? Analyze reasons why the mill owners did or did not meet their demands.
- Why did Irish immigrants come to take the place of women workers at many of the mills? How might their experiences at the mills have been similar and different?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the transportation revolution that followed the opening of the Erie Canal and the ways in which it influenced the American economy.
2. What factors account for the tremendous growth in cotton cultivation from 1790 to 1860?
3. Examine the movement westward that took place in the early nineteenth century, making note of the various developments in transportation and communication that helped make it possible.
4. Examine the impact the War of 1812 had on American industrial development.
5. Discuss the unique role Catholicism played in the resistance to immigration.

6. Define the term *nativism* and discuss the reasons it emerged as a national movement, the effects it had on immigrant communities, and the opposition that arose in response to it.
7. Examine what was considered “women’s work” in the first half of the nineteenth century. What professions, if any, were readily available to women, and how did some individuals help push these boundaries?

PRACTICING CITIZENSHIP

This chapter suggests some of the ecological changes brought about by the growth of many different industries. Villages, such as the backwoods town of Chicago, developed into bustling cities, and new technologies brought an increased demand for various types of fuel and materials. Of course, the present day confronts us with environmental challenges undreamed of in the nineteenth century. One of those is the need to conscientiously dispose of outmoded or unwanted electronic equipment or “e-waste.” Find out where nearby centers are located that recycle this material (and that don’t just dump it in a landfill) and take your own e-waste there. Better yet, contact the environmental club or office on your campus and help them organize a day at your college when everyone can bring in their electronic discards for recycling.