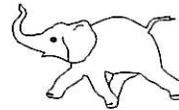

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**SOCIAL CHANGE
IN AMERICA**

From the Revolution

Through the Civil War



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Two Directions for Labor

SLAVERY BECAME an issue for reform as the United States' different regional societies took increasingly distinct paths. Under the adaptive pressure of the limitations experienced in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, household-based economies in all regions had modified and extended their activities. In some areas these changes reinforced and extended established patterns; in other regions they initiated a process of social transformation. The biggest distinction arose between areas of nonslave labor, where older systems of compelled labor began to decline, and regions of the South that relied strongly on slavery, where coerced labor remained significant.

Some important social and economic characteristics of slave and nonslave societies diverged in this period, setting up an increasingly marked set of contrasts between them. Urban development continued more slowly in the South than elsewhere. Particularly after 1810, manufacturing too, though it remained an important feature of many Southern regions, did not in most parts of the South keep pace with the scale or scope of developments to the north. Such differences in these features that came to be seen as marks of "modern" societies have often led historians to regard the South as increasingly backward, and its society as relatively slow to change. Following a long tradition, they ascribed this relative backwardness to the persistence of slavery. As a Kentucky physician, Benjamin W. Dudley, claimed in 1806, slavery induced "dependency and dissipation" among slaves which impaired their capacity for hard work. By mid-century, abolitionist critics of slavery were also pointing to the

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system's apparent inefficiencies. Many of these analyses rested on the assumption—with roots in eighteenth-century social thought, and seemingly justified by later events—that slavery was not merely inhumane but doomed ultimately to fail and die out.¹

Various recent historians, however, have sought to qualify the argument that the South was backward. They stress the extent to which the region was actively engaged in developing commercial and other activities. Some accounts have also tended to downplay the effects of slavery on the South, or of slavery's differences from the other forms of labor that were prominent elsewhere in the economy. Meanwhile, historians of slavery itself have done much to emphasize the extent to which it was a system of power, and frequently of barbarity toward its captives. The discussion that follows seeks to put these new conclusions toward a fresh assessment.²

The Expansion of Slavery

SLAVERY ENABLED Southern society to participate in the dynamic development shared by other household-based societies in the early United States. The South was not "backward" in the sense of being slow to grow or lacking in dynamic energy, though its commitments to staple-crop production and to the use of slave labor took it in directions that differed from those of nonslave regions. Nor was American slavery inevitably doomed. Its rapid expansion in the nineteenth century suggested the possibility—one that was comfortably assumed by its beneficiaries and regarded with horror by its victims and opponents—that slavery might continue indefinitely. Yet its operations were shaped by the irreducible unwillingness of slaves to consent to their predicament.

Many late-eighteenth-century observers, aware of the injustices and ideological inconsistencies of a republic based on slavery, believed that slave labor would eventually cease to be important, and that the institution would die. They took the abolition of slavery or steps toward gradual emancipation in the northeastern states as signs of progress toward that end. Had production in the South continued to concentrate only on the old staple crops of the colonial period, they might have been proved correct. Tobacco did not need to be grown by slave labor, and

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many tobacco growers in the upper Chesapeake were shifting to grain crops anyway. In most parts of the North where slavery was not yet illegal by the early nineteenth century, it was dying out even ahead of measures for gradual abolition. As late as 1831–1832 it was possible for members of the Virginia legislature to hold a debate on the future of slavery and to entertain the possibility that it might become extinct.

But its defenders had long reconciled slavery to republican assumptions. After the Revolution, full citizenship was in theory accorded only to those whose personal independence rendered them immune from political pressure or corruption. Slaves, like women, children, and the propertyless, were “dependents,” and they were denied rights only in greater degree than those other groups. The republic also protected the rights of property owners, and as democratization for white men eroded property qualifications for the franchise, the entitlement to possess slaves came to be defended all the more vigorously as a property right. Race itself also came to play a more explicit role in the justifications put forward for slavery. People of African descent, so the argument went, were inferior beings who needed enslavement for their own protection. The Virginia political theorist John Taylor defended slavery in the 1820s as a protection for slaves against the poverty, ignorance, and exploitation they would suffer if they were a free but propertyless class.³

Such justifications, however, only followed the substantial expansion of slavery in the decades after the Revolution. In practice the extension of tobacco cultivation and the intensification of rice production both created new demands for slave labor. But the South did not remain reliant just on its old crops. The addition of sugar and, above all else, the adoption and expansion of cotton production drove the growth of the slave labor force and the increasing confidence with which it was regarded by its owners as the bedrock of the Southern economy. Between 1790 and 1830 alone the slave population expanded almost threefold. The availability of coerced slave labor for agriculture tied the South even more strongly than before to its staple-crop and export economies. The ability of some slaveholders to sustain plantations (units worked by twenty or more slaves) in many of the most productive districts led to a consolidation of political power across much of the South by members of a planter elite.

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Some crops were confined to particular areas. The ready availability of slave labor and the development of water control and planting techniques ensured the survival and development of thriving rice plantations along the South Carolina and Georgia tidewater. Some of these estates became among the largest in the United States, with hundreds of slaves on each. Slave labor was essential not just for growing and harvesting the rice crop but for regulating and maintaining a delicately balanced system of dikes and water flows that irrigated the rice while also protecting the land from inundation by the sea. Similarly, the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803 included a sugar plantation region in the Mississippi delta that also expanded during the following half-century. Large plantations were common there too, together with large slave workforces essential both to the harvesting and to the crushing and processing of sugarcane at mills owned by the planters. Both sugar and rice production involved hard toil in harsh conditions, for which adequate free labor was impossible to hire but which slaves could be compelled to undertake.

By far the most important development in the Southern economy was the expansion of cotton growing, which by the 1850s had become the single most valuable crop not just in the South but in the whole United States. The introduction of cotton gins, which solved the difficulties of growing inland short-staple cotton in the 1790s, unleashed a massive increase in cotton cultivation to provide the raw material for new and fast-growing mechanized textile industries, first in Britain and later in other European countries and the American Northeast. American exports of cotton to Britain alone, which were negligible before 1793, exceeded 100 million pounds' weight by 1815, and more than doubled again to 263 million pounds in 1830. As production boomed, vast acreages were planted with cotton, and new fortunes were created.

Unlike sugar and rice, cotton could be cultivated successfully on small farms as well as large ones. But the need for labor to hoe cotton fields to keep them free of weeds, and for the finicky task of harvesting, meant that yeoman farm families could handle only small acreages of the crop. Advantage went to cultivators who could afford slaves to do this work, so most cotton was grown on slave-worked farms and plantations of various sizes. It was the expansion of cotton in particular that ensured that, far from dying out, slavery would revive. Cotton consigned further generations of enslaved people to lives in bondage.

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Cotton cultivation and, to a lesser extent, projects to grow sugar, hemp, tobacco, and other crops with slave labor were the driving forces behind the expansion of settlement after the 1790s into the Southwest. The backcountry of South Carolina had already been settled by a mixture of slaveholders, yeoman farmers, and squatters; cotton reinforced the numbers and power of the slaveholders and created an inland elite. Over the following decades this group colonized and cultivated vast areas in what became Alabama, Mississippi, and parts of Tennessee, and began settlements across the Mississippi River in Arkansas and Texas. In areas like the Macon region in interior Georgia, land was initially opened up and cleared by yeoman farmers who had migrated from the seaboard or moved south from Pennsylvania and the Virginia backcountry. As the more prosperous ones adopted cotton cultivation, buying or hiring in a few slaves each, they began a transformation. With increased cotton production, advantage went to those who could purchase larger acreages and the slaves to work them, and the region began to be dominated by plantation agriculture; by 1840 slaves accounted for half the Macon area's population. Yeoman farmers still remained, but they lost much of their political influence to the more dominant planters. Across the southwestern frontier, initial squatter settlers on speculators' land were undisturbed until the prospect of cotton cultivation made landholders interested in working it. Squatters were then often displaced. They and yeoman farmers might make their way farther west to fresh land if they could, but many remained behind in what grew into plantation districts.⁴

The southwestward expansion of slavery created different kinds of social inequality than those of the seaboard states. Between 1810 and 1840 the combined populations of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi increased from about 300,000 (of whom 252,433 were in Georgia) to 1,657,799. Over 40 percent (and in Mississippi, 52 percent) of these people were slaves, many of whom had been moved in chained gangs (known as "coffles") from plantations and slave markets in the coastal states to clear land and create new cotton plantations. The lure of cotton profits, and the drive for the land and labor that could produce them, gave this expansion a particularly hard, grasping edge. Pressure for land in Georgia and Alabama led to unjust state seizures of territory from the Cherokee and Creek nations and, under the Jackson and Van

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Buren administrations in the 1830s, to the enforced removal of many thousands of "civilized" Indians to land designated for them in "Indian Territory," which would eventually become Oklahoma.

The Culture of a Slave Economy

THE DRIVE to open new cotton lands caused the sons of seaboard planters to move west to take up land claims. In some cases, as around Macon, Georgia, they bought up or appropriated land that yeoman farmers or squatters had already cleared for agriculture. In other cases, especially in Mississippi in the 1820s and 1830s, they deployed slave gangs that had been assembled from older plantations or acquired in slave markets to break and clear land for cotton. Sons of planters who set out for the Southwest did so both to make profits from cotton and to break with the constraints of family and kinship ties that characterized plantation life back east. They worked their slaves hard to clear land and establish cotton crops, and though they also usually permitted slaves to cultivate their own gardens to help supply their plantations, there is evidence that work routines and discipline were more rigorous than on many older plantations in the Southeast.

Moving slaves into new regions also involved breaking up their families. Because the initial clearing of land made demand heaviest for male labor during the early stages of plantation development, black family life was harder to reestablish than in regions where the ratio of men to women was more even. Whites also faced disruption. Women, accompanying their new husbands to lives on a distant frontier, faced an often wrenching removal from family and kin. Because of the newness of frontier plantation society, the low proportion of white settlers, and social inequalities between planters and nonslaveholding whites, planter women often faced an isolation they had not known back home. The new societies of the cotton South presented both slavery and white life in some of their harsher aspects.

Prominent among earlier interpretations of slave society was the work of the historian Eugene Genovese, who argued that slaveowners formed a noncapitalist, nonbourgeois elite, different from their Northern commercial and industrial counterparts. The class relationships of

slavery differed from those between employers and wage earners, Genovese suggested. Planters and slaves were bound by the complexities of their relationship to a pattern he called paternalism. The claims of slaveholders to have responsibilities for their slaves, and the irreducible humanity of slaves themselves, meant that the peculiar fact of holding other people as property placed the planters in an exploitative but non-commercial connection with those they owned. The importance of slave ownership to their social and political status, Genovese argued, combined with this noninstrumental aspect of the master-slave relationship, caused many planters to be devoted to noncommercial concerns. Entrepreneurship was stifled and the relative backwardness of the Southern economy explained. More concerned with reproducing slavery than with maximizing profits, planters sought to avoid risk and put their way of life ahead of commercial considerations.

Later studies have subjected the elements of Genovese's argument to searching scrutiny. In some respects it no longer survives intact, though its central insights about the contradictions arising from holding property in people, about the resistance of slaves to planter authority, and about slavery as a class relationship are still essential to understanding the system. Various authors have argued that masters and overseers were more active and commercially minded in the operation of plantations than was once assumed, and that the cultivation of an "anti-commercial" ethos was an affectation of a powerful planter class anxious to demonstrate its genteel credentials. In regions like the interior of South Carolina, for example, planters adjusted their activities more than once in response to shifts in markets. In the 1780s they began planting tobacco on their newly cleared land, but in the 1810s, as tobacco markets weakened, they switched out of this into cotton growing because British demand was driving prices up. On many plantations, planters and overseers adopted modern practices for overseeing and controlling labor, and for tracking and accounting for their slaves' work and produce. On the sugar plantations of Louisiana, planters were obliged to make complex and sophisticated judgments about investment and the control of resources. They aimed to derive profits not just from the labor of their slaves but from the substantial capital value tied up in sugar mills, crushing machines, and other advanced equipment.⁵

Slavery, then, can appear as a more dynamic system than some older interpretations and the comfortable self-image of many planters would imply. Some studies suggest that this dynamism lay in part in the degree of flexibility in master-slave relations: that the reciprocal relationships that Genovese called paternalism were conducive not to slow-paced production but to a kind of negotiation between parties with distinct interests and incentives, not unlike that between wage earners and their bosses. The distinctions noted earlier between different types of work regimes on farms and plantations often reflected the scope that existed in places for slaves and owners to jockey for position with each other. On smaller farms where slaves were held in ones or twos, they were often working either alongside members of the farm family or left to undertake tasks with a degree of independence. On larger cotton and tobacco plantations, work was usually organized in gangs, under the supervision either of overseers or of slave "drivers" who had been promoted to take this responsibility. Gang systems represented what appeared to be the harshest aspects of slavery: enforced, regimented work under careful supervision embodied not only a tough regime but the assumption that slaves were incapable of working efficiently under other circumstances. Yet gang work might provide the best opportunity for slaves to help one another, if help were needed. The continued prevalence of the task system in rice cultivation, and in other contexts where the nature of the work did not lend itself to large groups or gang supervision, indicated the ability of slavery to accord a limited degree of autonomy to slaves. Accompanying, as it often did, the use of provision grounds (gardens), fishing, and hunting to supplement slave diets, and the possibility of private trading between slaves and others off the plantations, the task system appears to mark the tendency of slave regimes to adapt themselves to circumstances and offer a degree of flexibility within which slaves might find negotiating room.⁶

Power in Slave Societies

YET IF some historians disagree that slavery was inefficient, and have suggested ways in which it frequently offered flexibility, recent studies have also questioned the use of "paternalism" as a governing metaphor

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for master-slave relationships. Certainly—particularly as it came under scrutiny from its opponents in the 1830s and 1840s—slavery's defenders contended that it offered protective shelter under usually benevolent owners, whose interest in the value of their slaves was itself some sort of guarantee of fair treatment. But evidence from across the range of regions and crop types throughout the South suggests that most of this—even more than the anti-commercial gentility claimed by many planters—was a deceptive (probably also self-deceptive) image. If there was space within which slaves enjoyed a manner of autonomy, it was often slender. "Negotiations" between slaves and their masters or overseers were conducted, if at all, on narrow ground, between parties with widely different access to power and to rights.

