Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

**LO 1** Describe the economic system known as the American System.

**LO 2** List the three specific parts of the Market Revolution in early-nineteenth-century America, and evaluate how America developed during this era.

**LO 3** Describe the growth of America’s middle class during the first half of the 1800s, and discuss some of the stronger movements toward reform during the era.
The American System of economics was a fantastic success.

In the years following the War of 1812, America became relatively isolated from Europe. It focused inward. There was a strong feeling that the United States needed to strengthen its economy to protect itself against further incursion from outside powers. This view took tangible form as politicians and citizens designed what they called an “American System” of economics that focused on keeping American goods within the United States.

The American System of economics was a fantastic success, and it facilitated so many economic and social changes between 1812 and the 1860s that historians see this period as the social and economic equivalent of the political revolution of the 1770s. They describe all these transitions under the umbrella term Market Revolution. Aided by numerous transportation, communication, and technological innovations, the Market Revolution refers to the time when an increasing number of farmers willingly turned away from the ideal of being self-sufficient to focus on a single crop that could be sold at market. This change encouraged specialization and the growth of a dynamic string of market hubs within the United States. The United States had always been a part of the colonial world market, and between 1810 and 1860 the markets moved closer to home. Instead of American commerce focusing on transactions between the Atlantic seaboard and Europe, it shifted, focusing now on transactions between the East Coast and the lands extending to and beyond the Mississippi River.

The rise of localized, commercial agriculture changed the way Americans lived their lives. It moved them closer to the world of the marketplace and allowed many to leave the world of agriculture altogether. At the dawn of the 1800s, more than 80 percent of the American labor force worked in agriculture. By 1850, that figure had declined to 55 percent. By the 1880s, less than half of America’s work force was engaged in farming. Local markets needed local salesmen, lawyers, factories, marketers, economists, and bookkeepers. The changes associated with this transition affected nearly every American, and America in 1860 looked dramatically different than it did in 1810.

This chapter examines the Market Revolution, its causes and effects, and the variety of responses to it.

LO Economic Nationalism

The second generation of American politicians (James Monroe was the last American revolutionary to be president, serving from 1817 to 1825) did not have the distrust of
centralized authority that characterized the revolutionary era. Several men of this younger generation developed a nationalist program for economic growth similar to the one proposed by Alexander Hamilton during the Federalist era. Updated to fit the demands of the 1810s and 1820s, they called this economic plan the American System.

### The American System

The American System came from a surprising source: young Democratic-Republican politicians from the West, the South, and the Middle Atlantic states who had superficially embraced Jefferson’s vision of a small federal government but in fact eagerly sought the patronage that a large federal government could dole out. Henry Clay from Kentucky and John C. Calhoun from South Carolina led this group. Together, they advanced a vision that the federal government should encourage economic enterprise in three ways: (1) by creating roads and canals, collectively called internal improvements; (2) by developing secure economic institutions, such as banks; and (3) by providing for the security of America’s economic interests through high tariffs. After seeing the weaknesses of Jefferson’s vision of a disparate collection of states, the leaders of the American System wanted to strengthen the nation and secure the advancement of the West through the creation of tremendous public works projects.

### A New National Bank

One of the key components of the American System was the creation of a national bank. When Congress, before the War of 1812, refused to recharter the First National Bank in 1811, the states chartered their own banks, offering a bewildering variety of credit and currencies. More than four hundred banks were operating in 1818, each offering its own form of currency and credit. Speculation ran rampant, as investors attempted to pick which currency would appreciate the quickest. Fortunes were won and lost very quickly, and investors had little idea which currencies would be the most durable.

To end the mayhem and strengthen the national government, proponents of the American System designed the Second Bank of the United States. In a bill drafted by Calhoun, the Second National Bank was established with support from western and southern congressmen. New Englanders, who had adequate and secure banks in the North, opposed the creation of the bank. With Democratic-Republicans mostly supporting a national bank and former New England Federalists opposing it, times had changed since the Federalist era; now each party was advocating what it had opposed just two decades prior. The new bank was chartered in 1816. Ironically, the loose credit offered by the newly rechartered bank, and then a sudden tightening of that credit, led to a major economic recession, the Panic of 1819 (discussed in Chapter 11).
A Protective Tariff

Calhoun and Clay also supervised the passage of the Tariff of 1816, which taxed all incoming goods at the stiff rate of 25 percent. They designed the tariff to limit consumption of foreign goods in the United States and to encourage the development of American commerce and industries. This meant that the goods in the American System were to be American.

Court Cases

During these years, the Supreme Court issued a number of decisions that advocated economic growth at the expense of the states or of previous contracts. One of the most consequential cases was Dartmouth College v. Woodward (1819), which forbade state legislatures from altering college charters in order to gain control over them, because a corporation (the university) had drafted the charter. This decision prioritized the rights of a corporation over those of the state, thus clearing the path for increased economic development. In Gibbons v. Ogden (1824), a steamboat operator named Aaron Ogden argued that his business license from the state of New York entitled him to a monopoly on transporting commerce along the New York coastline. The U.S. Supreme Court disagreed, however, arguing that Thomas Gibbons, whose steamboat company had been chartered by the U.S. Congress, could navigate there as well, suggesting that the federal government’s power to regulate commerce overruled that granted by states.

A Protected Hemisphere

The War of 1812 and the economics of nationalism also allowed the United States to assert its dominance throughout the Western Hemisphere. In 1818, it established a northern boundary at the 49th parallel between the United States and British Canada, and in 1819 it won from Spain both Florida and lands extending nearly to today’s Oregon, all in exchange for parts of Texas. Now the United States extended from the southern tip of Florida to the current-day northern boundary with Canada, and from the Atlantic almost to the Pacific (although it still did not claim today’s American Southwest).

