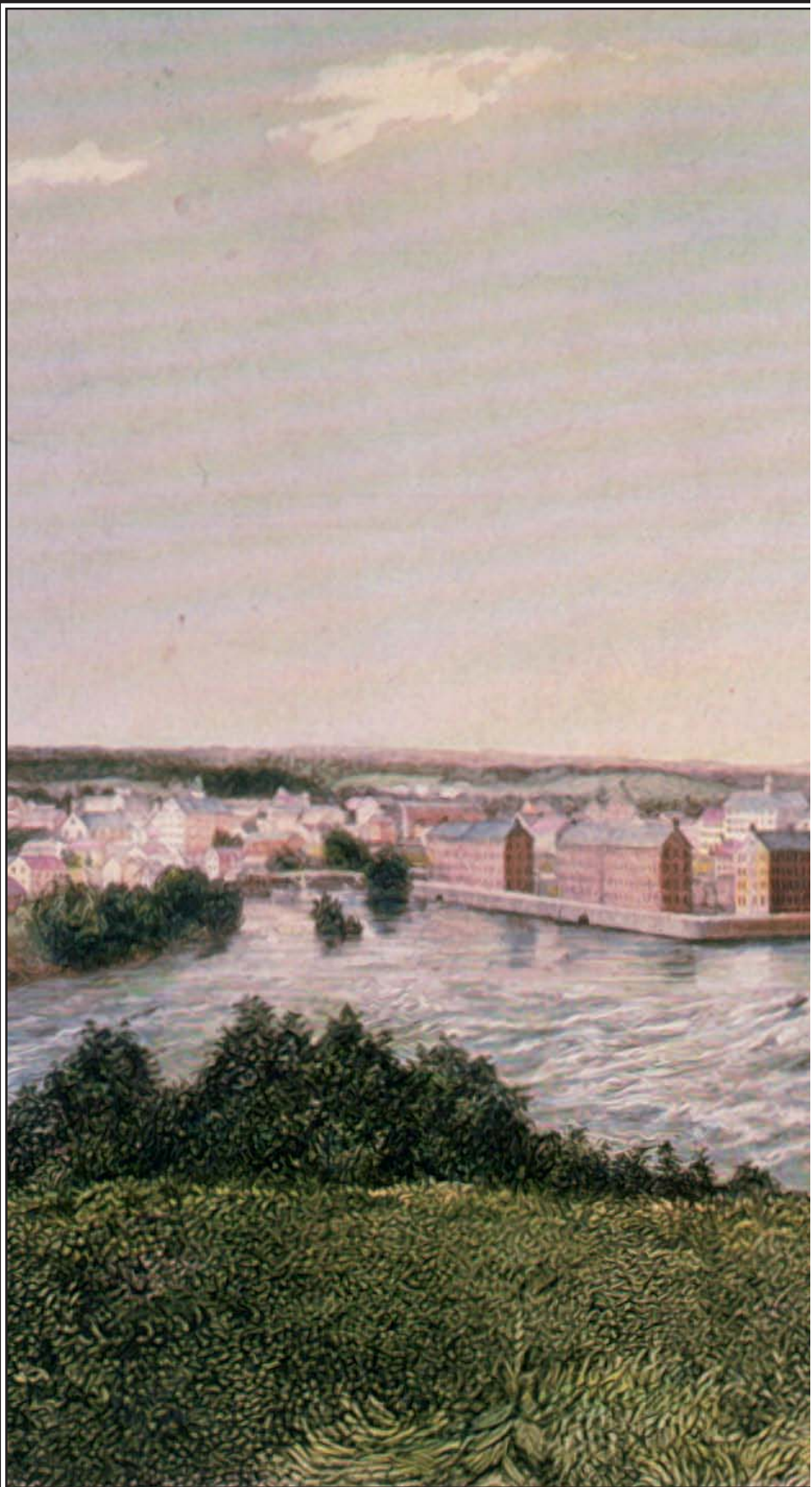
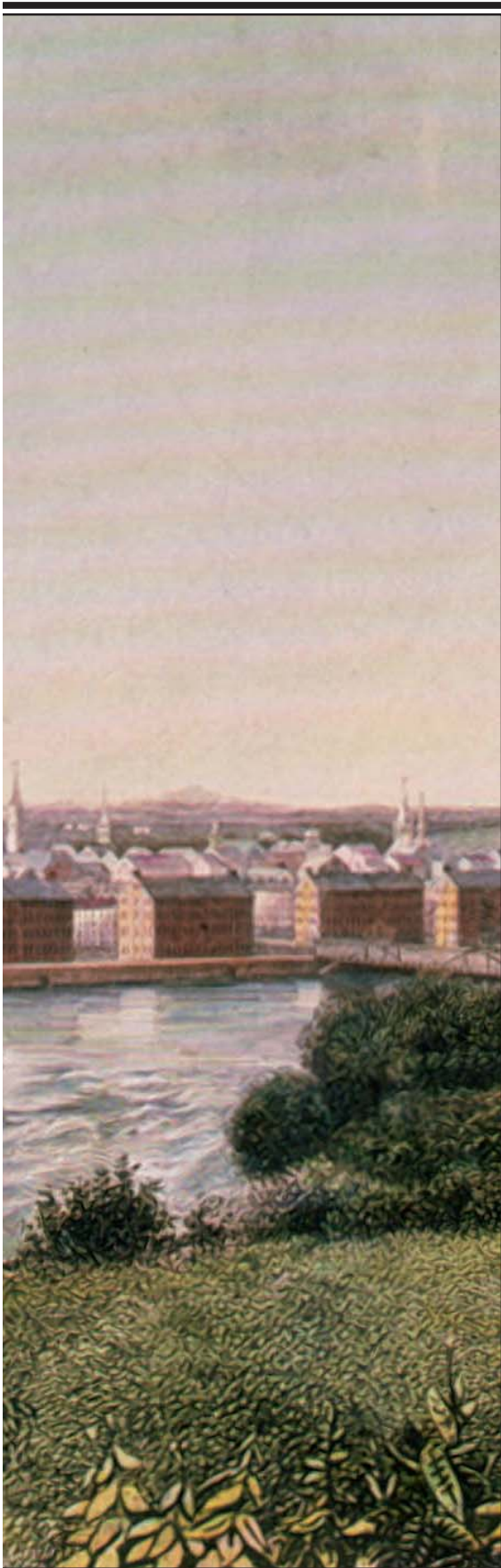


# CHAPTER 9

- 1793 Eli Whitney invents cotton gin
- 1806 Congress approves funds for the National Road
- 1807 Robert Fulton's Steamboat navigates Hudson River
- 1808 Congress abolishes international slave trade
- 1819 Adams-Onís Treaty with Spain  
*Dartmouth College v. Woodward*
- 1824 *Gibbons v. Ogden*
- 1825 Erie Canal opens
- 1829 Lydia Maria Child's *The Frugal Housewife*
- 1831 Cyrus McCormick introduces the reaper
- 1837 John Deere introduces the steel plow  
Depression begins  
Ralph Waldo Emerson's "The American Scholar"
- 1820s– Second Great Awakening  
1830s
- 1844 Telegraph put into commercial operation
- 1845 John O'Sullivan coins phrase "manifest destiny"
- 1845– Ireland's Potato Famine  
1851  
Factory Life as it Is
- 1854 Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*





# The Market Revolution, 1800–1840

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## A NEW ECONOMY

Roads and Steamboats  
The Erie Canal  
Railroads and the Telegraph  
The Rise of the West  
The Cotton Kingdom  
The Unfree Westward Movement

## MARKET SOCIETY

Commercial Farmers  
The Growth of Cities  
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The "Mill Girls"  
The Growth of Immigration  
Irish and German Newcomers  
The Rise of Nativism  
The Transformation of Law

## THE FREE INDIVIDUAL

The West and Freedom  
The Transcendentalists  
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The Awakening's Impact

## THE LIMITS OF PROSPERITY

Liberty and Prosperity  
Race and Opportunity  
The Cult of Domesticity  
Women and Work  
The Early Labor Movement  
The "Liberty of Living"

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*Painted around 1850, this work depicts the city of Lowell, Massachusetts, the most famous of the early factory towns and a center of the cotton textile industry. The factories sit alongside the Merrimack River, which supplies them with water power. The artist's prominent depiction of trees suggests that nature and industry can coexist harmoniously.*



## FOCUS QUESTIONS

- What were the main elements of the market revolution?
- How did the market revolution spark social change?
- How did the meanings of American freedom change in this period?
- How did the market revolution affect the lives of workers, women, and African-Americans?

In 1824, the Marquis de Lafayette visited the United States. Nearly fifty years had passed since, as a youth of twenty, the French nobleman fought at Washington's side in the War of Independence. Now, his thirteen-month tour became a triumphant Jubilee of Liberty. Americans had good reason to celebrate Lafayette's visit and their own freedom. Since 1784, when he had last journeyed to the United States, the nation's population had tripled to nearly 12 million, its land area had more than doubled, and its political institutions had thrived. Lafayette's tour demonstrated how profoundly the nation had changed. The thirteen states of 1784 had grown to twenty-four, and he visited every one—a journey that would have been almost impossible forty years earlier. Lafayette traveled up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers by steamboat, a recent invention that was helping to bring economic development to the trans-Appalachian West, and crossed upstate New York via the Erie Canal, the world's longest man-made waterway, which linked the region around the Great Lakes with the Atlantic coast via the Hudson River.

Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century were fond of describing liberty as the defining quality of their new nation, the unique genius of its institutions. The poet Walt Whitman wrote of his countrymen's "deathless attachment to freedom." Likenesses of the goddess of Liberty, a familiar figure in eighteenth-century British visual imagery, became even more common in the United States, appearing in paintings and sculpture and on folk art from weather vanes to quilts and tavern signs. Never, declared President Andrew Jackson in his farewell address in 1837, had any population "enjoyed so much freedom and happiness as the people of these United States." The celebration of freedom could be found in sermons, newspaper editorials, and political pronouncements in every region of the country. In *Democracy in America*, the French historian and politician Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of the "holy cult of freedom" he encountered on his own visit to the United States during the early 1830s. "For fifty years," he wrote, "the inhabitants of the United States have been repeatedly and constantly told that they are the only religious, enlightened, and free people. They . . . have an immensely high opinion of themselves and are not far from believing that they form a species apart from the rest of the human race."

Even as Lafayette, Tocqueville, and numerous other visitors from abroad toured the United States, however, Americans' understandings of freedom were changing. Three historical processes unleashed by the Revolution accelerated after the War of 1812: the spread of market relations, the westward movement of the population, and the rise of a vigorous political democracy. (The first two will be discussed in this chapter, the third in Chapter 10.) All powerfully affected the



development of American society. They also helped to reshape the idea of freedom, identifying it ever more closely with economic opportunity, physical mobility, and participation in a vibrantly democratic political system.

But American freedom also continued to be shaped by the presence of slavery. Lafayette, who had purchased a plantation in the West Indies and freed its slaves, once wrote, “I would never have drawn my sword in the cause of America if I could have conceived that thereby I was founding a land of slavery.” Yet slavery was moving westward with the young republic. The same steamboats and canals that enabled millions of farm families to send their goods to market also facilitated the growth of slave-based cotton plantations in the South. And slavery drew a strict racial boundary around American democracy, making voting, officeholding, and participation in the public sphere privileges for whites alone. In several southern cities, public notices warned “persons of color” to stay away from the ceremonies honoring Lafayette. Half a century after the winning of independence, the coexistence of liberty and slavery, and their simultaneous expansion, remained the central contradiction of American life.

## A NEW ECONOMY

In the first half of the nineteenth century, an economic transformation known to historians as the market revolution swept over the United States. Its catalyst was a series of innovations in transportation and communication. American technology had hardly changed during the colonial era. No important alterations were made in sailing ships, no major canals were built, and manufacturing continued to be done by hand, with skills passed on from artisan to journeyman and apprentice. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, most roads were little more than rutted paths through the woods. Apart from sailing ships plying the Atlantic coast and flatboats floating downstream on major rivers, trade within the new nation faced insuperable barriers. Transporting goods thirty miles inland by road cost as much as shipping the same cargo from England. In 1800, it took fifty days to move goods from Cincinnati to New York City, via a flatboat ride down the Mississippi River to New Orleans and then a journey by sail along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts.

The market revolution represented an acceleration of developments already under way in the colonial era. As noted in previous chapters, southern planters were marketing the products of slave labor in the international market as early as the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth, many colonists had been drawn into Britain’s commercial empire. Consumer goods like



**BOSTON,  
Plymouth & Sandwich  
MAIL STAGE,**  
CONTINUES TO RUN AS FOLLOWS:

LEAVES Boston every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings at 5 o'clock, breakfast at Leonard's, Scituate; dine at Bradford's, Plymouth; and arrive in Sandwich the same evening. Leaves Sandwich every Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings; breakfast at Bradford's, Plymouth; dine at Leonard's, Scituate, and arrive in Boston the same evening.