Harsh and violent punishments, poor diets, arbitrary power, unhealthy demographic conditions, and other characteristics pervaded the slave system. Benjamin Dudley of Kentucky noted in 1806 that "insufficiency of clothing, and . . . scanty and improper aliment [food]" frequently made slaves susceptible to disease. The fact that in many regions slave populations reproduced themselves and thus grew naturally is now seen as having happened not because conditions were favorable but in spite of poor treatment. In parts of the South these rates of natural reproduction were, in any case, only marginal. Low population densities, which inhibited the spread of infectious diseases and reduced mortality rates, may alone have been a significant factor in enabling slave numbers to grow. Given that slaves were legally bound to their owners, and that owners had wide-ranging (if not totally unlimited) legal discretion to treat them arbitrarily as they pleased, it seems more appropriate to accept the historian Peter H. Wood's portrayal of slave plantations as forced labor camps than as variants of "free" labor institutions.⁷

Even where slaves could make trade-offs, as in the flexibility provided by the task system, the advantages to them were often few. Slaves on rice plantations might obtain a degree more autonomy than those working in gangs in the cotton fields, but they were usually required to do hard, demanding labor, were expected to produce much of their own food, and were as subject as other slaves to degrading and often brutal punishment for infractions. William Dusinger's catalog of abuses recorded in the plantation records of the rice districts, or Wilma King's evidence of the systematic maltreatment of children, undermine

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planters' claims to paternalistic solicitude. Frequently their concern for profit from their crops came second only to their anxiety to sustain their power and authority over the men, women, and children they owned.⁸

Considerable research from the 1960s on, including that of Genovese, has helped establish, however, that even within the harshness of most slaves' existence they were able to carve out a degree of cultural autonomy for themselves. This creation of slave cultures may have become more important over time as the number of slaves held in larger units, rather than separately on small farms, rose. The increasing Christianization of Southern slaves during the first half of the nineteenth century also created pockets of cultural autonomy within the confines of the slave system. Even on plantations where white masters insisted on slave attendance at worship or local churches, and where the Word was officially preached with a clear message of personal and racial subordination, the slaves' nighttime, weekend, and backwoods meetings and the circulation of slave preachers enabled many slave believers to acquire from Christian teachings a quite different, oppositional perspective. Above all, these teachings often reinforced the underlying conviction of slavery's fundamental injustice and illegitimacy. Hopes for freedom, the denial of enslavement, the desire for jubilee, the crossing of the Jordan, the delivery from bondage—all took nourishment from religion. Even as many submitted to their enslavement, few accepted it.⁹

Planters and small slaveholders used their coercive power to extract labor from their slaves; wherever they could, slaves attempted to build their own lives and culture within the bounds of enslavement. Ephraim Beanland, overseer on James K. Polk's cotton plantation in western Tennessee, made several complaints to his employer in 1833 that arose from the escapes and other unruliness of the estate's slaves. After Beanland had punished one of them for an infraction, two male slaves ran away. They were being hunted. The overseer was anxious lest Polk should override his own authority when they were recaptured: "I do not want any arrangements made for either of them." At stake in Beanland's view was his ability to coerce the other slaves as well: "I want them both brought back. If they ain't the rest will leave me also." Misplaced liberality, Beanland implied, had undermined his ability to keep discipline: "your Negroes has traded with white people and bin let run at so lo[o]se

. . . [rein] that I must be verry close [i.e., tough] with them." Notably, though, he was unwilling to assign full blame for his predicament to the slaves themselves. "The[re] is a set of white people that lives close hear [i.e., near here] that would spoil any set of negroes." Like many whites, Beanland could not ascribe the ability to act autonomously to people he regarded as inferior and whom he helped hold captive. Yet there is widespread evidence that slaves acted to defend their sense of community, assert their individuality, and resist their bondage.¹⁰

The ability to acquire a limited degree of cultural autonomy was a source both of solace and of deep anxiety for many slaves. Prominent in slave culture were attachment to marriage and the building of kinship systems. Slave marriage was not legally recognized because it interfered with the absolute property rights of slaveowners, but large numbers of slaves constructed partnerships and family life for themselves within the constraints of the system. Planters tolerated or even encouraged these arrangements because they rightly perceived them as conducive to order and a means for control over their human property. The solaces of family and of life in the "slave community" provided slaves with sustenance in the face of arbitrary power; but they also provided entry points for the cruel exercise of that power when owners found it expedient.

Slaves' fundamental nonacceptance of their captivity, which belied their owners' claims that they were content with their situation, was illustrated not just by the desire for freedom but by the frequent steps that many took to try to achieve it. Recent estimates suggest that as many as fifty thousand slaves each year may have run off from their owners. Of these, only a small handful managed to escape for long. The difficulties of hiding out in swamps or woodlands, of functioning in hostile white societies, or of traveling without means the long distances north to freedom without being caught made permanent escape a relatively rare occurrence. Indeed, many escapes were not intended to be permanent. Slaves ran away to avoid or protest punishment, or to link up with or visit partners and family on other plantations, often nearby. But coupled with myriad small acts of resistance or insubordination, the high incidence of escape reflected slaves' rejection of the circumstances in which they found themselves. Escapes also prompted planters and the white authorities to organize rigorous pass systems and patrols to combat this form of disobedience.

Slave Markets and Slave Families

BUT PLANTERS had another, powerful sanction: the threat to sell a slave away from his or her home or family. Fear of sale and of the breakup of families actively shaped many slaves' lives. Its power to coerce slaves was greatest when slave communities were strong and family ties and children present. It may have exercised somewhat less fear over young men who had not yet formed marriages; they, at least, seem to have formed a measurable segment of those who flouted slaveholders' authority by running away each year. But the variability and changing character of Southern economies gave rise to structural conditions that made slave sale, and the fear of it, a constant presence in the system.

Slavery embodied three conditions that promoted the expansion of slave sales. First, its early stronghold in Virginia now entered a phase of comparative economic decline as old crops became uneconomic, soil was exhausted, and new regions were opened up to the south and west. Second, the expansion of settlement was accomplished, as we saw, partly by squatters and yeoman farm families but also by the movement of slaves into newly opened regions. Finally, the demographic characteristics of some areas, especially the sugar plantations of Louisiana, made them net demanders of slaves because they could not sustain their populations through natural increase. Between 1818 and 1830, for example, these plantations obtained around five thousand slaves each year from the East. Sugar planters, seeking to extract profit from their estates and from the expensive equipment they installed, heavily recruited male slaves for field labor and processing work. The resulting unbalanced gender ratios contributed to the inability of sugar-growing regions to achieve slave population growth and so helped sustain the region's demand for labor from elsewhere. All these factors led to the creation of the antebellum South's most notable institution other than slavery itself: the internal market for slaves.

Over several decades at least one million slaves were moved from older-settled states, first from the Chesapeake and Lowcountry, later from parts of Kentucky, and in the 1850s from Tennessee and Georgia, to new locations west and south. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and later Arkansas, Florida, and parts of Texas and Missouri,

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were populated with slaves substantially through these forced movements. In the 1820s and 1830s alone, roughly 443,000 slaves were shifted in this way. About one-third of these slaves were moved in the company of their owners, as planters established new estates in the West and assigned slave men and women to settle and develop them. But as many as two-thirds were sold on the slave market and moved by traders, either to fulfill orders placed by Western planters with suppliers further east, or on consignment by Eastern planters for speculative sale in markets where slaves were in demand. Slave trading, in the words of its leading historian, was "the one great entrepreneurial activity in the South." Networks of slave-trading firms linked large and small towns across the region. Slave markets and auction houses sprang up, and towns and countryside alike were dotted with slave jails where men, women, and children were shackled and confined to await sale or to prevent escape during overnight stops on forced marches.¹¹

Available evidence is ambiguous as to whether slaves were intentionally bred in older regions like Virginia for prospective sale to traders. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, James Henry Hammond of South Carolina expressed frustration and anger at the slaves on his plantation because disease repeatedly killed young children, spoiling his expectations of realizing value from the reproduction of his slaves. Hammond, though, was not necessarily planning to sell slaves; he could hope to save on purchases as he expanded his plantations. But slaves were sold in a range of circumstances. Some were sold as punishment for infractions; a few planters were known to avoid whipping their slaves, instead threatening to sell them if they failed to meet the demands made of them. Slaves were sold because of changes in planters' plans or fluctuations in the markets for crops; because planters fell into debt; or because death led to the breakup and distribution of estate property, which of course included slaves. Especially under pressure from abolitionist critics of the effects of slavery on families, some planters made a point of trying to sell family members together, but they frequently either could not accomplish this or lost control once slaves were in the hands of traders. Family breakups remained one of the lasting indictments of slavery; the fear and reality of it seared millions of slaves' lives. And the Louisiana sugar plantations were legendary for their harshness, which gave an added horror to the prospect of being sold "down the river."¹²

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Slave labor was secured wherever it could be obtained, often without regard to the law or individuals' legal status. The newly freed New York slave Isabella Van Wagenen (later known as Sojourner Truth) scored a rare court victory in the late 1820s when she obtained the release and return from Alabama of her son, who had illegally been sold and sent there. William J. Anderson of Hanover County, Virginia, was less fortunate. When his father died in 1816 and his mother could no longer support him, Anderson was bound out as an indentured servant at the age of five. Ten years later his master, a planter, sold him into slavery. Anderson's mother was a free black, so legally Anderson was also free, but this did not save him from shipment to Tennessee or from a twenty-four-year incarceration as a slave before one of his repeated escape attempts at last succeeded.¹³

Slavery and White Society in the South

THE EXPANSION of the plantation system profoundly affected social relations among whites across the South. In many regions, particularly in the mountains and backcountry, plantations were few or nonexistent, and smaller farmers rarely owned slaves. Yeoman farmers, relying on family labor, dominated the social structure of such regions; it was not uncommon, for example, in up-country areas for women to work in the fields. These regions often remained relatively independent of the concerns of plantation districts, placing different demands on state governments and opposing planters on issues such as internal improvements, banking, and tax measures. Areas like upland East Georgia remained relatively self-contained in this way for much of the antebellum period. On parts of the frontier, too, yeoman-dominated communities grew up beyond the edge of plantation developments. Small farmers in Warren County, Mississippi, cleared land quickly by slash-and-burn methods in the 1820s, planning to cultivate new land when soil became exhausted. Many yeoman farm families also moved to Missouri and settled in the same period, rapidly increasing the state's population as they sought to avoid the plantation districts farther east. Missouri farmers, who continued to dominate the state, gave its policies a distinctive anti-developmental character as they attempted to insulate

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themselves from the financial and market pressures that developed in other regions.

Often, though, yeoman farm settlements accompanied plantation development or were overtaken by them, and planter influence grew. Even in the up-country of South Carolina after 1810, more than 36 percent of households owned slaves, and slaves exceeded 26 percent of the population. The rise in land values as plantations were carved out of new regions made the position of many early-arrived independent farmers precarious, and it was in this context that many "pushed on" elsewhere. In areas like northeast Alabama, where public lands were opened to settlement after 1819, large landowners obtained control of much of the land. On former Creek and Cherokee lands in southern Appalachia, distributed in the 1830s, only about one in five farmers came to own their property.

Across the plantation zone, however, yeoman farm families continued to make their way among their wealthier, more powerful neighbors. In the rice-growing districts of South Carolina, yeoman farmers and their households formed a majority of the white population. Many of these farmers practiced mixed agriculture, but about 45 percent of them also cultivated rice, though probably less intensively than on the bigger plantations, and mainly for home or local consumption. Yeoman farmers in plantation regions often formed client relations with their planter neighbors, creating patterns of political patronage and obligation that represented a significant element in planters' power. There was also a constant overlap between yeoman and slaveholder status. Many small farmers hired in slaves as extra labor when they needed it, and especially during the 1820s and 1830s some become slaveholders in their own right.

Across the South, however, especially where landownership was heavily skewed toward a few wealthy individuals, significant numbers among the nonslaveholding white population could not claim yeoman farmer status. The free rural poor—the vast majority of whom in the deep South were white—had no land of their own and often had fewer opportunities for making a livelihood than their wage-earning counterparts in the North and Midwest. In parts of Alabama and Mississippi, for example, as many as one-third of the white heads of household were landless. Looked down upon by planters, yeomen, and slaves alike, poor whites were obliged to make do with what casual work they could obtain in the interstices of the plantation economy: laboring jobs, usually seasonal, on yeo-

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man farms, or other unskilled, temporary work. The structure of Southern society largely excluded them from stable employment: small farmers needed hired help only intermittently; planters had their slaves to keep occupied, and so had little need for the extra labor of whites. Poor whites found that, by comparison with the North, there were few towns and cities for them to move to and try their luck in, and often fewer employers in transportation or manufacturing to offer alternatives to rural laboring work. Marginal and frequently on the move in search of scarce jobs, the rural poor had little opportunity to exercise political power, even when they could legally vote. Like the poorer farmers of the Appalachian region, most had insufficient means to migrate long distances or to take the risk of cutting themselves off from the family and kinship networks that could help them eke out a living. Their mobility, both social and geographical, was constrained.¹⁴

Thus although planters represented a small minority of Southern society, their control of land and slaves gave them disproportionate influence, especially among the yeoman farmers and poor whites in their immediate neighborhoods who relied on them for employment or other kinds of patronage. Awareness of the divisions in white society and the possible risks these posed frequently shaped discussions of slavery itself. In some instances, distrust of other whites and belief in the docility and pliability of black slaves led individuals to rely on slaves in preference to the alternatives. A Mississippi planter, Francis Terry Leak, urged a bachelor friend with means to return to running a plantation, arguing that slaves could best be trusted to look after him. Family members, Leak argued, would only be interested in his money, and hired servants could scheme to get themselves a share of his estate. Slaves, on the other hand, knowing they had no hope of gaining legal title to anything he owned, would serve him purely from "affection." At the same time the existence of slavery was seen by many of its apologists as a guarantee of social stability among whites. "The menial and low offices being all performed by blacks," wrote Thomas B. Dew in 1832, "there is at once taken away the greatest cause of distinction and separation of the ranks of [white] society." Hence, Dew claimed, along with many others, there could be a "perfect spirit of equality" among Southern whites. Ideology and self-interest together cemented an attachment to slavery across swaths of white society.¹⁵

Nonslave Societies in the North

WHILE SLAVERY expanded, making unfree labor more important in its contributions to the American economy and in its significance for the South, nonslave regions to the north were adjusting their degree of reliance on compelled labor. Household production remained central. To that extent, as in the South, the ability of household heads and property owners to demand labor from their own family members remained highly important. But during the early nineteenth century, population growth and the adjustments that accompanied expansion, migration, and intensification of production altered the degree to which Northern economies relied on unfree forms of labor. A lack of data makes estimates conjectural, but by 1820 perhaps one-fifth of the U.S. workforce was employed for wages, a proportion that had almost doubled since 1800. Wage workers were formally free, and their significance for work and production, especially in the North, would continue to grow. Indeed, in the North various forms of unfree labor were by this time declining or coming under scrutiny.