The new dominance was expressed most clearly in the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. This doctrine declared that any European nation attempting to colonize Latin America would be treated as a party hostile to the United States. President James Monroe announced that the Western Hemisphere was the domain of the United States and was to remain separate from the affairs of Europe. At the same time, Monroe agreed to refrain from any interference with existing European colonies or with the internal affairs or wars of the European powers. Although the Monroe Doctrine was little noted at the time, it later became a foundation for American foreign policy, used to justify American expansion into and involvement with the countries of Latin America.

Opponents of the American System

Not everyone favored the American System. Some southerners saw it as merely an attempt to wrangle taxes from wealthy cotton planters and give the money to northern and western business interests. Others liked the American System well enough when the money was spent in their home state but opposed it when resources were spent elsewhere. War-hero-turned-politician Andrew Jackson at first enjoyed the fruits of the plan but eventually came to see it as a vehicle for corruption. Despite these mounting complaints, which would increase throughout the first half of the 1800s, the American System was the prevailing economic plan for the nation until the 1830s and 1840s.
Combining tariffs, internal improvements, and a national bank, the American System of economics facilitated the Market Revolution. Farmers, more than ever before, could focus on producing what they produced best, bring their goods to local American markets, and purchase the items they could not grow or make themselves. The result was a change in people’s notions about their role in the economy, leaving behind the idea that they had to be self-sustaining farmers. Instead, they began to think of themselves as participants in the national and international marketplace. This made them more accepting of commercial and capitalist goals, for they were becoming not only producers, but also consumers. For the most part, the Market Revolution had to do with commercialized agriculture and not with industrialization (although the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution can be identified in this period).

The Market Revolution was made up of three parts, in roughly this order: (1) a transportation and communications revolution, (2) a transition to commercialized farming, and (3) industrialization. Each transition provoked significant social changes.

The Transportation and Communications Revolution

Along with friendly government policies, the Market Revolution could not have happened without a revolution in the way people and goods moved around and the way people communicated with one another. Since the start of European settlement in North America, long-distance travel had meant using rivers or the sea. Water offered the quickest and most reliable means of moving goods from their place of origin to a market where they could be sold. However, America’s rivers run primarily from north to south, making travel from east to west difficult. For instance, there was not a single navigable river connecting the northeastern cities of New York, Philadelphia, or Boston to the farmlands of the Ohio River Valley.

Recognizing the importance of speedy transportation, in the years after 1800 some states began internal improvements. They financed, for the most part through tax dollars, the construction of toll roads, canals, and other modes of transportation. This funding sparked four eras of transportation innovation: (1) the turnpike era, (2) the canal era, (3) the steamboat era, and (4) the railroad era (Map 10.1).

The Turnpike Era

The first improvements were roads and turnpikes (private roads with tolls), and the 1810s were the turnpike era. Between 1800 and 1825, hundreds of miles of toll roads crisscrossed the nation. The Cumberland Road was the best known, extending from Maryland to West Virginia. But these early roads were mostly unpaved, and huge ruts and tree stumps made them dangerous. The roads were too unpredictable for Americans to use reliably to transport large amounts of commercial goods.

The Canal Era

To solve this problem, human ingenuity provided the country with something that nature had not—a series of east-to-west canals—and the 1820s were the canal era. New York led the way in 1817, when the New York legislature paid for the construction of the Erie Canal, an artificial river connecting Buffalo—on the shore of Lake Erie—to Albany. Because Albany was linked to New York City by the Hudson River, the Erie Canal provided a continuous water route from the shores of the Atlantic to the Great Lakes. This was an immensely complex project. At the time, the longest canal in the world was 28 miles long. The Erie was 364 miles long and 40 feet wide. New Yorkers completed construction in eight years. When it was

>> These early roads were mostly unpaved, and huge ruts and tree stumps made them dangerous.
The first fifty years of the nineteenth century witnessed four separate revolutions in transportation: the turnpike era, the canal era, the steamboat era, and the railroad era. All but the railroad era were concentrated in the North and the West.

The Steamboat Era

Despite the general reluctance of the South to invest in transportation improvements, there were innovations in the South and the West as well. There, steamboats, developed in the early 1800s, proved to be effective transport on the region's broad rivers.

By the 1830s, they carried much of the commerce in those regions and succeeded in reducing cargo rates across the country. Their fabulous success made many southerners consider funding other internal improvements unnecessary.

The Railroad Era

The most transformative new form of transportation was the railroad, which became the cornerstone of the American transportation revolution of the 1840s and 1850s. The development of railroads further extended the transportation improvements begun during the


The reasons why . . . on the next page)
canal and steamboat eras, but railroads had three crucial advantages over water travel: (1) unlike canals, rail lines did not depend on natural waterways as their end points; (2) railroads did not freeze; and (3) trains traveled significantly faster than mules.

For these reasons, railroads completed the full transition to a market-based economy. In the 1830s, American builders laid more than 3,000 miles of track. By the 1860s, more than 30,000 miles of track ran through the country. As with the canals, most of the nation's railroads were concentrated in the North, laid by merchants and state governments eager to develop a diversified economy. The South, meanwhile, maintained its plantation-based culture and its dependence on natural waterways to move its key staple crops.

From 1810 to 1850, the speed with which goods and people could be moved across vast stretches of land increased considerably. In the 1810s, a journey via horseback from the Atlantic coast to the Great Lakes would have taken several weeks. In the 1850s, one could take either the Erie Canal or a railroad and be there in a matter of days.