Passing through Dorchester, Quincy, Weymouth, Hingham, Scituate, Hanover, Pembroke, Duxbury, Kingston, Plymouth to Sandwich. Fare, from Boston to Scituate, 1 doll. 25 cts. From Boston to Plymouth, 2 dolls. 50 cts. From Boston to Sandwich, 3 dolls. 63 cts.

N.B. Extra Carriages can be obtained of the proprietors, at Boston and Plymouth, at short notice—  
STAGE BOOKS kept at Boyles's Market-square, Boston, and at Fownden's, Plymouth.

**LEONARD & WOODWARD.**  
BOSTON, November 24, 1810.

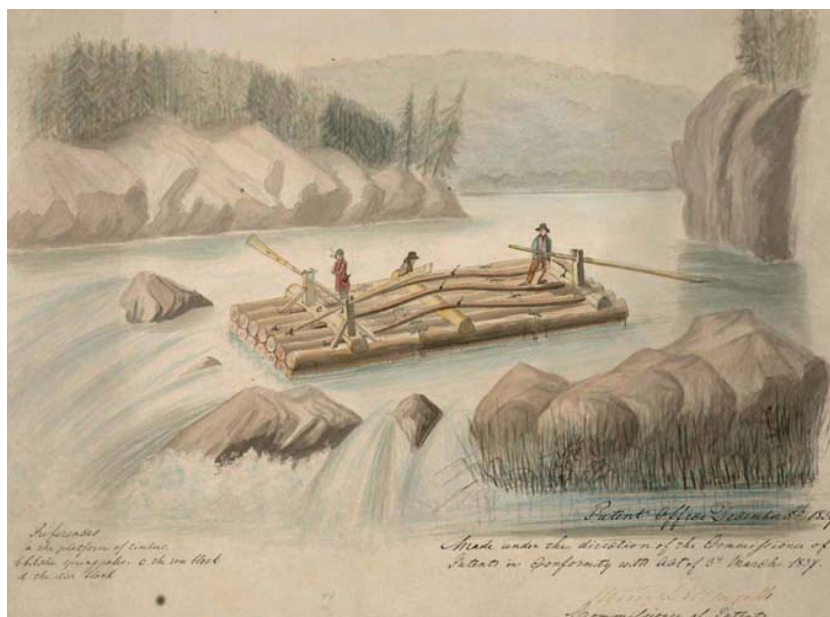
An 1810 advertisement for a stagecoach route linking Boston and Sandwich, Massachusetts, reveals the slow speed and high cost of land transportation in the early nineteenth century. It took the entire day (beginning at 5 A.M.), and cost around fifty dollars in today’s money to travel the fifty-seven miles between the towns, with stops along the way for breakfast and lunch.

sugar and tea, and market-oriented tactics like the boycott of British goods, had been central to the political battles leading up to independence.

Nonetheless, as Americans moved across the Appalachian Mountains, and into interior regions of the states along the Atlantic coast, they found themselves more and more isolated from markets. In 1800, American farm families produced at home most of what they needed, from clothing to farm implements. What they could not make themselves, they obtained by bartering with their neighbors or purchasing from local stores and from rural craftsmen like blacksmiths and shoemakers. Those farmers not located near cities or navigable waterways found it almost impossible to market their produce.

The early life of Abraham Lincoln was typical of those who grew up in the pre-market world. Lincoln was born in Kentucky in 1809 and seven years later moved with his family to Indiana, where he lived until 1831. His father occasionally took pork down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to market in New Orleans, and Lincoln himself at age nineteen traveled by flatboat to that city to sell the goods of a local merchant. But essentially, the Lincoln family was self-sufficient. They hunted game for much of their food and sewed most of their clothing at home. They relied little on cash; Lincoln's father sometimes sent young Abraham to work for neighbors as a way of settling debts. As an adult, however, Lincoln embraced the market revolution. In the Illinois legislature in the 1830s, he eagerly promoted the improvement of rivers to facilitate access to markets. As a lawyer, he eventually came to represent the Illinois Central Railroad, which opened large areas of Illinois to commercial farming.

Many Americans devoted their energies to solving the technological problems that inhibited commerce within the country. Thomas Paine spent the 1780s and 1790s not only promoting democracy in America and Europe but also developing a design for an iron bridge, so that rivers could be crossed in all seasons of the year without impeding river traffic.



An 1837 copy of a color drawing that accompanied a patent application for a type of raft designed in 1818. For many years, rafts like this were used to transport goods to market on western rivers.



### ROADS AND STEAMBOATS

In the first half of the nineteenth century, in rapid succession, the steamboat, canal, railroad, and telegraph wrenched America out of its economic past. These innovations opened new land to settlement, lowered transportation costs, and made it far easier for economic enterprises to sell their products. They linked farmers to national and world markets and made them major consumers of manufactured goods. Americans, wrote Tocqueville, had “annihilated space and time.”

The first advance in overland transportation came through the construction of toll roads, or “turnpikes,” by localities, states, and private companies. Between 1800 and 1830, the New England and Middle Atlantic states alone chartered more than 900 companies to build new roads. In 1806, Congress authorized the construction of the paved National Road from Cumberland, Maryland, to the Old Northwest. It reached Wheeling, on the Ohio River, in 1818 and by 1838 extended to Illinois, where it ended.

Because maintenance costs were higher than expected and many towns built “shunpikes”—short detours that enabled residents to avoid tollgates, most private toll roads never turned a profit. Even on the new roads, horse-drawn wagons remained an inefficient mode of getting goods to market, except over short distances. It was improved water transportation that most dramatically increased the speed and lowered the expense of commerce.

Robert Fulton, a Pennsylvania-born artist and engineer, had experimented with steamboat designs while living in France during the 1790s. He even launched a steamboat on the Seine River in Paris in 1803. But not until 1807, when Fulton’s ship, the *Clermont*, navigated the Hudson River from New York City to Albany, was the steamboat’s technological and commercial feasibility demonstrated. The invention made possible upstream commerce (that is, travel against the current) on the country’s major rivers as well as rapid transport across the Great Lakes and, eventually, the Atlantic Ocean. By 1811, the first steamboat had been introduced on the Mississippi River; twenty years later some 200 plied its waters.

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*A view of New York City, in 1849, by the noted lithographer Nathaniel Currier. Steamships and sailing vessels of various sizes crowd the harbor of the nation’s largest city and busiest port.*

## THE ERIE CANAL

The completion in 1825 of the 363-mile Erie Canal across upstate New York (a remarkable feat of engineering at a time when America's next largest canal was only twenty-eight miles long) allowed goods to flow between the Great Lakes and New York City. Almost instantaneously, the canal attracted an influx of farmers migrating from New England, giving birth to cities like Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse along its path. Its water, wrote the novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne after a trip on the canal, served as a miraculous "fertilizer," for "it causes towns with their masses of brick and stone, their churches and theaters, their business . . . to spring up."

New York governor DeWitt Clinton, who oversaw the construction of the state-financed canal, predicted that it would make New York City "the granary of the world, the emporium of commerce, the seat of manufactures, the focus of great moneyed operations." And, indeed, the canal gave New York City primacy over competing ports in access to trade with the Old Northwest. In its financing by the state government, the Erie Canal typified the developing transportation infrastructure. With the federal government generally under the control of political leaders hostile to federal funding for internal improvements, the burden fell on the states. Between 1787 and 1860, the federal government spent about \$60 million building roads and canals and improving harbors; the states spent nearly ten times that sum.

The completion of the Erie Canal set off a scramble among other states to match New York's success. Several borrowed so much money to finance elaborate programs of canal construction that they went bankrupt during the economic depression that began in 1837. By then, however, more than 3,000 miles of canals had been built, creating a network linking the Atlantic states with the Ohio and Mississippi Valleys and drastically reducing the cost of transportation.

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*A watercolor from 1830 depicts the Erie Canal five years after it opened. Boats carrying passengers and goods traverse the waterway, along whose banks farms and villages have sprung up.*





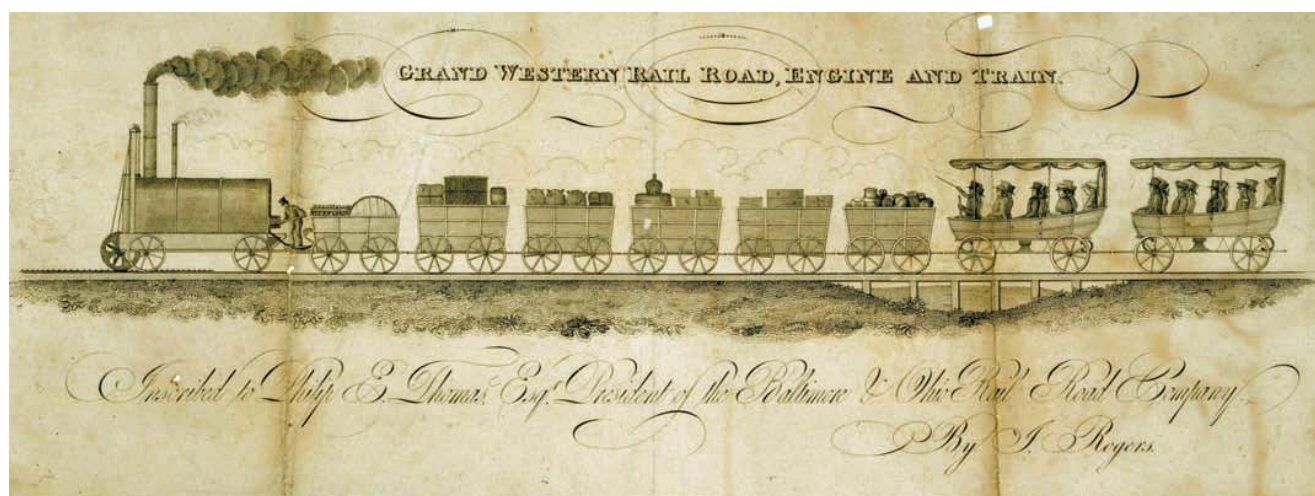


### RAILROADS AND THE TELEGRAPH

Canals connected existing waterways. The railroad opened vast new areas of the American interior to settlement, while stimulating the mining of coal for fuel and the manufacture of iron for locomotives and rails. Work on the Baltimore and Ohio, the nation's first commercial railroad, began in 1828.

*The improvement of existing roads and building of new roads and canals sharply reduced transportation times and costs and stimulated the growth of the market economy.*





An 1827 engraving designed to show the feasibility of railroads driven by steam-powered locomotives, and dedicated to the president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, which began construction in the following year. The engraver placed passengers as far from the locomotive as possible to ensure their safety in case of an explosion.

Five years later, the South Carolina Canal and Railroad, which stretched from Charleston across the state to Hamburg, became the first long-distance line to begin operation. By 1860, the railroad network had grown to 30,000 miles, more than the total in the rest of the world combined.

At the same time, the telegraph made possible instantaneous communication throughout the nation. The device was invented during the 1830s by Samuel F. B. Morse, an artist and amateur scientist living in New York City, and it was put into commercial operation in 1844. Using Morse code, messages could be sent over electric wires, with each letter and number represented by its own pattern of electrical pulses. Within sixteen years, some 50,000 miles of telegraph wire had been strung. Initially, the telegraph was a service for businesses, and especially newspapers, rather than individuals. It helped speed the flow of information and brought uniformity to prices throughout the country.

#### THE RISE OF THE WEST

Improvements in transportation and communication made possible the rise of the West as a powerful, self-conscious region of the new nation. Between 1790 and 1840, some 4.5 million people crossed the Appalachian Mountains—more than the entire U.S. population at the time of Washington's first inauguration. Most of this migration took place after the end of the War of 1812, which unleashed a flood of land-hungry settlers moving from eastern states. In the six years following the end of the war in 1815, six new states entered the Union (Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Alabama, Mississippi, and Maine—the last an eastern frontier for New England).

Few Americans moved west as lone pioneers. More frequently, people traveled in groups and, once they arrived in the West, cooperated with each other to clear land, build houses and barns, and establish communities. One stream of migration, including both small farmers and planters with their slaves, flowed out of the South to create the new Cotton Kingdom of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Many farm families from the Upper South crossed into southern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. A third population stream moved from New England across New York to the

Upper Northwest—northern Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and Michigan and Wisconsin.

