Chapter 12
The Market Revolution and Social Reform, 1815—1850

Chapter Summary

Chapter 12 offers an overview of the modernization of the American North during the period from 1815 to 1850. Topics discussed in this chapter include the growth in American industry, transportation, and urbanization; German and Irish immigration during the 1840s; and the rise of nineteenth century reform movements. These movements included educational reform; the development of institutions for the poor, criminal, and insane; and the rise in experimental utopian communities. The role of women in reform movements is also examined particularly the role of women in the development of the abolitionist movement.

I. Industrial Change and Urbanization
   A. The Transportation Revolution
      1. Steamboats and canals
      2. Railroads
      3. Government and the transportation revolution
   B. Cities and Immigrants
      1. The port cities
      2. New industrial cities
      3. Immigration
   C. The Industrial Revolution
      1. Sources of labor
      2. Technological gains
   D. Growing Inequality and New Classes
      1. The new middle class
      2. Women and the cult of domesticity
      3. The working classes
      4. Early trade unions

II. Reform and Moral Order
   A. The Benevolent Empire
   B. The Temperance Movement
   C. Women’s Role in Reform
   D. Backlash against Benevolence

III. Institutions and Social Improvement
   A. School Reform
   B. Prisons, Workhouses, and Asylums
      1. Workhouses
      2. Asylums for the Mentally Ill
   C. Utopian Alternatives

IV. Abolitionism and Women’s Rights
Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 12, students should be able to do the following:

1. Define the term *transportation revolution* and explain its impact on stimulating the development of American manufacturing.

2. Explain the role of state governments as funding agents for railroad construction.

3. Identify two Supreme Court decisions that offered protection and support for railroads.

4. Compare and contrast Irish and German immigrants of the early nineteenth century, focusing on the numbers of people of each nationality who came to the United States, the levels of economic security reflected in each population, and the regions of the United States where each group settled.

5. Define the term *putting out system* and explain why it is so often considered the first step in the Industrial Revolution.

6. Identify and describe the working and living conditions of the Lowell girls.

7. Explain the impact of steam power on the expansion of industrial growth in the United States.

8. Describe the expansion and complexity of the American middle class during the early nineteenth century and discuss changes in American middle-class ideology regarding the family. Focus particularly on the changing views regarding the roles of women and children and the definition of the term *cult of domesticity*.

9. Identify the major distinction among American industrial workers of the early nineteenth century. Comment on the extent to which skill, class, and national origin contributed to this division.

10. Identify two means used by the working class to voice its concerns during the early nineteenth century.

11. Define the term *Benevolent Empire* and explain its organization during the early nineteenth century.

12. Define the term *temperance* and explain why this issue became so popular during the nineteenth century. Define the term *nativism* and explain why this issue became so popular during the early nineteenth century. Make the connection between the two terms.

13. Describe the Workingmen’s Movement as a reflection of the first political demands for free tax-supported schools. Explain why New England played a significant role in the school reform movement.
14. Identify Horace Mann and explain his historical significance in the area of school reform.

15. Explain the role of northern middle-class women in early nineteenth-century American public education.

16. Define the term utopian socialism and identify the major examples of American experimentation with utopian communities during the early nineteenth century.

17. Define the term transcendentalism and list the major American transcendentalist writers of the early nineteenth century.

18. Identify William Lloyd Garrison and explain his antislavery philosophy. Point out his unique contributions to the organization of a national abolitionist movement.

19. Explain the role of the abolitionist movement in the emergence of the nineteenth-century American women’s movement.

20. Identify and explain the historical significance of the Seneca Falls Convention and its adoption of the Declaration of Sentiments.

21. Discuss the impact of antislavery reform on American national politics by the 1840s. Identify the Liberty Party and assess its performance in the 1840 and 1844 presidential elections.

Topics for Classroom Lectures

1. Discuss the impact of early nineteenth-century Irish immigration on the United States. Focus on a variety of issues, including the provision of an industrial labor force, the emergence of urban slums, and the Irish immigrants’ cultural and religious distinctions from middle-class, native-born Americans. How did their presence in the United States impact American moral and political values? How did their presence lead to the popularity of temperance and nativism as parts of the American nineteenth-century social and political agenda?