The stream of European immigrants who, since the seventeenth century, had traveled particularly to the Mid-Atlantic and the South to work as indentured servants finally dwindled. Among the last of them were the German migrants who arrived in Pennsylvania as "redemptioners," sold by ship captains to householders to repay the cost of their transatlantic passage and legally bound to work for a period sufficient to pay off their purchase price. Of immigrants arriving at Philadelphia between 1797 and 1812, some 27 percent entered servitude, and in the postwar years from 1815 to 1818 the proportion actually rose temporarily, to about 42 percent. But by 1820 the pattern had altered; the supply of redemptioners dried up, and subsequently the vast majority of immigrants arrived as free laborers. An important reason for the change lay in the scale and character of German communities now established in the United States. Sufficient numbers were now present as farmers or urban proprietors who could assist new migrants effectively without the need for formal servitude. The introduction of regular transatlantic packet ships after 1815 also improved sea communication, making it

much easier than before for immigrants in the United States to send remittances to their home communities or arrange informal, kin-based "chain" migrations to bring over and support emigrants. Both factors led to the rapid decline of the redemption system.¹⁶

Meanwhile in the larger towns and cities, the use of formal apprenticeships to train and supply labor was also declining. Late in the eighteenth century, apprenticeship remained the normal mode of entry into skilled trades, and many young artisans could contemplate becoming masters of their trades. A study of Boston artisans in 1796, for example, suggests a high ratio of masters to journeymen and apprentices in most occupations. But the growth of urban populations and the relative prevalence of poverty helped assure many employers access to labor without the need to rely on legal ties of compulsion. Early trade societies, especially of journeymen who had advanced through formal apprenticeship to obtain their skills, frequently complained of and tried to resist the employment of half-trained or unskilled workers in many artisan trades. At the same time the democratization of white political participation, and the concepts of "equal rights" and producers' rights that it encapsulated, set out new standards for "free" labor against which various other practices and arrangements came to be measured. The printer and economist Mathew Carey remarked in 1826 that it was not acceptable in Philadelphia to strike a servant, black or white, in punishment for an infraction. Household labor, for nonfamily members, was coming to be transmuted into wage labor, with different patterns of authority.¹⁷

Along the Hudson River Valley, pressure to divide their own estate in the face of family growth and generational change led manorial landlords to tighten their demands on tenants in the 1820s and to abandon their previous leniency toward those who were slow to pay rents. Landlords initiated court actions for debt, increased the proportion of short-term leases that gave tenants little benefit from improvements, expanded their use of sharecropping arrangements, and attempted (unsuccessfully) to take control of timber that grew on common land. In the short run these changes amounted to a tightening of the manorial system's coercive elements, but they also sparked protests that marked the inception of a strong revival of the "anti-rent" sentiment that had challenged landlords in the Revolutionary period. The growing anti-rent movement

drew on arguments in favor of “free” labor and against compulsion, and ultimately achieved a significant amelioration of the manorial system in the New York State constitution of 1846.¹⁸

The ideological climate of equal rights and producerism generated assaults on other practices seen as restricting “free labor.” Pennsylvania campaigners condemned imprisonment for debt as “a discreditable remnant of a barbarous system of ancient times, whereby insolvent debtors became the slaves of their creditors, and were subject to all the pains and penalties of slavery.” There and in New York and elsewhere they largely succeeded in ending the practice during the 1830s and 1840s. Workingmen campaigned for mechanics’ lien laws that could give tradesmen and laborers priority for the payment of wages when an employer went bankrupt. Complaints were heard about wages paid not in cash but in goods at company stores, and the frequency of indebtedness to or by employers who restricted workers’ freedom of movement by threatening financial loss. The 1820s witnessed a renewal of the assault on Southern slavery that by mid-century would come to dominate American society and politics. The growth of free black populations in many parts of the North provided a vigorous base for an anti-slavery campaign, and British abolitionists’ campaigns against slavery in West Indies colonies provided an international context for a debate over slavery. The rapid spread of evangelical revivalism among Northern churches, black and white, also created a powerful institutional impetus against the sin of human bondage, and provided spiritual and theological underpinnings to notions of individuals’ self-ownership and autonomy.¹⁹

All these developments accompanied a steady increase in the importance of wage labor in the North. Wage work, once regarded as disreputable and as a mark of dependence unless undertaken as a temporary expedient by independent farmers, artisans, or their sons, was beginning a profound shift in respectability. By the late 1840s it would emerge as one archetype of an ideal “free labor” system. Accompanying this, and in part related to the evangelical revivals and their embrace of sentimentalism, was a renewed ideological validation of the family as a social ideal and moral shelter from the world’s vagaries and temptations. The respectability of wage work and of family life, added to the long-standing regard for independent proprietorship, underpinned the primary institutions that now governed labor in Northern societies: self-employment;

working for the family in the household; or working for wages. All became construed as part of the fabric of “free labor.”

The “Fertility Transition”

ACROSS THE nation, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had witnessed rapid population growth from natural increase. Among the free population there was a high rate of marriage, and because fertility rates were high, marriages generally produced large families of children. Among slaves, the interests of slaveholders in obtaining the value of children led to the encouragement of breeding and to high fertility there too. During the eighteenth century, however, regional differences had begun to emerge in these high rates of reproduction. These were connected with broader patterns of social change, particularly with differences that were emerging in the importance of households as institutions.²⁰

Across the United States as a whole between 1800 and 1860, the average number of live births fell from 7.04 per family to 5.21, a decline of 26 percent. Although this does not immediately appear to be a sharp drop, the aggregate figure masks variations between regions and social groups, some of which were dramatic. Fertility rates fell in all regions but tended to remain higher in the South than in the North, and to fall faster in urban settings and in older-settled rural regions than in frontier areas. The persistence in the South of slavery and of other rural social structures, even as the region expanded geographically, introduced fewer circumstances or inducements for families to alter their reproductive behavior than occurred in the Northeast. Among Alabama’s white population in 1840, for example, the ratio of children under ten to females aged between fifteen and forty-nine was 1.85:1. In Connecticut in 1840, by contrast, there were only 0.92 children under ten for every female aged fifteen to forty-nine, less than half the ratio in Alabama. By 1860, except on the frontier, fertility rates in Southern regions averaged between 3 percent and 28 percent higher than in the North.

Even in aggregate, however, the shift was significant. It meant that on average families would give birth to one or two fewer children in the middle of the century than they had at the beginning. Across the white

population of the United States as a whole, the proportion of children under five fell from 1,342 per thousand women of childbearing age in 1800 to only 905 by 1860. Households became smaller. Some of the burdens of household work were reduced. By the same token, as children grew up there were fewer of them to contribute labor to the family's activities. Such changes, subtle as they often were, pointed to important shifts in the way societies worked, especially in the North.

Changes in family fertility came about first in older-settled regions, particularly in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. By 1860 the ratios of children under five to women aged between twenty and forty-four were, respectively, 0.639 and 0.784 in the two regions, significantly below the national average. There had been signs of a fall in family size before the end of the eighteenth century, but this was reversed in some areas, as early-nineteenth-century families averaged over 7 recorded live births. After 1810, however, fertility rates began declining. In Sturbridge, Massachusetts, couples who married between 1780 and 1799 averaged 7.32 children; forty years later, their successors averaged 5.3 children. In Amherst and Hadley, Massachusetts, couples married between 1830 and 1839 had an average of 4.47 live births, by contrast with the 7.12 births averaged by their predecessors thirty years earlier. In about one generation, therefore, fertility fell by more than 37 percent, and the average family had between two and three fewer children than their parents' generation had produced. This process would continue.²¹

Demographers have often connected fertility rates to families' access to resources. An important interpretation of the decline of fertility in New England, for example, attributed it to land shortage. As access to land became more constricted, the argument went, families limited their fertility so as to reduce their need to divide land to provide farms for their sons. By the same token, as access to land became more difficult, couples had to wait longer before accumulating the resources to marry, thus raising the marriage age and reducing the period of marriage during which women were still fertile—hence reducing the average number of children they bore. To a limited degree, the evidence about fertility changes in our period bears out this hypothesis. Marriage ages did rise in the early nineteenth century; some demographers have calculated that about half the reduction in family sizes that occurred before 1850 was attributable to higher ages of marriage for women. Moreover, fertility

rates in frontier regions, where access to land was not so constrained, remained higher than those back east.

But more detailed analysis has cast doubt on this argument. Rather than simply adjusting their family size to scarcity, nineteenth-century Americans were bringing about a different kind of social change. If fertility were dependent on resources, we would expect wealthier families to be larger than poorer ones, and some evidence suggests that until the eighteenth century this had been so. But the fertility changes of the early nineteenth century altered that pattern, creating a situation in which family size no longer correlated with wealth, or did so inversely. What kinds of things, then, led husbands and wives to reduce the size of their families?

As noted, higher marriage ages did have an impact on family size. In Amherst and Hadley, Massachusetts, for example, the mean age of first marriage for women, which had been running at below 24 years during the 1770s and 1780s, was consistently over 25 years between 1790 and 1829 and peaked at 27.5 years in the 1830s. But factors other than scarcity of land or access to livelihoods may have played a role in this change. Opportunities for work in cities or settlement in new regions drew young men away from older farming districts, making it harder for women to find marriage partners. In 1830 the five counties of central and western Massachusetts were all among the areas of the state where the ratio of males aged 20 to 29 to females of the same age group was lowest; Hampden County had only 86 men of that age for every 100 women. But women also restricted their fertility in several ways: completing their families earlier (having their last children at younger ages); increasing the birth intervals between children by delaying weaning or practicing sexual abstinence; and in some instances adopting birth-control measures that were beginning to be discussed in popular medical literature. Fertility limitation was therefore to some degree a conscious process, not simply a consequence of access to resources.

Evidence about who limited fertility and where they lived can throw light on the probable reasons for it. Among the U.S.-born white population, by the mid-nineteenth century smaller family sizes were most common among professional and business-owning families, and among the skilled and semi-skilled workforce. These families were more common in

the Northeast than in the Midwest or the South, and in urban than in rural areas; and they were more common in districts that gave access to a range of employment opportunities than they were in predominantly farming areas. New Englanders practiced family limitation as urbanization, nonagricultural employment, new institutional access to financial resources, and out-migration altered the fabric of their society and the roles of households within it. This suggests that the change in fertility patterns reflected not access to resources but changes in people's views of the relationships between children, livelihoods, and family strategies. Coupled with these broader social characteristics of smaller families is evidence that women often took the lead in adopting strategies for reducing their rates of reproduction.²²

In a classic, older, rural pattern, farm families had children both to provide labor for the household and to provide emotional and practical comfort and assistance to other members of their families, especially to parents in their old age. As different opportunities for employment and livelihoods became available through the diversification of rural economies and the growth of urban areas, families began to look at their children in different ways. And as their own sources of livelihood shifted from direct reliance on the land to a greater variety or different sources of income, the availability of family labor to provide for their own needs became less important to some parents. They could invest their emotional and financial resources in fewer children because they might have to rely on them less in old age, and they could be more optimistic that their children could obtain livelihoods for themselves by leaving the land. In this connection it is noteworthy that farm families and those in frontier regions made a later, slower change in their fertility practices, and that poorer families remained more likely than prosperous ones to retain high fertility rates. Children in those circumstances held on longer to their roles of providing labor or income directly for the family than they did among skilled, professional, or proprietary families with other access to livelihoods. Fertility changes were therefore a subtle index of the character of change across different social groups. They marked changes in the functions of households, the increasing status of free labor, and a reduction in the reliance on labor based on deference, unfree status, or social obligation.

Westward Expansion: Family Aspirations and Restlessness

POPULATION GROWTH and pressures in Eastern societies, together with the aspirations of farm families and other settlers, continued to drive migration west and to swell populations in recently settled territory. New England out-migration, which in the 1800s and 1810s had been heavily directed toward western New York State and the Ontario shore of Lake Erie, in the 1820s and 1830s became more concentrated on Ohio and then Indiana, with substantial movements into these newer regions and then into Michigan. From 1830 on, parallel streams of migrants from Pennsylvania, parts of the South, and Kentucky and Tennessee also settled as far west as Illinois. Meanwhile, farther south, yeoman farmers and slaveholders had settled across the Mississippi. By the 1830s they were campaigning for control of the Mexican province of Texas, where slavery was outlawed but American planters were establishing it anyway. A settler revolt and struggles against the Mexican authorities resulted in the founding of an independent republic of Texas in 1836, strongly influenced by the large landowning planters and ranchers who wanted the land for their own interests.²³

The speed and character of western migration and settlement contained a number of paradoxes. On one hand it contained mechanisms for social advancement and prosperity, and for the realization of individual ambitions. On the other hand, western settlement was often a collaborative process and not infrequently took settlers and their families into areas where prosperity and social advancement were hard to realize. Men's and women's encounters with new land were, in other words, a complex mixture of innovation with the recreation of older social structures.