There were four reasons why the opening of the Erie Canal was a landmark event:

**Financial.** First, the project was a tremendous economic success. The cost of moving one ton of goods from Buffalo to New York City dropped from nineteen cents per mile to a little more than one cent. The canal cut the time it took to move goods between Buffalo and New York City from twenty days to six. The state of New York charged tolls on the canal, which yielded a huge profit.

**Copycats.** Second, these profits pushed other states to invest in transportation. Many states chartered private corporations to build those internal improvements, which greatly politicized the role of corporations in American life. This process became political because it was profitable to run a canal, so winning a charter to build one was comparable to winning the lottery. Significantly, all but three of the largest canals were built in the North, signaling a northern commitment to the Market Revolution. Southern leaders, who were usually wealthy landowners, remained content to rely on the rivers that transported cotton and other staple crops.

**Creating a major metropolis.** Third, it spurred the growth of New York City. As the major trading link between the interior of the United States and the Atlantic Ocean, New York City became the nation's major economic center.

**A change in farming.** Fourth, the creation of a cheap way to move goods to market made it more enticing to farmers in the interior to produce only the few items that would be the most profitable.
The Communications Revolution

At the same time, Americans were inventing and incorporating new methods of communication. The key development was Samuel F. B. Morse’s successful transmission via the first telegraph, which used electric wires to send a message nearly instantaneously from one place to another. Now news about politics, the price of goods, and arrival of new products could be known throughout the nation in a matter of seconds. The telegraph facilitated nationwide commerce and lowered the cost of communication. It also symbolized the energy of the era, when, for the first time in human history, communication was set free from the realm of physical transit. Americans at the time were unaware of the kinds of communications that would emerge in future years, but they were aware that they were living at a transformative time in human history. Morse emphasized this notion when he chose the first words to be transmitted: “What Hath God Wrought?”

Commercialized Farming

The transportation and communications revolutions caused a transition in how farmers (that is, most Americans) farmed their land. No longer did each family have to produce almost everything it consumed. This transition was not entirely new to farmers in the South and in areas of the Middle Colonies, where colonial-era farmers had already oriented their production around staple crops. But the rest of the nation had concentrated on self-sufficiency and diversified farming, and this market transition led to dramatic changes in the South, the West, and New England.

Changes in the South

Before 1793, southern agriculture consisted of the staple crops of tobacco and rice, but farmers had added a few more varieties of crops during the 1700s. After 1793, when Eli Whitney promoted a new invention called the cotton gin, everything changed. The cotton gin allowed for the profitable cultivation of cotton even in land with poor soil by allowing the harvesting of “short staple” (or hard-to-reach) cotton. This meant that cotton was easy and profitable to produce throughout the South (not just in areas rich in nutrients), and cotton production rapidly took over southern agriculture and the southern economy. By 1825, the American South was the world’s largest producer of cotton. Between 1816 and 1840 southern cotton constituted more than half the value of all American exports.

This created obvious opportunities for white southerners. If you could get a little land and a few slaves, you could earn huge profits. The ease with which wealth could be generated spurred a large westward migration throughout the South, as small farmers searched for land to grow cotton. The development of the cotton gin also reinforced the farmers’ dependence on slaves, because it made their labor even more valuable (slaves could be used profitably on even poor land). At the same time, slavery moved west with the cotton farmers, making the slave trade profitable even after the importation of slaves from Africa had stopped in 1808, per the agreement reached in the U.S. Constitution. These farmers revived the domestic slave trade. Any ideas that emancipation might be plausible in the South during these years vanished after the introduction of the cotton gin.

This cotton boom had two other key outcomes. First, cotton impeded any significant internal improvements in the South because wealthy southerners considered waterways sufficient to transport cotton. This hurt small farmers, who could not afford land along waterways, and it stalled the development of any major railroad lines in the southern states. Second, the roaring success of cotton, in combination with the Market Revolution elsewhere in the nation, hindered southerners from developing a diversified economy. They could rely on other parts of the nation for the goods they needed. This meant that if the South’s cotton production was ever threatened, the southern economy would be in trouble.

Changes in the West

The Market Revolution also meant that farmers in the Midwest (Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois) could
take maximum advantage of the land’s rich soil and plentiful rain. Reflecting the Market Revolution’s transition to commercialized agriculture, a wheat belt stretched from western New York to Wisconsin, a corn belt reached from Ohio to Illinois, a tobacco belt extended from Kentucky to Missouri, and a cotton belt spread from Georgia to Mississippi. Each area continued to grow a diverse range of crops, but each increasingly specialized in what it grew best.

The commercial development of these regions prompted a huge shift of the American population (Map 10.2). With the **Land Act of 1820**, the federal government helped promote settlement of land west of the Appalachians by setting affordable prices for manageable plots of land. This prompted one of the largest internal migrations in American history. In 1789, two-thirds of all Americans (about 3 million people) lived within fifty miles of the Atlantic Ocean, while only 5 percent lived west of the Appalachians. By 1840, one-third of the population (more than 5 million people) lived in new states west of the Appalachians. Several new areas applied for statehood, almost all of them as a result of westward migration: Indiana (1816), Mississippi (1817), Illinois (1818), Alabama (1819), Maine (1820), Missouri (1821), Arkansas (1836), Michigan (1837), Florida (1845), Texas (1845), Iowa (1846), and Wisconsin (1848). During these years, between 5 and 10 percent of all Americans moved each year.

