The Transformation of American Society, 1815–1840

Alexis de Tocqueville

In December 1831 two young French aristocrats, **Alexis de Tocqueville** and Gustave de Beaumont, arrived in the small town of Memphis, Tennessee, after a harrowing journey from Cincinnati. They had planned to take a steamboat down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans, but the early freezing of the Ohio had necessitated an overland trip through Kentucky and Tennessee to reach the Mississippi. Now they were exhausted and, worse, faced the prospect of spending the winter in Memphis.

On Christmas Day, they saw a puff of smoke on the river, the sign of an approaching steamboat. Unfortunately, the steamboat was bound for Louisville, the wrong direction. The young Frenchmen sought to persuade the captain that ice had made an upriver passage impossible and that the only sensible course was to turn around and head south. The steamboat's passengers pleaded with the captain to keep going north. The captain hesitated.

A large group of Choctaw Indians supervised by a federal agent was gathering on the river's bank. Evicted from their homes in Georgia and Alabama, the Choctaws were being resettled on reservations west of the Mississippi. The federal agent accompanying them offered cash to the captain to head south. The captain turned the boat, discharged his passengers, who were forced to wait in Memphis for a thaw, and took on Tocqueville, Beaumont, and the Choctaws.

Before coming to America, Tocqueville and Beaumont had read James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans.* These dispirited Choctaws

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Westward Expansion (p. 250)
The Sweep West 250
Western Society and Customs 251
The Far West 252
The Federal Government and the West 252
The Removal of the Indians 253
The Agricultural Boom 254

The Growth of the Market Economy (p. 255)
Federal Land Policy 256
The Speculator and the Squatter 256
The Panic of 1819 257

The Transportation Revolution: Steamboats, Canals, and Railroads (p. 257)
The Growth of the Cities 259

Industrial Beginnings (p. 263)
Causes of Industrialization 264
Textile Towns in New England 265
Artisans and Workers in Mid-Atlantic Cities 267

Equality and Inequality (p. 267)
Urban Inequality: The Rich and the Poor 268
Free Blacks in the North 269
The "Middling Classes" 270

The Revolution in Social Relationships (p. 271)
The Attack on the Professions 271
The Challenge to Family Authority 272
Wives and Husbands 273
Horizontal Allegiances and the Rise of Voluntary Associations 275

were nothing like the proud Indians of Cooper's fiction. "In this whole scene," Tocqueville wrote, "there was an air of ruin and destruction, something which betrayed a final and irrevocable adieu; one couldn't watch without feeling one's heart wrung." Unlike the Spanish, he wrote, the Americans did not massacre the Indians; instead white Americans believed that "whenever a square mile could nourish ten times as many civilized men as savages," the "savages would have to move away."

The two Frenchmen had arrived in the United States seven months earlier with the stated purpose of reporting on American prisons to the French government, but with the real intent of learning more about the sprawling American republic. Tocqueville eventually would weave his impressions of this "half-civilized, half-wild" nation into his two-volume masterpiece, *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), still considered the most insightful analysis of the American character by a foreigner. From the start, Tocqueville had been struck by the "restless temper" of the Americans, who appeared to live in the middle of "an always moving stream."

Tocqueville came at a time when everything seemed to be changing: where Americans lived, how they worked, and how they related to each other. Improvements in transportation in the form of new roads, canals, and steamboats were stimulating interregional trade and migration to the trans-Appalachian West, encouraging an unprecedented development of towns and cities, and transforming social relationships. Increasingly, farmers raised crops for sale in distant markets rather than merely for their families' consumption. The new urban dwellers formed a market not only for farm products but also for those of new factories springing up in the industrializing East.

To Tocqueville, Americans seemed to have just one goal: "that of getting rich." In some respects, he admired this attitude. White Americans were an industrious and democratic people with little tolerance for restraints based on tradition or privilege. Yet whites treated nonwhites harshly. In Baltimore, an amazed Beaumont described how, when a black man entered a race track along with whites, "one of them gave him a volley of blows with his cane without this deed appearing to surprise either the crowd or the negro himself." Both Frenchmen recognized slavery as a great blot on the American character. Still, whites treated each other as equals. Indeed, they all seemed alike to Tocqueville, animated by the same passion for getting ahead.

Focus Questions

- What caused the upsurge of westward migration after the War of 1812?
- How did the rise of the market economy affect where Americans lived and how they made their living?
- What caused the rise of industrialization?
- What caused urban poverty in this period?
- How did the rise of the market economy and industrialization influence relationships within families and communities?

Westward Expansion

In 1790 the vast majority of the non-Indian population of the United States, nearly 4 million people, lived east of the Appalachian Mountains and within a few hundred miles of the Atlantic Ocean. But by 1840 one-third of the non-Indian population of just over 17 million were living between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River, the area that Americans of the time referred to as the West but that historians call the **Old Northwest** and **Old Southwest**. Migrants brought traditional values and customs with them, but in adapting to the West they gradually developed new values and customs. In short, they became westerners, men and women with a distinctive culture.

Only a few Americans moved west to seek adventure, and these few usually headed into the half-known region west of the Rocky Mountains, the present Far West. Most migrants desired and expected a better version of the life they had known in the East: more land and more bountiful crops. Several factors nurtured this expectation: the growing power of the federal government; its often ruthless removal of the Indians from the path of white settlement; and a boom in the prices of agricultural commodities after the War of 1812.

The Sweep West

Americans moved west in a series of bursts. Americans leapfrogged the Appalachians after 1791 to bring four new states into the Union by 1803: Vermont, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio. The second burst occurred between 1816 and 1821, when six states entered the Union: Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, Maine, and Missouri.

Even as Indiana and Illinois were gaining statehood, settlers were pouring farther west into Michigan. Ohio's population jumped from 45,000 in 1800 to 581,000 by 1820 and 1,519,000 by 1840; Michigan's from 5,000 in 1810 to 212,000 by 1840.

Seeking security, pioneers usually migrated as families rather than as individuals. To reach markets with their produce, most settlers clustered near the navigable rivers of the West, especially the magnificent water system created by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. Only with the spread of canals in the 1820s and 1830s, and later of railroads, did westerners feel free to venture far from rivers. In addition, westerners often clustered with people who hailed from the same region back east. For instance, in 1836 a group of farmers from nearby towns met at Castleton, Vermont, listened to a minister intone from the Bible, "And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan," and soon established the town of Vermontville in Michigan. Other migrants to the West were less organized than these latter-day descendants of the Puritans, but most hoped to settle among familiar faces in the West. When they found that southerners already were well entrenched in Indiana, for example, New Englanders tended to prefer Michigan.

Western Society and Customs

Most westerners craved sociability. Even before towns sprang up, rural families joined with their neighbors in group sports and festivities. Men met for games that, with a few exceptions like marbles (popular among all ages), were tests of strength or agility. These included wrestling, weightlifting, pole jumping (for distance rather than height), and a variant of the modern hammer toss. Some of these games were brutal. In gander pulling, horseback riders competed to pull the head off a male duck whose neck had been stripped of feathers and greased. Women usually combined work and play in quilting and sewing parties, carpet tackings, and even chicken and goose pluckings. Social activities brought the genders together. Group corn huskings usually ended with dances; and in a variety of "hoedowns" and "frolics," even westerners who in principle might disapprove of dancing promenaded to singing and a fiddler's tune.

Within western families, there was usually a clear division of labor between men and women. Men performed most of the heaviest labor such as cutting down trees and plowing fields. Women usually rose first in the morning because they were responsible for milking the

Border Settlers in Ohio Around 1840
Before settlers could farm, they had to construct dwellings and clear the land of trees. Large families like this one, in which children and adults alike were expected to work, were an advantage.

cows and preparing breakfast. As they had always done, women fashioned the coverlets that warmed beds in unheated rooms, and spun yarn and wove the fabrics to make their family's shirts, coats, pants, and dresses. Farmwomen often helped butcher hogs. They knew that the best way to bleed a hog was to slit its throat while it was still alive, and after the bleeding, they were adept at scooping out the innards, washing the heart and liver, and hanging them to dry. There was nothing dainty about the work of pioneer women.

Most western sports and customs had been transplanted from the East, but the West developed a character of its own. Before 1840, few westerners could afford elegant living. Arriving on the Michigan frontier from New York City in 1835, the well-bred Caroline Kirkland quickly discovered that her neighbors thought that they had a right to borrow anything she owned with no more than a blunt declaration that "you've got plenty." "For my own part," Caroline related, "I have lent my broom, my thread, my tape, my spoons, my cat, my thimble, my scissors, my shawl, my shoes, and have been asked for my comb and brushes." Their relative lack of refinement made westerners easy targets for easterners' contemptuous jibes.

Criticisms of westerners as yokels provoked westerners to assert that they lived in a land of honest democracy and that the East was soft and decadent. This exchange of insults fostered a regional identity among westerners that further shaped their behavior. Priding themselves on their simple manners, some westerners were intolerant of other westerners who had pretensions to gentility. On one occasion, a traveler who hung up a blanket in a tavern to shield his bed from public gaze had it promptly ripped down. On another, a woman who improvised a screen behind which to retire in a crowded room was dismissed as "stuck up." A politician who rode to a public meeting in a buggy instead of on horseback lost votes.

The Far West

The great majority of pioneers sought stability and prosperity in the area between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River, the region today known as the Midwest. By contrast, an adventuring spirit carried a few Americans far beyond the Mississippi. On an exploring expedition in the Southwest in 1806, Zebulon Pike sighted the Colorado peak that was later named after him. The Lewis and Clark expedition whetted interest in the Far West. In 1811, a New York merchant, John Jacob Astor, founded the fur-trading post of Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River in the Oregon Country. In the 1820s and 1830s, fur traders also operated along the Missouri River from St. Louis to the Rocky Mountains and beyond. At first, whites relied on Native Americans to bring them furs, but during the 1820s white trappers or "mountain men"—among them, Kit Carson, Jedediah Smith, and the mulatto Jim Beckwourth—gathered furs on their own while performing astounding feats of survival in harsh surroundings.

Jedediah Smith was representative of these men. Born in the Susquehanna Valley of New York in 1799, Smith moved west with his family to Pennsylvania and Illinois and signed on with an expedition bound for the upper Missouri River in 1822. In the course of this and subsequent explorations, he was almost killed by a grizzly bear in the Black Hills of South Dakota, learned from the Native Americans to trap beaver and kill buffalo, crossed the Mojave Desert into California, explored California's San Joaquin Valley, and hiked back across the Sierras and the primeval Great Basin to the Great Salt Lake, a trip so forbidding that even Native Americans avoided it. The exploits of Smith and the other mountain men were popularized in biographies, and they became legends in their own day.

The Federal Government and the West

Of the various causes of expansion to the Mississippi from 1790 to 1840, the one that operated most generally and uniformly throughout the period was the growing strength of the federal government. Even before the Constitution's ratification, several states had ceded their western land claims to the national government, thereby creating the bountiful public domain. The Land Ordinance of 1785 had provided for the survey and sale of these lands, and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 had established procedures for transforming them into states. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 brought the entire Mississippi River under American control, and the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819 wiped out the last vestiges of Spanish power east of the Mississippi.

The federal government directly stimulated settlement of the West by promising land to men who enlisted during the War of 1812. With 6 million acres allotted to these so-called military bounties, many former soldiers and their families pulled up roots and settled in the West. To facilitate westward migration, Congress authorized funds in 1816 for the extension of the National Road, a highway begun in 1811 that reached Wheeling, Virginia, on the Ohio River in 1818 and Vandalia, Illinois, by 1838. Soon settlers thronged the road. "Old America seems to be breaking up," a traveler on the National Road wrote in 1817. "We are seldom out of sight, as we travel on this grand track towards the Ohio, of family groups before and behind us."

The same government strength that aided whites brought misery to the Indians. Virtually all the foreign-policy successes during the Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe administrations worked to Native Americans' disadvantage. The Louisiana Purchase and the Transcontinental Treaty stripped them of Spanish protection. In the wake of the Louisiana Purchase, Lewis and Clark bluntly told the Indians that they must "shut their ears to the counsels of bad birds" and listen henceforth only to the "Great Father" in Washington. The outcome of the War of 1812 also worked against the Native Americans; indeed, the Indians were the only real losers of the war. Early in the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Ghent, the British had insisted on the creation of an Indian buffer state between the United States and Canada in the Old Northwest. But after the American victory at the Battle of Plattsburgh, the British dropped the demand and essentially abandoned the Indians to the Americans.