Contemporaries frequently noted the apparent restlessness of many settlers in the West and the willingness of families recently arrived in one area to pull up their roots and move on once more to somewhere new. Behind this seemingly frenzied activity lay a variety of causes, rooted in settlers' origins and circumstances. Often enough it reflected a desire to recreate conditions they had left behind in their original homes. "My wishes . . . and my exertions," wrote Isaac Briggs, a Maryland Quaker, as

he prepared to move to Ohio in the mid-1820s, "have in view . . . a place where my whole family, for a generation or two to come, may sit down, in *one* neighborhood, in peace, competence, and humble virtue." When Briggs's daughter at length reached her family's new Ohio land, she wrote, "A feeling of thankfulness arose in my heart as I thought, here *is* my home, here *is* an inheritance for my children where they *may* earn their bread [even] if it *is* by the sweat of their brow."²⁴

Early emigrants and more prosperous settlers had advantages over poorer or later-arriving migrants. Data on wealth and geographical persistence confirm the connections between first arrival, prosperity, and the tendency to remain in an area. First settlers often had the choice of the best land or access to water, transport links, or other resources that would benefit them and help sustain their families by enabling them to accumulate or increase the value of property. Propertied families were more likely to remain settled where they were than those with less wealth or with fewer material ties to a locality.

Thus inequality itself was a common mechanism for encouraging further movement on the frontier. Poorer families, those less able to obtain or develop valuable land, were among those more likely to move on to fresh places to settle. The sources of these inequalities often lay in the societies that settlers had left. On the Southern frontier, for example, slaveholding settlers often had substantial advantages over yeoman farm families. They had slave labor to clear land and then raise cash crops; income from crops might then bolster their local credit or enable them to purchase further land. Wealthier settlers, including slaveholders, could also more likely displace squatter-settlers whom they found on their land. A substantial number of out-migrants from newly settled regions were therefore poorer farmers, squatters, or laborers who had been unable to sustain their livelihoods when slaveholding farmers and planters established themselves. Displaced nonslaveholding settlers were prominent among early migrants to the southern tiers of counties in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and to many parts of Missouri. Escaping the inequalities of slaveholding regions and seeking more egalitarian settlements farther west were motives that drew many farm families to newer frontier areas.

On the Southern frontier these motives were also supplemented by the consequences of slave-worked cash-cropping. As in older regions

back east, certain plantation crops, including tobacco and cotton, were often quick to deplete the quality even of fertile soil. The haste for income from crops encouraged many farmers and planters to sow cash crops repeatedly on the same land. Methods such as crop rotation or the use of manure or other fertilizers to sustain soil fertility were rarely used in the early nineteenth century. Instead planters acquired new land and moved their slaves and households to it after relatively short periods, again reinforcing the outward thrust of frontier settlement. Others, particularly larger planters, acquired new land simply to expand their successful operations. James K. Polk, who had substantial numbers of slaves on his western Tennessee cotton plantation by the early 1830s, sought more income by redeploying and purchasing slaves to work a new plantation he had acquired and set up in north central Mississippi.

Farther north, where slavery did not exist, the mechanisms for frontier settlement had some parallels with those of the South but also distinctive features. Some migrants, who settled on land acquired from speculators or land companies, found their interests at odds with those of their proprietors and left again to seek better circumstances. William Cooper of Otsego County, New York, found settlers moving off his land in substantial numbers in the 1790s. Later, proprietors like the Holland Land Company attempted to develop policies that would encourage farm settlers to stay and develop the land they were purchasing. But proprietors' policies could not always correct for the effects of other considerations at work.²⁵

In many places across frontier regions, land values rose as settlement proceeded and the denser population or connections to towns and commercial centers enhanced the land's desirability or income-earning capacity. Early occupiers or holders of substantial amounts of land found the values of their holdings growing, and the upward shift of land prices was an important factor in overall changes in wealth and wealth distribution during the first half of the nineteenth century. But the price mechanism affected families differently according to circumstances. Those who settled on less fertile or less favorably located land might benefit less readily from rising values. And for the many farm families who had seen moving to new land as an opportunity to realize the ambition to settle their own children on farms, the rise in values provided an impetus that could carry them still farther west.²⁶

Social Change in America

Critics of Western farming practices noted a tendency for farm families to purchase more land than they needed and to cultivate only small portions of their holdings. But a common reason for doing this was the family's hopes of using Western land to accomplish what they had been unable to do in the East: settle their offspring on farms of their own. Acquiring the largest acreages they could afford might affect their credit and make their financial position precarious, but it was often the best strategy they could adopt to fulfill their family ambitions. The rise in land values had a series of consequences in this context. Holders of only small acreages were often forced out of regions they had settled because they could no longer hope to acquire the land there that they needed for farms for their children. Meanwhile some holders of larger areas of land were motivated by the opening of new regions to trade their holdings in for yet larger acreages closer to the frontier. The desire to settle children on the land, the rise in land prices as regions became settled, and the tendency to regard land as a commodity that could be exchanged rather than as a fixed patrimony to be attached to induced both prosperous and poor farm families to seek out new settlements.²⁷

This process, too, contained a set of contradictions. Early-nineteenth-century frontier settlement tended to be across fairly dispersed areas, wherever families could obtain fertile land or title to good land. Soon, though, the need for transportation links and demand for commercial connections led to greater emphasis on localities accessible to water transport. In Kentucky and southern Ohio before 1810, for example, many migrants settled away from rivers, but the emergence of steamboat transport in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys drew new settlers to localities closer to river access and raised the prices of fluvial land. Similarly, in upstate New York, distinctions emerged between the regions lying adjacent to Lake Ontario and the Erie Canal, completed in 1825, and those in the uplands to the south which had poorer access to transportation. Yet over time the demand for land and the desire of families to settle children on the land tended to overcome the limitations of the transport system. By the late 1820s migrants were pushing out onto the prairies of Illinois, taking farm settlement not toward places of commercial interchange but away from them.

Government policy also played a role in encouraging Western settlement and shaping its terms. In several stages between 1800 and the

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1830s, democratic pressure in Congress led to the setting of increasingly liberal terms for taking up public land. The price per acre was reduced and the size of minimum purchases cut. Average farm sizes in successive new regions reflected these changes. In Michigan, large parts of which were divided up for settlement after the minimum purchase had been reduced from eighty acres to forty in 1832, farms were smaller and tenancy less common than in Illinois and Indiana, which had been settled earlier on larger acreages. Falling purchase prices and minimum acreages for public land also fueled speculative fevers when periodic "rushes" for new zones occurred. In Gull Prairie, Michigan, land acquired at the government's price of \$1.25 per acre when the locality was settled in 1830 had become worth ten times that amount only six years later. Low initial prices and high expectations that values would appreciate led to an especially intense land frenzy. No fewer than 38 million acres of public land were sold between 1835 and 1837; the year 1836 saw the sale of 6 percent of all federal land, and one-fifth of public land sold was in Michigan alone. Even normally staid prosperous Easterners, like the Amherst, Massachusetts, lawyer Edward Dickinson, hungered to get their hands on title to unsettled land. Dickinson's anxiety "to make some money in some way, & if I don't speculate in the lands, at the 'East,' I must at the 'West'," was sharpened by his perception that middling or poorer men, whom he called "mere jacanapes," were riding to fortune on the increase in land prices. Being in on the process was as much a way of preserving the social order as of increasing his own wealth.²⁸

Westward Expansion: Individuals and Kin

SUBJECT AS it was to the creation and loss of wealth, to competition for land and other advantage, and to the seemingly restless character of a nation anxious for material advancement, the process of Western settlement was nevertheless connected to existing social structures and relationships. The ability of Southern planters to move onto frontier land as a way of breaking with older family and emotional ties reflected not so much a tendency common to all movement to settle new land but the special opportunities that were afforded to those who controlled slave labor and could use it to achieve a degree of personal independence for

themselves. When Southern slaveholders interested in settling in Indiana and Illinois argued in 1823 for the admission of slaves to those states, in violation of the terms of the Northwest Ordinance, they maintained that slave labor would be the quickest means of providing income in a new country and of ensuring the region's rapid development.²⁹

Most settlers, however—North or South—were not owners of others' labor and had to accomplish their movement to new land in ways different from planters. In some cases it was possible for yeoman farmers to move away from old ties and start afresh without them, but it was more common for nonslaveholders to rely to some degree on their family ties in order to resettle successfully. Households and families rather than individuals were most commonly at the heart of this important process. As one historian has put it, the settlement of the trans-Appalachian West was not accomplished by "self-made men" but by "family-made men."³⁰

Family connections often shaped migration patterns. Young men might be sent west to look for new land or other opportunities, but often they were joined by family members, kin, and sometimes neighbors too. The information they gathered formed a basis for the departure of a wider network of acquaintances. Patterns of chain migration were common, as families who first moved to a new area helped bring their relatives to settle nearby them. Clusters of settlements from different parts of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and the South remained distinctive features in regions of Ohio and states to the west throughout the antebellum period. Family connections were often the glue by which these regional patterns were fixed. Although evidence from censuses suggests that individuals and families might move frequently, analysis of larger social networks indicates that they often did so within wider social contexts. Family and neighborhood credit and assistance was frequently utilized in setting up new farms. In Michigan and elsewhere there were examples of farms nominally run by one family but actually worked by more than one, as kin or neighbors cooperated to establish their settlements.³¹

The use of family and kin was itself often a mark of social distinction. Wealthy settlers, such as slaveholders in the South, were less likely to make use of them than middling farm families. So too, at the other end of the wealth spectrum, were the poor, who were more likely to be obliged to move according to where they could find work, or access to small plots

of land, than to where they could enter a mutual support system based on kinship. In areas where tenancy was common, or where, as in the South, slaveholding prevailed, different patterns of migration helped produce class divisions in the West, based not just on wealth but on the access to social connections and credit that different levels of wealth could allow. Even where in-migrants were from the same general region, distinct patterns of social interaction could remain detectable for years after arrival. Two separate streams of New England migrants, for example, settled the township of Claridon in eastern Ohio after 1810. Even a generation later, the groups maintained distinct social networks and marriage patterns.³²

New Englanders and other migrants to the Midwest thus assembled a mixture of commercial, family, individual, and communally based institutions that in part reflected the societies they had moved from and in part were adaptations to their new circumstances. Soon, increasing numbers of migrants from Europe heading for land in the West would also mark the landscape with distinctive social patterns. From the 1810s onward, numbers of English migrants sought to settle in farm colonies on newly acquired land in Illinois and elsewhere. Most later English farm settlers, together with a growing number of Canadian migrants into the American Midwest, would follow individual strategies or build limited neighborhood networks not unlike those of New England or Mid-Atlantic settlers. German and, later, Scandinavian settlers were often more concerned to rebuild social and religious communities intact in the Midwest, and relied even more thoroughly on family, kinship, and neighborhood ties to accomplish this. In the settlements of members of the Mormon church, gathered in Ohio, Illinois, and Missouri in the 1830s, with farm families drawn from declining regions of Vermont, upstate New York, and elsewhere, patterns of kinship and religious adherence were also closely woven. All illustrated the potential of the household economy to provide models of social adaptability and change from attempts to secure stability.³³

Commerce and Towns

THE EXTENSION of rural societies to the West and the changes that occurred in their social structures were also much influenced by urban

development. During the eighteenth century the proportion of people living in urban settlements fell, and America became more rural, but this trend was gradually reversed in the early nineteenth century. On average between 1790 and 1840 the urban population as a proportion of total U.S. population rose by about 20 percent each decade, though with a fall between 1810 and 1820. Urban growth reflected both changes in the overall size and activities of the population and the new connections that were being forged between rural areas and commercial centers as the rural population grew larger and more geographically dispersed. In towns of all sizes during this period, commerce and its related functions were the most important activities.

Urban growth seemed most dramatic in the Eastern port cities, which experienced particularly rapid rates of population expansion between 1790 and 1830. Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York City all grew, along with smaller coastal towns, though Baltimore and especially New York experienced the most dramatic changes. Philadelphia, though still important, found itself somewhat eclipsed by the rapid expansion of its neighbor cities to the north and south; by 1810 New York had surpassed it as the largest city on the continent. But urban expansion was by no means any longer confined to the older port towns. Inland towns also grew and established themselves. This process was connected with broad changes in the countryside.

On one hand, towns became the predominant focal points of westward migration. Even before new farming regions were settled and cultivated, towns had appeared on major migration and transport routes to cater to the needs of emigrants and to service their new rural hinterlands. Albany, Rochester, and Buffalo in New York; Erie and Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania; Cincinnati, Cleveland, and a host of smaller Ohio towns; Louisville and later St. Louis, and numerous smaller centers on the upper Mississippi River sprang up to provision migrants moving to settle in successive regions of newly opened land. Since the work of Richard C. Wade several decades ago, historians have noted that the archetypal form of "frontier" development, at least in the nonslave and border states, was as much urban as rural, and that these towns placed their marks on the territory that was settled around them. On the other hand, towns in older-settled inland regions also expanded as rural areas diversified their production and became centers of demand for goods

and services. Places such as Worcester and Springfield in Massachusetts, and York and Lancaster in Pennsylvania, expanded on the prosperity and needs of the rural areas around them and also became centers of manufacture themselves. In many cases, as at Albany, New York; Hartford, Connecticut; or Trenton, New Jersey, the functions of local urban centers were combined with those of small ports or settler supply centers. In 1811, Timothy Dwight counted twenty-nine different types of manufacture taking place in New Haven, Connecticut. As newly settled farming areas evolved and began to diversify their production, they turned frontier urban centers into the same kinds of mixed-function towns that were expanding in the East.³⁴

While many of the speculators who dealt in land for farming were unsuccessful in realizing their dreams of wealth, their possession of land that could support urban development often did lead to wealth or local influence, or both. In small Appalachian towns that were often the first settlements in what became a predominantly rural area, urban landholders tended to form local elites, earning rental income from tenants both in town and in surrounding country areas. In Ohio, small developers such as David Hudson, who had emigrated from Connecticut in 1800, found themselves holding key lots in what became successful small towns. Hudson was able to name the growing settlement he helped found in eastern Ohio after himself, and recruited fresh settlers there from New England. Among various Eastern elite groups, holding land in the West in the hope of speculative gains was an important means of storing wealth. Around Trenton, New Jersey, for example, men such as Richard Stockton and Jonathan Rhea held modest landholdings that scarcely reflected their wealth and influence, but each had substantial interests in Western land as well. Members of the Tappan family from Massachusetts had holdings in various parts of the Western Reserve in Ohio whose value multiplied as settlements developed. A few found themselves owning property on what became big-city sites. There were examples to the contrary, of course. Marc Beaubien, a landowner at the southwestern tip of Lake Michigan in the 1820s, made a habit of giving away parcels of this "mighty lonesome, wet place" at local taverns. Asked much later why he had missed out on the fortune he could have made from owning Chicago, Beaubien explained that "he didn't expect no town."³⁵

Social Change in America

Although there were other sources of wealth in large urban centers, real property holdings became a significant component of the fortunes of the rich. The most valuable dwellings in Boston in 1798 occupied city lots that averaged fifty-one times the size of those of the poorest dwellings. As population grew, and land values rose, the potential earnings from subdividing such properties were prodigious. An 1846 survey of rich Philadelphians found that at least one in eight had made some or all of their fortunes from city property. Wealthy New York City landowners used their influence to shape the city's physical landscape, pressing for the development of parks and other facilities in locations that would optimize their property values. Even more than in the countryside, the advantages of early possession of urban land could become manifest in growing personal and family wealth.³⁶

Whatever their size, towns were centers of diversified activities and occupations. In the slave South too, towns grew up and shared these characteristics of occupational diversity with those farther north. Inhabitants of Vicksburg, Mississippi, for example, by 1860 worked in as many as 193 occupations. Across Virginia, towns such as Charlottesville, Petersburg, and Fredericksburg provided commercial and manufacturing services for the surrounding countryside. But urban growth was slower and generally less significant in the South than in the Northeast and Midwest. The South's largest towns—Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans, and Louisville—all lay at the region's periphery, where its plantation and yeoman farming districts intersected with the main routes of river and ocean commerce. The combination of slave labor and staple-crop production continued, as it had in the colonial period, to create a smaller demand for urban services and functions than did the diversified production and the family- and wage-labor of the nonslave regions. The South's urban population remained a smaller portion of the total than in the North, and the largest Southern towns did not match the Northeast's largest cities.