**The West and Slavery**

Westward migration provoked another significant question: what to do about slavery? In 1819, Missouri sought entry into the union as a slave state. Its request provoked a debate in Congress that Congress wished desperately to avoid. Even the aging Thomas Jefferson wrote that the issue of slavery frightened him like a “fire bell in the night.”

The issue of whether slavery would be allowed in Missouri was pivotal for two reasons: (1) Missouri lay along the same latitude as several free states, and its entry into the Union as a slave state would move slavery northward; and (2) the admission of Missouri as a slave state would upset the congressional balance of eleven slave states and eleven free states. Northerners, mindful of the ideals of the Revolution and intent on avoiding a large black population in the North, sought to keep slavery in the South. Southerners sought to expand the development of cotton, which, they felt, required the labor of slaves.

When Representative James Tallmadge, Jr., proposed the **Tallmadge Amendment**, which would have enforced gradual emancipation in Missouri, a vicious debate broke out on the floor of Congress. Henry Clay brokered a compromise: Missouri could enter as a slave state if Maine could enter as a free state. In addition, Clay drew a line at the latitude of 36˚30’. Territories north of the line would remain free, south of it could maintain slavery. This was the **Missouri Compromise**, passed in 1820, which would dictate the spread of slavery in the West for the next thirty years.

**The New England Transition**

New England farmers had since colonial times developed diversified farms that could fulfill many of their families’ needs, while local markets provided the items that could not be grown or manufactured
The Market Revolution (combined with soil exhaustion) slowly eroded this lifestyle. Rocky, cold New England had never been a great place to farm, and access to cheap western agriculture furthered the decline in farming during the 1820s.

Without a central profitable crop to turn to, New Englanders reorganized their economy. Giving up on corn and wheat, New Englanders began to grow garden vegetables, fruit, dairy products, meat, eggs, and other perishable goods that could sustain growing urban markets. They took advantage of the new methods of transportation to get their goods to market. In 1820, about one-third of all New England produce was sent to market. By 1850, that percentage had jumped to about half.

The result was dazzling success—for those who owned land. Those who did not own land confronted rising land prices. Many headed west, where land was cheaper. Others worked as wage laborers on farms, hoping one day to earn enough money to buy land of their own.

Women’s output was similarly affected. Many women stopped weaving clothes, because store-bought cloth was cheaper. They churned butter and made cheese instead, participating in the new market economy by selling these dairy products at market.

**Industrialization**

The transportation revolution and the conversion to commercial agriculture required machines. Railroads needed machinery to fabricate engines, cars, and tracks. Cotton crops required factories to turn the raw product into cloth. Specialized farming in the West demanded large reapers and tough plows. Thus, the third aspect of the Market Revolution was the rise of industrialization and the creation of factories.
176  CHAPTER 10  The Market Revolution

It is important to remember that this was not yet the full-scale industrialization associated with today's large factories. But it was the beginning of that process.

The Mechanization of Agriculture

Cyrus McCormick's development of the reaper in 1831 was the most significant industrial development in agriculture. A twenty-five-year-old Virginia farmer, McCormick created a machine that harvested grain much faster than manual labor could. This was a boon for the western states, because they had miles of flat farmland that was perfect for the reaper. In 1837, McCormick moved his factory from Virginia to Chicago, the principal city of the booming Midwest, and sold his reapers to farmers there. In the same way, John Deere's steel plow (1837) made it easier to plow tough fields, and the cotton gin (1793) sped up the process of separating short-staple cottonseed from its fiber.

The Mechanization of Machine Tools

McCormick and Whitney noted the precise specifications of the many moving parts that made up their machines. They then reproduced those parts in large quantities, thus introducing the system of interchangeable parts. Eli Whitney was chiefly credited for this development (more than he deserved) and won government contracts to develop muskets that used interchangeable parts. With interchangeable parts, producers could make products more quickly and cheaply instead of handcrafting each item one by one. Watches, clocks, and locks—all luxury items in 1800—became inexpensive household goods by 1840 because of interchangeable parts.

Factories

Factories were the most efficient way to produce the large quantities of goods that were needed to accommodate the Market Revolution, but they did not prosper as quickly as one might imagine. Before 1800, most production was done in a decentralized system of family- or artisan-based manufacturing. Large manufacturers would pay one family to perform one task, then pass the item on to the next family or artisan to perform the next task. This was called the "putting out" system.

The rise of the factory in the 1820s altered this system by bringing nearly all aspects of production under one roof. Samuel Slater was the first to develop the workings of a factory on American soil, designing in 1789 a factory that spun cotton into thread. Within its first ten years of operation, Slater's textile mill hired more than one hundred people, mostly women and young children. The amount of thread produced by Slater's mill prompted a rise in the volume of thread-based goods (mainly clothes, but also towels and curtains) and a drop in their price.

Entrepreneurs opened other factories, and these new factories continued to improve production. Slater could not weave thread into cloth at his mill, for example (he still had to "put out" his thread to home workers for this task). In 1813, Boston merchants developed a power loom to weave cloth. Headed by Francis Lowell, the new factory brought all the processes of cloth-making under one roof. This quickened the pace and cheapened the price of production. Between 1820 and 1860 textile mills sprouted all over the northern and Middle Atlantic states, harnessing the power of swift-

"putting out" system
Division of labor in which large manufacturers would pay one family to perform one task, then pass the item on to the next family or artisan to perform the next task.

The cotton gin easily separated cotton fibers from the seed, a mechanizing process that led to the dramatic expansion of the cotton industry.
moving rivers. Americans began purchasing their clothing rather than making it, which boosted the rise of retail clothing stores. Other manufacturing industries, such as shoemaking and clockmaking, followed.