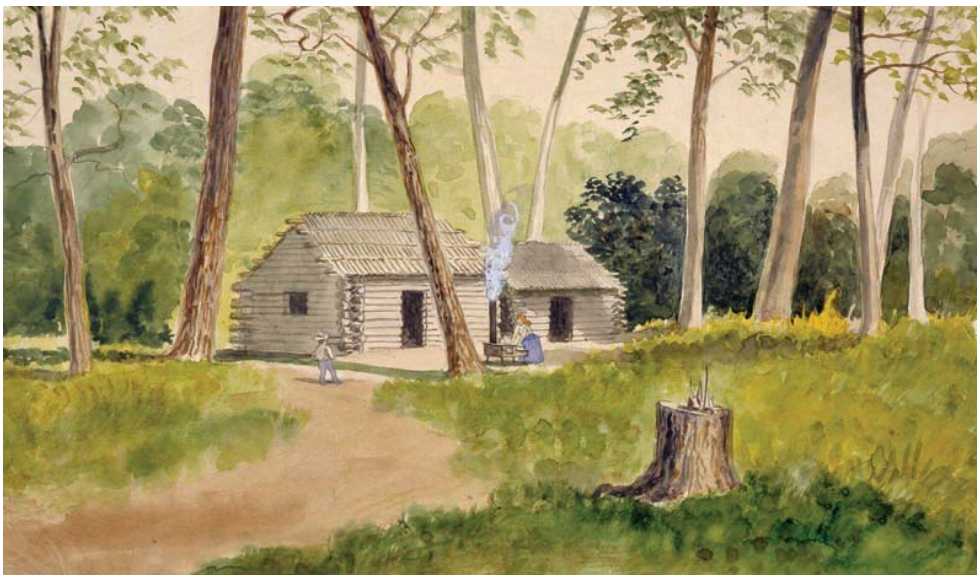
Some western migrants became “squatters,” setting up farms on unoccupied land without a clear legal title. Those who purchased land acquired it either from the federal government, at the price, after 1820, of \$1.25 per acre payable in cash, or from land speculators on long-term credit. By 1840, settlement had reached the Mississippi River and two large new regions—the Old Northwest and Old Southwest—had entered the Union. The West became the home of regional cultures very much like those the migrants had left behind. Upstate New York and the Upper Northwest resembled New England, with its small towns, churches, and schools, while the Lower South replicated the plantation-based society of the southern Atlantic states.

As population moved west, the nation's borders expanded. National boundaries made little difference to territorial expansion—in Florida, and later in Texas and Oregon, American settlers rushed in to claim land under the jurisdiction of foreign countries (Spain, Mexico, and Britain) or Indian tribes, confident that American sovereignty would soon follow in their wake. Nor did the desire of local inhabitants to remain outside the American republic deter the nation's expansion. Florida, for example, fell into American hands despite the resistance of local Indians and Spain's rejection of American offers to buy the area. In 1810, American residents of West Florida rebelled and seized Baton Rouge, and the United States soon annexed the area. The drive for the acquisition of East Florida was spurred by Georgia and Alabama planters who wished to eliminate a refuge for fugitive slaves and hostile Seminole Indians. Andrew Jackson led troops into the area in 1818. While on foreign soil, he created an international crisis by executing two British traders and a number of Indian chiefs. Although Jackson withdrew, Spain, aware that it could not defend the territory, sold it to the United States in the Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819.

Successive censuses told the remarkable story of western growth. In 1840, by which time the government had sold to settlers and land companies nearly 43 million acres of land, 7 million Americans—two-fifths of the

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*A watercolor by the artist Edwin Whitefield depicts a squatter's cabin in the Minnesota woods.*



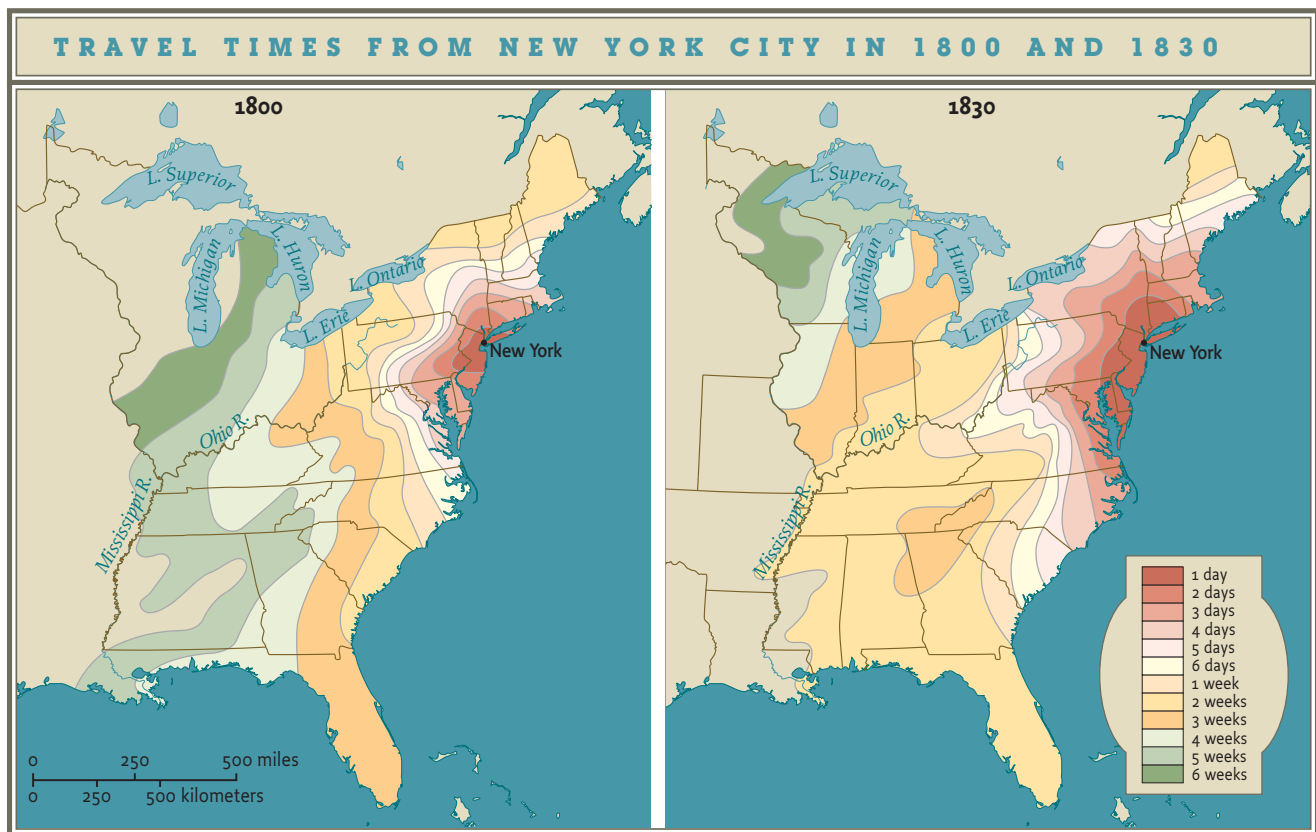
### THE MARKET REVOLUTION: WESTERN SETTLEMENT, 1800–1820



*In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the westward movement of the population brought settlement to and across the Mississippi River. Before canals—and later, railroads—opened previously landlocked areas to commercial farming, settlement was concentrated near rivers.*

total population—lived beyond the Appalachian Mountains. Between 1810 and 1830, Ohio's population grew from 231,000 to more than 900,000. It reached nearly 2 million in 1850, when it ranked third among all the states. The careers of the era's leading public figures reflected the westward movement. Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and many other statesmen had been born in states along the Atlantic coast but made their mark in politics after moving west.





### THE COTTON KINGDOM

Although the market revolution and westward expansion occurred simultaneously in the North and the South, their combined effects heightened the nation's sectional divisions. In some ways, the most dynamic feature of the American economy in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century was the rise of the Cotton Kingdom. The early industrial revolution, which began in England and soon spread to parts of the North, centered on factories producing cotton textiles with water-powered spinning and weaving machinery. These factories generated an immense demand for cotton, a crop the Deep South was particularly suited to growing because of its climate and soil fertility. Until 1793, the marketing of cotton had been slowed by the laborious task of removing seeds from the plant itself. But in that year, Eli Whitney, a Yale graduate working in Georgia as a private tutor, invented the cotton gin. A fairly simple device consisting of rollers and brushes, the gin quickly separated the seed from the cotton. It made possible the growing and selling of cotton on a large scale.

Coupled with rising demand for cotton and the opening of new lands in the West to settlement, Whitney's invention revolutionized American slavery. An institution that many Americans had expected to die out because its major crop, tobacco, exhausted the soil, now embarked on a period of unprecedented expansion. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, cotton plantations spread into the South Carolina upcountry (the region inland from the Atlantic coast previously dominated by small farms), a major reason why the state reopened the African slave trade between

*These maps illustrate how the transportation revolution of the early nineteenth century made possible much more rapid travel within the United States.*

**Table 9.1 POPULATION GROWTH OF SELECTED WESTERN STATES, 1800–1850 (EXCLUDING INDIANS)**

| State       | 1810    | 1830    | 1850      |
|-------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Alabama     | 9,000   | 310,000 | 772,000   |
| Illinois    | 12,000  | 157,000 | 851,000   |
| Indiana     | 25,000  | 343,000 | 988,000   |
| Louisiana   | 77,000  | 216,000 | 518,000   |
| Mississippi | 31,000  | 137,000 | 607,000   |
| Missouri    | 20,000  | 140,000 | 682,000   |
| Ohio        | 231,000 | 938,000 | 1,980,000 |



Slave Trader, Sold to Tennessee, a watercolor sketch by the artist Lewis Miller from the mid-1850s. Miller depicts a group of slaves being marched from Virginia to Tennessee. Once Congress voted to prohibit the further importation of slaves into the country, slaveowners in newly opened areas of the country had to obtain slaves from other parts of the United States.

1803 and 1808. After the War of 1812, the federal government moved to consolidate American control over the Deep South, forcing defeated Indians to cede land, encouraging white settlement, and acquiring Florida. With American sovereignty came the expansion of slavery. Settlers from the older southern states flooded into the region. Planters monopolized the most fertile land, while poorer farmers were generally confined to less productive and less accessible areas in the “hill country” and piney woods. After Congress prohibited the Atlantic slave trade in 1808—the earliest date allowed by the Constitution—a massive trade in slaves developed within the United States, supplying the labor force required by the new Cotton Kingdom.

#### THE UNFREE WESTWARD MOVEMENT

Historians estimate that around 1 million slaves were shifted from the older slave states to the Deep South between 1800 and 1860. Some traveled with their owners to newly established plantations, but the majority were transported by slave traders to be sold at auction for work in the cotton fields. Slave trading became a well-organized business, with firms gathering slaves in Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina and shipping them to markets in Mobile, Natchez, and New Orleans. Slave coffles—groups chained to one another on forced marches to the Deep South—became a common sight. A British visitor to the United States in the 1840s encountered what he called a “disgusting and hideous spectacle,” a file of “about two hundred slaves, manacled and chained together,” being marched from Virginia to Louisiana. A source of greater freedom for many whites, the westward movement meant to African-Americans the destruction of family ties, the breakup of long-standing communities, and receding opportunities for liberty.

In 1793, when Whitney designed his invention, the United States produced 5 million pounds of cotton. By 1820, the crop had grown to nearly 170 million pounds. Thomas Jefferson had believed that European demand for American grain would underpin the nation’s economic growth and the small farmer’s independence. But as the southern economy expanded westward, it was cotton produced on slave plantations, not grain grown by sturdy yeomen, that became the linchpin of southern development and by far the most important export of the empire of liberty.

#### MARKET SOCIETY

Since cotton was produced solely for sale in national and international markets, the South was in some ways the most commercially oriented



region of the United States. Yet rather than spurring economic change, the South's expansion westward simply reproduced the same agrarian, slave-based social order of the older states. The region remained overwhelmingly rural. In 1860, roughly 80 percent of southerners worked the land—the same proportion as in 1800. The South's transportation and banking systems remained adjuncts of the plantation economy, geared largely to

*Maps of cotton production graphically illustrate the rise of the Cotton Kingdom stretching from South Carolina to Louisiana.*



transporting cotton and other staple crops to market and financing the purchase of land and slaves.

### COMMERCIAL FARMERS

In the North, however, the market revolution and westward expansion set in motion changes that transformed the region into an integrated economy of commercial farms and manufacturing cities. As in the case of Lincoln's family, the initial pioneer stage of settlement reinforced the farmer's self-sufficiency, for the tasks of felling trees, building cabins, breaking the soil, and feeding the family left little time for agriculture geared to the market. But as the Old Northwest became a more settled society, bound by a web of transportation and credit to eastern centers of commerce and banking, farmers found themselves drawn into the new market economy. They increasingly concentrated on growing crops and raising livestock for sale, while purchasing at stores goods previously produced at home.