The emergence of large and small towns as characteristic components of Northeastern and Midwestern landscapes reflected the dispersed character of the functions they fulfilled. Rural areas with mixed-crop and other diversified production created demand for traders and craft manufacturers in local centers. Similarly the demand for provisions and consumption goods that came from both newly settling rural districts and

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established regions that were achieving a measure of prosperity also supported the position of traders and merchants in dispersed town centers. The shifts in the production strategies of many Northern farm households, noted earlier, were made possible partly by the dispersal of trading functions, and in turn they reinforced local traders' positions. Towns and cities also often became the locations for the institutions—such as banks—that some local households turned to for relief from the limitations and obligations of the local exchange system.

Developments in the plantation South, by contrast, did not fully support or reinforce dispersed trading on the same scale. Shipments of staple goods such as cotton and rice tended to be arranged through specialist agents ("factors") in large port towns. Slaves earned no wages and slender other earnings for themselves, and so provided only limited markets for provisions and manufactures. Many plantations were to a greater degree than Northern farms self-sufficient in their needs for foodstuffs and craft productions, or were themselves centers of local exchange in these items. The character of rural markets, linked to the character of social structures, supported differing patterns of urban development and hence the differences in overall depth and growth of urbanization.

Urban growth accompanied the expansion of commercial functions. The numbers of merchants, stores, ships and steamboats, and banks grew to foster and to measure wider urban expansion. New York City grew rapidly after 1790 in conjunction with an upsurge in commercial activity; its directories listed 248 merchants in 1790 and more than 1,100 a decade later. The scope of its growing hinterland helped the city's merchant class exceed that of Philadelphia in size before the 1807 embargo slowed trade temporarily. But the periods of renewed commercial expansion after the peace of 1815, and again after the recovery from the panic of 1819, continued to drive up the scale of New York's activities. A count of ships in the harbor one day in 1824 found 324 vessels in port; a similar count twelve years later found 1,241 vessels. Such measures were also indices not only of the expanding volume of goods being shipped through New York but of the growth of the labor force necessary to load, unload, provision, build, and repair all these vessels, and to build and supply all the services and facilities that this labor force in turn used. Commercial expansion provided a powerful impetus to

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city growth that, except in times of slump, produced further gains in commercial activity.³⁷

Connections between cities and hinterlands were also fostered by the investment decisions of urban merchants. Throughout the eighteenth century, merchant groups had chiefly pursued overseas and coastal trade, but in the 1790s and increasingly when the 1807 embargo brought to an end the post-Revolutionary commercial boom, they turned their attention to developments in the interior as well. Historians have emphasized merchants' investments in manufacturing, though ventures in transportation and finance were also of broad and lasting importance. Providence, Rhode Island, merchants such as the Brown family sponsored early manufacturing development in the state and had other interests. Zachariah Allen, Jr., who joined his father's Providence mercantile firm in 1801, when he was sixteen, helped turn a business that had previously focused on the West Indies provision trade toward investments in textile manufacturing, machine building, and insurance. The switch from overseas to internal investments was epitomized by the activities of Boston merchants of the Lowell, Appleton, and Lawrence families, who reinvested profits earned from Asian trade before 1807 into substantial textile manufacturing innovations during the War of 1812. Their partnerships, informally known as the "Boston Associates," in the 1820s and 1830s became the most prominent New England manufacturers.

Individual careers also traced the shift of emphasis from sea to land. Nathaniel Bowditch was the son of a cooper from Salem, Massachusetts, who was himself apprenticed as a cooper and then became a mercantile clerk before going to sea on five merchant voyages between 1795 and 1803, rising to become master and part-owner of his ship. Coming ashore again at the age of thirty, he subsequently entered the insurance business, turned his mathematical skills to use as an actuary, and emerged as head of the Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company, a corporation that—despite its name—was notable by the 1820s as the nation's largest lender of mortgages on real estate. Bowditch the merchant's clerk and sea captain turned his career toward financing and profiting from the development of the land.

The expansion of trade and the numbers of merchants also accompanied a growing degree of specialization and the routinization of functions. Merchants in large ports came to specialize not only in particular

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trades but in categories of goods and stages of the trading process. After the turn of the century it was becoming rare for ship captains to continue their traditional role as traders on their own account, with discretion to buy and sell goods. Merchants now placed these decisions in the hands of agents, who by the 1820s handled most of a ship's commercial business while it was in port. The growth of agency agreements also enabled merchants in large ports to handle trading business elsewhere. The Baltimore merchant house of Alexander Brown built its business during the early expansion of cotton exports by acting as an agent for Southern shippers seeking purchasers in Europe. The growth of the Browns' and others' cotton business meant that Baltimore and New York merchants began to accumulate control of a significant share of cotton exports. The Northern merchants' ability to offer services from their large commercial centers gave them influence over traffic that never came near their own ports, and underscored the implications of the South's comparative lack of large towns.

One reason that New York and its neighbors could gain influence in the cotton trade was that British and European traders handling return cargoes to the United States found better markets for their own export goods in the expanding Northern cities and rural hinterlands than they did in the more constricted markets of the slave South. Hence regional differences imprinted themselves on a wider range of social and economic changes. Merchants intensified their connections with rural regions and developed networks of traders who profited from shipping produce and goods to and from farm families. By the early 1830s it seemed evident to the French observer Alexis de Tocqueville, on his famous American visit, that the nation's best opportunities for profit and wealth lay in commerce.

Social Differentiation

AS RAPIDLY growing centers, towns and cities often came to depend on influxes of migrants from elsewhere. Fertility rates were lower in cities than in the countryside, and there is evidence that mortality rates were higher, especially among the poor. So towns were often unable to grow much by natural population increase. Rural migrants, however, especially

young men of limited means, continued to flock to cities and towns, to find commercial, maritime, or construction work. Twelve thousand newcomers arrived in Albany, New York, between 1825 and 1835, many of them young, unmarried men in their twenties, who found work as journeymen or laborers. Maritime activities no longer relied solely on coastal communities for labor but drew workers from the rural interior as well. By the 1830s one-fifth of New England whaler crews were from farming regions, sometimes to the amusement of other seamen who could not regard them as "proper sailors." When Richard Henry Dana's vessel encountered a Poughkeepsie-based whaling ship off the Chilean coast near Cape Horn in 1834, he noted "one of the lads . . . a thoroughly countrified-looking fellow," who came aboard, "seemed to care very little about the vessel, rigging, or anything else, but went round looking at the livestock, and leaned over the pigsty, and said he wished he was back again tending his father's pigs."³⁸

The port cities were also receiving increasing numbers of overseas migrants as immigration from abroad began a long upswing after the War of 1812. Already in 1820 an estimated 20 percent of the population of New York City was foreign-born, a proportion that would rise to 50 percent over the next thirty years. Philadelphia continued to be a magnet for immigrants, and Baltimore and Boston, along with some interior towns, also increased their rate of in-migration from abroad.

By the 1820s it was noted that European immigrants, especially from Ireland, were replacing African-American servants in many New York households. Structural changes in employment underlay tensions between free black populations and urban in-migrants, both American and foreign. A succession of race riots in Providence, Rhode Island, including the "Hardscrabble" riot of 1824 and the Olney's Lane riot of 1831, were rooted in job competition and in white suspicion of increasing black independence, as African Americans moved from domestic service into their own housing and casual wage work during this period. When seventeen-year-old William J. Brown went looking for a trade in Providence in 1831 he found himself thwarted by a white refusal to let a black do anything "which would elevate us to a free and independent position." Finally he found a black shoemaker willing to take him on, and he took over the shop when the man died. But he found that he needed sharp skills to avoid being cheated by his customers. One firm for which

he supplied shoes tried to trim its payments to Brown by two-thirds, and he prevented this only by keeping a more accurate set of accounts of his own. Elleanor Eldridge, born in the late eighteenth century, undertook household work in rural Warwick, Rhode Island, during the 1812 war, moving from house to house spinning yarn, weaving cloth, washing linens, or nursing the sick. She also lived part of the time with a sister and began to sell on the Providence market the soap they made together. These petty selling activities grew into a more substantial business. Eldridge moved to Providence and established herself as a painter and decorator. She began to accumulate property, supplementing her earnings by renting tenements to poorer neighbors.

Such a progression seems unusual, if not unique, for a woman in the 1820s until we recall that Elleanor Eldridge was black. African Americans were largely excluded from the expanding Rhode Island textile industry; on the other hand, her race exempted Eldridge from cultural constraints on the kinds of work and business that would have affected many white women in the same period. Still, it proved to be her undoing. It is easy to exaggerate the scale of Eldridge's "success"; her income was small, and she was obliged to supplement it with periodic employment away from Providence. Her absence gave enemies a chance to use the legal process to effectively declare her bankrupt and, with the connivance of white lawyers and officials, to seize and sell her property and obstruct her efforts to regain it. Eldridge's race and gender did not mix with her relative independence, and she was reduced to becoming an object of Providence abolitionists' appeals for charity.³⁹

Commercial growth expanded the demand for young, male urban labor. By the 1830s New York City had many thousands of clerks and other commercial functionaries, and smaller towns such as Utica, New York, also witnessed a rapid growth in merchants' and store clerks after 1815. Especially in larger cities, many of these young men lived unsupervised in cheap boardinghouses, giving rise to anxiety in some circles about social order and stability. Evangelical reformers and rural observers feared the cities as centers of uncontrolled immorality and vice. A recent estimate has suggested that by the mid-1830s, with a total population of about 270,000, New York City had at least 1,500 and possibly as many as 10,000 prostitutes at work. The publicity given to the murder of the courtesan Helen Jewett in the city in 1835, and the subsequent trial and

acquittal of her lover and alleged killer, exposed a shadowy world of sexual bargaining and predation well outside the expectations of "respectable" society.⁴⁰

Even in the colonial period some wealthier residents of Boston and other towns had begun to separate their residences from the tumult and crowdedness of the urban setting. After 1815 this process continued more intently. Between 1816 and 1830 the development of housing for prosperous families at Brooklyn Heights, New York, and its connection by ferry service to Manhattan's commercial district, established what the city's most recent historians have called the "first commuter suburb." Property developments in Philadelphia and at the edge of Boston, together with an increasing interest among urban elites in establishing country residences outside their cities, marked both a tendency toward suburban development and a desire by the wealthy to achieve separation from what they now saw as rough or disorderly crowds of urban dwellers. The continued prevalence and periodic ravages of epidemic disease, such as the serious cholera outbreak in New York in 1832, reinforced this desire.⁴¹

Most urban dwellers did not have these options and were obliged to crowd into increasingly densely packed working-class districts, or at best obtain modest-sized housing in areas intended for middling families. Poverty and marginality marked the lives of many. Poor women found employment hawking and peddling goods, or working in the grossly underpaid needle trades. For most working men and women, city life brought little relief from the seasonal fluctuations and consequent hardships of the countryside. As the newspaper editor Horace Greeley noted in his memoirs, winter brought hard times to New York as rivers and canals froze up, goods ceased to move, and the cost of coal and supplies rose. "Mechanics and laborers lived awhile on the scanty savings of the preceding Summer and Autumn; then on such credit as they could wring from grocers and landlords, till milder weather brought them work again." If summer brought epidemic diseases, work was again disrupted as thousands who could do so fled to retreats or relatives in the countryside, and much commerce was suspended. The structure and marginality of many urban populations made towns—for reasons different from those in the countryside—areas of recruitment for labor in manufacturing as well as in commerce and its attendant activities.⁴²

Social Structures and Manufacturing Growth

BETWEEN 1810 and 1840 there occurred a sevenfold increase in U.S. manufacturing output, most of it in the Northeast, in a belt stretching from the Merrimack Valley in New England to Philadelphia and the northern Chesapeake region. At the start of the nineteenth century most American manufacturing took place in household units, in the shops of urban and rural artisans, or on farms. These regions subsequently saw a rapid increase in other kinds of manufacturing activity: in mills and factories, in urban workshops, and in merchants' putting-out systems that operated in town and countryside. All represented an increase in waged labor in manufacture and tended to concentrate labor in larger units.