**Social Changes Associated with the Market Revolution**

The Market Revolution had many social ramifications. The six most significant were (1) the growth of cities, (2) the impact on the environment, (3) the changing face of the labor force, (4) an increase in religious divisions, (5) the beginnings of a working class and a middle class, and (6) increased protest movements.

**The Growth of Cities**

The expansion of markets and the growth of factories led to a slow process of urbanization. In 1830, only 5 percent of Americans lived in towns of 8,000 people or more. By 1850, that number had more than tripled, to 16 percent. With the development of the Erie Canal, New York City solidified its position as the largest city in the nation, with a population in 1840 of more than 300,000. Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore experienced robust growth as well. Of the ten largest cities in 1860, only one, New Orleans, was in the South.

**Environmental Costs of the Market Revolution**

There were significant environmental costs of the Market Revolution as well. Steamboats and early railroads burned wood as a source of power, which caused rapid deforestation in the Northeast. Similarly, as the transportation revolution enabled more people to move west, new settlers cleared land and chopped wood, destroying animal habitats and western landscapes. Sawmills and textile mills, relying on waterways for their power, interrupted the paths of spawning fish. These costs would only increase as industrialization expanded through the rest of the century.

**Women and Immigrants in the Labor Force**

There was also a dramatic change in the composition of the labor force. Setting a pattern followed by other factory owners, Francis Lowell hired single women from New England farms to work in his clothmaking factory. He needed cheap labor, and young women would work for lower wages than men. To present a wholesome image to the farm families who might send their daughters to work there, Lowell built boarding houses for his “mill girls,” where they were taught Christian ethics and monitored by chaperones. This was called the Lowell System. Factory life was harsh for these workers, however, and most sought to return home to start families after a short tenure in a Lowell mill. Most stayed just five years. They worked without insurance, wage guarantees, or legal protections of any kind, and when times were hard, these factory workers were the first to suffer.

For the most part, working in a factory was arduous, and wages were low. People often worked fifteen-hour days, six days a week, and usually an entire family had to work in order to get by. Men, women, and young children spent long hours in the hot, noisy factories.

But mill owners were not obligated to listen to complaints; they could always find eager replacements. After 1840, the number of immigrants arriving in the United States suddenly soared, causing the nation’s population to increase a whopping 36 percent in the 1840s. Roughly two-thirds of these new arrivals were Irish, fleeing years of miserable poverty and hunger that peaked during the Great Irish Famine of 1845–1851. The majority of Irish immigrants settled in northeastern cities and worked at industrial jobs, replacing New England women and children. By the 1860s, half of the employees in most American factories were immigrants, most of them Irish. The Irish became a distinct underclass in the nineteenth-century United States.

**Challenges to the Protestant Consensus**

Along with a willingness to work for cheap wages, the Irish immigrants brought Roman Catholicism. Catholicism had been present in the United States since the first European settlements, but Catholics had always been a small minority compared to the Protestant majority (roughly 1 percent at the time of the Revolution). With the wave of Irish immigrants, Catholics formed the first sizeable religious minority in American history. Many Protestant Americans feared this development, believing that rising
levels of Catholic immigration threatened the character of America, which they considered a “Protestant nation.” Catholics, most nineteenth-century Americans believed, were too bound to the teachings of the pope to behave like free and independent republicans. They were also prone to the excesses of drinking and licentiousness, or so claimed Protestant nativists.

To counteract the growing Catholic presence, some Protestants began seeking an official proclamation of Protestantism as the official religion of the nation. Such efforts did not succeed, but they stirred controversy. For instance, the efforts of Protestant educators to introduce Protestant religious study into the curriculum of the nation's public schools prompted the development of the first Catholic parochial schools.

**A New Working Class**

In their new jobs, Irish workers earned little pay. Indeed, what made Irish laborers so attractive to factory owners was their willingness to work for low wages. Moreover, as urban land prices skyrocketed, the Irish were forced to accept the worst housing available. Irish families crowded together in basement apartments or in attics, and Irish slums became hotbeds for diseases like cholera and tuberculosis. To the eyes of native-born Americans, these conditions served as unhappy notice that the squalor of Britain’s industrial towns had been transplanted to America. In fact, the Irish slums were simply a part of the new working class that worked in the factories, earned day wages, and were increasingly removed from the fruits of their labor. Over the course of the 1800s, these laborers would begin to feel aligned with one another, creating a sense of belonging to a particular class.

**Protest Movements**

Several movements arose to protest the living and working conditions experienced by the working class. Protest movements of the early nineteenth century were usually one of two kinds: (1) an organization of middle-class reformers seeking to safeguard the morality of workers or (2) laborers fighting for economic and work-related protections, such as a shorter workday. The two movements often opposed each other, sometimes because the middle-class reformers were anti-immigrant, while the labor movement was made up of Irish and non-Irish immigrants. Furthermore, the federal and state governments firmly supported economic development, so ceding to the demands of laborers did not seem to offer immediate gains for the economy.

Despite these hurdles, the laborers enjoyed some successes. Neighborhood groups began to meet up in citywide trade assemblies that delved into politics and rallied to elect politicians sympathetic to their cause. They then attempted to unify the citywide assemblies into nationwide unions. One such union, the **Workingmen’s Party**, was formed in 1828 and spread through fifteen states. It was surpassed in 1834 by the **National Trades Union**, a first large-scale labor union in the United States; formed in 1834.
which is usually regarded as the nation’s first large-scale union. And, although the power of the trade unions varied depending on the economy, in 1840, President Martin Van Buren instituted the ten-hour day for federal employees, yielding to one of the long-standing demands of the laboring classes.