The Removal of the Indians

Westward-moving white settlers found sizable numbers of Native Americans in their paths, particularly in the South, home to the so-called **Five Civilized Tribes**: the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, Chickasaws, and Seminoles. Years of commercial dealings and intermarriage with whites had created in these tribes, especially the Cherokees, an influential minority of mixed-bloods who embraced Christianity, practiced agriculture, built gristmills, and even owned slaves. One of their chiefs, Sequoyah, devised a written form of their language; other Cherokees published a bilingual newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*.

The "civilization" of the southern Indians impressed New England missionaries more than southern whites, who viewed the Civilized Tribes with contempt and their land with envy. Presidents James Monroe and John Quincy Adams had concluded several treaties with Indian tribes providing for their voluntary removal to public lands west of the Mississippi River. Although some assimilated mixed-bloods sold their tribal lands to the government, other mixed-bloods resisted because their prosperity depended on trade with close-by whites. In addition, full-bloods, the majority even in the "civilized" tribes, clung to their land and customs. They wanted to remain near the burial grounds of their ancestors and condemned mixed-bloods who bartered away tribal lands to whites. When the Creek mixed-blood chief William McIntosh sold all Creek lands in Georgia and two-thirds of Creek lands in Alabama to the government in the Treaty of Indian Springs (1825), a Creek tribal council executed him.

During the 1820s, whites in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi intensified pressure on the Indians by surveying tribal lands and squatting on them. Southern legislatures, loath to restrain white settlers, passed laws that threatened to expropriate Indian lands unless the Indians moved west. Other laws extended state jurisdiction over the tribes (which effectively outlawed tribal government) and declared that no Indian could be a witness in a court case involving whites (which made it difficult for Indians to collect debts owed them by whites).

These measures delighted President Andrew Jackson. Reared on the frontier and sharing its contempt for Indians, Jackson believed that it was ridiculous to treat the Indians as independent nations; rather, they should be subject to the laws of the states where they lived. This position spelled doom for the Indians, who could not vote or hold state office. In 1834, Cherokee chief John

Political Cartoon of Jackson and Native Americans
This cartoon, which depicts Native Americans as children or dolls subject to father Andrew Jackson, was intended as a satire on Jackson's policy of forcibly removing the Indians to reservations. The painting in the upper right corner pointedly depicts the goddess Liberty trampling a tyrant.

Ross got a taste of what state jurisdiction meant; Georgia, without consulting him, put his house up as a prize in the state lottery.

In 1830, Jackson secured passage of the **Indian Removal Act**, which authorized him to exchange public lands in the West for Indian territories in the East and appropriated $500,000 to cover the expenses of removal. But the real costs of removal, human and monetary, were vastly greater. During Jackson's eight years in office, the federal government forced Indians to exchange 100 million acres of their lands for 32 million acres of public lands. In the late 1820s and early 1830s the Choctaws (whom Tocqueville had observed near Memphis), Creeks, and Chickasaws started their "voluntary" removal to the West. In 1836, Creeks who clung to their homes were forcibly removed, many in chains. Most Seminoles were removed from Florida, but only after a bitter war between 1835 and 1842 that cost the federal government $20 million.

Ironically, the Cherokees, whose leaders were the most accommodating to American political institutions, suffered the worst fate. In 1827, the Cherokees proclaimed themselves an independent republic within Georgia. When the Georgia legislature subsequently extended the state's jurisdiction over this "nation," the Cherokees petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court for an injunction to halt Georgia's action. In the case of *Cherokee Nation* v. *Georgia* (1831), Chief Justice John Marshall denied the Cherokees' claim to status as a republic within Georgia; rather, they were a "domestic dependent nation," a kind of ward of the United States. Marshall added that prolonged occupancy had given the Cherokees a claim to their lands within Georgia. A year later, he clarified the Cherokees' legal position in *Worcester* v. *Georgia* by holding that they were a "distinct" political community entitled to federal protection from tampering by Georgia.

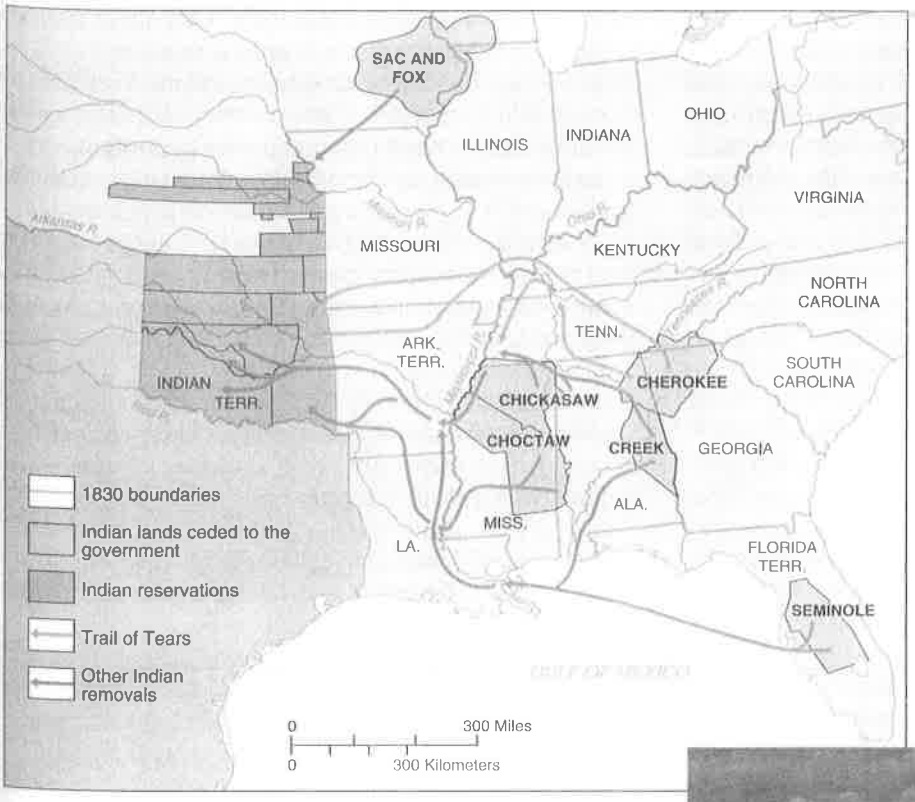
Reportedly sneering, "John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it," President Jackson ignored it. Next, federal agents persuaded some minor Cherokee chiefs to sign the Treaty of New Echota (1835), which ceded all Cherokee lands in the United States for $5.6 million and free passage west. Congress ratified this treaty (by one vote), but the vast majority of Cherokees denounced it. In 1839, a Cherokee party took revenge by murdering its three principal signers, including a former editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*.

The end of the story was simple and tragic. In 1838 the Cherokees were forcibly removed to the new Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma. They traveled west along what became known as the "**Trail of Tears**" (see Map 9.1). As a youth, a man who later became a colonel in the Confederate Army had participated in the forced removal of some sixteen thousand Cherokees from their lands east of the Mississippi River, where North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee more or less converge. He recollected: "I fought through the civil war and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by the thousands, but the Cherokees removal was the cruelest work I ever knew." Perhaps as many as eight thousand Cherokees, more than one-third of the entire nation, died during and just after the removal.

Indians living in the Northwest Territory fared no better. A series of treaties extinguished their land titles, and most moved west of the Mississippi. The removal of the northwestern Indians was notable for two uprisings. The first, led by Red Bird, a Winnebago chief, began in 1827 but was quickly crushed. The second, led by a Sac and Fox chief, Black Hawk, raged along the Illinois frontier until 1832, when federal troops and Illinois militia virtually annihilated Black Hawk's followers. Black Hawk's downfall persuaded the other Old Northwest tribes to cede their lands. Between 1832 and 1837, the United States acquired nearly 190 million acres of Indian land in the Northwest for $70 million in gifts and annual payments.

The Agricultural Boom

In pushing Indians from the paths of white settlers, the federal government was responding to whites' demands for more land. After the War of 1812, the rising prices of agricultural commodities such as wheat, corn, and cotton drew settlers westward in search of better farmland. Several factors accounted for the skyrocketing farm prices. During the Napoleonic Wars, the United States had quickly captured former British markets in the West Indies and former Spanish markets in South America. With the conclusion of the wars, American farmers found brisk demand for their wheat and corn in Britain and France, both exhausted by two decades of warfare. In addition, demand within the United States for western farm commodities intensified after 1815 as the quickening pace of industrialization and urbanization in the East spurred a shift of workers toward nonagricultural employment. Finally, the West's splendid river systems made it possible for farmers in Ohio to ship wheat and corn down the Ohio River to the Mississippi and down the Mississippi to New Orleans. There, wheat and corn were either sold or transshipped to the East, the West Indies, South America, or Europe. Just as government policies made farming in the West possible, high prices for foodstuffs made it attractive.



Map 9.1 The Removal of the Native Americans to the West, 1820–1840
The so-called Trail of Tears, followed by the Cherokees, was one of several routes along which various tribes migrated on their forced removal to reservations west of the Mississippi.

Trail of Tears, by Robert Lindneux

As the prospect of raising wheat and corn pulled farmers toward the Old Northwest, Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 (see Chapter 7) cleared the path for settlement of the Old Southwest, particularly the states of Alabama and Mississippi. As cotton clothing came into fashion around 1815, the British textile industry provided seemingly bottomless demand for raw cotton. By 1820, Alabama and Mississippi were producing nearly half of the nation's cotton. With its warm climate, wet springs and summers, and relatively dry autumns, the Old Southwest was especially suited to cotton cultivation. The explosive thrust of small farmers and planters from the seaboard South into the Old Southwest resembled a gold rush. By 1817, "Alabama fever" gripped the South; settlers bid the price of good land up to thirty to fifty dollars an acre. Accounting for less than a quarter of all American exports between 1802 and 1807, cotton comprised just over half by 1830, and nearly two-thirds by 1836.

The Growth of the Market Economy

Many farmers traditionally had grown only enough food to feed their families (subsistence agriculture). With agricultural commodities like wheat and cotton commanding high prices, a growing number of farmers added a cash crop (called commercial agriculture, or the **market economy**). In the South, slaves increasingly became a valuable commodity; the sale of slaves from declining agricultural states in the Southeast to planters and farmers migrating to Alabama and Mississippi grew into a huge business after 1815. "Virginia," an observer stated in 1832, "is, in fact, a *negro* raising State for other States; she produces enough for her own supply and six thousand a year for sale."

The unprecedented scale of commercial agriculture after 1815 exposed farmers to new risks. Farmers had no control over prices in distant markets. Furthermore, the often long interval between harvesting a cash crop and selling it forced farmers to borrow money to sustain their families. Thus the market economy forced farmers into short-term debt in the hope of long-term profit.

The debt was frequently worse than most had expected. Many western farmers had to borrow money to buy their land. The roots of this indebtedness for land lay in the federal government's inability to devise an effective policy for transferring the public domain directly into the hands of small farmers.

Federal Land Policy

Partisan and sectional pressures buffeted federal land policy like a kite in a March wind. The result was a succession of land laws passed between 1796 and 1820, each of which sought to undo the damage caused by its predecessors.

At the root of early federal land policy lay a preference for the orderly settlement of the public domain. To this end, the Ordinance of 1785 divided public lands into sections of 640 acres (see Chapter 6). The architects of the ordinance did not expect that ordinary farmers could afford such large lots; rather, they assumed that farmers who shared ties based on religion or region of origin would band together to purchase sections. This outcome would ensure that compatible settlers would live on adjoining lots in what amounted to rural neighborhoods, and it would make the task of government much easier than if settlers were to live in isolation on widely scattered homesteads.

