CHAPTER TWELVE: INDUSTRY AND THE NORTH, 1790s-1840s

PREINDUSTRIAL WAYS OF WORKING
   Rural Life: The Springer Family
   The Family Labor System
   Urban Artisans and Workers
   Patriarchy in Family, Work, and Society
   The Social Order

THE MARKET REVOLUTION
   The Accumulation of Capital
   The Putting-Out System
   The Spread of Commercial Markets
   British Technology and American Industrialization
   Slater’s Mill
   The Lowell Mills
   Family Mills
   “The American System of Manufactures”
   Other Factories

FROM ARTISAN TO WORKER
   Personal Relationships
   Mechanization and Women’s Work
   Time, Work, and Leisure
   The Cash Economy
   Free Labor
   Early Strikes

A NEW SOCIAL ORDER
   Wealth and Class
   Religion and Personal Life
   The New Middle-Class Family
   Family Limitation
   Middle-Class Children
   Sentimentalism
   Transcendentalism and Self-Reliance

CONCLUSION

KEY TOPICS
* Preindustrial ways of working and living
* The nature of the market revolution
* The effects of industrialization on workers in early factories
* Ways the market revolution changed the lives of ordinary people
* The emergence of the middle class

AMERICAN COMMUNITIES: WOMEN FACTORY WORKERS FORM A COMMUNITY IN LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS Young women from New England farms were offered wages of around three dollars a week and respectable living arrangements to work in the Lowell textile mills. Although the young women found the work a welcome change from
farm routine, in time they found themselves in conflict with their employers. By 1830s the mill owners were cutting wages and ending their paternalistic endeavors. The result was strikes and the replacement of the young women with more manageable Irish immigrants. The vignette illustrates the changing nature of the industrial labor force and the new meaning of work.

PREINDUSTRIAL WAYS OF WORKING  The family of Thomas and Elizabeth Springer of Mill Creek, Delaware represents the yeomen existence of farm families in the Mid-Atlantic states. They sold dairy products, wool, and livestock in nearby Wilmington and raised crops for family use and commercial sale. They participated in a local network of barter and mutual obligation. The traditional labor system put the entire family to work. The relative absence of cash meant that goods and services originating in the home were bartered for other goods and services. In New England, many farm families engaged in outside work, often developing a skill such as shoemaking.

Urban craftsmen traditionally learned their trades through the European apprenticeship system. Young men worked as artisans until they had perfected their skills and could become journeymen and (they hoped) master craftsmen. Though women did skilled work too, no apprenticeship system existed for them. Work for the urban craftsman was a family affair, organized along patriarchal lines, and generally specializing in one area. The father was head of the family and boss of the enterprise. Legally, the father owned all family property and was considered its representative in the larger society. Women had their own significant responsibilities as managers of the household and informal assistants.

Preindustrial society fixed the place of people in the social order. Most artisans did not challenge the traditional authority of the wealthy. But in the early 19th century, the market revolution undermined the traditional social order.

THE MARKET REVOLUTION  Rapid improvements in transportation, commercialization, and industrialization caused the market revolution. Merchants comprised the business community of the northern seaboard and often accumulated great wealth. When conflicts during the period between 1807-1815 disrupted United States trade with Europe, merchants invested in local enterprises supplemented by banks and the government. But it was southern cotton produced by slaves that bankrolled industrialization.

In the early 19th century merchants “put out” raw goods in homes. In the case of shoemaking artisans, journeymen cut the leather; wives and daughters bound the upper parts together; and so on. As demand grew, merchants like Micajah Pratt built central workshops and brought workers into Lynn, Massachusetts. Although he still used the putting out system, Pratt’s modification provided greater control over the workforce and flexibility to respond to changing economic conditions. The putting out system and the central workshops caused the decline of the artisan shop. As more workers became part of the putting out system, wages for piecework replaced bartering and families bought mass-produced goods rather than making them at home. Commercialization did not happen immediately or in the same way across the nation.