Reformers

But the most influential reform movement of the early nineteenth century emerged from the middle class. Spurred by a religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening, a large group of middle-class social reformers attempted to control the changes brought about by the Market Revolution. The men and especially the women who led the reform movement promoted a vision of a more caring nation, one more considerate of human life. In doing so, these reformers broached some of the most consequential issues the nation would face during the next two hundred years, including racism, the rights of workers, and the rights of women.

The Creation of the Middle Class

Where did these reformers come from? As more and more unskilled laborers transitioned to factory work, a need arose for paper-pushing bureaucrats who could manage others, balance the books, and sell goods. This was new. In 1800, a shoemaker would have made shoes himself, selling them at his own shop. By 1860, however, many “shoemakers” did not actually make shoes at all. Rather, they supervised a group of semiskilled or unskilled laborers, each of whom completed a part of the shoemaking process. Similarly, large factories needed bookkeepers, accountants, salesmen, and clerks.

This management class formed the backbone of an emerging middle class. Before 1800, Americans had hardly ever used the term middle class. By 1850, the term was part of the popular vocabulary. The middle class began to develop a culture distinct from that of the elite property owners or that of the workers. In the middle class of the mid-1800s, men were presumed to be the sole income earners, usually working outside the home. Their wives, meanwhile, transitioned from income providers to guardians of the home and family, a concept that came to be called the “cult of female domesticity.” Middle-class women developed their own social and cultural outlets. Manufacturers were quick to recognize this trend, providing products exclusively geared to women, in a feminization of consumer-ism. Publishers introduced a “ladies” literature, a feminization of culture. But a woman’s first priority was making the family home a sanctuary for her laboring husband, a “haven in a heartless world.”

The Second Great Awakening

For most people, and especially for women, new evangelical churches lay at the center of middle-class culture. More than any other group in American society, the middle class—the shopkeepers, clerks, and managers—was most active in the evangelical sects that developed in the 1830s and formed the center of what historians call the Second Great Awakening. The Second Great Awakening was a Protestant religious revival that began in the West but shortly moved to the Northeast and the South. It lasted from the 1790s to the 1840s, and reached its high tide between the 1820s and 1840s.

The Theology

The central theological idea behind the Second Great Awakening was that an individual’s soul could be saved through human agency (meaning hard work) and his or her acceptance of responsibility for
large crowds in small towns. The Transcendentalists, socialists, feminists, and other reformers believed that ultimate truths were beyond human grasp. They believed that these truths “transcended” our capacity for understanding. This being so, they turned inward—to themselves and to their society—asking what could be done to improve the human condition. The best-known Transcendentalists were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, two genuine celebrities of the time. Seeking to live by their ideals, Thoreau’s attempt to return to nature was narrated in his book *Walden*. Telling the tale of his two-year journey living in the wilderness, the book demonstrated Thoreau’s desire for self-sufficiency and for the conservation of nature. He also protested slavery and war, and he advocated civil disobedience, starting a tradition that would influence later reformers like Martin Luther King, Jr. His friend Emerson, meanwhile, criticized economic competition and social conformity. The purity of their ideals struck a chord with their generation and with the generation that followed, whose luminaries included Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. These writers debated in their fiction the perfectibility of humankind. Perhaps ironically, all of these thinkers were speakers on the *lyceum circuit*, a touring lecture circuit that was made possible only by the transportation breakthroughs of the Market Revolution.

### Why a Revival?

Some historians have argued that middle-class interest in religion stemmed from a desire for economic security. As the American economy became more competitive, those who aspired to succeed embraced religion for a sense of hope and confidence in the future. In addition, evangelical religion promoted the values—frugality, sobriety, diligence, and zeal—that Americans needed to achieve their economic goals. More prosaically, church membership also bestowed social respectability, and those who joined were more likely to impress their superiors at work, which might lead to promotions. Both religion and the cult of female domesticity were central aspects of the emerging American middle class.

### The Transcendentalists

The theology of perfectibility appeared in secular form in writings by the Transcendentalists, a group of thinkers and writers in the Northeast who believed that ultimate truths were beyond human grasp. They believed that these truths “transcended” our capacity for understanding. This being so, they turned inward—to themselves and to their society—asking what could be done to improve the human condition. The best-known Transcendentalists were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, two genuine celebrities of the time. Seeking to live by their ideals, Thoreau’s attempt to return to nature was narrated in his book *Walden*. Telling the tale of his two-year journey living in the wilderness, the book demonstrated Thoreau’s desire for self-sufficiency and for the conservation of nature. He also protested slavery and war, and he advocated civil disobedience, starting a tradition that would influence later reformers like Martin Luther King, Jr. His friend Emerson, meanwhile, criticized economic competition and social conformity. The purity of their ideals struck a chord with their generation and with the generation that followed, whose luminaries included Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. These writers debated in their fiction the perfectibility of humankind. Perhaps ironically, all of these thinkers were speakers on the *lyceum circuit*, a touring lecture circuit that was made possible only by the transportation breakthroughs of the Market Revolution.

---

**burned-over district**

Area in upstate New York that had many converts who had been inspired by the fiery orators speaking the Word of God during the Second Great Awakening.

**Transcendentalists**

Group of thinkers and writers in the Northeast who believed that ultimate truths were beyond human grasp.