Political developments in the 1790s undermined the expectations of the ordinance's framers. Because their political bases lay in the East, the Federalists were reluctant to encourage headlong settlement of the West, but at the same time they were eager to raise revenue for the federal government from land sales. They reconciled the goals of retarding actual settlement while gaining revenue by encouraging the sale of huge tracts of land to wealthy speculators who had no intention of farming the land themselves. The speculators held onto the land until its value rose and then sold off parcels to farmers. For example, in the 1790s the Holland Land Company, composed mainly of Dutch investors, bought up much of western New York and western Pennsylvania. A federal land law passed in 1796 reflected Federalist aims by maintaining the minimum purchase at 640 acres at a minimum price of two dollars an acre, and by allowing only a year for complete payment. Few small farmers could afford to buy that much land at that price.

Believing that the small farmer was the backbone of the Republic and aware of Republican political strength in the West, Thomas Jefferson and the Republicans tried to ease the transfer of the public domain to farmers. The land law of 1800 dropped the minimum purchase to 320 acres and allowed up to four years for full payment but kept the minimum purchase price at $2 an acre. In 1804, the minimum purchase came down to 160 acres, in 1820 to 80 acres, and in 1832 to 40 acres. The minimum price also declined from $2 an acre in 1800 to $1.64 in 1804 and $1.25 in 1820.

Although Congress steadily liberalized land policy, speculators always remained one step ahead. Long before 1832, speculators were selling forty-acre lots to farmers. Farmers preferred small lots (and rarely bought more than 160 acres) because the farms they purchased typically were forested. A new landowner could clear no more than ten to twelve acres of trees a year. All land in the public domain was sold at auction, usually for much more than the two-dollar minimum. With agricultural prices soaring, speculators assumed that land would continue to rise in value and accordingly were willing to bid high on new land, which they resold to farmers at hefty prices.

After the War of 1812, speculators found it increasingly easy to borrow money. The chartering of the Second Bank of the United States in 1816 had the dual effect of increasing the amount of money in circulation and stimulating the chartering of private banks within individual states (state banks). The circulation of all banks grew from $45 million in bank notes in 1812 to $100 million in 1817. Many state banks were founded primarily to lend their directors money for land speculation. The result was an orgy of land speculation between 1815 and 1819. In 1819, the dollar value of sales of public land was over 1,000 percent greater than the average between 1800 and 1814.

The Speculator and the Squatter

Nevertheless, most of the public domain eventually found its way into the hands of small farmers. Because speculators gained nothing by holding land for prolonged periods, they were only too happy to sell it when the price was right. In addition, a familiar frontier type, the squatter, exerted a restraining influence on the speculator.

Even before the creation of the public domain, **squatters** had helped themselves to western land. George Washington himself had been unable to drive squatters off

lands he owned in the West. Squatters were an independent and proud lot, scornful of their fellow citizens who were "softened by Ease, enervated by Affluence and Luxurious Plenty, & unaccustomed to Fatigues, Hardships, Difficulties or dangers." Disdaining land speculators above all, squatters formed claims associations to police land auctions and prevent speculators from bidding up the price of land. Squatters also pressured Congress to allow them preemption rights—that is, the right to purchase at the minimum price land that they had already settled on and improved. Seeking to undo the damaging effects of its own laws, Congress responded by passing special preemption laws for squatters in specific areas and finally, in 1841, acknowledged a general right of preemption.

Preemption laws were of no use to farmers who arrived after speculators had already bought up land. Having spent their small savings on livestock, seed, and tools, these settlers had to buy land from speculators on credit at interest rates that ranged as high as 40 percent. Many western farmers, drowning in debt, had to skimp on subsistence crops while expanding cash crops in the hope of paying off their creditors.

Countless farmers who had carried basically conservative expectations to the West quickly became economic adventurers. Forced to raise cash crops in a hurry, many worked their acreage to exhaustion and thus had to keep moving in search of new land. The phrase "the moving frontier" refers not only to the obvious fact that the line of settlement shifted farther west with each passing decade, but also to the fact that the same people kept moving. The experience of Abraham Lincoln's parents, who migrated from the East through several farms in Kentucky and then to Indiana, was representative of the westward trek.

The Panic of 1819

The land boom collapsed in the financial **Panic of 1819**. The state banks' loose practices contributed mightily to the panic. Like the Bank of the United States, these banks issued their own bank notes. A bank note was just a piece of paper with a printed promise from the bank's directors to pay the bearer ("redeem") a certain amount of specie (gold or silver coinage) on demand. State banks had long issued far more bank notes than they could redeem, and these notes had fueled the economic boom after 1815. With credit so readily available, farmers borrowed money to buy more land and to plant more crops, confident that they could repay their loans when they sold their crops. After 1817, however, the combination of bumper crops in Europe and a recession in Britain trimmed foreign demand for U.S. wheat, flour, and cotton at the very time when American farmers were becoming more dependent on exports to pay their debts.

In the summer of 1818, reacting to the flood of state bank notes, the Bank of the United States began to insist that state banks redeem in specie their notes that were held by the Bank of the United States. Because the Bank of the United States had more branches than any state bank, notes of state banks were often presented by their holders to branches of the Bank of the United States for redemption. Whenever the Bank of the United States redeemed a state bank note in specie, it became a creditor of the state bank. To pay their debts to the Bank of the United States, the state banks had no choice but to force farmers and land speculators to repay loans. The result was a general curtailment of credit throughout the nation, particularly in the West.

The biggest losers were the land speculators. Land that had once sold for as much as sixty-nine dollars an acre dropped to two dollars an acre. Land prices fell because the credit squeeze drove down the market prices of staples like wheat, corn, cotton, and tobacco. Cotton, which sold for thirty-two cents a pound in 1818, sank as low as seventeen cents a pound in 1820. Since farmers could not get much cash for their crops, they could not pay the debts that they had incurred to buy land. Since speculators could not collect money owed them by farmers, the value of land that they still held for sale collapsed.

The Panic left a bitter taste about banks, particularly the Bank of the United States, which was widely blamed for the hard times. Further, plummeting prices for cash crops demonstrated how much farmers were coming to depend on distant markets. In effect, it took a severe business reversal to show farmers the extent to which they had become entrepreneurs. The fall in the prices of cash crops accelerated the search for better forms of transportation to reach faraway markets. If the cost of transporting crops could be cut, farmers could keep a larger share of the value of their crops and thereby adjust to falling prices.

The Transportation Revolution: Steamboats, Canals, and Railroads

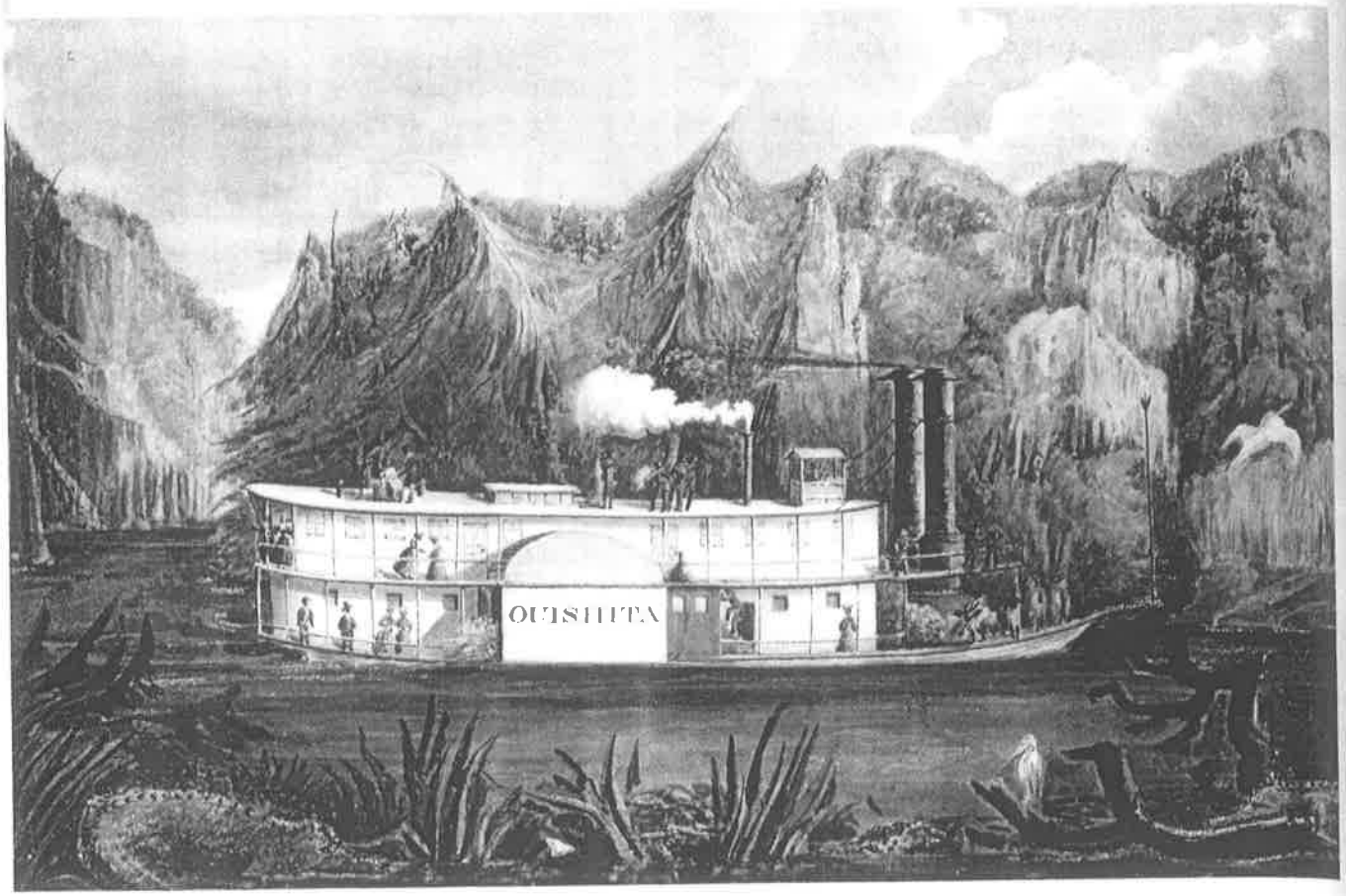
The transportation system linking Americans in 1820 had severe weaknesses. The great rivers west of the Appalachians flowed north to south and hence could not by themselves connect western farmers to eastern markets. Roads were expensive to maintain, and horse-drawn

wagons could carry only limited produce. Consequently, after 1820 attention and investment shifted to improving transportation on waterways, thus initiating the **transportation revolution**.

In 1807, Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton introduced the steamboat *Clermont* on the Hudson River. They soon gained a monopoly from the New York legislature to run a New York–New Jersey ferry service. Spectacular profits lured competitors, who secured a license from Congress and then filed suit to break the Livingston-Fulton monopoly. After a long court battle, the Supreme Court decided against the monopoly in 1824 in the famous case of ***Gibbons* v. *Ogden***. Speaking for a unanimous court, Chief Justice John Marshall ruled that Congress's constitutional power to regulate interstate commerce applied to navigation and thus had to prevail over New York's power to license the Livingston-Fulton monopoly. In the aftermath of this decision, other state-granted monopolies collapsed, and steamboat traffic increased rapidly. The number of steamboats operating on western rivers jumped from 17 in 1817 to 727 by 1855.

Steamboats assumed a vital role along the Mississippi–Ohio River system. They were vastly superior to keelboats (covered flatboats pushed by oars or poles). It took a keelboat three or four months to complete the 1,350-mile voyage from New Orleans to Louisville; in 1817 a steamboat could make the trip in twenty-five days. The development of long, shallow hulls permitted the navigation of the Mississippi-Ohio system even when hot, dry summers lowered the river level. Steamboats became more ornate as well as practical. To compete for passengers, they began to offer luxurious cabins and lounges, called saloons. The saloon of the *Eclipse,* a Mississippi River steamboat, was the length of a football field and featured skylights, chandeliers, a ceiling crisscrossed with Gothic arches, and velvet-upholstered mahogany furniture.

The Paddle Steamer *Ouishita* on the Red River in the Louisiana Territory, 1836
With its several smokestacks and enclosed deck, the *Ouishita* was typical of the second generation of steamboats. Large interior rooms made for a comfortable passage.