Western farmers found in the growing cities of the East a market for their produce and a source of credit. Loans originating with eastern banks and insurance companies financed the acquisition of land and supplies and, in the 1840s and 1850s, the purchase of fertilizer and new agricultural machinery to expand production. The steel plow, invented by John Deere in 1837 and mass-produced by the 1850s, made possible the rapid subduing of the western prairies. The reaper, a horse-drawn machine that greatly increased the amount of wheat a farmer could harvest, was invented by Cyrus McCormick in 1831 and produced in large quantities soon afterward. Tens of thousands were in use on the eve of the Civil War. Between 1840 and 1860, America's output of wheat nearly tripled. Unlike cotton, however, the bulk of the crop was consumed within the country. Eastern farmers, unable to grow wheat and corn as cheaply as their western counterparts, increasingly concentrated on producing dairy products, fruits, and vegetables for nearby urban centers.

Lagonda Agricultural Works, a color lithograph from 1859 advertising an Ohio manufacturer of agricultural machinery, in this case a horse-drawn reaper.



### THE GROWTH OF CITIES

From the beginning, cities formed part of the western frontier. Western cities like Cincinnati and St. Louis that stood at the crossroads of inter-regional trade experienced extraordinary growth. Cincinnati was known as "porkopolis," after its slaughterhouses where hundreds of thousands of pigs were butchered each year and processed for shipment to eastern consumers of meat. The greatest of all the western cities was Chicago. In the early 1830s, it was a tiny settlement on the shore of Lake Michigan. By 1860, thanks to the railroad, Chicago had become the nation's fourth largest city,



*A painting of Cincinnati, self-styled Queen City of the West, from 1835. Steamboats line the Ohio River waterfront.*

where farm products from throughout the Northwest were gathered to be sent east.

Like rural areas, urban centers witnessed dramatic changes due to the market revolution. The number of cities with populations exceeding 5,000 rose from 12 in 1820 to nearly 150 three decades later, by which time the urban population numbered more than 6 million. Urban merchants, bankers, and master craftsmen took advantage of the economic opportunities created by the expanding market among commercial farmers. The drive among these businessmen to increase production and reduce labor costs fundamentally altered the nature of work. Traditionally, skilled artisans had manufactured goods at home, where they controlled the pace and intensity of their own labor. Now, entrepreneurs gathered artisans into large workshops in order to oversee their work and subdivide their tasks. Craftsmen who traditionally produced an entire pair of shoes or piece of furniture saw the labor process broken down into numerous steps requiring far less skill and training. They found themselves subjected to constant supervision by their employers and relentless pressure for greater output and lower wages.

#### THE FACTORY SYSTEM

In some industries, most notably textiles, the factory superceded traditional craft production altogether. Factories gathered large groups of workers under central supervision and replaced hand tools with power-driven machinery. Samuel Slater, an immigrant from England, established America's first factory in 1790 at Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Since British law made it illegal to export the plans for industrial machinery, Slater, a skilled mechanic, built from memory a power-driven spinning jenny, one of the key inventions of the early industrial revolution.



Although the United States was still predominantly agricultural, by 1840 major cities had arisen in the northern and northwestern states. The South lagged far behind in urban growth. Most cities were located on navigable waterways—either the Atlantic coast or inland rivers—or on rivers that provided water power for early factories.

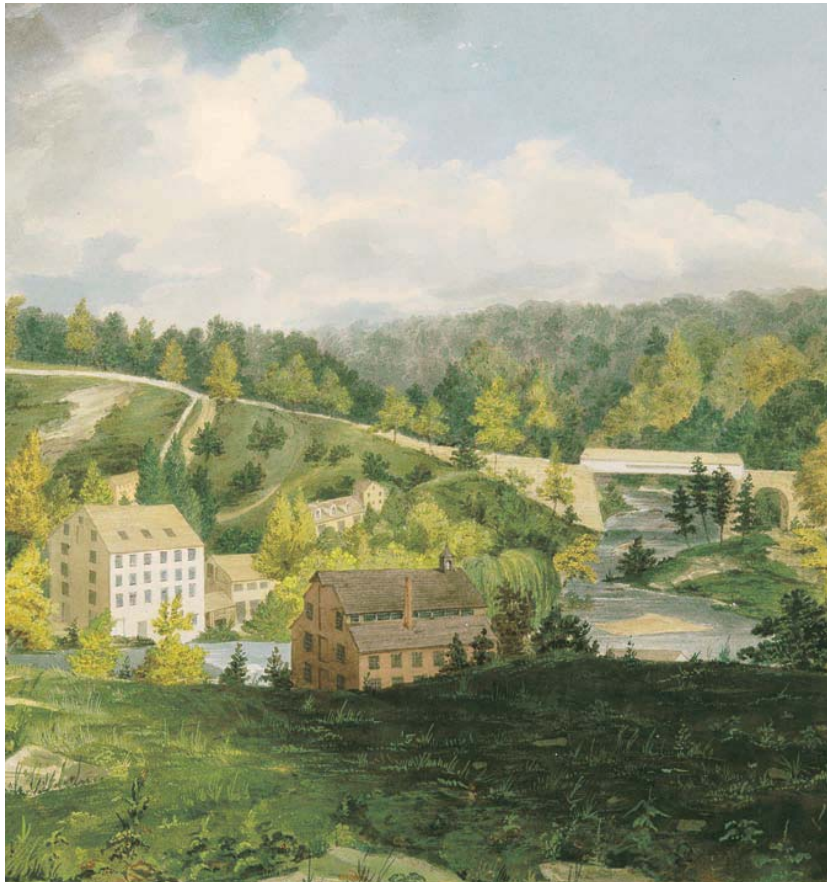


Spinning factories such as Slater's produced yarn, which was then sent to traditional hand-loom weavers and farm families to be woven into cloth. This "outwork" system, in which rural men and women earned money by taking in jobs from factories, typified early industrialization. Before shoe production was fully mechanized, for example, various parts of the shoe were produced in factories, then stitched together in nearby homes, and then returned to the factories for finishing. Eventually, however, the entire manufacturing process in textiles, shoes, and many other products was brought under a single factory roof.

The cutoff of British imports because of the Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812 stimulated the establishment of the first large-scale American factory utilizing power looms for weaving cotton cloth. This was constructed in 1814 at Waltham, Massachusetts, by a group of merchants who came to be called the Boston Associates. In the 1820s, they expanded their enterprise by creating an entirely new factory town (incorporated as the city of Lowell in 1836) on the Merrimack River, twenty-seven miles from Boston. Here they built a group of modern textile factories that brought together all phases of production from the spinning of thread to the weaving and finishing of cloth. By 1850, Lowell's fifty-two mills employed more than 10,000 workers. Across New England, small industrial cities sprang up pat-



*A group of shoemakers with their tools, photographed in 1837. Artisan production survived in many crafts, but shoemakers found themselves in dire straits as factories began industrializing shoe production.*



*Mill on the Brandywine, an 1830 watercolor of a Pennsylvania paper mill. Because it relied on water power, much early manufacturing took place in the countryside.*



*The early industrial revolution was concentrated in New England, where factories producing textiles from raw cotton sprang up along the region's many rivers, taking advantage of water power to drive their machinery.*

turned on Waltham and Lowell. Massachusetts soon became the second most industrialized region of the world, after Great Britain.

The earliest factories, including those at Pawtucket, Waltham, and Lowell, were located along the “fall line,” where waterfalls and river rapids could be harnessed to provide power for spinning and weaving machinery. By the 1840s, steam power made it possible for factory owners to locate in towns like New Bedford nearer to the coast, and in large cities like Philadelphia and Chicago with their immense local markets. In 1850, manufacturers produced in factories not only textiles but also a wide variety of other goods, including tools, firearms, shoes, clocks, ironware, and agricultural machinery. What came to be called the “American system of manufactures” relied on the mass production of interchangeable parts that could be rapidly assembled into standardized finished products. This technique was first perfected in the manufacture of clocks by Eli Terry, a

Connecticut craftsman, and in small-arms production by Eli Whitney, who had previously invented the cotton gin. More impressive, in a way, than factory production was the wide dispersion of mechanical skills throughout northern society. Every town, it seemed, had its sawmill, paper mill, iron works, shoemaker, hatmaker, tailor, and a host of other such small enterprises.

The early industrial revolution was largely confined to New England and a few cities outside it. Lacking a strong internal market, and with its slaveholding class generally opposed to industrial development, the South lagged in factory production. And outside New England, most northern manufacturing was still done in small-scale establishments employing a handful of workers, not in factories. In Cincinnati, for example, most workers in 1850 still labored in small unmechanized workshops.

### THE INDUSTRIAL WORKER

The market revolution helped to change Americans' conception of time itself. Farm life continued to be regulated by the rhythms of the seasons. But in cities, clocks became part of daily life, and work time and leisure time came to be clearly marked off from one another. In artisan workshops of the colonial and early national eras, bouts of intense work alternated with periods of leisure. Artisans would set down their tools to enjoy a drink at a tavern or attend a political discussion. As the market revolution accelerated, work in factories, workshops, and even for servants in Americans' homes, took place for a specified number of hours per day. In colonial America, an artisan's pay was known as his "price," since it was linked to the goods he produced. In the nineteenth century, pay increasingly became a "wage," paid according to an hourly or daily rate. The increasing reliance on railroads, which operated according to fixed schedules, also made Americans more conscious of arranging their lives according to "clock time."

Closely supervised work tending a machine for a period determined by a clock seemed to violate the independence Americans considered an essential element of freedom. Consequently, few native-born men could be attracted to work in the early factories. Employers turned instead to those who lacked other ways of earning a living.

### THE "MILL GIRLS"

While some factories employed entire families, the early New England textile mills relied largely on female and child labor. At Lowell, the most famous center of early textile manufacturing, young unmarried women from Yankee farm families dominated the workforce that tended the spinning machines. To persuade parents to allow their daughters to leave home to work in the mills, Lowell owners set up boarding houses with strict rules regulating personal behavior. They also established lecture halls, churches, and even a periodical edited by factory workers, the *Lowell Offering*, to occupy the women's free time.

The constant supervision of the workers' private lives seems impossibly restrictive from a modern point of view. But this was the first time in history that large numbers of women left their homes to participate in the pub-

# TIME TABLE OF THE LOWELL MILLS,

Arranged to make the working time throughout the year average 11 hours per day,  
TO TAKE EFFECT SEPTEMBER 21st, 1853.

The Standard time being that of the meridian of Lowell, as shown by the Regulator  
Clock of AMOS SANBORN, Post Office Corner, Central Street.

From March 30th to September 19th, inclusive.

COMMENCE WORK, at 6.30 A. M. LEAVE OFF WORK, at 6.30 P. M., except on Saturday Evenings.  
BREAKFAST at 6 A. M. DINNER, at 12 M. Common Work, after dinner, 12.45 P. M.

From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.

COMMENCE WORK at 7.00 A. M. LEAVE OFF WORK, at 7.00 P. M., except on Saturday Evenings.  
BREAKFAST at 6.30 A. M. DINNER, at 12.30 P. M. Common Work, after dinner, 1.15 P. M.

## B E L L S .

From March 30th to September 19th, inclusive.

| Morning Bells.                   |            | Dinner Bells.  |             | Evening Bells.               |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------------|------------|
| First bell,.....                 | 4.30 A. M. | Ring out,..... | 12.00 M.    | Ring out,.....               | 6.30 P. M. |
| Second, 5.30 A. M. ; Third, 6.30 |            | Ring in,.....  | 12.30 P. M. | Except on Saturday Evenings. |            |

From September 20th to March 19th, inclusive.

| Morning Bells.                   |            | Dinner Bells.  |             | Evening Bells.               |            |
|----------------------------------|------------|----------------|-------------|------------------------------|------------|
| First bell,.....                 | 5.00 A. M. | Ring out,..... | 12.30 P. M. | Ring out at,.....            | 7.00 P. M. |
| Second, 6.00 A. M. ; Third, 6.50 |            | Ring in,.....  | 1.05 P. M.  | Except on Saturday Evenings. |            |

## SATURDAY EVENING BELLS.

During APRIL, MAY, JUNE, JULY, and AUGUST, Ring out, at 6.00 P. M.  
The remaining Saturday Evenings in the year, ring out as follows:

| SEPTEMBER.                          |                                    | NOVEMBER.                           |  | JANUARY. |  |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|----------|--|
| First Saturday, ring out 6.00 P. M. | Third Saturday ring out 4.00 P. M. | Third Saturday, ring out 4.35 P. M. |  |          |  |
| Second " " " 5.45 " "               | Fourth " " " 3.55 " "              | Fourth " " " 4.35 " "               |  |          |  |
| Third " " " 5.30 " "                |                                    |                                     |  |          |  |
| Fourth " " " 5.20 " "               |                                    |                                     |  |          |  |

| OCTOBER.                            |                                     | DECEMBER.                           |  | FEBRUARY. |  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|-----------|--|
| First Saturday, ring out 5.05 P. M. | First Saturday, ring out 3.50 P. M. | First Saturday, ring out 4.45 P. M. |  |           |  |
| Second " " " 4.55 " "               | Second " " " 3.55 " "               | Second " " " 4.55 " "               |  |           |  |
| Third " " " 4.45 " "                | Third " " " 3.55 " "                | Third " " " 5.00 " "                |  |           |  |
| Fourth " " " 4.35 " "               | Fourth " " " 4.00 " "               | Fourth " " " 5.10 " "               |  |           |  |
| Fifth " " " 4.25 " "                | Fifth " " " 4.00 " "                |                                     |  |           |  |

| MARCH.                              |                                     | NOVEMBER. |  | JANUARY. |  |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|--|----------|--|
| First Saturday, ring out 5.25 P. M. |                                     |           |  |          |  |
| Second " " " 5.30 " "               |                                     |           |  |          |  |
| Third " " " 5.35 " "                |                                     |           |  |          |  |
| Fourth " " " 5.45 " "               |                                     |           |  |          |  |
| First Saturday, ring out 4.15 P. M. | First Saturday, ring out 4.10 P. M. |           |  |          |  |
| Second " " " 4.05 " "               | Second " " " 4.15 " "               |           |  |          |  |

YARD GATES will be opened at the first stroke of the bells for entering or leaving the Mills.