The industrial revolution began in Britain in the textile industry and created deplorable conditions. Samuel Slater slipped out of England and brought with him plans for a cotton-
spinning factory that followed British custom by hiring women and children. New England was soon dotted with factories along its rivers. Francis C. Lowell studied British spinning machines, but added innovations, helped invent a power loom, and built the first integrated cotton mill near Boston in 1814. So successful was the mill that it drove smaller competitors out of business and Lowell’s successors soon built an entire town to house the new enterprise.

Factories were set up with elaborate divisions of labor that established a hierarchy of value and pay. Mills were run with strict schedules and with fines and penalties for workers who did not meet them. Farm families had worked long hours, but the shift to a precise timetable was a major change. Unlike the Lowell mills, most mills were “family mills.” Entire families would work in them and pool their wages to reach needed income levels. Communities developed antagonistic relationships with the mills. They resented the influx of transient workers and frequently looked down upon them. Factories in other industries sprang up throughout rural America, coexisting with the traditional artisan system.

Homegrown innovators like Eli Whitney, Simeon North, and John Hall developed ideas such as interchangeable parts in the manufacturing of rifles—the American system of manufacturing. Standardization spread into other areas like sewing machines. Although it would take some time until everything was being made with fully interchangeable parts, the availability of these goods affected American thinking about democracy and equality. Americans could have mass-produced copies, indistinguishable from the originals.

**FROM ARTISAN TO WORKER** As artisans were turned into workers their lives were transformed. The putting out system destroyed the apprenticeship tradition in artisan production, replacing them with child labor. The older system of personal relationships between master and workers was replaced with an impersonal wage system. By subdividing tasks, masters could hire low-skill, low-wage women and children, denying opportunities to male artisans. As textile mills grew, they replaced women’s most reliable home occupation. Women found work in mills or worked at other paid tasks at home. The rise of the garment industry led many women to work sewing ready-made clothing for piece rates. So poorly paid were these tasks that women might work 15 to 18 hours a day.

Workers did not readily adjust to the demands of the factory. Though used to long hours, they were not acclimated to the strict regimen. Absenteeism was common among workers who increasingly saw their interests as being different from their employers. A much more rigid separation between work and leisure developed. Leisure spots like taverns emerged, as did leisure activities like spectator sports.

The introduction of the cash economy led to the decline of the barter system, radically altering the lives of people who had previously been connected through local and informal ties. Their contact with employers came through the pay envelope. Workers frequently found this to be liberating and took advantage of the lack of ties to move about in search of better jobs. Laborers saw themselves as “free”—able to move about to new jobs and possessing the individualistic characteristics needed for success. Owners cited this individualism when they opposed government mandated protections and denounced unions. But this did not stop workers
from striking, though most of the early strikes were unsuccessful. Women played significant roles in these early labor protests.

A NEW SOCIAL ORDER  The market revolution affected every aspect of life, ending the natural fixed social order that previously existed. The market revolution created a social order in which members were presumably able to climb the social ladder. The upper class stayed about the same, but the number of “middling sorts” grew rapidly. They also changed their attitudes and emphasized sobriety, steadiness, and removed themselves from the boisterous sociability of the working class. Religion helped shape the new attitudes.

The Second Great Awakening moved from the frontier to the new market towns stressing salvation through personal faith. Preachers such as Charles G. Finney urged businessmen to convert and accept the self-discipline and individualism that religion brought. Evangelism became the religion of the new middle class.

Families changed under the weight of the market revolution. As production moved out of the household, family and work matters became separate. The wife concentrated on domestic tasks. Middle-class women were to manage their homes and provide a safe haven for their husbands. Attitudes about appropriate male and female roles and qualities hardened. Men were seen as steady, industrious, and responsible; women as nurturing, gentle, and moral. The popularity of housekeeping guides underscored the radical changes occurring in middle-class families. Middle-class couples limited their family size through birth control, abstinence, and abortion. Physicians urged that sexual impulses be controlled, particularly among women whom they presumed to possess superior morality.