Once steamboats had demonstrated the feasibility of upriver navigation, the interest of farmers, merchants, and their elected representatives shifted away from turnpikes and toward canals. Although the cost of canal construction was mind-boggling—Jefferson dismissed the idea as little short of madness—canals offered the prospect of connecting the Mississippi–Ohio River system with the Great Lakes, and the Great Lakes with eastern markets.

Constructed between 1817 and 1825, New York's **Erie Canal**, connecting the Hudson River with Lake Erie, enabled produce from Ohio to reach New York City by a continuous stretch of waterways (see Map 9.2; also see Technology and Culture: Building the Erie Canal). Completion of the Erie Canal started a canal boom during the late 1820s and 1830s. Ohio constructed a network of canals that allowed its farmers to send their wheat by water to Lake Erie. After transport across Lake Erie, the wheat would be milled into flour in Rochester, New York, then shipped on the Erie Canal to Albany and down the Hudson River to New York City. Throughout the nation, canals reduced shipping costs from twenty to thirty cents a ton per mile in 1815 to two to three cents a ton per mile by 1830.

When another economic depression hit in the late 1830s, states found themselves overcommitted to costly canal projects and ultimately scrapped many. As the canal boom was ending, the railroad, an entirely new form of transportation, was being introduced. In 1825, the world's first commercial railroad began operation in England, and by 1840 some three thousand miles of track had been laid in America, about the same as the total canal mileage in 1840. During the 1830s, investment in American railroads exceeded that in canals. Cities like Baltimore and Boston, which lacked major inland waterway connections, turned to railroads to enlarge their share of the western market. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, chartered in 1828, took business away from the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal farther south. Blocked by the Berkshire Mountains from building a canal to the Erie, Massachusetts chartered the Boston and Worcester Railroad in 1831 and the Western Railroad (from Worcester to Albany) in 1833.

Cheaper to build, faster, and able to reach more places, railroads had obvious advantages over canals. But railroads' potential was only slowly realized. Most early railroads ran between cities in the East, rather than from east to west, and carried more passengers than freight. Not until 1849 did freight revenues exceed passenger revenues, and not until 1850 was the East Coast connected by rail to the Great Lakes.

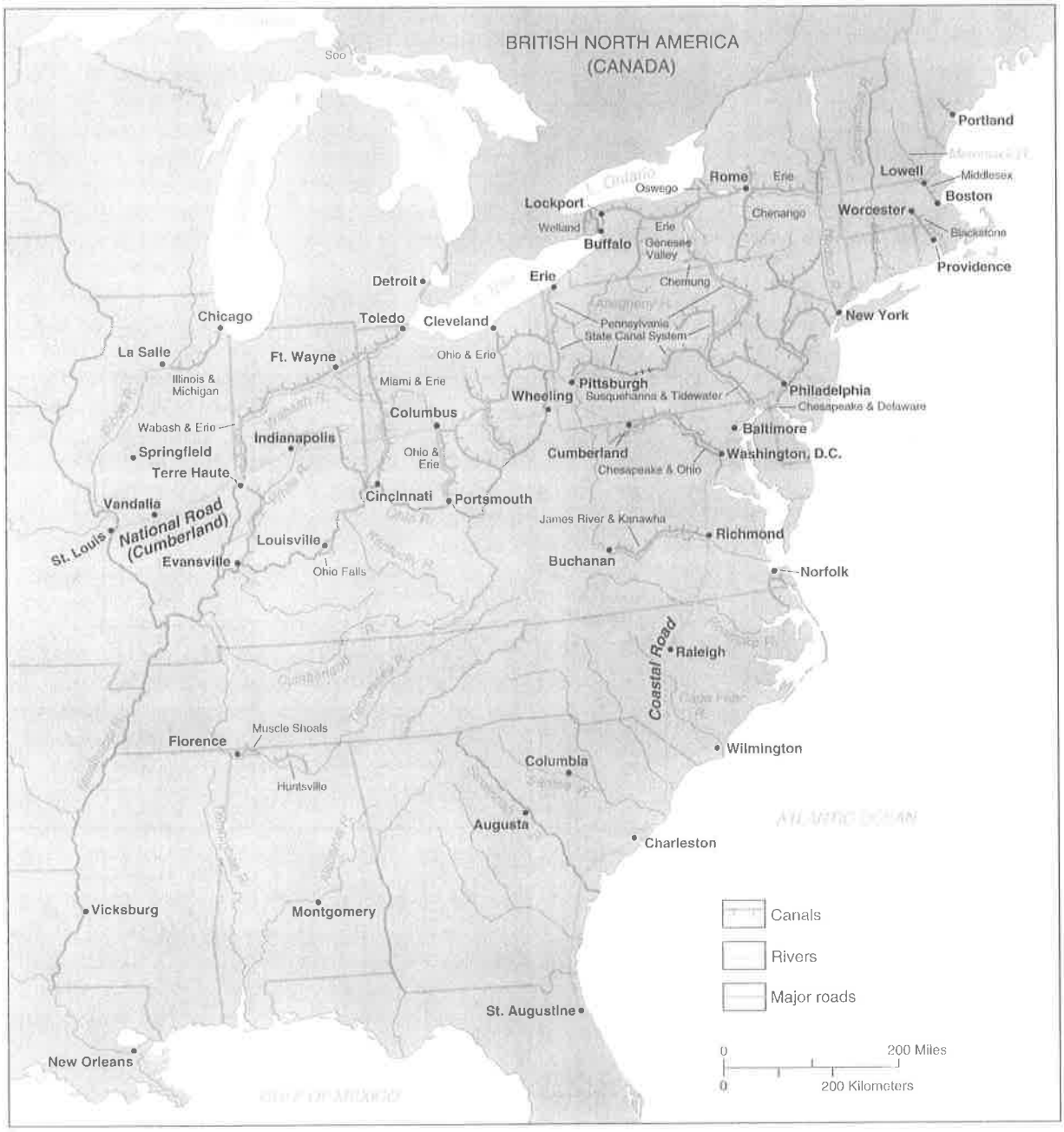
Two factors explain the relatively slow spread of interregional railroads. First, unlike canals, which were built by state governments, most railroads were constructed by private corporations seeking quick profits. To minimize their original investment, railroad companies commonly resorted to cost-cutting measures such as covering wooden rails with iron bars. As a result, although relatively cheap to build, American railroads needed constant repairs. In contrast, although expensive to construct, canals needed relatively little maintenance and were kept in operation for decades after railroads appeared. Second, it remained much cheaper to ship bulky commodities such as iron ore, coal, and nonperishable agricultural produce by canal.

The Growth of the Cities

The transportation revolution speeded the growth of towns and cities. Canals and railroads vastly increased opportunities for city businesses: banks to lend money, insurers to cover risks of transport, warehouses and brokers to store and sell goods. In relative terms, the most rapid urbanization in American history occurred between 1820 and 1860. The Erie Canal turned New York City into the nation's largest city; its population rose from 124,000 in 1820 to 800,000 by 1860. An even more revealing change was the transformation of sleepy villages of a few hundred people into thriving towns of several thousand. For example, the Erie Canal turned Rochester, New York, from home to a few hundred villagers in 1817 into the Flour City with nine thousand residents by 1830.

City and town growth occurred with dramatic suddenness, especially in the West (see Map 9.3). Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and St. Louis were little more than hamlets in 1800. The War of 1812 stimulated the growth of Pittsburgh, whose iron forges provided shot and weapons for American soldiers, and Cincinnati, which became a staging ground for attacks on the British in the Old Northwest. Meanwhile, St. Louis acquired some importance as a fur-trading center. Then, between 1815 and 1819, the agricultural boom and the introduction of the steamboat transformed all three places from outposts with transient populations of hunters, traders, and soldiers into bustling cities. Cincinnati's population nearly quadrupled between 1810 and 1820, then doubled in the 1820s.

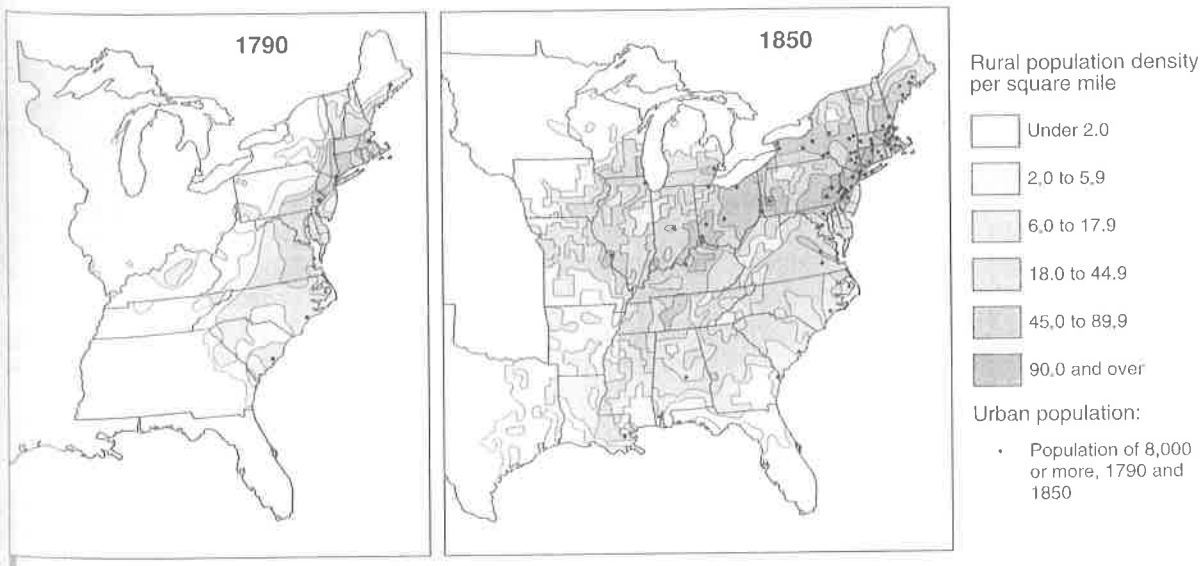
With the exception of Lexington, Kentucky, whose lack of access to water forced it into relative stagnation after 1820, all the prominent western cities were river ports: Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville on the Ohio; St. Louis



Map 9.2 Major Rivers, Roads, and Canals, 1825–1860
Railroads and canals increasingly tied the economy of the Midwest to that of the Northeast.

and New Orleans on the Mississippi (see Map 9.4). Except for Pittsburgh, all were essentially commercial hubs rather than manufacturing centers and were flooded by individuals eager to make money. In 1819, land speculators in St. Louis were bidding as much as a thousand dollars an acre for lots that had sold for thirty dollars an acre in 1815. Waterfronts endowed with natural beauty were swiftly overrun by stores and docks.

The transportation revolution acted like a fickle god, selecting some cities for growth while sentencing others to relative decline. Just as the steamboat had elevated the river cities over landlocked Lexington, the completion



Map 9.3 Population Distribution, 1790 and 1850
By 1850, high population density characterized parts of the Midwest as well as the Northeast.
Source: 1900 Census of Population, Statistical Atlas, plates 2 and 8.

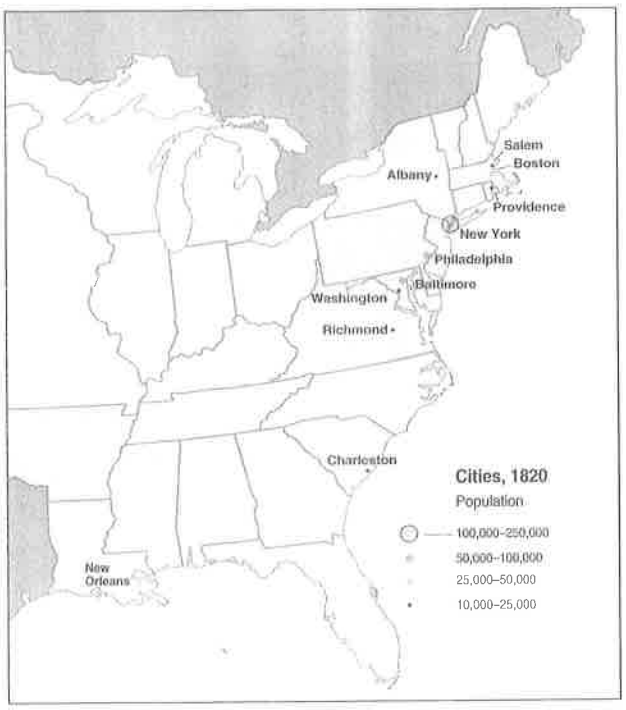
of the Erie Canal shifted the center of western economic activity toward the Great Lakes. The result was a gradual decline in the importance of river cities such as Cincinnati and Louisville and a rise in the importance of lake cities such as Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee. In 1830, nearly 75 percent of all western city-dwellers lived in the river ports of New Orleans, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh; by 1840 the proportion had dropped to 20 percent.