\*.\* SPEED GATES commence hoisting three minutes before commencing work.

Feshell, Printer, Wyman's Exchange, 25 Market St.

A broadside from 1853, illustrating the long hours of work (twelve hours per day, with thirty minutes for lunch) in the Lowell mills and the way factory labor was strictly regulated by the clock.



Women at work tending machines in the Lowell textile mills.





A photograph from around 1860 of four anonymous working women. Their stance and gaze suggest a spirit of independence.

lic world. Most valued the opportunity to earn money independently at a time when few other jobs were open to women. Home life, Lucy Larcom later recalled, was narrow and confining, while living and working at Lowell gave the “mill girls” a “larger, firmer idea of womanhood,” teaching them “to go out of themselves and enter into the lives of others. . . . It was like a young man’s pleasure in entering upon business for himself.” But women like Larcom did not become a permanent class of factory workers. They typically remained in the factories for only a few years, after which they left to return home, marry, or move west. Larcom herself migrated to Illinois, where she became a teacher and writer. The shortage of industrial labor continued, easing only when large-scale immigration began in the 1840s and 1850s.

#### THE GROWTH OF IMMIGRATION

Economic expansion fueled a demand for labor, which was met, in part, by increased immigration from abroad. Between 1790 and 1830, immigrants contributed only marginally to American population growth. But between 1840 and 1860, over 4 million people (more than the entire population of 1790) entered the United States, the majority from Ireland and Germany. About 90 percent headed for the northern states, where job opportunities were most abundant and the new arrivals would not have to compete with slave labor. Immigrants were virtually unknown in the slave states, except in cities on the periphery of the South, such as New Orleans, St. Louis, and Baltimore. In the North, however, they became a visible presence in both urban and rural areas. In 1860, the 814,000 residents of New York City, the major port of entry, included more than 384,000 immigrants, and one-third of the population of Wisconsin was foreign-born.

Numerous factors inspired this massive flow of population across the Atlantic. In Europe, the modernization of agriculture and the industrial revolution disrupted centuries-old patterns of life, pushing peasants off the land and eliminating the jobs of traditional craft workers. The introduction of the ocean-going steamship and the railroad made long-distance travel more practical. The Cunard Line began regular sailings with inexpensive fares from Britain to Boston and New York City in the 1840s. Beginning around 1840, emigration from Europe accelerated, not only to the United States but to Canada and Australia as well. Frequently, a male family member emigrated first; he would later send back money for the rest of the family to follow.

#### IRISH AND GERMAN NEWCOMERS

To everyone discontented in Europe, commented the *New York Times*, “thoughts come of the New Free World.” America’s political and religious freedoms attracted Europeans who chafed under the continent’s repressive governments and rigid social hierarchies, including political refugees from

**Table 9.2 TOTAL NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS BY FIVE-YEAR PERIOD**

| Years     | Number of Immigrants |
|-----------|----------------------|
| 1841–1845 | 430,000              |
| 1846–1850 | 1,283,000            |
| 1851–1855 | 1,748,000            |
| 1856–1860 | 850,000              |

the failed revolutions of 1848. “In America,” wrote a German newcomer, “there aren’t any masters, here everyone is a free agent.”

The largest number of immigrants, however, were refugees from disaster—Irish men and women fleeing the Great Famine of 1845–1851, when a blight destroyed the potato crop on which the island’s diet rested. An estimated 1 million persons starved to death and another million emigrated in those years, most of them to the United States. Lacking industrial skills and capital, these impoverished agricultural laborers and small farmers ended up filling the low-wage unskilled jobs native-born Americans sought to avoid. Male Irish immigrants built America’s railroads, dug canals, and worked as common laborers, servants, longshoremen, and factory operatives. Irish women frequently went to work as servants in the homes of native-born Americans, although some preferred factory work to domestic service. “It’s the freedom that we want when the day’s work is done,” one Irish woman explained. “Our day is ten hours long, but when it’s done it’s done”; however, servants were on call at any time. By the end of the 1850s, the Lowell textile mills had largely replaced Yankee farm women with immigrant Irish families. Four-fifths of Irish immigrants remained in the Northeast. In Boston, New York, and smaller industrial cities, they congregated in overcrowded urban ghettos notorious for poverty, crime, and disease.

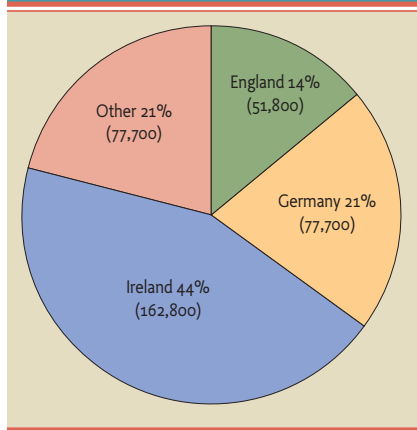
The second-largest group of immigrants, Germans, included a considerably larger number of skilled craftsmen than the Irish. Germans also settled in tightly knit neighborhoods in eastern cities, but many were able to move to the West, where they established themselves as craftsmen, shopkeepers, and farmers. The “German triangle,” as the cities of Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee were sometimes called, all attracted large German populations. A vibrant German-language culture, with its own schools, newspapers, associations, and churches, developed wherever large numbers of Germans settled. “As one passes along the Bowery,” one observer

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*Although our image of the West emphasizes the lone pioneer, many migrants settled in tightly knit communities and worked cooperatively. This painting by Olof Krans, who came to the United States from Sweden with his family in 1850 at the age of twelve, shows a group of women preparing to plant corn at the immigrant settlement of Bishop Hill, Illinois.*



**Figure 9.1 SOURCES OF IMMIGRATION, 1850**



noted of a part of New York City known as Kleindeutschland (Little Germany), “almost everything is German.”

Some 40,000 Scandinavians also emigrated to the United States in these years, most of whom settled on farms in the Old Northwest. The continuing expansion of industry and the failure of the Chartist movement of the 1840s, which sought to democratize the system of government in Britain, also inspired many English workers to emigrate to the United States.

### THE RISE OF NATIVISM

Immigrants from England (whose ranks included the actor Junius Brutus Booth, father of John Wilkes Booth) were easily absorbed, but those from Ireland encountered intense hostility. As Roman Catholics, they faced discrimination in a largely Protestant society in which the tradition of “anti-papery” still ran deep. The Irish influx greatly enhanced the visibility and power of the Catholic Church, previously a minor presence in most parts of the country. During the 1840s and 1850s, Archbishop John Hughes of New York City made the Church a more assertive institution. Hughes pressed Catholic parents to send their children to an expanding network of parochial schools, and he sought government funding to pay for them. He aggressively attempted to win converts from Protestantism.

The idea of the United States as a refuge for those seeking economic opportunity or as an escape from oppression has always coexisted with suspicion of and hostility to foreign newcomers. American history has witnessed periods of intense anxiety over immigration. The Alien Act of 1798 reflected fear of immigrants with radical political views. During the early twentieth century, as will be discussed below, there was widespread hostility to the “new immigration” from southern and eastern Europe. In the early twenty-first century, the question of how many persons should be allowed to enter the United States, and under what circumstances, remains a volatile political issue.

The Irish influx of the 1840s and 1850s thoroughly alarmed many native-born Americans. Those who feared the impact of immigration on American political and social life were called “nativists.” They blamed immigrants for urban crime, political corruption, and a fondness for intoxicating liquor, and they accused them of undercutting native-born skilled laborers by working for starvation wages. The Irish were quickly brought into the urban political machines of the Democratic Party, whose local bosses provided jobs and poor relief to struggling newcomers. Nativists contended that the Irish, supposedly unfamiliar with American conceptions of liberty and subservient to the Catholic Church, posed a threat to democratic institutions, social reform, and public education. Stereotypes similar to those directed at blacks flourished regarding the Irish as well—childlike, lazy, and slaves of their passions, they were said to be unsuited for republican freedom.

Nativism would not become a national political movement until the 1850s, as we will see in Chapter 13. But in the 1840s, New York City and Philadelphia witnessed violent anti-immigrant riots. Appealing mainly to skilled native-born workers who feared that immigrants were taking their jobs and undercutting their wages, a nativist candidate was elected New York City’s mayor in 1844.



### THE TRANSFORMATION OF LAW

American law increasingly supported the efforts of entrepreneurs to participate in the market revolution, while shielding them from interference by local governments and liability for some of the less desirable results of economic growth. The corporate form of business organization became central to the new market economy. A corporate firm enjoys special privileges and powers granted in a charter from the government, among them that investors and directors are not personally liable for the company's debts. Unlike companies owned by an individual, family, or limited partnership, in other words, a corporation can fail without ruining its directors and stockholders. Corporations were therefore able to raise far more capital than the traditional forms of enterprise. By the 1830s, many states had replaced the granting of charters through specific acts of legislation with "general incorporation laws," allowing any company to obtain a corporate charter if it paid a specified fee.

Many Americans distrusted corporate charters as a form of government-granted special privilege. But the courts upheld their validity, while opposing efforts by established firms to limit competition from newcomers. In *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819), John Marshall's Supreme Court defined corporate charters issued by state legislatures as contracts, which future lawmakers could not alter or rescind. Five years later, in *Gibbons v. Ogden*, the Court struck down a monopoly the New York legislature had granted for steamboat navigation. And in 1837, with Roger B. Taney now the chief justice, the Court ruled that the Massachusetts legislature did not infringe the charter of an existing company that had constructed a bridge over the Charles River when it empowered a second company to build a competing bridge. The community, Taney declared, had a legitimate interest in promoting transportation and prosperity.

Local judges, meanwhile, held businessmen blameless for property damage done by factory construction (such as the flooding of upstream farmlands and the disruption of fishing when dams were built to harness water power). Numerous court decisions also affirmed employers' full authority over the workplace and invoked the old common law of conspiracy to punish workers who sought to strike for higher wages. Not until 1842, in *Commonwealth v. Hunt*, did Massachusetts chief justice Lemuel Shaw decree that there was nothing inherently illegal in workers organizing a union or a strike. Like changes in work and time, changes in the law illustrated the comment of Horace Bushnell, a Connecticut minister, that the market economy had produced a "complete revolution" in Americans' "life and manners."

### THE FREE INDIVIDUAL

By the 1830s, the market revolution and westward expansion had produced a society that amazed European visitors: energetic, materialistic, and seemingly in constant motion. Arriving in Chicago in 1835, the British writer Harriet Martineau found the streets "crowded with land speculators, hurrying from one sale to another. . . . As the gentlemen of our party walked the streets, store-keepers hailed them from their doors,

with offers of farms, and all manner of land-lots, advising them to speculate before the price of land rose higher.” Alexis de Tocqueville was struck by Americans’ restless energy and apparent lack of attachment to place. “No sooner do you set foot on American soil,” he observed, “than you find yourself in a sort of tumult. All around you, everything is on the move.” Westward migration and urban development created a large mobile population no longer tied to local communities who sought to seize the opportunities offered by economic change. “In the United States,” wrote Tocqueville, “a man builds a house in which to spend his old age, and sells it before the roof is on; he plants a garden and [rents] it just as the trees are coming into bearing; he brings a field into tillage and leaves other men to gather the crops.”