Americans skeptical about manufacturing development had long feared this kind of concentration. In the 1780s, Thomas Jefferson had issued a famous warning against adopting the ways of corrupt and impoverished European societies, and advocated a future for America based on farming and commerce, keeping the workshops safely across the Atlantic. By the 1800s, Jefferson and his followers had been obliged to modify their views, but some still adhered to the notion that American manufactures could be conducted on a small scale. A Massachusetts Democratic-Republican, Benjamin Austin, urged Jefferson in 1815 to issue a statement in support of American manufactures, to help "those . . . which have arisen during the late war" achieve "a respectable state of maturity and improvement." Nevertheless, Austin stressed, "*Domestic* manufactures is the object contemplated; instead of establishments under the sole control of capitalists." Jefferson responded that manufactures should take their place alongside agriculture as a use for surplus labor. His hope was that, as a household-based activity, this could be accomplished without transforming the character of American society.⁴³

But in fact manufacturing was growing in a variety of contexts, and control by capitalist proprietors was becoming a hallmark of American industry as it was in Britain and elsewhere. Observers of European manufacturing growth linked it with the presence of large numbers of people without property or other ties to the land, whose need for employment meant that their labor could be harnessed to new activities. While later

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scholars long ascribed this shift of labor to dramatic changes such as agricultural enclosures (which were seen to drive people from the countryside by removing access to the commons and other sources of subsistence for the rural poor), more recent approaches have stressed the effects of a longer, more complex pattern of changes, including internal migration, population growth, the emergence of industrial by-employments in certain rural locations, the differential effects of enclosures and agricultural improvement on rural regions, and the slow, rather than rapid, emergence of large-scale industrial organizations like mechanized factories. This kind of approach to early European industrialization also holds the key to understanding the origins of American industrial development. From the 1840s on, increasing supplies of labor for American industry would come from large influxes of European immigrants. But important groundwork for American manufacturing was laid before then, in a period when immigration, though increasing, was not yet a primary source of industrial labor. The emergence and character of early industry was instead rooted in the social structure of existing American regions.

The demographic growth of the post-Revolutionary decades produced a substantial increase in the labor supply. The total free labor force in 1800 was 1.9 million; by 1820 it had reached 3.1 million, and by 1840, 5.7 million people. Until the 1812 war period, the pervasiveness of household production had limited the development of larger-scale industrial enterprises, except in activities such as ironmaking and shipbuilding where these had already existed before the Revolution. Most early manufacturing occurred in small urban workshops or in the countryside. The initial importance of rural social structures was sustained even as larger manufacturing enterprises were being developed. Although cities contained significant concentrations of people without property, this was less true of rural regions of New England and the Mid-Atlantic. Manufacturing in these regions did grow out of inequalities but also out of the gender differences within households and the makeshift arrangements put together by farming and marginal families to build their livelihoods.

In New England, population growth and pressure on land had given rise to clusters of craft-based manufacturing activities closely linked to farming and arising out of local exchange, intermittent hired labor, and the division of labor in households. The regular demands of farm work

supported blacksmiths, coopers, wheelwrights, and leather workers, and such crafts were widely dispersed across the countryside. But, as noted earlier, more specialized activities also emerged, often using locally available raw materials or employing seasonal or intermittent surplus labor from the farm economy, and with close connections to farm households. In addition to seasonal manufactures, such as the making of corn brooms in the Connecticut River Valley, and part-time production in many farm workshops, there emerged significant industrial developments rooted in these rural social structures.

Toolmaking, chair making, and carriage and wagon making were among activities that grew substantially in rural areas. They either employed a coordinated specialization and division of labor between small workshops that cooperated with one another or, more occasionally, gave rise to larger, capitalized shops and factories where various stages of production were concentrated under one roof. The increasingly crowded population of southwestern Connecticut had access to local resources and to sources of demand in the New York area, and the region became an important center of woodenware, furniture, and metalware production, again initially on a household basis. Among its notable developments were the emergence of mechanical skills and devices for the manufacture of clocks, guns, and other equipment that would help lay the basis for an American engineering industry. Among the facets of this kind of development was the geographical dispersal of manufacturing activity across the countryside, in part to harness sources of waterpower and materials such as wood, but primarily to tap sources of labor.⁴⁴

The dispersed character of the household-based system, and the intermittent supply of labor it produced, spurred the emergence of three features that would become a hallmark of the Northeast's manufacturing: the use of a division of labor to produce simple, component parts that could be assembled into finished products; the beginnings of a degree of standardization of those parts, to make feasible the assembly of pieces provided by different suppliers; and the role of the "manufacturer" not merely as a craft producer with mechanical skills but as a coordinator of work conducted by other people.

So farm workshops became adjunct to and often gave way to larger specialized shops and small factories. Yet production initially based in households did not always directly or entirely come to be concentrated

in larger operations. In eastern Massachusetts, shoemaking had begun in the late eighteenth century in various locations, including coastal towns like Lynn where labor was available among former fishing and maritime workers. A division of labor grew up in many households, in which men working on the uppers and other components of shoes gave binding work to their wives or daughters in the household. From the 1820s on, larger shoe merchants, who came to organize the trade, began to distribute binding and other tasks separately, concentrating some activities in their own "central shops" where they could exercise supervision of the work, and sending out binding to be done in rural households across northeastern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire.

In other instances, household production became the basis for new types of industry altogether. In the early 1820s, Emily Graves Williston, married to a farmer in Easthampton, Massachusetts, invented a process for covering wooden buttons with cloth. Within a few years her development was the basis of a thriving business; her husband, Samuel Williston, put work out at making button molds and covering buttons to rural families in the area, and soon extended his operations into a large firm making buttons, suspenders, and webbing. Such putting-out networks typified regions in the interior of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, where farming remained prosperous but where women and children in rural households also took in industrial work. By the 1830s, according to some estimates, up to forty thousand New England women were at work making straw bonnets, palm-leaf hats, and similar products in their homes. These activities were often not well paid but provided sources of work and income that could be accommodated within the other pressing demands of domestic life.⁴⁵

To explore the effects of social structures on the emergence of larger-scale industrial production, it is instructive to compare developments in the textile industry in two different regions: southern New England and the area centered on Philadelphia. In both cases, textile manufacture was the most prominent early industrial activity; in the early nineteenth century it moved from households into mechanized factories. But the ways in which work was organized in the two regions differed markedly.

In New England between about 1810 and 1830, fertility rates rose to a peak, creating exceptional population pressure on scarce land and on

work within households. This pressure effectively increased the labor available to industry as rural households shifted their strategies to abandon their own textile production and find income to purchase cloth. In 1833, Aaron Tufts of Dudley, Massachusetts, noted that household textile manufacture had almost ceased: "Comparatively nothing is done in the household manufactory," he remarked; "a female can now earn more cloth in a day than she could make in the household way in a week." But factory production followed different patterns, matching the varying conditions under which labor could be released from rural households to run it.⁴⁶

Textile mills that operated on the "family" system were established widely across the countryside of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and southern Massachusetts. They recruited poorer rural men, women, and children to live in factory villages, sometimes providing land for men to farm as tenants, and employed women and children in the mills. An early report on one Rhode Island firm found that it had a total of 178 workers: 29 women and 24 men working in the company's mill itself, and another 75 women and 50 men employed as outworkers doing tasks in local farmhouses. By the 1820s the combination of millwork and putting out was in decline in the textile industry, and most tasks became concentrated in the mills themselves.

The disruptions to international trade of the 1807 embargo and 1812 war period encouraged greater investments in American factory textile operations. Most striking were those made at Waltham, Massachusetts, by the "Boston Associates"—merchants seeking more secure profits from earnings they had previously made in trade. Building a large, integrated mill with a substantial capital investment, they soon employed some 260 women workers, according to a contemporary report "principally the daughters of the adjacent farmers." The Waltham system became a model for further successful investments along the same lines, particularly at Lowell, Massachusetts, whose mills from the mid-1820s were soon employing not hundreds but thousands of women workers. Many of these were young women, daughters of farm families especially from New Hampshire and Vermont, where fertility rates had remained higher than in other parts of New England and where many farms were on poorer or marginal land.⁴⁷

The recruitment zones for New England textile workers rarely overlapped; Lowell and Rhode Island mill owners, for example, drew

on different regions and different elements of the farm population. And recruitment to these centers was smallest in districts where local manufacturing establishments had grown up instead, or where farming remained most prosperous. Early industrial labor forces, in other words, were found from among quite subtle and precise variations in the structure and character of rural societies.

Comparison with developments in the Philadelphia region illustrates this. In southeastern Pennsylvania and adjacent Delaware, rural economies were obliged to adjust during the 1790s to falling prices in the wheat trade as overall production grew and crops in some regions became diseased. Over the next few decades a division arose between the industrialized Delaware Valley region near Philadelphia and a dairying and mixed-farming region to the west of the city. As in New England, this functional split was rooted in local social structures and inequalities. Population density and pressure on land remained lower to the west, but high population densities in the Delaware Valley provided a surplus of rural labor available to be drawn by manufacturers into workshops and factory villages.

There were some similarities between the early industrial workforces in the two regions. When papermaking establishments near Philadelphia were put out of work by the financial crisis of 1819, about two-thirds of the eight hundred or so people affected were women, mainly daughters of farm families. Similarly, the burning of a cotton mill in the early 1820s on the Patapsco River, near Baltimore, idled one hundred workers, about seventy-five of whom were women, mainly from farms. But it had been more common in Pennsylvania, because of the surplus rural labor generated by wheat farming, for household-based textile manufacture to be conducted by male workers. So industrialization there relied more heavily on male labor than did early New England manufacturing. Combined with the relative prosperity of Pennsylvania farm households that were able to maintain wheat production or switch to dairying, this also meant that rural outwork played a smaller role in the industrialization of the Philadelphia region than it did in New England. By 1830 there were clear contrasts between New England, where women and children formed a high percentage of the early factory labor force, and the Mid-Atlantic region, where the proportion was lower.⁴⁸

Rural surplus labor had long made Philadelphia a powerful magnet for migration. Rural migrants to the city rubbed shoulders with considerable numbers of European immigrants, creating an abundant urban labor market for entrepreneurs to employ. Its combination of migrants and skills made Philadelphia itself a major center of textile production, first in households and workshops, then increasingly in factories. Philadelphia's neighborhoods, including Kensington, Moyamensing, and Northern Liberties, became centers of textile production, initially dominated by male handloom weavers working in their own homes and small shops. In time these shops coalesced into factories owned by local merchants and master weavers. Unlike parts of New England that developed networks of textile firms owned by companies or groups of large investors, Philadelphia remained a center of relatively small proprietary mills. Boston, by contrast, with access to a different kind of labor, did not become a textile city in its own right, though its merchants became powerful investors in the geographically diffused New England textile industry. Even after the expansion of European immigration to New England in the 1840s relaxed many constraints on the urban labor supply, these differential patterns between major cities persisted.

Indeed, for the antebellum period, small manufacturing organizations remained normal. New York City expanded into a major manufacturing center based on small shops owned by artisans or controlled by merchants, producing a wide range of light goods. But some of its industries, especially the production of men's clothing, were transformed in this period. Between 1825 and 1835, clothing merchants organized large networks in the city, centered on small manufacturers' workshops and making heavy use of domestic outworkers for sewing, stitching, and other tasks. As much as some rural areas, city centers became the location for putting-out industries, drawing on and supporting the growing populations of poor families and single women in urban areas. In newer cities too, the clothing trades followed similar patterns. In Cincinnati in 1826 there were thirty-five clothing workshops, employing a total of 132 men and 467 women. By 1841 there had been an expansion and reorganization. Now there were sixty shops, though with only 195 men working in them while another 813 men and almost 4,000 women worked for these shops as outworkers.

Social Change in America

Between 1820 and 1840 the proportion of the American population engaged in manufacturing grew from just under 14 percent to nearly 17 percent, but the increase in the Northeast was more pronounced; in Massachusetts the proportion rose from 30 to more than 40 percent. Increases occurred in coastal urban centers such as Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston; in rural regions, especially in southern New England and eastern Pennsylvania; and in the newly growing towns and cities that were springing up to serve the farming communities of the new West. The growth of manufacturing was an index of the increasing coordination of activities across urban and rural sectors of the Northeast and Midwest, as markets for agricultural and manufacturing goods became integrated and mutually dependent, and as towns, merchants, and master manufacturers organized links between them.

The recruiting of manufacturing labor, and hence the structure of manufacturing itself, was strongly influenced by existing social structures and by the different ways rural economies, household needs, and patterns of regional and international migration shaped labor's availability. The fitness of recruitment strategies for local circumstances was one of the factors that helped determine the success or failure of a business or industry. Household-based production powerfully influenced the ways manufacturers initially operated. But once they were established, new work processes became dynamic influences. The relationships between employers and workers and the needs of production often conflicted in ways that drove employers to attempt new strategies, which in turn influenced the development of local and regional social structures. In the longer run, particularly in older regions where farming had become especially intertwined with manufacturing, these changes often marked the seeds of decline in household-based industries and the roots of greater industrial concentration.

✧ CHAPTER 5 ✧

Crisis and Expansion

THE SHIFTS in social structure that became evident in the 1820s and 1830s were associated with economic expansion. This was initiated by the slow recovery from the Panic of 1819 and would be brought to a sudden halt by the financial Panic of 1837 and another long period of depression. With greater prosperity came improved prices for farm goods and produce but also increased costs of goods for laborers and families dependent on wages. At the same time entrepreneurs whose businesses had picked up after the 1819 panic tended to take stronger measures to exercise control over their employees. Under these conditions it was not surprising that labor organizations, protest movements, and the first labor periodicals should grow up in the 1820s and contribute by the early 1830s to a burgeoning period of industrial militancy in both craft and factory-based occupations.

In 1826 the radical pamphleteer Langdon Byllesby, in a commentary on the causes and consequences of unequal wealth, noted the implications of social and economic changes. He saw commercial activities becoming generalized and mercantile exchanges being elevated above those between locals and equals. Making commerce a source of profit and relieving the mechanic and farmer of the obligation to exchange among themselves, Byllesby argued, the trader obtained undue wealth without productive labor. Why, he asked, should the merchant be entitled to a greater share of the proceeds of a transaction than the producers themselves received? Byllesby's comment pointed to an important change that was under way, particularly in the North, as the relative positions of

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merchants, manufacturers, farmers, and laborers were realigned between the 1820s and the 1850s.¹

New Social Relations in Production

THE GROWTH of manufacturing did foster the emergence of large factories in some regions and industries. Textile mills in Rhode Island and eastern Connecticut and in Philadelphia and environs commonly employed dozens of workers; the larger mills built by Boston capitalists at Lowell, Massachusetts, and other sites employed hundreds and were among the largest organizations of their day. Yet the bulk of manufacturing continued to take place in much smaller craft shops, either in cities and towns or scattered across manufacturing districts in the countryside. Most artisans and industrial laborers were employed in these small units, and social distances between proprietors and workers often remained small. In some occupations, such as printing in small town centers, some machining trades, and construction crafts, the costs of entry to proprietorship were relatively low, and young journeymen could often hope to advance to master's or owner's status. In the Philadelphia construction trades, for example, access to capital and credit enabled many craftsmen to become master builders or achieve equivalent status in specialized trades. Newly emerging crafts, too, like machine building and locomotive building, at first emphasized skill rather than capital and were built up by craft workers who obtained finance or credit to go into business on their own account.