**lyceum circuit**

Schedule of lectures in which clergymen, reformers, Transcendentalists, socialists, feminists, and other speakers would speak to large crowds in small towns.
Utopianism

Utopianism provided another response to the quest for perfectibility. After their inception in Europe, several “perfectionist” communities popped up in the 1840s and 1850s, mostly in the Northeast, but also in the Midwest. One was in Oneida, New York, where John Humphrey Noyes led a group of fifty-one followers to develop what he viewed as a perfect community. The Oneida community had open sexual mores, communal child rearing, a unique division of labor, and a therapeutic milieu where people freely offered constructive criticism of one another under the watchful eye of Noyes.

The Shakers, meanwhile, who developed from a group of Quakers, also believed in perfectionism and communal property. Their communities developed a tradition of rejecting commercial endeavors, one result being their creation of beautiful handcrafted furniture. There were many more of these groups. More than one hundred utopian communities were established between the 1820s and the 1850s, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest.

The Latter-day Saints

Creating a utopia was not for everyone. Some preferred to anticipate the Second Coming of Christ, when perfection would reign for the chosen. The most significant group was the Mormons, founded by Joseph Smith, a Protestant convert who witnessed one of Charles Finney’s revivals. After his conversion in the burned-over district, Smith claimed to have been visited by the angel Moroni, who led Smith to golden tablets upon which were written the Book of Mormon.
Mormons called themselves the Latter-day Saints.

Smith’s vision appealed to a growing number of people who were either convinced by Smith’s vision and/or dissatisfied with the new social order unfolding during the Market Revolution. Chastised as heretics, Joseph Smith led his congregation to Ohio, then Missouri, then Illinois, in an attempt to avoid persecution. By 1844, Smith was tried for treason and, facing persecution once again, the Mormons headed west in 1846, ultimately settling in the territory of Utah. (For more on the Mormons, see Chapter 13.)

The Reform Impulse

While movements striving for perfectibility continued to blossom throughout the first half of the 1800s, most Americans preferred more subtle attempts at reform.

The Benevolent Empire

Instead of drastically altering the entire society, most Americans sought to change one element at a time. This led to a series of single-issue reforms. Many of the reformers felt that, all together, their various efforts would create a “Benevolent Empire” on American soil. Led by individuals like Arthur and Lewis Tappan, evangelical brothers who advocated numerous reforms, the reformers of the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s sought social change with a messianic fervor. In their advocacy, they sometimes patronizingly questioned the morality of impoverished immigrants and non-Protestants, but they claimed to do so only in an effort to improve American society.

Female Reform Societies

The reforming impulse was particularly meaningful for nineteenth-century women. Politics were thought of as men’s arena, but social reform was considered within women’s sphere, and thus activist women played a large role in the movement for social reform. This was most dramatically illustrated by the American Female Moral Reform Society, which by 1840 had more than five hundred local chapters throughout the country and had successfully lobbied for legislation governing prostitution.

Temperance

By far the largest reforming effort went into moderating the consumption of alcohol in America. In 1800, Americans per capita drank five gallons of alcohol every year (today we drink about two gallons per capita). Booze was especially integral to the new culture of politics, but it permeated the rest of American culture too. At the same time, the Irish immigrants who streamed into the country in the 1840s brought with them a tradition of alcohol consumption and of gathering in saloons.

Female reformers attacked the habit, claiming that men who drank often beat their wives and children. They maintained that drinking also affected their work habits, sometimes forcing families into financial hardship. In 1826, temperance workers founded the American Temperance Society, and by the middle of the 1830s, 5,000 local and state temperance organizations had appeared. In 1851, Maine prohibited the sale of alcohol. By 1855, temperance and prohibition laws spread throughout New England and the Midwest. The temperance movement also played a prominent role in the presidential elections of the 1840s and 1850s, as temperance workers vigorously promoted candidates who shared their ideals.
**Education**

Between 1800 and 1860, free public education expanded across parts of the United States. Overcoming the mainstream perception that free schools were only for poor people, reformers such as Horace Mann and Henry Barnard fought to establish the public elementary school as a fixture in antebellum America. By the 1820s, public secondary schools had increased in number, although they were generally reserved for those interested in a profession. Schools expanded in every region, with the South being the slowest to adopt the institution.

A few state-supported colleges also opened in these years. Women gained access to public education as well, highlighted by the founding of a series of coeducational colleges. Most schools took for granted America’s Protestant majority and subsequently instituted courses in Protestant moral theology and Bible readings from the King James, or Protestant, Bible.

**Prison Reform**

Prisons also attracted significant attention from middle-class reformers. Before 1800, punishment was usually doled out financially (in fines) or physically (in lashes). But during these reform years, reformers designed a criminal justice system whereby criminals were incarcerated for a fixed period of time. Solitary confinement—another old-time punishment—was limited to extreme cases. Inmates were allowed (mostly forced) to work together in the daytime, a practice thought to bring about personal reform. The reformer Dorothea Dix was crucial in focusing public interest on the criminal justice system and in removing large numbers of the mentally ill from prisons.

**Abolition**

Of deeper importance was the small but growing movement for abolition. The moral perfectibility preached during the Second Great Awakening openly exposed the greatest sin of the nation: slavery. And, as the cotton gin enabled cotton production to expand westward, slavery became firmly established in the expanding South during the first quarter of the 1800s.

Free African Americans had long advocated abolition, and in the 1820s they accelerated their protests. Richard Allen, head of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and David Walker, a vocal pamphleteer, advocated immediate emancipation. Walker’s essay *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829) serves as the strongest statement from an African American during the era; it provoked many small slave riots across the South.