#### THE WEST AND FREEDOM

Westward expansion and the market revolution profoundly affected the lives of all Americans. They reinforced some older ideas of freedom and helped to create new ones. American freedom, for example, had long been linked with the availability of land in the West. A New York journalist, John L. O’Sullivan, first employed the phrase “manifest destiny,” meaning that the United States had a divinely appointed mission, so obvious as to be beyond dispute, to occupy all of North America. Americans, he proclaimed, had a far better title to western lands than could be provided by any international treaty, right of discovery, or long-term settlement. Their right to the continent was provided by the nation’s mission to extend the area of freedom. Other peoples’ claims, O’Sullivan wrote, must give way to “our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experiment in liberty.” Those who stood in the way of expansion—European powers like Great Britain and Spain, Native Americans, Mexicans—were by definition obstacles to the progress of freedom.

O’Sullivan wrote these words in 1845, but the essential idea was familiar much earlier. As the population moved across the Appalachian Mountains, so did the linkage between westward expansion and freedom. “The Goddess of Liberty,” declared Senator John Breckinridge of Kentucky, was not “governed by geographical limits.” A sense of spatial openness, of the constant opportunity to pick up and move when the pursuit of happiness seemed to demand it, became more and more a central component of American freedom. Like its predecessors, this generation of Americans believed that the United States had been selected by God for the greatest experiment in human history, the achievement of liberty, and that westward expansion was part and parcel of this destiny. Freedom in the United States, wrote the French historian Michel Chevalier, one of the many Europeans who visited the country in the 1830s, was a “practical idea” as much as a “mystical one”—it meant “a liberty of action and motion which the American uses to expand over the vast territory that Providence has given him and to subdue it to his uses.”

In national myth and ideology, the West would long remain, as the writer Wallace Stegner would later put it, “the last home of the freeborn American.” The settlement and economic exploitation of the West prom-

ised to prevent the United States from following down the path of Europe and becoming a society with fixed social classes and a large group of wage-earning poor. In the West, land was more readily available and oppressive factory labor far less common. With population and the price of land rising dramatically in the older states and young men's prospects for acquiring a farm or setting up an independent artisan shop declining, the West still held out the chance to achieve economic independence, the social condition of freedom.

### THE TRANSCENDENTALISTS

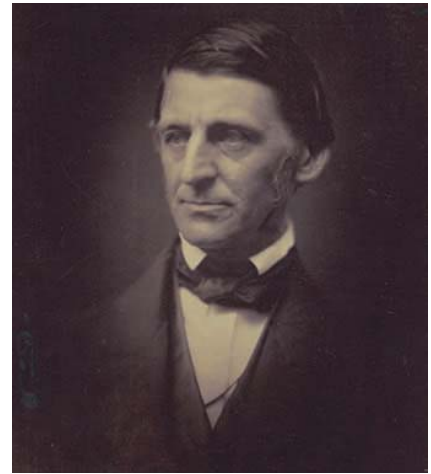
The restless, competitive world of the market revolution strongly encouraged the identification of American freedom with the absence of restraints on self-directed individuals seeking economic advancement and personal development. The "one important revolution" of the day, the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in the 1830s, was "the new value of the private man." The opportunity for personal growth offered a new definition of Jefferson's pursuit of happiness, one well suited to a world in which territorial expansion and the market revolution had shattered traditional spatial and social boundaries and made moving from place to place and status to status common features of American life.

In a widely reprinted 1837 address, "The American Scholar," Emerson called on the person engaged in writing and thinking to "feel all confidence in himself, . . . to never defer to the popular cry," and to find and trust his own "definition of freedom." In Emerson's definition, rather than a preexisting set of rights or privileges, freedom was an open-ended process of self-realization by which individuals could remake themselves and their own lives. The keynote of the times, he declared, was "the new importance given to the single person" and the "emancipation" of the individual, the "American idea."

Emerson was perhaps the most prominent member of a group of New England intellectuals known as the transcendentalists, who insisted on the primacy of individual judgment over existing social traditions and institutions. Emerson's Concord, Massachusetts, neighbor, the writer Henry David Thoreau, echoed his call for individual self-reliance. "Any man more right than his neighbors," Thoreau wrote, "is a majority of one."

### INDIVIDUALISM

Ironies abounded in the era's "individualism" (a term that first entered the language in the 1820s). For even as the market revolution promoted commercial connections between far-flung people, the idea of the "sovereign individual" proclaimed that Americans should depend on no one but themselves. Of course, personal independence had long been associated with American freedom. But eighteenth-century thinkers generally saw no contradiction between private happiness and self-sacrificing public virtue, defined as devotion to the common good. Now, Tocqueville observed, individualism led "each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his



*The daguerreotype, an early form of photography, required the sitter to remain perfectly still for twenty seconds or longer. The philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, depicted here, did not like the result. He complained in his journal that in his "zeal not to blur the image," every muscle had become "rigid" and his face was fixed in a frown as "in madness, or in death."*





## VOICES OF FREEDOM

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### FROM RALPH WALDO EMERSON, “The American Scholar” (1837)

Ralph Waldo Emerson was perhaps the most prominent intellectual in mid-nineteenth-century America. In this famous address, delivered at Harvard College, he insisted on the primacy of individual judgment over existing social traditions as the essence of freedom.

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Perhaps the time is already come, when . . . the sluggard intellect of this continent will look from under its iron lids and fill the postponed expectation of the world with something better than the exertions of mechanical skill. Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close. . . .

In self-trust, all the virtues are comprehended. Free should the scholar be,—free and brave. Free even to the definition of freedom. . . . Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind. They are the kings of the world who give the color of their present thought to all nature and all art. . . .

[A] sign of the times . . . is the new importance given to the single individual. Every thing that tends to insulate the individual,—to surround him with barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state,—tends to true union as well as greatness. ‘I learned,’ said the melancholy Pestalozzi [a Swiss educator], “that no man in God’s wide earth is either willing or able to help any other man.” Help must come from his bosom alone. . . .

We have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe. The spirit of the American freeman is already suspected to be timid, imitative, tame. . . . The scholar is decent, indolent, complaisant. See already the tragic consequence. The mind of this country taught to aim at low objects, eats upon itself. Young men . . . do not yet see, that if the single man [should] plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him. . . . We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.

## FROM “Factory Life as It Is, by an Operative” (1845)

**Beginning in the 1830s, young women who worked in the cotton textile factories in Lowell, Massachusetts, organized to demand shorter hours of work and better labor conditions. In this pamphlet from 1845, a factory worker details her grievances as well as those of female domestic workers, the largest group of women workers.**

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Philanthropists of the nineteenth century!—shall not the operatives of our country be permitted to speak for themselves? Shall they be compelled to listen in silence to [those] who speak for gain, and are the mere echo of the will of the corporations? Shall the worthy laborer be awed into silence by wealth and power, and for fear of being deprived of the means of procuring his daily bread? Shall tyranny and cruel oppression be allowed to rivet the chains of physical and mental slavery on the millions of our country who are the real producers of all its improvements and wealth, and they fear to speak out in noble self-defense? Shall they fear to appeal to the sympathies of the people, or the justice of this far-famed republican nation? God forbid!

Much has been written and spoken in woman's behalf, especially in America; and yet a large class of females are, and have been, destined to a state of servitude as degrading as unceasing toil can make it. I refer to the female operatives of New England—the free states of our union—the states where no colored slave can breathe the balmy air, and exist as such;—but yet there are those, a host of them, too, who are in fact nothing more nor less than slaves in every sense of the word! Slaves to a system of labor which requires them to toil from five until seven o'clock, with one hour only to attend to the wants of nature, allowed—slaves to the will and requirements of the “powers that be,” however they may infringe on the rights or conflict with the feelings of the operative—slaves to

ignorance—and how can it be otherwise? What time has the operative to bestow on moral, religious or intellectual culture? How can our country look for aught but ignorance and vice, under the existing state of things? When the whole system is exhausted by unremitting labor during twelve and thirteen hours per day, can any reasonable being expect that the mind will retain its vigor and energy? Impossible! Common sense will teach every one the utter impossibility of improving the mind under these circumstances, however great the desire may be for knowledge.

Again, we hear much said on the subject of benevolence among the wealthy and so called, Christian part of community. Have we not cause to question the sincerity of those who, while they talk benevolence in the parlor, compel their help to labor for a mean, paltry pittance in the kitchen? And while they manifest great concern for the souls of the heathen in distant lands, care nothing for the bodies and intellects of those within their own precincts? . . .

In the strength of our united influence we will soon show these drivelling cotton lords, this mushroom aristocracy of New England, who so arrogantly aspire to lord it over God's heritage, that our rights cannot be trampled upon with impunity; that we WILL not longer submit to that arbitrary power which has for the last ten years been so abundantly exercised over us.

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### QUESTIONS

1. How does Emerson define the freedom of what he calls “the single individual”?
2. Why does the female factory worker compare her conditions with those of slaves?
3. What does the contrast between these two documents suggest about the impact of the market revolution on American thought?

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Outing on the Hudson, painted by an unknown artist around 1850. The steamboat, pictured in the foreground, made it possible for city dwellers to enjoy rural excursions such as this, although, as the tree stump suggests, they were not experiencing unspoiled nature.



friends . . . [leaving] society at large to itself.” Americans increasingly understood the realm of the self—which came to be called “privacy”—as one with which neither other individuals nor government had a right to interfere. As will be discussed in the next chapter, individualism also helped to inspire the expansion of democracy. Ownership of one’s self rather than ownership of property now made a person capable of exercising the right to vote.

Looking back from the 1880s, Emerson would recall the era before the Civil War as a time when “social existence” gave way to “the enlargement and independency of the individual, . . . driven to find all his resources, hopes, rewards, society, and deity within himself.” In his own life, Thoreau illustrated Emerson’s point about the primacy of individual conscience in matters political, social, and personal, and the need to find one’s own way rather than following the crowd. Like other transcendentalists, he did not approve of the way individuals in a market economy engaged in this pursuit of happiness. Thoreau became persuaded that modern society stifled individual judgment by making men “tools of their tools,” trapped in stultifying jobs by their obsession with acquiring wealth. Even in “this comparatively free country,” he wrote, most persons were so preoccupied with material things that they had no time to contemplate the beauties of nature.

To escape this fate, Thoreau retreated for two years to a cabin on Walden Pond near Concord, where he could enjoy the freedom of isolation from the “economical and moral tyranny” he believed ruled American society. He subsequently published *Walden* (1854), an account of his experiences and a critique of how the market revolution was, in his opinion, degrading both Americans’ values and the natural environment. An area that had been covered with dense forest in his youth, he observed, had been so



transformed by woodcutters and farmers that it had become almost completely devoid of trees and wild animals. In one famous passage, Thoreau noted how his enjoyment of nature was disturbed by the distant sound of a locomotive whistle—a symbol of how it seemed impossible to escape the market revolution. Thoreau appealed to Americans to “simplify” their lives rather than become obsessed with the accumulation of wealth. Genuine freedom, he insisted, lay within.

### THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

The popular religious revivals that swept over the country during the Second Great Awakening added a religious underpinning to the celebration of personal self-improvement, self-reliance, and self-determination. These revivals, which began at the turn of the century, were originally organized by established religious leaders alarmed by low levels of church attendance in the young republic (perhaps as few as 10 percent of white Americans regularly attended church during the 1790s). But they quickly expanded far beyond existing churches. They reached a crescendo in the 1820s and early 1830s, when the Reverend Charles Grandison Finney held months-long revival meetings in upstate New York and New York City.

The son of Connecticut farmers, Finney had been inspired to preach after attending a religious revival in 1821. Like the evangelists (traveling preachers) of the first Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century, discussed in Chapter 4, Finney warned of hell in vivid language while offering the promise of salvation to converts who abandoned their sinful ways. He became a national celebrity after his success in Oneida County in upstate New York. After Finney’s preaching, according to one report, the area had

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*Religious Camp Meeting, a watercolor from the late 1830s depicting an evangelical preacher at a revival meeting. Some of the audience members seem inattentive, while others are moved by his fiery sermon.*





Das neue Jerusalem (*The New Jerusalem*), an early-nineteenth-century watercolor, in German, illustrates the narrow gateway to heaven and the fate awaiting sinners in hell. These were common themes of preachers in the Second Great Awakening.

been “completely overthrown by the Holy Ghost” so that “the theater has been deserted, the tavern sanctified . . . and far higher and purer enjoyment has been found in exercises of devotion.”

The Second Great Awakening democratized American Christianity, making it a truly mass enterprise. At the time of independence, fewer than 2,000 Christian ministers preached in the United States. In 1845, they numbered 40,000. Evangelical denominations like the Methodists and Baptists enjoyed explosive growth in membership, and smaller sects proliferated. By the 1840s, Methodism, with more than 1 million members, had become the country’s largest denomination. Deism, a form of religious belief hostile to organized churches, had been prominent among the generation of the founding fathers. It now waned, and Christianity became even more central to American culture. Americans, wrote Tocqueville, “combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other.”