With the expansion of the manufacturing economy, the number of skilled workers also increased. In cabinetmaking in New York City, where some two hundred skilled workmen were employed in 1806, by 1853 there were about eight hundred craftsmen in the trade. In many smaller towns, artisans continued to operate with a degree of autonomy, setting up their own voluntary organizations, fostering a mechanics' consciousness, and using their networks of connections to sponsor or support younger entrants to their trades. Mechanics' ideology during the 1820s and 1830s was still rooted in the post-Revolutionary concept of propertied independence. Mechanics' and trades' associations, and the "middling interest" parties that sprang up in Boston and other

towns, urged that property used in the production of goods should be the basis for freedom and equality.²

But the small scale of many industrial operations and the continued accessibility in many instances to craft skill or mastership nevertheless masked important changes that were taking place. Although the numbers of skilled workers continued to rise, their proportion in the manufacturing workforce was starting to fall. The two hundred New York cabinetmakers of 1806 controlled their trade. By 1853 the eight hundred skilled craftsmen in the trade were working alongside about four thousand other workers less skilled than they. The introduction of batch production and the division of labor, rooted both in the characteristics of part-time rural manufacturing and in the organizational logic of concentrated workshops and factories, did not so much "de-skill" individual craft workers as alter patterns of work and the social relations that went with them. An industrial world was emerging in which "mastership" and proprietorship were not the presumed aim of most craftsmen; they were achievements to which only a minority could aspire. Of Boston journeymen carpenters in 1790, about 45 percent became masters; by 1825 that portion had fallen to 11 percent. Whether they were employed in small workshops or in larger factories, an increasing portion of manufacturing workers were likely to remain as hired hands. Similar patterns were evident in the maritime economy. Among Essex County, Massachusetts, mariners a smaller proportion advanced from being ordinary seamen to officer's rank in the 1820s and 1830s than had made this progression in the decades following the Revolution.³

For those in manufacturing, living arrangements shifted too. The tradition that apprentices or those hired for work would live, or at least take meals, with their employers did not disappear; it continued, especially in rural areas and small towns. But it became rarer in larger towns and manufacturing districts, where separate housing or boardinghouses for workers began to be common. In some cases, apprentices had rebelled against the household discipline of the old system. Master shoemakers in Lynn, Massachusetts, had sometimes whipped their apprentices for poor work or infractions. Joel Munsell, son of a wagon maker in Deerfield, Massachusetts, had been apprenticed as a young man to a printer in the nearby town of Greenfield, but he left when his master insisted on his presence at all family meals. As the number of their

workers increased, many employers too withdrew from the conception of the workplace as an extension of the master's household, and established residences separate from their workshops. In New York, Boston, and Philadelphia such separation was frequent by the 1820s. In a smaller city, such as Albany, New York, by 1830 almost two-thirds of the wealthiest 10 percent of households lived apart from their workplaces.⁴ Around the large mills built by Boston capitalists in Lowell, Massachusetts, and other towns, company-owned boardinghouses were built to house the young women who were recruited as millhands and known as "operatives" because they worked machines. Seeking to reassure the rural families these women came from, the individual boardinghouses were intended to recreate a household environment under supervision, but they were quite separate from the houses of the mill agents, foremen, and overseers who supervised the workplace. In the fast-growing town of Rochester, New York, distinct middle- and working-class neighborhoods began to emerge in the 1820s. In 1828 the Albany city council commented on the "miserable collection of hovels" that housed many of the town's mechanics and laborers, and where many victims would die in the cholera outbreak of 1832.

Residential separation accompanied a growing separation of functions at work between the activities of production and those of supervision. The distinction had been present in early factories and only grew as factories expanded and became more common. Mill owners installed bells that rang the hours for starting and finishing work, and published "timetables" specifying working hours and the penalties that would be exacted for lateness or absence. But this tighter work discipline also emerged in smaller workshops as master craftsmen expanded their activities, introduced a greater division of labor, and devoted more of their time to organization rather than actual production. A Philadelphia cabinetmaker, Charles James, moved to Cincinnati in 1824, set up his own small workshop four years later, and then switched his efforts from making custom-ordered furniture to turning out cheap ready-made items in batches. As he expanded his output, he began to hire employees to do tasks, such as painting and ornamenting, that he would once have put out to craftsmen in the vicinity. Owners who enlarged their shops hired foremen to supervise work and exercise discipline. A sheet outlining "The Duty of a Foreman of a Printing Office," printed in New Haven,

Connecticut, in 1825, stipulated that the foreman should seek out workmen to hire when wanted, "dismiss them when no longer wanted," "regulate the hours of their work," and "keep them still, sober and peaceable, and attentive to their business, to see that they do not slight their work, [and] that they are obedient to his lawful commands." "In short," the instructions concluded, "he is to be in the view of the Workmen, their Captain and Commander, the same as a Captain of a Ship." And it was the foreman's role, not anyone else's, "to consult and advise with the Owners." Patterns of workplace distinction and authority once unique to maritime circumstances were now increasingly common ashore.⁵

Wage workers were in legal terms "free." They were not legally bound to owners or employers other than by the terms of employment contracts, either implicit or explicit, that they had voluntarily entered into and could choose to abandon. The growth of waged employment marked the passing, in the North, of most forms of "unfree" labor and would become a hallmark of the emergence of a "free labor" system distinct from that of slavery in the South.

There were some exceptions to the disappearance of coerced labor, however. Where textile mills or ironworks were located in rural areas, distant from other settlements, workers frequently depended on supplies from company-owned stores, which often debited them for goods against their credits for wages. These "truck" payments from their stores both reduced companies' need for ready cash and provided a source of profit on the sale of goods. Company stores and truck payments became increasingly common in mining and forestry as these activities developed during the century. In the South, lumber and mining camps often employed numbers of free laborers alongside slaves; in the gold mines opened up at Dahlonega, in northern Georgia, around 1836, for example, three-quarters of the workforce were slaves, but the other quarter were free white laborers. Company stores and truck payments often curbed the effective freedom of workers in such situations. "A factory store is a sponging place," complained Thomas Man of Rhode Island in a protest poem written in 1833; "It is the eel-pot of our sorry race."⁶

Waged employment occurred, moreover, within a legal framework that gave force to employers' efforts to instill and maintain work discipline. Workers were technically obliged to fulfill their contract agreements. In some contrast with the situation in Britain, for example,

American employers almost never sought legal remedy from workers who quit before their contracts had expired; indeed, the ability to leave undesirable employment without legal penalty was a crucial characteristic of "free labor." Yet there remained legal provisions that placed limits on the absolute freedom of workers. First, employers or foremen usually had power to fire them at will. Second, while they were at work, employees were subject to the disciplinary authority of their bosses under the scope of master-and-servant laws derived from English tradition; legally, workers had little remedy for conditions they found intolerable other than to quit the job. Third, though it was very rare for employers to sue workers who quit on them, it was often impossible for employees to recover back wages if they walked out of a job before a contract expired. Most workers were not in a position to sue for their wages, and in some cases that did come before the courts, judges found that failure to perform part of a contract invalidated a claim for any payment in regard to it. Finally, of course, the legal condition of "freedom" took no account of economic means. Having the right to quit at will and being able to afford to do so were quite different matters. As a writer in a Utica, New York, newspaper expressed it in 1832, "I had generally to take up with such wages as my employer offered, and had always to pay him the price he asked, for what I wanted to buy." The emerging social distinctions between workers and employers, which were coming into focus for the first time in the 1820s, gave rise to reflections on the actual character of "free labor."⁷

Labor Radicalism

MECHANICS' IDEOLOGY had stressed the importance and virtue of those who were "producers." It viewed participation in productive labor as the principal basis for earning and for citizenship. Workingmen's advocates such as Philadelphia's William Heighton attacked "aristocratic accumulators" who were not direct producers themselves but who profited from others' labor through trade, the rental of property, or other "unproductive" pursuits. Craft workers arriving from England and Ireland, and settling in growing towns like Paterson, New Jersey, often subscribed to such ideas and lent their weight to the politicization of man-

ufacturing centers. This ideology was reinforced by religious ideals as mechanics came to participate in the evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening that swept the Northeast from the 1820s on. Baltimore artisan evangelicals embraced the producerist ideology; there and elsewhere mechanics and laborers invoked a biblical tradition of equality against what they saw as "unrighteous distinctions" in society. In many cities and towns, Methodism proved attractive to craft workers drawn by its emphases on spiritual equality, self-improvement, and self-discipline that fit well with the ideals of producerism.⁸

Yet as the conditions of work changed in the 1820s and 1830s, divisions opened between those who could become masters or proprietors and those who remained wage workers. Along with growing residential separation and the decline of working arrangements based in proprietors' households, these divisions gave rise to anxiety even among skilled craft workers that they were being looked down upon by the middle-class men who owned and controlled their trades. At the very time democratization was giving most white males the vote and bringing them formally into the political sphere, many men were sensitized to the new social divisions they perceived growing around them.

In New York and other towns during the early 1820s, mechanics' organizations began to criticize the Tammany Society and other centers of Democratic-Republican organization and influence as bastions of privilege, fostering the interests of the elite groups that ran urban politics. Across the Northeast, workingmen's parties were organized at the end of the decade in an attempt to convert this opposition into action at the ballot box. In Albany in the late 1820s, the established Mechanics' Society split apart and separate masters' and journeymen's organizations appeared, the latter growing particularly strong among printers and carpenters. Elements of a burgeoning labor movement challenged the power of employers and sought to restore what its advocates saw as an undermining of the independence of craft workers and laborers. Working men and women in several crafts and occupations campaigned or went on strike over issues such as wage rates, hours of work, discipline, and other working conditions.

They also disputed the exercise of control over these things. In 1831, 250 carpenters and joiners in Cincinnati went on strike against a lengthening of the workday by their employers. The following year

their colleagues in Buffalo struggled with their bosses over the journeymen's claim to have "ten hours of labor to be called a day's work." When employers insisted that the workday lasted from dawn to dusk, and journeymen walked off the job in protest, master builders resolved not to re-hire them. Journeymen masons, too, then lodged their claim for a ten-hour workday. New York City tailors and cabinetmakers struck several times in the early 1830s in disputes over who would set rates of pay (still called "prices") for their work. Workers at a Trenton, New Jersey, factory secured an agreement from owners that they would be paid half in cash and half in "store orders" (credit notes redeemable only in goods at the company store), but then went on strike in protest when the cash share of their wages fell below the agreed level.

Women workers were notable participants in this upsurge of labor radicalism. New York tailoresses went on strike in 1831. Massachusetts shoe binders protested twice during the 1830s against employers who refused to agree on wage rates when they handed out tasks, or cheated them out of wages due. Like many male colleagues, these women claimed "equal rights" to the fruits of their labor. In 1834 and 1836, young women working in the Lowell textile mills went on strike against wage cuts or rent increases in company boardinghouses, campaigning as "the daughters of free men." On the latter occasion they were successful in pushing the companies to rescind changes.

Patterns of militancy among early industrial workers often varied according to their distance from household patterns of organization and production, and to the extent of their continuing involvement in household production. Rural outworkers were least "militant" because they could show discontent in other ways—by refusing to continue to take work, or simply by failing to return materials. Factory workers who were separated from household work, such as the Lowell women in the 1834 and 1836 stoppages, or the English immigrant women at the Manayunk Mills in Philadelphia who established a tradition of militancy, were more likely to take strike action because their working and living arrangements bred solidarity and cohesion, and because they could not so readily turn to household-based work to eke out their livelihoods. In between were women working in the "family system" mills of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and southeastern Massachusetts, who rarely adopted the militancy of their Lowell or Philadelphia counterparts but who used absenteeism and

other subtle forms of action to express protest or assert some measure of control over their working lives.

Labor advocates saw factories and the companies that owned them as threats to the equality and independence the producer ideology valued. "The liberty our fathers sought / The factory system sets at nought," wrote the Rhode Islander Thomas Man in his 1833 poem. Journeymen carriage makers in Massachusetts, protesting against the incorporation of a carriage-building company, wrote of their aspirations to become masters of their own shops, to which they perceived the proposed corporation as a threat. "The *many*," asserted a Utica newspaper in 1832, "have become the temporal and local slaves of the few"; productive laborers were "suffering under the malignant influence of an unseen power, that carries with it the *semblance* only of right, and is, in reality, as the Horse-Leech upon his earnings." The New England labor radical Seth Luther argued that society had become divided between "the producers on the one part and the consumers and accumulators on the other," and concluded that producers were not benefiting from their labors equally with those who lived off the work done for them.⁹

A keynote of many 1830s labor protests was the claim that capitalists and master craftsmen were disrupting the harmony and mutuality of a society of independent producers. Their claims were reinforced by the precarious standing of labor unions and militant action before the law. Strikers and unions often faced injunctions and other legal penalties while strike action was usually regarded as a breach of contract, subject to sanctions. Although a landmark Massachusetts court judgment in 1842 would uphold the legal right of trade unions to exist, many other provisions continued to weigh labor disputes firmly in favor of employers and proprietors. And in the shorter term, economic events would also tip the balance against labor.

Slump

THE END of the 1830s and the early 1840s found the American economy once again in deep crisis. The boom of the early 1830s had pushed up prices and, with easy money available on loan from banks, floated a good many speculative schemes. Inflation and banking reforms in the

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mid-1830s, including the hotly contested decision of Andrew Jackson's administration not to recharter the Second Bank of the United States, were followed by critical shifts in international economic conditions that, as had happened in 1819, provoked a panic in 1837. As one Ohioan recollected, when the banks were forced to suspend specie payments "all varieties of failure naturally followed," and there was great disruption. Scores of banks collapsed. Mercantile firms and small businesses alike were plunged into bankruptcy as debts were called in and the money supply dried up.¹⁰

All parts of the country were affected by the panic and by the slump that followed and lasted for several years. But the damage was lighter in the South than in the North. Southern cotton growers faced the sudden collection of debts and the prospect of financial ruin, and many in fact failed. In the new regions of the Southwest, where there were few banks, for example, many recently established planters were forced either to abandon their efforts or to turn for financial support to the families they had left behind in the Southeastern states. But the cotton market stabilized quite rapidly. Owners of slaves found they had the labor and the locally produced food supplies to continue production. Although cotton prices remained low for several years, the slave-based economy was able to adjust to these conditions, and it continued to expand.