2. Prepare a lecture on changing gender roles in the American middle class during the nineteenth century. Focus on the separation of men and women in American middle-class society and the increasing distinctions in their roles as men were identified with the world of work and women with home and hearth. Why do we associate these gender role changes with the middle class? How were gender roles in the middle class distinctive from gender roles in the upper class and the working class?

3. Prepare a lecture focusing on the temperance movement as a middle-class reform movement. Although there was a religious agenda involved in the movement, were there other more secular issues at stake? With what population did most middle-class Americans associate unacceptable drinking habits? Of what class and national origin was this population? How was the issue of alcohol consumption connected to the laboring class? Was the rise of the temperance movement in any way connected to the rise of nativism during the nineteenth century? Were there as many secular as religious motivations for promoting temperance in the nineteenth century?

4. Discuss the types of antislavery reform that emerged during the early nineteenth century. In discussing the issue, address the following questions connecting antislavery reform to racism:
   a. Could a person in the nineteenth century oppose slavery without being an abolitionist?
   b. Could a person in the nineteenth century oppose slavery and be a racist?
c. Could a person in the nineteenth century be an abolitionist and be a racist?
d. Did abolitionists actually appeal to Northern racist fears in an effort to popularize the agenda of the abolitionist movement?

Topics for Classroom Discussion and Essays

1. Discuss the Lowell girls of Massachusetts as an example of a labor force utilized during the early nineteenth century. Is the use of women for labor in Lowell and their treatment by management at the Lowell factory an example of empowerment of women or exploitation of women? Were women strengthened by the economic rewards of labor or victimized by a patriarchal management style? Have students connect this issue from the early nineteenth century to the ongoing debate in America regarding women in the labor force.

2. Discuss the impact of nineteenth-century northern economic and social change on the issue of sectionalism. How did the construction of internal improvements during the nineteenth century promote a mutually beneficial, interdependent economic relationship between the Northeast and Northwest to the virtual exclusion of the South? How would industrialization, urbanization, and immigration impact the northern political agenda for the remainder of the nineteenth century?

3. Have students read The Declaration of Sentiments from the Seneca Falls Convention; then, have a class discussion focusing on some of the following issues:
   a. Have students point out phrases from the document that were lifted from the Declaration of Independence. Why did the women at Seneca Falls choose to model the Declaration of Sentiments on the Declaration of Independence? What did the Declaration of Independence mean to Americans? By using the Declaration of Independence as a model, what were Stanton and Mott saying about the status of women?
   b. Explain to students the significance of the year 1848 in Western history. Is there any importance to the fact that the year the Seneca Falls Convention adopted the Declaration of Sentiments is also the year of the Revolutions of 1848 in Europe and the year Karl Marx published *The Communist Manifesto*.
   c. Have students discuss The Declaration of Sentiments as a document of its times. Have students choose phrases from the document that reflect nativism, the cult of domesticity, and the traditional nineteenth-century link between women, moral superiority, and social reform.

Topics for Term Papers and Class Projects

1. Write a paper focusing on the shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts during the early nineteenth century. A study of this group of laborers focuses on the difficulties one town experienced in the transition from artisanal manufacturing to the factory system of production.

2. Explore the issue of social mobility in nineteenth-century America. American historical myth often cites the rags to riches phenomenon as being typical of the American social condition. Is this myth a reality? Was social mobility a reality in nineteenth-century America? What has typically been the nature of American social improvement over time?

3. Choose one of the nineteenth-century American utopian societies and write a paper on the origins, leadership, defining philosophy, and success of the community. What about nineteenth-century American society served as a motivation for the creation of the community, and how effective were its members in offering a workable alternative lifestyle? What characteristics of American culture and which
American values have made it most difficult for Americans to embrace communal living as anything more than a passing fancy?

**Resources for Lectures and Research Projects**


**Audio-Visual Resources**

This four-part series, narrated by Michael Murphy, examines Irish immigration to the United States during the 1840s.

*Frederick Douglass: When the Lion Wrote History*, WETA/ROJA Productions, 1994, 90 minutes.
This three-part series examines the life and times of Frederick Douglass, the African-American leader of the abolitionist movement.

Ken Burns examines this intriguing religious sect in one of his early historical documentaries.

This three and a half-hour series chronicles the professional lives and personal friendship of the two women who are credited with originating the American women’s movement.