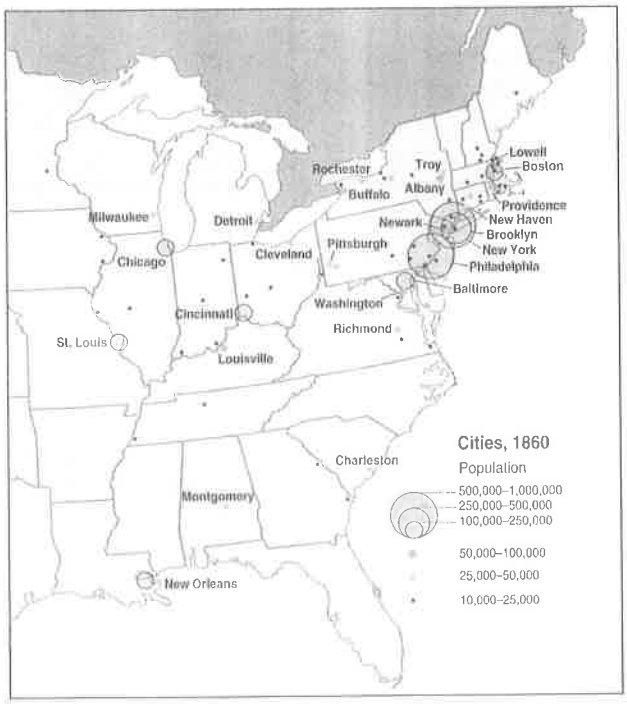
Industrial Beginnings

Spurred initially by the transportation revolution and the development of interregional trade, the growth of cities and towns received an added boost from the development of industrialization. The United States lagged a generation behind Britain in building factories. Eager to keep the lead, Britain banned the emigration of its skilled mechanics. Passing himself off as a farm laborer, one of these mechanics, Samuel Slater, came to the United States in 1789 and helped design and build the first cotton mill in the United States at Pawtucket, Rhode Island, the following year. The mill spun yarn by using Slater's adaptation of the spinning frame invented by the Englishman Richard Arkwright. Slater's work force quickly grew from nine to one hundred, and his mills multiplied. From these beginnings, the pace of industrialization quickened in the 1810s and 1820s, especially in the production of cotton textiles and shoes.

Industrialization varied widely from region to region. There was very little in the South, whose economy was based on cash crops, especially cotton (see Chapter 12). Cold economic calculations led wealthy southerners to invest in land and slaves rather than machines. In contrast, New England's poor soil stimulated investment in factories instead of agriculture. Industrialization itself was a gradual process, with several distinct components. It always involved the subdivision of tasks, with each worker now fabricating only a part of the final product. Often, but not always, it led to the gathering of workers in large factories. Finally, high-speed machines replaced skilled handwork. In some industries, these elements arrived simultaneously, but more often their timing was spread out over several years.

Industrialization changed lives. Most workers in the early factories were recruited from farms. On farms, men and women had worked hard from sunrise to sunset, but they had set their own pace and taken breaks after completing tasks. Factory workers, operating machines that ran continuously, encountered the new discipline of industrial time, regulated by clocks rather than tasks and signaled by the ringing of bells. Industrialization also changed the lives of those outside of factories by encouraging specialization. During the colonial era, most farm families had made their own clothes and often their shoes.





Map 9.4 American Cities, 1820 and 1860
In 1820, most cities were seaports. By 1860, however, cities dotted the nation's interior and included San Francisco on the West Coast. This change occurred in large measure because of the transportation revolution.
Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States.

With industrialization, they concentrated on farming, while purchasing factory-made clothes and shoes.

Causes of Industrialization

A host of factors stimulated industrialization. Some were political. The Embargo Act of 1807 persuaded merchants who were barred from foreign trade to redirect their capital into factories. The Era of Good Feelings saw general agreement that the United States needed tariffs. Once protected from foreign competition, New England's output of cloth that was spun from cotton rose from 4 million yards in 1817 to 323 million yards by 1840. America also possessed an environmental advantage in the form of the many cascading rivers that flowed from the Appalachian Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean and that provided abundant waterpower for mills. The transportation revolution also played a key role by bringing eastern manufacturers closer to markets in the South and West.

Industrialization also sprang from tensions in the rural economy, especially in New England, where in the late eighteenth century population grew beyond the available land to support it. Farm families adopted new strategies to survive. For example, a farmer would decide to grow flax, which his wife and daughters would make into linen for sale; or he would choose to plant broomcorn (used for making broom whisks), and he and his sons would spend the winter months making brooms for local sale. In time, he would form a partnership with other broom makers to manufacture brooms on a larger scale and for more-distant markets. At some point, he would cease to be a farmer; instead, he would purchase his broomcorn from farmers and, with hired help, concentrate on manufacturing brooms. By now, his contacts with merchants, who would provide him with broom handles and twine and who would purchase and sell all the brooms he could make, had become extensive.

In contrast to broom making, some industries, like textiles, depended on new technologies. Although Britain had a head start in developing the technology relevant to industrialization, Americans had a strong incentive to close the gap. With a larger population and far less land, Britain contained a class of landless laborers who would work cheaply in factories. In contrast, the comparatively high wages paid unskilled laborers in the United States spurred the search for labor-saving machines. In some instances, Americans simply copied British designs. Ostensibly on vacation, a wealthy Boston merchant, Francis Cabot Lowell, used his visit to England in 1811 to charm information about British textile machinery out of his hosts; later he engaged an American mechanic to construct machines from drawings he had made each night in his hotel room.

The United States also benefited from the fact that, unlike Britain, America had no craft organizations (called guilds) that tied artisans to a single trade. As a result, American artisans freely experimented with machines outside their crafts. In the 1790s, Oliver Evans, a wagon-maker from Delaware, built an automated flour mill that required only a single supervisor to watch as the grain poured in on one side and was discharged from the other as flour.

Even in the absence of new technology, Americans searched for new methods of production to cut costs. After inventing the cotton gin, **Eli Whitney** won a government contract in 1798 to produce ten thousand muskets by 1800. Whitney's idea was to meet this seemingly impossible deadline by using unskilled workers to make interchangeable parts that could be used in any of his factory's muskets. Whitney promised much more than he could deliver (see Chapter 11), and he missed his deadline by nearly a decade. But his idea captured the imagination of prominent Americans, including Thomas Jefferson.

Textile Towns in New England

New England became America's first industrial region (see Map 9.5). The trade wars leading up to the War of 1812 had devastated its commercial economy and persuaded its wealthy merchants to invest in manufacturing. The many swift rivers were ideal sources of waterpower for mills. The westward migration of many of New England's young men left a surplus of young women, who supplied cheap industrial labor.

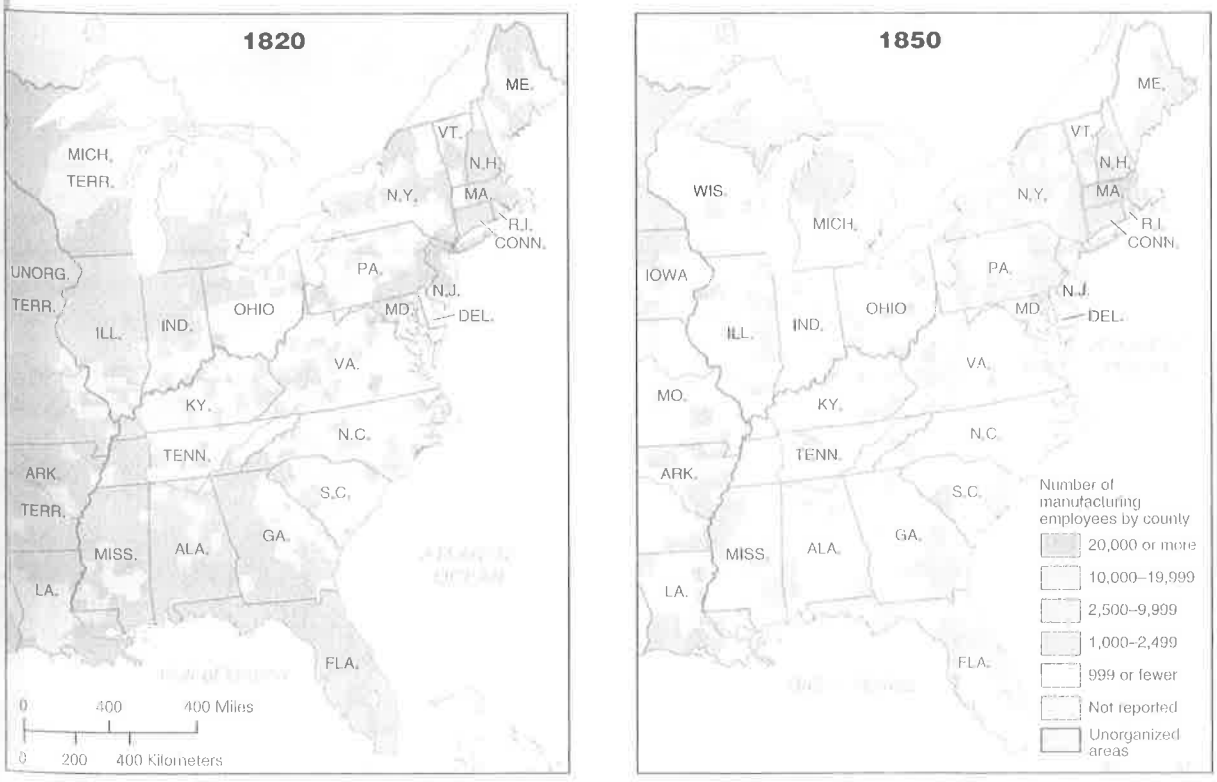
Cotton textiles led the way. In 1813, a group of Boston merchants, known as the Boston Associates and including Francis Cabot Lowell, incorporated the Boston Manufacturing Company. With ten times the capital of any previous American cotton mill, this company quickly built textile mills in the Massachusetts towns of Waltham and Lowell. By 1836, the Boston Associates controlled eight companies employing more than six thousand workers.

The **Waltham and Lowell textile mills** differed in two ways from the earlier Rhode Island mills established by

Map 9.5 U.S. Manufacturing Employment, 1820 and 1850

In 1820, manufacturing employment was concentrated mostly in the Northeast, where the first textile mills appeared. By 1850, the density of manufacturing in the Northeast had increased, but new manufacturing centers arose in Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Cincinnati.

Source: Historical Atlas of the United States, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1993), p. 148. Reprinted by permission of National Geographic Maps/National Geographic Society Image Collection.



Samuel Slater. Slater's mills performed only two of the operations needed to turn raw cotton into clothing: carding (separating batches of cotton into fine strands) and spinning these strands into yarn. In what was essentially cottage manufacturing, he contracted the weaving to women working in their homes. Unlike Slater's mills, the Waltham and Lowell mills turned out finished fabrics that required only one additional step, stitching into clothes. In addition, the Waltham and Lowell mills upset the traditional order of New England society to a degree that Slater had never contemplated. Slater had sought to preserve tradition not only by contracting weaving to farm families but also by hiring entire families for carding and spinning in his mill complexes. Men raised crops on nearby company lands, while women and children tended the machines inside. In contrast, 80 percent of the workers in Waltham and Lowell, places that had not even existed in the eighteenth century, were young unmarried women who had been lured from farms by the promise of wages. Mary Paul, a Vermont teenager, settled her doubts about leaving home for Lowell by concluding that "I . . . must work where I can get more pay."

In place of traditional family discipline, the workers ("operatives") experienced new restraints. They had to live either in company boardinghouses or in licensed private dwellings, attend church on the Sabbath, observe a 10:00 P.M. curfew, and accept the company's "moral police." Regulations were designed to give the mills a good reputation so that New England farm daughters would continue to be attracted to factory work.