While African Americans advocated immediate emancipation, most white Americans favored gradual emancipation, or gradualism. In the North, slavery had been phased out after the Revolution, and the problem seemed less pressing to northern white reformers. Some white Americans demonstrated racism in other ways, however, most significantly in founding the American Colonization Society. The society advocated sending all black Americans to Africa, and it even established the colony of Liberia on the West African coast for this purpose in the 1820s.

**Garrison and The Liberator**

Public opinion began to shift in 1831, when William Lloyd Garrison, a white journalist advocating immediate emancipation, began publishing the antislavery newspaper *The Liberator*. The *Liberator* served for thirty years as the central voice of the abolition movement. It drew together a group of antislavery advocates, many of whom were evangelical preachers affiliated with the Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati (men like Lyman Beecher and Theodore Weld). The ideas of the Second Great Awakening prodded these leaders to advocate immediate emancipation, although many other northern white churches were slower to adopt the cause of emancipation, prompting Garrison to attack them for their complicity. Garrison was clearly the most steadfast in his pursuit of abolition: at one point, he publicly burned a copy of the U.S. Constitution, suggesting that it too was complicit in allowing slavery (which, of course, it was). This action, and others like it, alienated Garrison from many white abolitionists who favored gradualism. In 1833, Garrison founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, an organization that served as a point of contact for escaped slaves like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman.
Resistance to Abolition

Abolitionists faced fierce, stubborn resistance in both the South and the North. In northern states like New York and Illinois, merchants and laborers challenged abolitionists mainly because they were afraid that poor black people would be willing to work for low wages, thus depressing the economy. In 1837, vigilantes in Illinois even murdered the minister and journalist Elijah Lovejoy for perpetually publishing abolitionist tracts.

In the South, southerners also sometimes violently prevented abolitionists from distributing antislavery tracts. Georgia offered a $5,000 reward to anyone who delivered Garrison to state authorities.

Congressional “Gag Rule”

Abolitionists continued to fight, though, sending thousands of petitions to Congress. In an effort to prevent Congress from discussing slavery (and therefore threatening the free state/slave state balance established by the Compromise of 1820), the House of Representatives adopted, in 1836, what opponents called the “gag rule.” This was a legal provision that automatically tabled any discussion of abolition. Under this law, slavery was not open for discussion in Congress. Former president John Quincy Adams, now a representative from Massachusetts, repeatedly protested the rule, but persistent opposition frustrated his efforts for eight years, when Congress finally rescinded the rule.

By the 1850s, the movement for abolition was growing, and so was its opposition. As the debate became increasingly polarized, more and more people had to weigh the costs associated with slavery.

The Women’s Movement

Women, both black and white, were some of the most ardent abolitionists. The sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimké, Lydia Maria Child, Maria Chapman, and Lucretia Mott were all active in the crusade. For many of these women, advocating the rights of African Americans highlighted the absence of basic civil rights for women. In one notable instance, the Grimké sisters were criticized for their abolitionist activism by Congregationalist ministers who circulated a letter outlining the “proper” duties of women in the church. This quite pointedly turned the Grimkés’ attention to the condition of women. In response, in 1838, Sarah Grimké published *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Men* and Angelina Grimké published her *Letters to Catherine E. Beecher*, both landmark tracts in the struggle for women’s equality. Together, these works brought together a group of like-minded reformers interested in the place of women in American society. They found eager constituents in the women who had found their voices during the Second Great Awakening and in the new occupations generated during the Market Revolution.
In 1848, several women, including the leading abolitionists mentioned previously and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, organized the Women’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, normally called the **Seneca Falls Convention**. The convention adopted a Declaration of Sentiments, which was modeled after the Declaration of Independence and articulated the injustices that women faced in American society. As a political tactic, the women’s movement put securing the vote for women atop their list of demands. But they faced two challenges: (1) from men reluctant to admit women into the raucous world of nineteenth-century politics, and (2) by the rising issue of racial equality, which would culminate in the Civil War and make all other attempts at social reform seem less pressing. The movements for justice by African Americans and women have always been linked (for example, Frederick Douglass spoke at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention), but the thorny issue of whether to concentrate on establishing African American rights or women’s rights perpetually divided the various women’s movements, at least until the latter half of the twentieth century.

### And in the end . . .

Between 1812 and the 1860s, the nation’s social and economic life had changed dramatically. With the American System of economics as a model, the United States became increasingly market oriented. Production was implemented on a larger scale and became more and more mechanized. The transportation and communications revolutions altered the way people thought of the vast expanse that was their nation. And urbanization and the creation of a sizeable working class served as reminders that certain advances come with costs.

The significant changes associated with the Market Revolution provoked various reactions, from the perfection seekers of the Second Great Awakening to calls for social reform from the working class, American Catholics, African Americans, and women. A new form of politics also arose during these years, years that are usually associated with one dynamic character. It is to Andrew Jackson and the politics of the Market Revolution that we now turn.

### What else was happening . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1815</td>
<td>John Roulstone writes the first three verses of “Mary Had a Little Lamb” after his classmate Mary Sawyer comes to school followed by her pet lamb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>The game of rugby is invented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833</td>
<td>Britain outlaw slavery in response to the continued efforts of evangelical Christians and the politician William Wilberforce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>Massachusetts prohibits the sale of liquor. One man gets around the law by painting stripes on a pig and advertising that, for 6 cents, a person could see the pig and get a free glass of whiskey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>Hanson Gregory, a New England mariner, invents the donut.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visit the CourseMate website at [www.cengagebrain.com](http://www.cengagebrain.com) for additional study tools and review materials for this chapter.