New views of motherhood emerged as women were seen as primarily responsible for training their children in self-discipline. Women formed networks and read advice magazines to help them in these tasks. Mothers made contacts that would contribute to their children’s latter development. Children also prolonged their education and professional training. The reality was that a man’s success was very much the result of his family’s efforts.

The competitive spirit led many Americans to turn to sentimentalism and nostalgia. Publishers found a lucrative market for novels of this genre, especially those written by women. Eventually this sentimentalism became more concerned with maintaining social codes. The intellectual reassurance for middle-class morality came from writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. Transcendentalist writers Henry David Thoreau and Margaret Fuller emphasized individualism and communion with nature.

CONCLUSION  The tremendous changes wrought by the market revolution affected all aspects of life and was felt most by the new middle class.

Lecture Suggestions

1. This is some of the most difficult material for students to understand because it describes the development of a society whose structure and values are very much our own. Students assume that a cash economy, wage labor, middle-class family, etc. are constants
throughout history. The instructor’s task is to make it clear that they were not. Spend a good deal of time on the pre-industrial economy. Make it clear that the quest for a “good job” was not what has motivated people for all time. Rather, personal independence was what drove most people in the traditional labor system.

2. One can approach the development of industry by looking at the stages laid out in the text. Before there were factories there had to be capital. Make the connection between the diplomatic crisis of the early 1800s described in Chapter Ten and the cut off of European trade. This helped create a source of mercantile capital and cut off the source of manufactured goods. There had to be, first, the putting-out system. Then there had to be a system whereby manufacturing was brought under a single roof (like the Lynn shoemakers). All of this took place before a factory system using power-driven machinery could emerge.

3. Students have a difficult time making the connection between economic change and what the text calls the “New Social Order.” Draw a line on the board. On one side write pre-Market Revolution on the other side write post-Market Revolution. On the left side illustrate the society of fixed ranks with a pyramid. One was born into a rank and stayed there. This was a system of external controls. Social betters could control the behavior of those below them. On the right side illustrate the possibility of social mobility. The external controls no longer held sway. Hence the new religion pushed by people like Finney brought in a sense of internal self-discipline. Make the connection between the Second Great Awakening discussed in Chapter Ten and Finney’s revivals. Note also the significant role the new moral system had in altering gender roles.

Discussion Questions

1. How did a man acquire the skills needed to work as an artisan? How and why did this system start to change? Why did this change come first in New England?

2. Were artisans better off under the old system or under the new system?

3. What factors contributed to the rapid pace of industrialization in America?

4. Why did the new middle class embrace the religious views of Charles G. Finney so thoroughly?

5. How did family life change for the new middle class? Why did it change in this manner?

Out of Class Activity

Students who have worked in factories could be encouraged to discuss their experiences. Those who have not could be encouraged to interview factory workers. They should try to focus on the issues of discipline, control over time, and the separation between work and leisure characteristic of an industrial economy. They could present their findings to the class as part of a look at the changing character of work, a theme that runs throughout the chapter.
If You’re Going to Read One Book on the Subject


Audio Visual Aids

“Industrial Revolution: Beginnings in the United States” Explains the events that led America towards industrialization. Shows the roles of Francis Lowell and Eli Whitney. Shows how the development of transportation encouraged industrialization. (Color, 23 minutes, 1968)

“Beginnings and Growth of Industrial America” Shows the development of American manufacturing from homecrafts to an industrial system. Includes reconstructed settings such as Hopewell Village and Slater’s Mill. (B&W, 11 minutes, 1960)

“The Sins of Our Mothers” From PBS series, “The American Experience.” Tells the story of Emeline Gurney, born to impoverished parents in Maine and sent to work in the mills of Lowell. (Color, 60 minutes, 1989)