Mill conditions were far from attractive. To provide the humidity necessary to keep the threads from snapping, overseers nailed factory windows shut and sprayed the air with water. Operatives also had to contend with flying dust and the deafening roar of the machines. Keener competition and a worsening economy in the late 1830s led mill owners to reduce wages and speed up work schedules. The system's impersonality intensified the harshness of the work environment.

Each of the major groups that contributed to the system lived in a self-contained world. The Boston Associates raised capital but rarely visited the factories. Their agents, all men, gave orders to the operatives, mainly women. Some eight hundred Lowell mill women quit work in 1834 to protest a wage reduction. Two years later, there was another "turnout," this time involving fifteen hundred to two thousand women. These were the largest strikes in American history to that date, noteworthy as strikes not only of employees against employers but also of women against men.

Mill Girl Around 1850
This girl mostly likely worked in a Massachusetts textile mill, at either Lowell or Waltham. Her swollen and rough hands suggest that she was a "warper," one of the jobs usually given to children. Warpers were responsible for constantly straightening out the strands of cotton or wool as they entered the loom.

The Waltham and Lowell mills were the most conspicuous examples of industrialization before 1840, but they were not typical of industrial development. Outside of textiles, many industries continued to depend on industrial "**outwork**." In contrast to the farmer who planted flax for fabrication into linen by his wife and daughters, the key movers behind outwork were merchants who provided households with raw materials and paid wages. For example, more than fifty thousand New England farmwomen, mainly daughters and widows, earned wages in their homes during the 1830s by making hats out of straw and palm leaves. Similarly, before the introduction of the sewing machine led to the concentration of all aspects of shoe manufacture in large factories in the 1850s, women often sewed parts of shoes at home and sent the piecework to factories for finishing.

Artisans and Workers in Mid-Atlantic Cities

Manufacturing in cities like New York and Philadelphia also depended on outwork. These cities lacked the fast-flowing rivers that powered machines in New England, and their high population densities made it unnecessary to gather workers into large factories. Nonetheless, they became industrial centers. Lured by the prospect of distant markets, some urban artisans and merchants started to scour the country for orders for consumer goods. They hired unskilled workers, often women, to work in small shops or homes fashioning parts of shoes or saddles or dresses. A New York reporter wrote,

We have been in some fifty cellars in different parts of the city, each inhabited by a shoemaker and his family. The floor is made of rough plank laid loosely down, and the ceiling is not quite so high as a tall man. The walls are dark and damp and . . . the miserable room is lighted only by . . . the little light that struggles from the steep and rotting stairs. In this apartment often lives the man and his work-bench, the wife, and five or six children of all ages; and perhaps a palsied grandfather or grandmother and often both. . . . Here they work, here they cook, they eat, they sleep, they pray.

New York and Philadelphia were home to artisans with proud craft traditions and independence. Those with highly marketable skills like cutting leather or clothing patterns continued to earn good wages. Others grew rich by turning themselves into businessmen who spent less time making products than making trips to obtain orders. But artisans lacking the capital to become businessmen found themselves on the downslide in the face of competition from cheap, unskilled labor.

In the late 1820s, skilled male artisans in New York, Philadelphia, and other cities began to form trade unions and workingmen's political parties to protect their interests. Disdaining association with unskilled workers, most of these groups initially sought to restore privileges and working conditions that artisans had once enjoyed rather than to act as leaders of unskilled workers. But the steady deterioration of working conditions in the early 1830s tended to throw skilled and unskilled workers into the same boat. When coal haulers in Philadelphia struck for a ten-hour day in 1835, they were quickly joined by carpenters, cigar makers, shoemakers, leatherworkers, and other artisans in the United States' first general strike.

The emergence of organized worker protest underscored the mixed blessings of economic development. Although some benefited from the new commercial and industrial economy, others found their economic position worsening. By the 1830s, many white Americans wondered whether their nation was truly a land of equality.

Dageurrotype of Skilled Artisan
This photograph of a Pennsylvania toolmaker, taken around 1850, omits the furnace in which he heated metal for molding but reveals the pride that he brought to his craft.

Equality and Inequality

That one (white) man was as good as another became the national creed in antebellum (pre–Civil War) America. For example, servants insisted on being called the "help" and on being viewed as neighbors invited to assist in running the household rather than as permanent subordinates. Merchants, held in disdain in Europe by the nobility, refused in America to bow to anyone. Politicians never lost an opportunity to celebrate artisans and farmers as every bit the equal of lawyers and bankers. Tocqueville observed that the wealthiest Americans pretended to respect equality by riding in public in ordinary rather than luxurious carriages.

The market and transportation revolutions, however, were placing new pressure on the ideal of equality

between 1815 and 1840. Improved transportation enabled eastern farmers to migrate to the richer soils of the West, but also made it difficult for eastern farmers who lacked the means or the desire to move west to compete with the cheaper grains now carried east by canals and railroads. Unable to compete with western grains, many eastern farmers had to move to cities, where they took whatever work they could find, sometimes in factories but more often as casual day laborers on the docks or in small workshops where their willingness to work for low wages undercut the position of skilled artisans. Tocqueville thought that the wide distribution of land in America and the individual American's insistence on being treated as an equal created more equality in America than in France. But he worried that the lower classes in the major cities were becoming "a rabble more dangerous even than that of European towns."

Urban Inequality: The Rich and the Poor

A few large cities provided the most striking examples of growing inequality. In Boston, for example, the richest 10 percent of the population had owned a little over half of the city's real estate and personal property in 1771. By 1833, the richest 4 percent owned 59 percent of the wealth, and by 1848 nearly two-thirds. In New York City, the richest 4 percent owned nearly half the wealth in 1828 and more than two-thirds by 1845. Splendid residences and social clubs set the rich apart. In 1828, over half of the five hundred wealthiest families in New York City lived on just eight of its more than 250 streets. By the late 1820s the city had a club so exclusive that it was called simply The Club.

Although commentators celebrated the self-made American who rose from poverty to wealth, the vast majority of those who became extremely rich started out with considerable wealth. Fewer than five of every hundred wealthy individuals started poor, and close to ninety of every hundred started rich. The usual way to wealth was to inherit it, marry into more, and then invest wisely. There were just enough instances of fabulously successful poor boys like John Jacob Astor, who built a fur-trading empire, to sustain popular belief in the rags-to-riches myth, but not enough to turn that myth into a reality.

At the opposite end of the social ladder were the poor. By today's standards, most antebellum Americans were poor. They lived close to the edge of misery, depended heavily on their children's labor to meet expenses, and had little money to spend on medical care or recreation. But when antebellum Americans spoke of poverty, they were not thinking of the hardships that affected most people. Instead, they were referring to "pauperism," a state of dependency or inability to fend for oneself that affected some people. Epidemics of yellow fever and cholera could devastate families. A frozen canal, river, or harbor spelled unemployment for boatmen and dock workers, and for workers in factories that depended on waterpower. The absence of health insurance and old-age pensions condemned many infirm and aged people to pauperism.

Contemporaries usually classified all such people as the "deserving" poor and contrasted them with the "undeserving" poor, such as indolent loafers and drunkards whose poverty was seen as being self-willed. Most moralists assumed that since pauperism resulted either from circumstances beyond anyone's control, such as old age and disease, or from voluntary decisions to squander money on liquor, it could not afflict entire groups generation after generation.

This assumption was comforting but also misleading. A class of people who could not escape poverty was emerging in the major cities during the first half of the nineteenth century. One source was immigration. As early as 1801, a New York newspaper called attention to the arrival of boatloads of immigrants with large families, without money or health, and "expiring from the want of sustenance."

The poorest white immigrants were from Ireland, where English landlords had evicted peasants from the land and converted it to commercial use in the eighteenth century. Severed from the land, the Irish increasingly became a nation of wanderers, scrounging for wages wherever they could. "The poor Irishman," it was said, "the wheelbarrow is his country." By the early 1830s, the great majority of canal workers in the North were Irish immigrants. Without the backbreaking labor of the Irish, the Erie Canal would never have been built. Other Irish congregated in New York's infamous Five Points district. Starting with the conversion of a brewery into housing for hundreds of people in 1837, Five Points became the worst slum in America.

The Irish were not only poor but were also Catholics, a faith despised by the Protestant majority in the United States. In short, they were different and had little claim on the kindly impulses of most Protestants. But even the Protestant poor came in for rough treatment in the years between 1815 and 1840. The more that Americans convinced themselves that success was within everyone's grasp, the less they accepted the traditional doctrine that poverty was ordained by God, and the more they were inclined to hold the poor responsible for their own misery.

Ironically, even as many Americans blamed the poor for being poor, they practiced discrimination that kept some groups mired in enduring poverty. Nowhere was this more true than in the case of northern free blacks.

Free Blacks in the North

Prejudice against blacks was deeply ingrained in white society throughout the nation. Although slavery had largely disappeared in the North by 1820, laws penalized blacks in many ways. One form of discrimination was to restrict their right to vote. In New York State, for example, a constitutional revision of 1821 eliminated property requirements for white voters but kept them for blacks. Rhode Island banned blacks from voting in 1822; Pennsylvania did the same in 1837. Throughout the half-century after 1800, blacks could vote on equal terms with whites in only one of the nation's major cities, Boston.

Laws frequently barred free blacks from migrating to other states and cities. Missouri's original constitution authorized the state legislature to prevent blacks from entering the state "under any pretext whatsoever." Municipal ordinances often barred free blacks from public conveyances and facilities and either excluded them from public schools or forced them into segregated schools. Segregation was the rule in northern jails, almshouses, and hospitals.

Of all restrictions on free blacks, the most damaging was the social pressure that forced them into the least-skilled and lowest-paying occupations throughout the northern cities. Recollecting his youthful days in Providence, Rhode Island, in the early 1830s, the free black William J. Brown wrote: "To drive carriages, carry a market basket after the boss, and brush his boots, or saw wood and run errands was as high as a colored man could rise." Although a few free blacks became successful entrepreneurs and grew moderately wealthy, urban free blacks were only half as likely as city-dwellers in general to own real estate.

One important black response to discrimination was to establish their own churches. White churches confined blacks to separate benches or galleries. When black worshipers mistakenly sat in a gallery designated for whites at a Methodist church in Philadelphia, they were ejected from the church. Their leader, former slave and future bishop **Richard Allen**, related, "we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no longer plagued by us." Allen initiated a movement that resulted in the organization of the **African Methodist Episcopal Church**, the first black-run Protestant denomination, in 1816. By 1822, the A.M.E. Church had active congregations in Washington, D.C., Pittsburgh, New York City, and throughout the mid-Atlantic states. Its members campaigned against slavery, in part by refusing to purchase produce grown by slaves.

Portrait of a Black Man
At a time when job opportunities for African-Americans were limited, the attire of this black man and the presence of the steamboat *New Philadelphia* in the background make it likely that he was the ship's steward or head waiter. The *New Philadelphia* was the first Hudson River steamboat to introduce "colored waiters." Its reputation for speed and innovation was a source of great pride to its officers and crew.

Just as northern African-Americans seceded from white churches to form their own, free blacks gradually acquired some control over the education of their children at a time when northern city governments made negligible provision for the education of free persons of color. Initially, northern blacks had to depend on the philanthropy of sympathetic whites to educate their children. For example, an antislavery society in New

York launched the African Free School in 1787 with white teachers. But the 1820s and 1830s witnessed an explosion of black self-help societies like New York City's Phoenixonian Literary Society, devoted to encouraging black education and run by such black graduates of the African Free School as Samuel Cornish and Henry Garnett.

The "Middling Classes"

The majority of antebellum Americans lived neither in splendid wealth nor in grinding poverty. Most belonged to what men and women of the time called the middling classes. Even though the wealthy owned an increasing proportion of all wealth, most people's standard of living rose between 1800 and 1860, particularly between 1840 and 1860 when per capita income grew at an annual rate of around 1.5 percent.