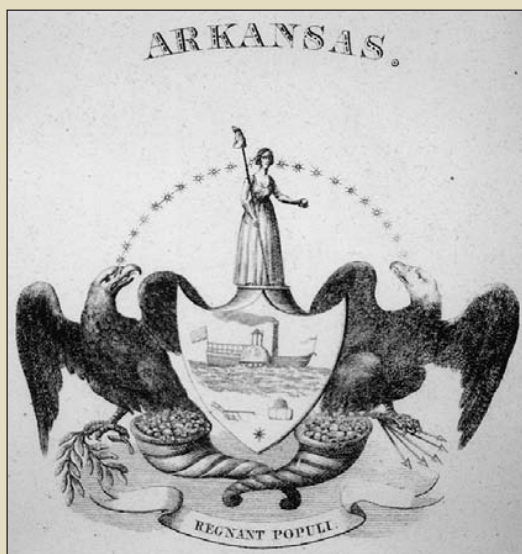
New religious prophets seemed to appear regularly in early-nineteenth-century America, determined, in novelist Herman Melville’s phrase, to “gospelize the world anew.” At large camp meetings, especially prominent on the frontier, fiery revivalist preachers rejected the idea that man is a sinful creature with a preordained fate, promoting instead the doctrine of human free will. At these gatherings, rich and poor, male and female, and in some instances whites and blacks worshiped alongside one another and pledged to abandon worldly sins in favor of the godly life.

#### THE AWAKENING’S IMPACT

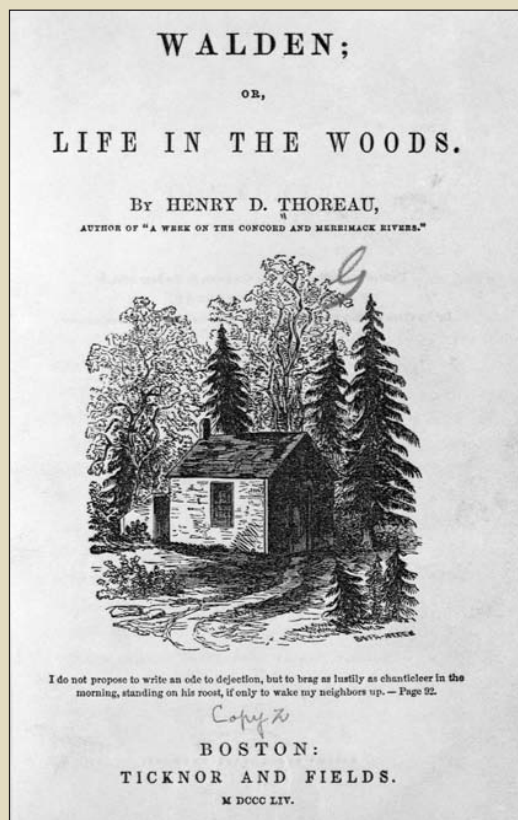
Even more than its predecessor of several decades earlier, the Second Great Awakening stressed the right of private judgment in spiritual matters and the possibility of universal salvation through faith and good works. Every



## VISIONS OF FREEDOM



Official Seal of Arkansas and Title Page of *Walden*. These images offer two responses to the market revolution. The official seal of Arkansas (1836) juxtaposes a woman holding a cap of liberty with symbols of technological progress (an iron plow and a steamboat) and material prosperity (horns of plenty). The sketch of Henry David Thoreau's cabin on Walden Pond illustrates his belief that Americans could enjoy what he called "absolute freedom" by rejecting market society and retreating into the wilderness. Only in this way, he insisted, could they preserve both individual independence and the natural environment.



### QUESTIONS

1. What does each vision of freedom offer that the other lacks?
2. Why do you think that the seal of Arkansas, a slave state, includes no image of slavery?



person, Finney insisted, was a “moral free agent”—that is, a person free to choose between a Christian life and sin. Sinners could experience a “change of heart” and embrace spiritual freedom, defined, in the words of evangelical minister Jonathan Blanchard, as “Christ ruling in and over rational creatures who are obeying him freely and from choice.”

Revivalist ministers seized the opportunities offered by the market revolution to spread their message. They raised funds, embarked on lengthy preaching tours by canal, steamboat, and railroad, and flooded the country with mass-produced, inexpensive religious tracts. The revivals’ opening of religion to mass participation and their message that ordinary Americans could shape their own spiritual destinies resonated with the spread of market values.

To be sure, evangelical preachers can hardly be described as cheerleaders for a market society. They regularly railed against greed and indifference to the welfare of others as sins. Finney called selfishness—an extreme form of individualism encouraged by the scramble for wealth produced by the market revolution—“the law of Satan’s empire,” not God’s. Yet the revivals thrived in areas caught up in the rapid expansion of the market economy, such as the region of upstate New York along the path of the Erie Canal. Most of Finney’s converts here came from the commercial and professional classes. Evangelical ministers promoted what might be called a controlled individualism as the essence of freedom. In stressing the importance of industry, sobriety, and self-discipline as examples of freely chosen moral behavior, evangelical preachers promoted the very qualities necessary for success in a market culture.



Pat Lyon at the Forge, an 1826–1827 painting of a prosperous blacksmith. Proud of his accomplishments as a self-made man who had achieved success through hard work and skill rather than inheritance, Lyon asked the artist to paint him in his shop wearing his work clothes.

## THE LIMITS OF PROSPERITY

### LIBERTY AND PROSPERITY

As the market revolution progressed, the right to compete for economic advancement became a touchstone of American freedom. “The whole question of freedom or slavery for man,” argued Henry C. Carey, perhaps the era’s most prominent economist, was bound up with economic achievement. Official imagery linked the goddess of liberty ever more closely to emblems of material wealth. New Jersey, whose official seal, adopted in 1776, had paired liberty with Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, in 1821 added the motto “Liberty and Prosperity.” The state seal of Arkansas, admitted to the Union in 1836, pictured liberty atop an image of a steamboat and two overflowing horns of plenty.

Many enterprising Americans seized the opportunities offered by the market revolution to enrich themselves. John Jacob Astor, the son of a poor German butcher who emigrated to the United States at the end of the War of Independence, earned large profits in the early nineteenth century by shipping furs to China and importing teas and silk. Astor invested his wealth in Manhattan real estate, which was rapidly rising in value, and built Astor House, which quickly became the nation’s most famous hotel. He died in 1848 the richest man in the United States, leaving a fortune of perhaps \$10 million, the equivalent of hundreds of millions of dollars today.

Astor’s story seemed to exemplify the opportunities open to the “self-made man,” a term that came into use during his lifetime. According to this

idea, those who achieved success in America did so not as a result of hereditary privilege or government favoritism as in Europe, but through their own intelligence and hard work. In the extent of his wealth, of course, Astor was hardly typical. But the market revolution and the quickening of commercial life enriched numerous bankers, merchants, industrialists, and planters. It produced a new middle class—an army of clerks, accountants, and other office employees who staffed businesses in Boston, New York, and elsewhere. It created new opportunities for farmers who profited from the growing demand at home and abroad for American agricultural products, and for skilled craftsmen like Thomas Rodgers, a machine builder who established a successful locomotive factory in Paterson, New Jersey. New opportunities for talented men opened in professions like law, medicine, and teaching. By the early 1820s, there were an estimated 10,000 physicians in the United States.

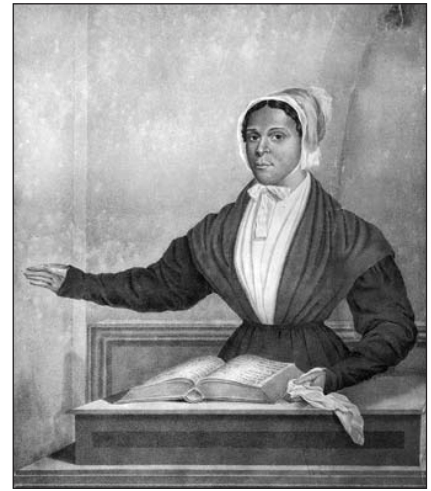
### RACE AND OPPORTUNITY

The market revolution affected the lives of all Americans. But not all were positioned to take advantage of its benefits. Most blacks, of course, were slaves, but even free blacks found themselves excluded from the new economic opportunities. The 220,000 blacks living in the free states on the eve of the Civil War (less than 2 percent of the North's population) suffered discrimination in every phase of their lives. Although virtually every northern county east of the Mississippi River reported some black residents, the majority of blacks lived in the poorest, unhealthiest sections of cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati. And even these neighborhoods were subjected to occasional violent assault by white mobs, like the armed bands that attacked blacks and destroyed their homes and businesses in Cincinnati in 1829.

Barred from schools and other public facilities, free blacks laboriously constructed their own institutional life, centered on mutual aid and educational societies, as well as independent churches, most notably the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Richard Allen of Philadelphia, a Methodist preacher, had been spurred to found the church after being forcibly removed from his former church for praying at the altar rail, a place reserved for whites.

While many white Americans could look forward to a life of economic accumulation and individual advancement, large numbers of free blacks experienced downward mobility. As noted in Chapter 6, northern free blacks were the last large group to experience indentured servitude, since the terms of emancipation generally required children of slave mothers to work for their owners before being freed. At the time of abolition, because of widespread slave ownership among eighteenth-century artisans, a considerable number of northern blacks possessed craft skills. But it became more and more difficult for blacks to utilize these skills once they became free. Although many white artisans criticized slavery, most viewed the freed slaves as low-wage competitors and sought to bar them from skilled employment. "They are leaders in the cause of equal rights for themselves," a black editor commented of New York City's artisans in the 1830s.

Hostility from white craftsmen, however, was only one of many obstacles that kept blacks confined to the lowest ranks of the labor market. White



*Juliann Jane Tillman, a preacher in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, in an 1844 engraving. Many Protestant denominations allowed women to preach, although their presence also aroused much criticism.*



The *Crowning of Flora*, a painting from 1816, depicts idealized women of virtue and modesty. These were the qualities the nineteenth century's cult of domesticity emphasized as essential to proper womanhood.

employers refused to hire them in anything but menial positions, and white customers did not wish to be served by them. The result was a rapid decline in economic status, until by mid-century, the vast majority of northern blacks labored for wages in unskilled jobs and as domestic servants. The state census of 1855 revealed 122 black barbers and 808 black servants in New York City, but only 1 lawyer and 6 doctors. Nor could free blacks take advantage of the opening of the West to improve their economic status, a central component of American freedom. Federal law barred them from access to public land, and by 1860 four states—Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Oregon—prohibited them from entering their territory altogether.

#### THE CULT OF DOMESTICITY

Women, too, found many of the opportunities opened by the market revolution closed to them. As the household declined as a center of economic production, many women saw their traditional roles undermined by the availability of mass-produced goods previously made at home. Some women, as noted above, followed work as it moved from household to factory. Others embraced a new definition of femininity, which glorified not a woman's contribution to the family's economic well-being, but her ability to create a private environment shielded from the competitive tensions of the market economy. Woman's "place" was in the home, a site increasingly emptied of economically productive functions as work moved from the household to workshops and factories. Her role was to sustain nonmarket values like love, friendship, and mutual obligation, providing men with a shelter from the competitive marketplace.

The earlier ideology of "republican motherhood," which allowed



women a kind of public role as mothers of future citizens, subtly evolved into the mid-nineteenth-century “cult of domesticity.” “Virtue,” which in the eighteenth century was a political characteristic of men essential to the success of republican government, came to be redefined as a personal moral quality associated more and more closely with women. “Virtue” for a woman meant not only sexual innocence but beauty, frailty, and dependence on men. “In whatever situation of life a woman is placed from her cradle to her grave,” declared *The Young Lady’s Book*, one of numerous popular magazines addressed to female audiences of the 1820s and 1830s, “a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind, are required from her.” These magazines carried articles such as “Woman, a Source of Comfort,” “Woman, a Being to Come Home To,” and “Woman—Man’s Best Friend.”

With more and more men leaving the home for work, women did exercise considerable power over personal affairs within the family. The rapid decline in the American birthrate during the nineteenth century (from an average of seven children per woman in 1800 to four in 1900) cannot be explained except by the conscious decision of millions of women to limit the number of children they bore. But the idea of domesticity minimized women’s even indirect participation in the outside world. For both sexes, freedom meant fulfilling their respective “inborn” qualities. Men were rational, aggressive, and domineering, while women were nurturing, selfless, ruled by the emotions, and thus less fitted for public life. If submission to the will of another increasingly seemed inadmissible for free men, it remained a condition natural to women and expected of them. Men moved freely between the public and private “spheres”; women were supposed to remain cloistered in the private realm of the family.