Americans applied the term *middling classes* to families headed by professionals, small merchants and manufacturers, landowning farmers, and self-employed artisans. Commentators portrayed these people as living stable and secure lives. In reality, life in the middle often was unpredictable. The increasingly commercial economy of antebellum America created greater opportunities for success and for failure. An enterprising import merchant, Alan Melville, the father of novelist Herman Melville, had an abounding faith in his nation, in "our national Eagle, 'with an eye that never winks and a wing that never tires,' " and in the inevitable triumph of honesty and prudence. The Melvilles lived comfortably in Albany and New York City, but Melville's business sagged in the late 1820s. In 1830, he begged his father for a loan of five hundred dollars, proclaiming, "I am destitute of resources and without a shilling—without immediate assistance I know not what will become of me." He got the five hundred dollars plus an additional three thousand dollars, but the downward spiral continued. In 1832 he died, broken in spirit and nearly insane.

In the emerging market economy, even such seemingly crisp occupational descriptions as farmer and artisan often proved misleading. Asa G. Sheldon, born in Massachusetts in 1788, described himself in his autobiography as a farmer, offered advice on growing corn and cranberries, and gave speeches about the glories of farming. Although Sheldon undoubtedly knew a great deal about farming, he actually spent very little time tilling the soil. In 1812, he began to transport hops from New England to brewers in New York City, and he soon extended this business to Philadelphia and Baltimore. He invested his profits in land, but rather than farm the land, he made money selling its timber. When a business setback forced him to sell his property, he was soon back in operation "through the disinterested kindness of friends" who lent him money with which he purchased carts and oxen. These he used to get contracts for filling in swamps in Boston and for clearing and grading land for railroads. From all this and from the backbreaking labor of the Irish immigrants he hired to do the shoveling, Sheldon the "farmer" grew prosperous.

The emerging market economy also transformed the lives of artisans. During the colonial period, artisans had formed a proud and cohesive group whose members often attained the goal of self-employment. They owned their own tools, made their own products on order from customers, boarded their apprentices and journeymen in their homes, and passed their skills on to their children. By 1840, in contrast, artisans had entered a new world of economic relationships. This was true even of a craft like carpentry that did not experience any industrial or technological change. Town and city growth in the wake of the transportation revolution created a demand for housing. Some carpenters, usually those with access to capital, became contractors. They took orders for more houses than they could build themselves and hired large numbers of journeymen to do the construction work. Likewise, as we have seen, in the early industrialization of shoe manufacturing during the 1820s, some shoemakers spent less time crafting shoes than making trips to obtain orders for their products, then hired workers to fashion parts of shoes. In effect, the old class of artisans was splitting into two new groupings. On one side were artisans who had become entrepreneurs; on the other, journeymen with little prospect of self-employment.

An additional characteristic of the middling classes, one they shared with the poor, was a high degree of transience, or spatial mobility. The transportation revolution made it easier for Americans to purchase services as well as goods and spurred many young men to abandon farming for the professions. For example, the number of medical schools rose from one in 1765 to twenty in 1830 and sixty-five in 1860. Frequently, the new men who crowded into medicine and into the ministry and law were forced into incessant motion. Physicians rode from town to town looking for patients. The itinerant clergyman mounted on an old nag and riding the countryside to visit the faithful or to conduct revivals became a familiar figure in newly settled areas. Even well-established lawyers and judges spent part of each year riding from one county courthouse to another, to plead and

decide cases, bunking (usually two to a bed) in rough country inns.

Transience affected the lives of most Americans. Farmers who cultivated land intensively in order to raise a cash crop, and so pay their debts, exhausted the land quickly and had to move on. For skilled and unskilled workers alike, work was often seasonal; workers had to move from job to job to survive. Canal workers and boatmen had to secure new work when waterways froze. Even city-dwellers who shifted jobs often had to change residences, for the cities were spreading out at a much faster rate than was public transportation. Some idea of the degree of transience can be gained from a survey by the Boston police on Saturday, September 6, 1851. At a time when Boston's population was 145,000, the survey showed that from 6:30 A.M. to 7:30 P.M., 41,729 people entered the city and 42,313 left. At a time when there were few suburbs, it is safe to say that these people were not commuters. Most likely, they were moving in search of work, as much a necessity for many in the middling classes as for the poor.

The Revolution in Social Relationships

Following the War of 1812, the growth of interregional trade, commercial agriculture, and manufacturing changed not only the lives of individuals but also the ways in which they related to each other. Two broad generalizations encompass these changes. First, many Americans questioned authority to an unprecedented degree. In 1775, they had rebelled against their king. Now, it seemed, they were rebelling as well against their lawyers, their physicians, their ministers, and even their parents. An attitude of individualism sprouted and took firm root in antebellum America. Once individualism had meant nothing more than selfishness, but now Americans used the word to signify positive qualities: self-reliance and the conviction that each person was the best judge of his or her own true interests. Ordinary Americans might still agree with the opinions of their leaders, but only after they had thought matters through on their own. Those with superior wealth, education, or social position could no longer expect the automatic deference of the common people.

Second, even as Americans widely proclaimed themselves a nation of self-reliant individualists and questioned the traditional basis of authority, they sought to construct new foundations for authority. For example, middle-class men and women came to embrace the idea that women possessed a "separate sphere" of authority in the home. In addition, individuals increasingly joined with others in these years to form voluntary associations through which they might influence the direction that their society would take.

The Attack on the Professions

In the swiftly changing antebellum society, claims to social superiority were questioned as never before. As a writer put it in 1836, "Everywhere the disposition is found among those who live in the valleys to ask those who live on the hills, 'How came we here and you there?' "

Intense criticism of lawyers, physicians, and ministers exemplified this assault on authority. As far back as the 1780s, Benjamin Austin, a radical Boston artisan, had complained that lawyers needlessly prolonged and confused court cases so that they could charge high fees. Between 1800 and 1840, a wave of religious revivals known as the Second Great Awakening (see Chapter 10) sparked new attacks on the professions. Some revivalists blasted the clergy for creating complicated theologies that ordinary men and women could not comprehend, for drinking expensive wines, and for fleecing the people. One religious revivalist, Elias Smith, extended the criticism to physicians, whom he accused of inventing Latin and Greek names for diseases in order to disguise their own ignorance of how to cure them.

These jabs at the learned professions peaked between 1820 and 1850. In medicine, a movement arose under the leadership of Samuel Thomson; a farmer's son with little formal education, to eliminate all barriers to entry into the medical profession. Thomson believed that anyone could understand the principles of medicine and become a physician. His crusade was remarkably successful. By 1845, every state had repealed laws that required licenses and education to practice medicine. Meanwhile, attacks on lawyers sharpened, and relations between ministers and their parishioners grew tense and acrimonious. In colonial New England, ministers had usually served a single parish for life, but by the 1830s a rapid turnover of ministers was becoming the norm as finicky parishioners commonly dismissed clergymen whose theology displeased them. Ministers themselves were becoming more ambitious—more inclined to leave small, poor congregations for large, wealthy ones.

The increasing commercialization of the economy contributed both to the growing number of professionals and to the attacks on them. Like so many other antebellum Americans, freshly minted lawyers and doctors

often were transients without deep roots in the towns that they served and without convincing claims to social superiority. Describing lawyers and physicians, a contemporary observer wrote, "Men dropped down into their places as from clouds. Nobody knew who or what they were, except as they claimed, or as a surface view of their character indicated." A horse doctor one day would the next day hang up his sign as "Physician and Surgeon" and "fire at random a box of his pills into your bowels, with a vague chance of hitting some disease unknown to him, but with a better prospect of killing the patient, whom or whose administrator he charged some ten dollars a trial for his marksmanship."

The questioning of authority was particularly sharp on the frontier. Here, to eastern and foreign visitors, it seemed that every man they met was a "judge," "general," "colonel," or "squire." In a society in which everyone was new, such titles were easily adopted and just as easily challenged. Where neither law nor custom sanctioned claims of superiority, would-be gentlemen substituted an exaggerated sense of personal honor. Obsessed with their fragile status, many reacted testily to the slightest insult. Dueling became a widespread frontier practice. At a Kentucky militia parade in 1819, an officer's dog jogged onto the field and sat at his master's knee. Enraged by this breach of military decorum, another officer ran the dog through with his sword. A week later, both officers met with pistols at ten paces. One was killed; the other maimed for life.

The Challenge to Family Authority

In contrast to adults' public philosophical attacks on the learned professions, children engaged in a quiet questioning of parental authority. Economic change created new opportunities that forced young people to choose between staying at home to help their parents and venturing out on their own. Writing to her parents in Vermont shortly before taking a job in a Lowell textile mill, eighteen-year-old Sally Rice quickly got to the point. "I must of course have something of my own before many more years have passed over my head and where is that something coming from if I go home and earn nothing. You may think me unkind but how can you blame me if I want to stay here. I have but one life to live and I want to enjoy myself as I can while I live."

A similar desire for independence tempted young men to leave home at earlier ages than in the past. Although the great migration to the West was primarily a movement of entire families, movement from farms to towns and cities within regions was frequently spearheaded by restless and single young people. Two young men in Virginia put it succinctly. "All the promise of life seemed to us to be at the other end of the rainbow—somewhere else—anywhere else but on the farm. . . . And so all our youthful plans had as their chief object the getting away from the farm."

Antebellum Americans also widely wished to be free of close parental supervision, and their changing attitudes influenced courtship and marriage. Many young people who no longer depended on their parents for land insisted on privacy in courting and wanted to decide for themselves when and whom to marry. Whereas seventeenth-century Puritans had advised young people to choose marriage partners whom they could learn to love, by the early 1800s young men and women viewed romantic love as indispensable to a successful marriage. "In affairs of love," a young lawyer in Maine wrote, "young people's hearts are generally much wiser than old people's heads."

One sign of young people's growing control over courtship and marriage was the declining likelihood that the young women of a family would marry in their exact birth order. Traditionally, fathers had wanted their daughters to marry in the order of their birth to avoid planting the suspicion that there was something wrong with one or more of them. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, daughters were making their own marital decisions, and the practice ceased to be customary. Another mark of the times was the growing number of long engagements. Having made the decision to marry, some young women were reluctant to tie the knot, fearing that marriage would snuff out their independence. For example, New Yorkers Caroline and William Kirkland were engaged for seven years before their marriage in 1828. Equally striking was the increasing number of young women who chose not to marry. **Catharine Beecher**, a leading author and the daughter of the prominent minister Lyman Beecher, broke off her engagement to a young man during the 1820s despite her father's pressure to marry him. She later renewed the engagement, but after her fiancé's death in a shipwreck, she remained single for the rest of her life.

Moralists reacted with alarm to signs that young people were living in a world of their own. They flooded the country with books of advice to youth, such as William Alcott's *The Young Man's Guide,* which went through thirty-one editions between 1833 and 1858. The vast number of such advice books sold in antebellum America all said the same thing. They did not advise young men and women to return to farms, and they assumed that parents had little control over them. Rather, the

authors exhorted youths to develop habitual rectitude, self-control, and "character." It was an age not just of the self-made adult but also of the self-made youth.

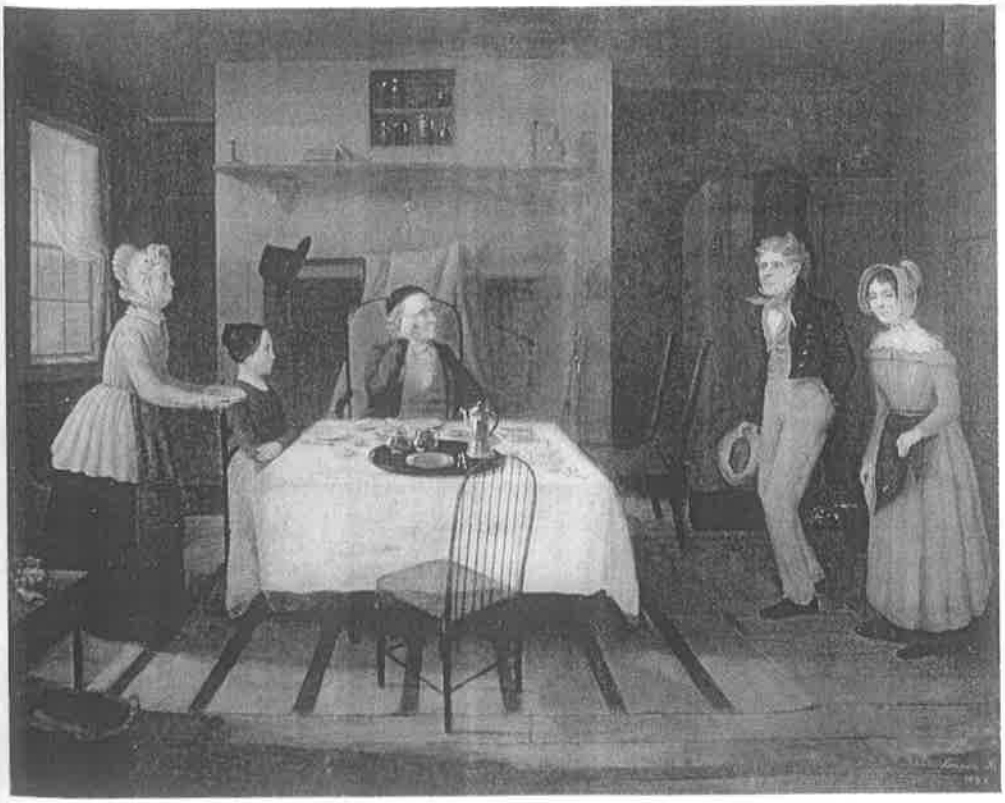
Wives and Husbands

Another class of advice books pouring from the antebellum presses counseled wives and husbands on their rights and duties. These were a sign that relations between spouses, too, were changing. Young men and women who had grown accustomed to making decisions on their own as teenagers were more likely than their ancestors to approach wedlock as a compact between equals. Of course, wives remained unequal to their husbands in many ways. With few exceptions, the law did not allow married women to own property. But relations between wives and husbands were changing during the 1820s and 1830s toward a form of equality.

One source of the change, zealously advocated by Catharine Beecher, lay in the doctrine of **separate spheres**. Traditionally, women had been viewed as subordinate to men in all spheres of life. Now middle-class men and women developed a kind of separate-but-equal doctrine that portrayed men as superior in making money and governing the world, and women as superior for their moral influence on family members.

One of the most important duties assigned to the sphere of women was raising children. During the eighteenth century, church sermons reminded fathers of their duty to govern the family; by the 1830s child-rearing manuals were addressed to mothers rather than fathers. "How entire and perfect is this dominion over the unformed character of your infant," the popular writer Lydia Sigourney proclaimed in her *Letters to Mothers* (1838). Advice books instructed mothers to discipline their children by loving them and withdrawing affection when they misbehaved rather than by using corporal punishment. A whipped child might become more obedient but would remain sullen and bitter; gentler methods would penetrate the child's heart, making the child want to do the right thing.

The idea of a separate women's sphere blended with a related image of the family and home as refuges secluded from a society marked by commotion and disorder. The popular culture of the 1830s and 1840s painted an alluring portrait of the pleasures of home life through



The Country Parson Disturbed at Breakfast
This young couple's decision to wed seems to have been on the spur of the moment. As young men and women became more independent of parental control, they gave their impulses freer play.

songs like "Home, Sweet Home" and poems such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Children's Hour" and Clement Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas." The publication of Moore's poem coincided with the growing popularity of Christmas as a holiday season in which family members gathered to exchange warm affection. Even the physical appearance of houses changed. The prominent architect Andrew Jackson Downing published plans for peaceful single-family homes that he hoped would offset the "spirit of unrest" and the feverish pace of American life. He wrote of the ideal home, "There should be something to love. There must be nooks about it, where one would love to linger; windows, where one can enjoy the quiet landscape at his leisure; cozy rooms, where all fireside joys are invited to dwell."

Downing deserves high marks as a prophet, because one of the motives that impelled many Americans to flee cities for suburbs in the twentieth century was the desire to own their own homes. In the 1820s and 1830s, this ideal was beyond the reach of most people—not only blacks, immigrants, and sweatshop workers, but also most members of the middle class. In the countryside, although middle-class farmers still managed productive households, these were anything but tranquil; wives milked cows and bled hogs, and children fetched wood, drove cows to pasture, and chased blackbirds from cornfields. In the cities, middle-class families often had to sacrifice their privacy by taking in boarders to supplement family income.

Despite their distortions, the doctrine of separate spheres and the image of the home as a refuge from a harsh world intersected with reality at some points. The rising number of urban families headed by lawyers and merchants (who worked away from home) gave mothers time to spend on child rearing. Above all, even if they could not afford to live in a Downing-designed house, married women found that they could capitalize on these notions to gain new power within their families. A subtle implication of the doctrine of separate spheres was that women should have control not only over the discipline of children but also over the more fundamental issue of how many children they would bear.

In 1800, the United States had one of the highest birthrates ever recorded. The average American woman bore 7.04 children. It is safe to say that married women had become pregnant as often as possible. In the prevailing farm economy, children carried out essential tasks and, as time passed, took care of their aging parents. Most parents had assumed that the more children, the better. The spread of a commercial economy raised troublesome questions about children's economic value. Unlike a farmer, a merchant or lawyer could not send his children to work at the age of seven or eight. The average woman was bearing only 5.02 children by 1850, and 3.98 by 1900. The birthrate remained high among blacks and many immigrant groups, but it fell drastically among native-born whites, particularly in towns and cities. The birthrate also declined in rural areas, but more sharply in rural villages than on farms, and more sharply in the East, where land was scarce, than in the West, where abundant land created continued incentives for parents to have many children.

For the most part, the decline in the birthrate was accomplished by abstinence from sexual intercourse, by *coitus interruptus* (withdrawal before ejaculation), or by abortion. By the 1840s, abortionists advertised remedies for "female irregularities," a common euphemism for unwanted pregnancies. There were no foolproof birth-control devices, and as much misinformation as information circulated about techniques of birth control. Nonetheless, interest in birth-control devices was intensifying. In 1832, Charles Knowlton, a Massachusetts physician, described the procedure for vaginal douching in his book *Fruits of Philosophy.* Although Knowlton was frequently prosecuted and once jailed for obscenity, efforts to suppress his ideas publicized them even more. By 1865, popular tracts had familiarized Americans with a wide range of birth-control methods, including the condom and the diaphragm. The decision to limit family size was usually reached jointly by wives and husbands. Economic and ideological considerations blended together. Husbands could note that the economic value of children was declining; wives, that having fewer children would give them more time to nurture each one and thereby carry out domestic duties.

Supporters of the ideal of separate spheres did not advocate full legal equality for women. Indeed, the idea of separate spheres was an explicit alternative to legal equality. But the concept did enhance women's power within marriage by justifying their demands for influence over such vital issues as child rearing and the frequency of pregnancies. In addition, it allowed some women a measure of independence from the home. For example, it sanctioned the travels of Catharine Beecher,

a leading advocate of separate spheres, to lecture women on better ways to raise children and manage their households.

Horizontal Allegiances and the Rise of Voluntary Associations

As some forms of authority, such as the authority of parents over their children and husbands over their wives, were weakening, Americans devised new ways for individuals to extend their influence over others. The pre-Civil War period witnessed the widespread substitution of **horizontal allegiances** for **vertical allegiances**. In vertical allegiances, authority flows from the top down. Subordinates identify their interests with those of their superiors rather than with others in the same subordinate role. The traditional patriarchal family was an example of a vertical allegiance: the wife and children looked up to the father for leadership. Another example occurred in the small eighteenth-century workshop, where apprentices and journeymen took direction from the master craftsman and even lived in the craftsman's house, subject to his authority.

Although vertical relationships did not disappear, they became less important in people's lives. Increasingly, relationships were more likely to be marked by horizontal allegiances that linked those in a similar position. For example, in large textile mills, operatives discovered that they had more in common with one another than with their managers and overseers. Similarly, married women formed maternal associations to exchange advice about child rearing. Young men formed debating societies to sharpen their wits and to bring themselves to the attention of influential older men. Maternal and debating societies exemplified the American zeal for **voluntary associations**—associations that arose apart from government and sought to accomplish some goal of value to their members. Tocqueville observed that the government stood at the head of every enterprise in France, but that in America "you will be sure to find an association."

Voluntary associations encouraged sociability. As transients and newcomers flocked into towns and cities, they tended to join others with similar characteristics, experiences, or interests. Gender was the basis of many voluntary societies. Of twenty-six religious and charitable associations in Utica, New York, in 1832, for instance, one-third were exclusively for women. Race was still another basis for voluntary associations. Although their names did not indicate it, Boston's Thompson Literary and Debating Society and its Philomathean Adelphic Union for the Promotion of Literature and Science were organizations for free blacks.

Voluntary associations also enhanced their members' public influence. At a time when state legislatures had little interest in regulating the sale of alcoholic beverages, men and women joined in temperance societies to promote voluntary abstinence. To combat prostitution, women formed moral-reform societies, which sought to shame men into chastity by publishing the names of brothel patrons in newspapers. Aiming to suppress an ancient vice, moral-reform societies also tended to enhance women's power over men. Moral reformers attributed the prevalence of prostitution to the lustfulness of men who, unable to control their passions, exploited poor and vulnerable girls. Just as strikes in Lowell in the 1830s were a form of collective action by working women, moral-reform societies represented collective action by middle-class women to increase their influence in society. Here, as elsewhere, the tendency of the times was to forge new forms of horizontal allegiance between like-minded Americans.

Conclusion

European demand for American cotton and other agricultural products, federal policies that eased the sale of public lands and encouraged the removal of Indians from the path of white settlement, and the availability of loose-lending banks and paper money all contributed to the flow of population into the area between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River after 1815. The collapse of the boom in 1819 reminded farmers of how dependent they had become on distant markets and prompted improvements in transportation during the 1820s and 1830s. The introduction of steamboats, the building of canals, and the gradual spread of railroads—the transportation revolution—encouraged a turn to commercial occupations and the growth of towns and cities. Now able to reach distant

Chronology, 1815–1840

1790	Samuel Slater opens his first Rhode Island mill for the production of cotton yarn.
1793	Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin.
1807	Robert R. Livingston and Robert Fulton introduce the steamboat *Clermont* on the Hudson River.
1811	Construction of the National Road begins at Cumberland, Maryland.
1813	Incorporation of the Boston Manufacturing Company.
1816	Second Bank of the United States chartered.
1817–1825	Construction of the Erie Canal started.
	Mississippi enters the Union.
1819	Economic panic, ushering in four-year depression.
	Alabama enters the Union.
1820–1850	Growth of female moral-reform societies.
1820s	Expansion of New England textile mills.
1824	*Gibbons* v. *Ogden*.
1828	Baltimore and Ohio Railroad chartered.
1830	Indian Removal Act passed by Congress.
1831	*Cherokee Nation* v. *Georgia*.
	Alexis de Tocqueville begins visit to the United States to study American penitentiaries.
1832	*Worcester* v. *Georgia*.
1834	First strike at the Lowell mills.
1835	Treaty of New Echota.
1837	Economic panic begins a depression that lasts until 1843.
1838	The Trail of Tears.
1840	System of production by interchangeable parts perfected.

consumers, merchants plunged capital into manufacturing enterprises. Ranging from the great textile mills of Lowell and Waltham to rural cottages that performed outwork to urban sweatshops, early industrialization laid the foundations for America's emergence a half-century later as a major industrial power.

The changes associated with the market economy and early industrialization carved new avenues to prosperity for some—and to penury for others. They challenged traditional hierarchies and created new forms of social alignment based on voluntary associations. By joining voluntary associations based on shared interests or opinions, footloose Americans forged new identities that paralleled and often supplanted older allegiances to their parents or places of birth.

Key Terms

Alexis de Tocqueville
Old Northwest
Old Southwest
Five Civilized Tribes
Indian Removal Act, 1830
Trail of Tears
market economy
squatters
Panic of 1819
Transportation revolution
Gibbons* v. *Ogden
Erie Canal
Eli Whitney
Waltham and Lowell textile mills
outwork
Richard Allen
African Methodist Episcopal Church
Catharine Beecher
separate spheres
horizontal allegiances
vertical allegiances
voluntary associations

For Further Reference

Edward J. Balleisen, *Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America* (2001). An important study of the risks spawned by the market economy.

Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826–1860* (1979). Traces the origins, work experiences, and eventual destinations of the Lowell mill girls.