#### WOMEN AND WORK

Prevailing ideas concerning gender bore little relation to the experience of those women who worked for wages at least some time in their lives. They did so despite severe disadvantages. Women could not compete freely for employment, since only low-paying jobs were available to them. Married women still could not sign independent contracts or sue in their own name, and not until after the Civil War did they, not their husbands, control the wages they earned. Nonetheless, for poor city dwellers and farm families, the labor of all family members was essential to economic survival. Thousands of poor women found jobs as domestic servants, factory workers, and seamstresses. Early industrialization enhanced the availability of paid work for northern women, as the spread of the putting-out system in such indus-



*A woman with a sewing machine, in an undated photograph. It is not clear if she is sewing for herself and family, or for income as a seamstress.*



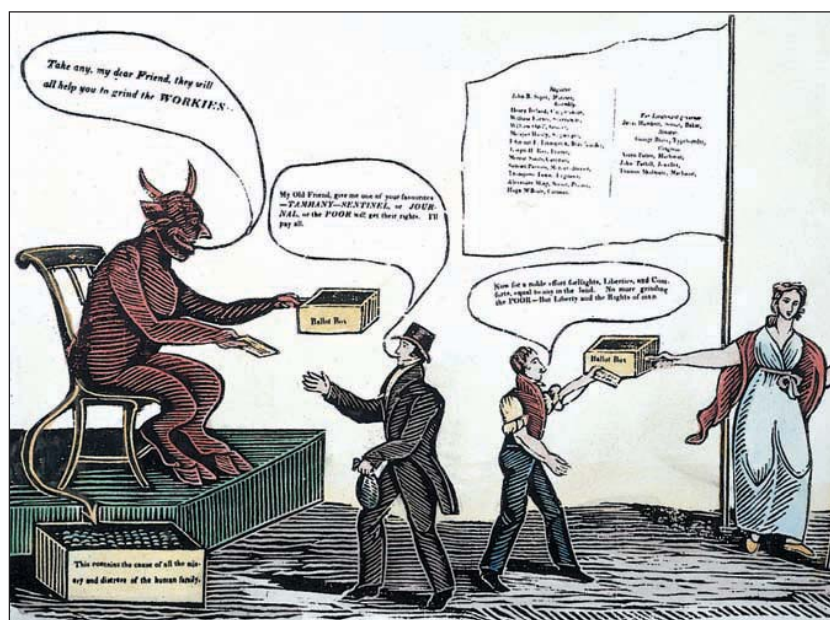
*An image from a female infant’s 1830 birth and baptismal certificate depicts a domestic scene, with women at work while men relax.*

tries as shoemaking, hatmaking, and clothing manufacture allowed women laboring at home to contribute to family income even as they retained responsibility for domestic chores.

For the expanding middle class, however, it became a badge of respectability for wives to remain at home, outside the disorderly new market economy, while husbands conducted business in their offices, shops, and factories. In larger cities, where families of different social classes had previously lived alongside one another, fashionable middle-class neighborhoods populated by merchants, factory owners, and professionals like lawyers and doctors began to develop. Work in middle-class homes was done by domestic servants, the largest employment category for women in nineteenth-century America. The freedom of the middle-class woman—defined in part as freedom from labor—rested on the employment of other women within her household.

Even though most women were anything but idle, in a market economy where labor increasingly meant work that created monetary value, it became more and more difficult to think of labor as encompassing anyone but men. Lydia Maria Child wrote a popular book, *The Frugal Housewife*, published in 1829, that sought to prepare women for the ups and downs of the market revolution (one chapter was entitled “How to Endure Poverty”). Child supported her family by her writing and became a prominent advocate of antislavery and of greater rights for women. Her diary reveals that in a single year she also sewed thirty-six pieces of clothing, prepared more than 700 meals, and spent much time supervising household help.

By any reasonable definition, Child worked—at home and as a writer. But discussions of labor rarely mentioned housewives, domestic servants, and female outworkers, except as an indication of how the spread of capitalism was degrading men. The idea that the male head of household should command a “family wage” that enabled him to support his wife and children became a popular definition of social justice. It sank deep roots



No More Grinding the Poor—But Liberty and the Rights of Man, a *labor movement cartoon of the 1830s*. The devil and a millionaire conspire to buy an election with money (in the box at the lower left), while an honest workingman hands his ballot to a female figure of liberty. The worker's motto is "Liberty, Equity, Justice, and The Rights of Man."



not only among middle-class Americans but among working-class men as well. Capitalism, said the newspaper *Workingman's Advocate*, tore women from their role as “happy and independent mistresses” of the domestic sphere and forced them into the labor market, thereby undermining the natural order of the household and the authority of its male head.

### THE EARLY LABOR MOVEMENT

As this complaint suggests, although many Americans welcomed the market revolution, others felt threatened by its consequences. Surviving members of the revolutionary generation feared that the obsession with personal economic gain was undermining devotion to the public good. “Commerce, luxury, and avarice,” warned John Adams, “have destroyed every republican government.” In the 1820s, as he neared the end of his life, Jefferson was denouncing “stockjobbers,” financiers, speculators, and others for leading the nation away from his idealized virtuous agrarian republic.

Many Americans experienced the market revolution not as an enhancement of the power to shape their own lives, but as a loss of freedom. The period between the War of 1812 and 1840 witnessed a sharp economic downturn in 1819, a full-fledged depression starting in 1837, and numerous ups and downs in between, during which employment was irregular and numerous businesses failed. For every aspiring American who rode the tide of economic progress, another seemed to sink beneath the waves. The economic transformation produced an explosive growth in the nation's output and trade and a rise in the general standard of living. But especially in the growing cities of the Northeast, it significantly widened the gap between wealthy merchants and industrialists on the one hand and impoverished factory workers, unskilled dockworkers, and seamstresses laboring at home on the other. In Massachusetts, the most industrialized state in the country, the richest 5 percent of the population owned more than half the wealth. Inequality was even more pronounced in Philadelphia, where the top 1 percent possessed more wealth than the rest of the population combined. Bankruptcy was a common fact of life, and men unable to pay their debts filled the prisons of major cities.

Alarmed at the erosion of traditional skills and the threat of being reduced to the status of dependent wage earners, skilled craftsmen in the late 1820s created the world's first Workingmen's Parties, short-lived political organizations that sought to mobilize lower-class support for candidates who would press for free public education, an end to imprisonment for debt, and legislation limiting work to ten hours per day. In the 1830s, a time of rapidly rising prices, union organization spread and strikes became commonplace. Along with demands for higher wages and shorter hours, the early labor movement called for free homesteads for settlers on public land and an end to the imprisonment of union leaders for conspiracy.



The Shoemakers' Strike in Lynn—Procession in the Midst of a Snow-Storm, of Eight Hundred Women Operatives, an engraving from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, March 17, 1860. The striking women workers carry a banner comparing their condition to that of slaves.



## THE “LIBERTY OF LIVING”

But over and above these specific issues, workers’ language of protest drew on older ideas of freedom linked to economic autonomy, public-spirited virtue, and social equality. The conviction of twenty New York tailors in 1835 under the common law of conspiracy for combining to seek higher wages inspired a public procession marking the “burial of liberty.” Such actions and language were not confined to male workers. The young mill women of Lowell walked off their jobs in 1834 to protest a reduction in wages and again two years later when employers raised rents at their boardinghouses. They carried banners affirming their rights as “daughters of free men,” and, addressing the factory owners, they charged, “the oppressive hand of avarice [greed] would enslave us.” Freedom, Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary* declared in 1828, was “a state of exemption from the power or control of another.” The labor movement asked how many wage earners truly enjoyed such “exemption.”

Some labor spokesmen, like Langdon Byllesby of Philadelphia, went so far as to describe wage labor itself as the “very essence of slavery,” since dependence on another person for one’s economic livelihood was incompatible with freedom. The idea that permanent wage work bore some resemblance to slavery was not confined to labor radicals. In Herman Melville’s short story *The Tartarus of Maids*, workers in a New England paper mill stand by their machines “mutely and cringingly as the slave.”

Rooted in the traditions of the small producer and the identification of freedom with economic independence, labor’s critique of the market economy directly challenged the idea that individual improvement—Emerson’s “self-trust, self-reliance, self-control, self-culture”—offered an adequate response to social inequality. “Wealth and labor,” wrote Orestes Brownson in his influential essay “The Laboring Classes” (1840), were at war. Workers’ problems, he went on, must be understood as institutional, not individual. They had their root in “the constitution of society,” and their solution required not a more complete individualism, but a “radical change [in] existing social arrangements” so as to produce “equality between man and man.”

“We are free,” wrote Peter Rödel, an immigrant German shoemaker, “but not free enough. . . . We want the liberty of living.” Here lay the origins of the idea, which would become far more prominent in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that economic security—a standard of life below which no person would fall—formed an essential part of American freedom.

Thus, the market revolution transformed and divided American society and its conceptions of freedom. It encouraged a new emphasis on individualism and physical mobility among white men, while severely limiting the options available to women and African-Americans. It opened new opportunities for economic freedom for many Americans, while leading others to fear that their traditional economic independence was being eroded. In a democratic society, it was inevitable that the debate over the market revolution and its consequences for freedom would be reflected in American politics.

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## WEBSITES

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- Erie Canal Time Machine: [www.archives.nysed.gov/projects/eriecanal/](http://www.archives.nysed.gov/projects/eriecanal/)
- Women in America, 1820–1842: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/FEM/home.htm>



## CHAPTER REVIEW

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Identify the major transportation improvements in this period and explain how they influenced the market economy.
2. How did state and local governments promote the national economy in this period?
3. How did the market economy increase the nation's sectional differences?
4. Explain how the market economy promoted the growth of cities in the East and along the frontier.
5. What role did immigrants play in the new market society?
6. What were the main changes in American law during this period?
7. As it democratized American Christianity, the Second Great Awakening both took advantage of the market revolution and criticized its excesses. Explain.
8. What was the "cult of domesticity" and how was it a result of the market revolution?



### FREEDOM QUESTIONS

1. Explain how the growth of the Cotton Kingdom benefited planters and other slaveowners, but reduced the liberties of poorer southern farmers and African-Americans.
2. How did the growth of the factory system limit the traditional freedoms of American artisans, and how did they respond?
3. The market revolution added new terminology to the American lexicon. Explain how each of the following concepts is related to a change in individual freedom: wages, clock time, self-made man, privacy, and middle class.
4. The 1828 edition of Noah Webster's *American Dictionary* defined freedom as "a state of exemption from the power and control of another." Using this definition, assess the impact of the market revolution on the freedoms of white women, African-Americans, immigrants, and wage workers.
5. Explain how the market revolution changed the meanings of American freedom, both by reinforcing older ideas and creating new ones.



**KEY TERMS**

turnpikes (p. 333)

Erie Canal (p. 334)

telegraph (p. 335)

squatters (p. 337)

cotton gin (p. 339)

Cotton Kingdom (p. 339)

slave coffles (p. 340)

John Deere steel plow (p. 342)

Cyrus McCormick reaper (p. 342)

factory system (p. 343)

"American system of  
manufactures" (p. 346)

mill girls (p. 348)

nativism (p. 350)

Gibbons v. Ogden (p. 351)

Charles River Bridge case (p. 351)

manifest destiny (p. 352)

transcendentalists (p. 353)

camp meetings (p. 358)

"self-made man" (p. 360)

cult of domesticity (p. 362)

**REVIEW TABLE***Landmarks of the Market Revolution*

| <b>Event</b>  | <b>Date</b>  | <b>Accomplishment</b>   |
|---|--------------|---|
| Congress approves funds for a National Road                                 | <b>1806</b>  | Cumberland Road reaches Ohio River in 1818 and Illinois in 1838 |
| Robert Fulton's steamboat, the <i>Clermont</i> , navigates the Hudson River | <b>1807</b>  | Makes possible upstream commerce on the country's major rivers  |
| Waltham textile mills open  | <b>1814</b>  | By 1850, the area's 52 mills employ 10,000 workers              |
| Dartmouth College case  | <b>1819</b>  | Court defines corporate charters issued by states as contracts  |
| Erie Canal completed  | <b>1825</b>  | Connects New York City to the Great Lakes                       |
| Work begun on B&O railroad, the nation's first commercial railroad          | <b>1828</b>  | National railroad network grows to 30,000 miles by 1860         |
| Invention of McCormick reaper and Deere steel plow                          | <b>1830s</b> | Made mass-production of grain crops possible                    |
| <i>Commonwealth v. Hunt</i>   | <b>1842</b>  | Affirmed legality of workers' unions and strikes                |
| Telegraph put into commercial operation                                     | <b>1844</b>  | 50,000 miles of telegraph wire is strung by 1860                |