The North faced greater disruption. The financial panic affected many businesses that had been highly regarded and assumed to be sound. The sudden collapse in 1837 of a poorly constructed building in New York's financial district seemed to some to be a symbol of the city's precarious economic fortunes. Most prominent was the failure of the silk importing firm of Arthur Tappan, one of New York's leading merchants, and a prominent evangelical reformer and philanthropist. Tappan was reported to have gone bankrupt with debts exceeding one million dollars. Commercial operations seemed to be placed in peril, and some individuals never recovered from their failure. A Hudson Valley man plagued by financial misfortune jumped from a third-floor window to his death in 1841, reportedly after having failed in an attempt to shoot himself.¹¹

Believers in the doctrine that fortune stemmed from self-discipline and effort, rather than from chance, were shaken by the realization that the fruits of hard work could be so easily wiped out, and that chance of-

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ten dictated who would be a victim. Newspaper editors and other observers agonized that the panic had resulted from an absence of self-control, as businessmen had succumbed to the temptation to overtrade in pursuit of easy wealth. The Amherst, Massachusetts, lawyer Edward Dickinson, who in 1836 had been tempted to break his own self-restraint to invest in land speculation, pondered like many others the "revulsion" that the financial collapse seemed to indicate, part of it his own lack of self-discipline. Investors did indeed get burned: the writer Caroline Kirkland and her husband had been living in the town of Pinckney, Michigan, which he had been trying to develop as one of its promoters. In 1843 they were obliged to give up and move back to New York, having lost most of the money he had sunk into the project.

The interruption to the financial system affected manufacturing businesses, even those whose products were in strong demand. The firm of R. Hoe and Company of New York, maker of the large printing presses that had been revolutionizing newspaper publishing for some years, was forced into bankruptcy and reorganization. As companies went out of business and factories closed, large numbers of people were thrown out of work. Wages and prices for farm produce fell, so both workers and farm households suffered. A tailor in Cincinnati wrote in 1840 that "our prices [i.e., wages] were so curtailed by our employers that we found it impossible to gain a livelihood." For two months he had been obliged to work for his board only. Many small manufacturers and craftsmen were unable to stay afloat financially without taking out mortgages or going to work for others. A Cincinnati chair maker, Jacob Roll, who had been a master for twenty years, was forced to abandon his own business in 1839 and go to work as a wage earner for one of his rivals. Thousands crowded the relief rolls in each of the large cities. As late as 1844, when the depression was beginning to lift, one New York City charity organization alone gave aid to more than 28,000 people.¹²

Immigration and the Labor Supply

THE DEEP effects of the Panic of 1837 and the depression that followed were felt in changes that altered the direction of Northern society when the economy began to recover. In some ways these changes reconfirmed

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patterns that had already been apparent in the 1820s and 1830s. As businesses were rebuilt, both large and small organizations remained important: the economy was still constructed around small enterprises, often household or workshop based, as well as larger companies and institutions. Across the nation as a whole, masking great variations in the size of particular enterprises, average manufacturing establishments rose in size from 4.31 workers in 1840 to 7.78 in 1850, and 9.36 in 1860, a 117 percent increase in twenty years.

Had the panic and depression of the late 1830s and early 1840s been confined to North America, it would not have had the profound effects it did on American society. Instead it was an international phenomenon, and so in addition to its influence domestically, the depression also altered the behavior of people in other countries toward the United States. Above all, it helped intensify the flow of immigrants who had been sailing to America in rising numbers, particularly since the 1810s. The influx reached new levels in the 1840s, changing the direction of American society, and particularly that of the North, permanently.

Economic depressions in the United States generally produced a slowdown in the arrivals of immigrants from Europe, and initially the same pattern prevailed this time. From Ireland, for instance, 48,000 immigrants came in 1837, before the impact of the financial panic was apparent; but in 1838 the number fell to 11,000. Word went back across family networks or other channels to discourage so many people from venturing across the Atlantic, for fear of finding no employment when they arrived. But several factors in the late 1830s and early 1840s neutralized this effect. Because the depression was also severe in European economies, especially in the British Isles, some workers and families shut out of opportunities at home took the risk of traveling to North America in the hope of rescuing themselves from difficulty. In 1841 alone about 120,000 people emigrated from Great Britain, many of them to North America. Textile workers from Lancashire, Yorkshire, and Scotland, affected by the closure of mills or displaced by the widespread abandonment of handloom weaving, sought out new opportunities in New England, New York, or Philadelphia. Pottery workers from the English Midlands organized emigration societies in the hope of removing to land in Wisconsin, or of taking up pottery work in the Ohio Valley. Some emigrants indeed succeeded in making a transition from la-

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boring status to landed proprietorship that they could not have contemplated in Britain. John Claxton, a thirty-six-year-old domestic servant, arrived in New York from Liverpool in 1840. Ten years later he was in business as a miller in the town of Whitestown, New York, though without yet having obtained real property of his own. Ten years on again, by moving west, he had achieved that; he now had a farm in McHenry County, Illinois, and owned real and personal estate totaling \$2,150. Irish craftspeople and laborers, impoverished by the disruptions in the Irish economy, or having already migrated to England or Scotland only to find continued difficulties there, also headed across the ocean to settlements being carved out by the rising numbers of their compatriots. All this meant that, even as the American economy was floundering in the early 1840s, its supply of labor was being augmented.¹³

Further overseas circumstances soon reinforced this process. The failure of the potato crops in Ireland in the mid-1840s, coupled with vast inequalities in Irish society and the effects of British free-trade policies on the situation, inflicted starvation on huge numbers of poor peasants who had no other food supply or resources to fall back on. Deaths from starvation and disease and the consequent disruption of rent payments led to a further massive displacement of tenants from large Irish estates. For the United States, the results of the Irish Famine were twofold. First, large numbers of men and women who had some means sought to emigrate to escape a collapsing economy. Second, as destitute people were cleared off many estates in Ireland, charitable and government efforts resulted in the shipment overseas of large numbers, simply to remove them from a situation incapable of sustaining them. Irish immigration to the United States jumped massively from the mid-1840s to the early 1850s, running at more than 100,000 in 1847 and as high as 221,000 in 1851.¹⁴

In other parts of Europe, too, economic disruption and political upheavals helped increase the numbers of families and individuals seeking to emigrate. The most important effects were in parts of the German states. Here the failure of political revolutions in 1848 and the consequent exile of liberals and radicals defeated by political reaction added to a flow of migrants already triggered by the weakening of peasant agriculture in areas such as the Rhineland. Early industrialization in Germany was undermining the household-based proto-industrial occupations of

peasant-farming regions. The demand for industrial labor in the United States created perceived opportunities, especially for German mechanics and other skilled workers. Although it was increasing in the 1840s, the flow of German migrants did not peak until 1854, when the number of Germans arriving in the United States, at 215,000, temporarily exceeded that of any other group. German migrants continued to play an important role in the provision of new labor to both urban and rural regions. They were joined by French Canadians escaping similar constraints in Quebec peasant agriculture, and in the 1850s by a small but growing exodus of Scandinavians displaced by limits to rural economies in Norway and Sweden, who sought to create new farm settlements in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Among the migrants from Germany were significant numbers of Jews, who helped swell the total U.S. Jewish population tenfold between 1840 and 1860, to around 150,000. About one-third of Jewish immigrants arrived in family groups. Like Irish and other migrants, Jews settling in American towns and cities began to create religious congregations and community organizations.¹⁵

The most important effect of these migration flows, from Britain and Ireland, from Germany and Scandinavia, and from Canada, was permanently to reverse the structural labor shortages that had influenced the character and development of the American economy since the colonial period. During the 1840s immigration to the United States reached an unprecedented annual average of 170,000 people, but even this was exceeded in the 1850s when the average reached 260,000 per year. From 1840 to 1855 almost 3.3 million immigrants arrived, and from 1845 to 1855 the number of arrivals was equivalent to 14.5 percent of the 1845 population, the highest proportion in U.S. history. Immigrants swelled the North's working population in particular. Between 1840 and 1850 the proportion of immigrants among the male workforce of the Northern states rose from 29 percent to 38.3 percent, and in another decade would reach 45.5 percent. But in some rural regions, and particularly in larger cities and manufacturing towns, the impact of immigration was even greater than these aggregate figures suggest. In Pittsburgh by 1850, seven of ten manual workers were foreign-born. In New York City, where the foreign-born population already measured one-fifth of the total in 1820, the proportion reached 51 percent by 1855, with 70 percent of the city's wage workers having been born abroad.

Irish and German immigrants contributed to a twofold evolution of the American economy, especially in the free states. Substantial numbers moved to large cities, where they provided manual labor for expansion and skilled work for growing services and manufacturing. Of all immigrant arrivals in the United States between 1840 and 1855, some 68 percent landed at New York City. Although a majority dispersed to other areas, the city's role as a gateway to North America contributed substantially to the expanding immigrant populations of New York, Brooklyn, and adjacent parts of New Jersey. Irish immigrants, by the same token, had augmented the Boston population in the 1840s. Although German and Irish migration patterns overlapped considerably, there were notable distinctions in their distribution. Large numbers of both groups settled in New York and its environs, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and the newly growing city of Chicago, but there were larger Irish groupings in New England, and a greater proportion of German migrants clustered in the Midwest and Great Lakes region.

Irish and German immigrants to these cities and to numerous smaller towns took up work across a spectrum of occupations, from manual jobs to commercial proprietorship, depending on the circumstances of their migration. A greater preponderance of Irish immigrants, including many of those displaced by the Irish Famine of the 1840s, found themselves in laboring occupations; 60 percent of Irish-born males in New York City in 1855 held unskilled jobs. German migrants, coming from a greater variety of backgrounds and under less severe economic pressure, were more likely to occupy skilled crafts or small proprietorships. Especially early on in the process of German emigration, significant numbers of migrants had already acquired literacy, training, or craft skills before they left Germany.¹⁶

In addition to settling in cities and industrial towns, both Irish and German immigrants moved to rural areas in significant numbers. Irish immigrants in rural areas were by 1850 spread widely, but often quite thinly, across large regions of the Northeast and Midwest. Some obtained farms of their own or were able to become tenant farmers. Irish families were among those who in this period took over New England farms that were being sold by locally born families who were migrating farther west. But many Irish, like their compatriots in the cities, lacked

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the resources to acquire land of their own. Instead, those who had come from rural areas of Ireland adapted their skills to become laborers and general help on farms that, with the increase in commercial crop production, needed more hired workers. Irish farm-laboring families were among the contributors to a subtle but important shift in class relations in the countryside, which was occurring in both older and newer regions.

German migrants to rural locations also furnished general farm labor, but to a greater extent than Irish immigrants they were positioned to acquire and develop farms of their own. A higher proportion of German than Irish immigrants had held their own farms back home, and those seeking land to farm in America were likely to head to relatively unsettled frontier areas where land was cheaper and opportunities for creating new communities greatest. Significant clusters of German farm families settled in regions such as southeastern Wisconsin and southwestern Illinois, where settlements were being established at the time of their arrival. Smaller numbers pushed on farther, to parts of southern Texas, establishing German farming communities toward the edge of white settlement, such as in the Colorado River region near San Antonio. Missouri and other Midwestern states also received considerable numbers of German rural migrants.

Although now finding themselves in new and unfamiliar surroundings, many of these emigrants aimed to recreate aspects of the rural societies they had left behind in Europe. Family clusters, chain migration, and the establishment of colonies of settlement by particular church congregations were notable features of the efforts of German, Swiss, and Austrian migrants. By 1860, for example, one in twelve of all immigrants from the German state of Braunschweig (Brunswick) were settled in a single county in Missouri. With more resources than most Irish emigrants and with stronger community bonds than many Yankee or English settlers on the American frontier, these groups moved to re-form their European social environments on the frontier. It was a pattern that Scandinavian immigrants to Iowa and Minnesota would also repeat. These "ethnic" farm families in the Midwest were more likely than American-born farmers to stay on the land they had acquired. Their households were also likely to retain aspects of traditional patriarchy and gender roles, and sustain greater inequalities between parents and chil-

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dren, and men and women, than those of American-born families in similar circumstances.

The effects of immigration were strongest in the free states. Although immigrants settled in every part of the Union, they were disproportionately underrepresented in the South, particularly in plantation regions. Throughout the nineteenth century these areas would continue to have some of the lowest proportions of foreign-born inhabitants anywhere in North America. Pockets of immigrant settlement did grow in some Southern towns and, as noted, in frontier regions such as Missouri and parts of Texas. But rural immigrants were rarely drawn in substantial numbers to regions with large slave-labor forces. Most German farm settlements in Texas were in places where slavery was weak. In Missouri by 1860, slaves represented 9.7 percent of the state's population, though the majority of them were concentrated in 36 of the state's 113 counties. None of these 36 counties was within the most prominent areas of German settlement, and all the counties with the greatest share of German-born inhabitants were those with below-average or negligible populations of slaves. Here and across the South, plantation slavery and employment for immigrants did not readily mix. Plantation zones usually filled their labor requirements with slaves; the yeoman farmers and poorer white laborers who also inhabited these zones were available for intermittent or casual labor needs. Such areas presented fewer opportunities to most migrants than those where freehold farming, family labor, or craft production were more prominent. German settlements in Missouri and elsewhere in the South were largely in towns and in rural districts without many slaves. Across the South as a whole, only 5.6 percent of the population in 1860 was foreign-born.

In the Northeast and Midwest the foreign-born proportions of the population were significantly higher, at 19.3 percent and 17.4 percent respectively. Here, in both urban and rural settings, immigrants furnished a substantial supply of new labor at different levels of economic activity and wealth. But while rural immigrants contributed to the extension of the frontier and the labor demands of older farming regions, those in urban and industrial areas extended the labor force for new manufacturing activities, or began to substitute for existing labor forces. Most striking was the progressive substitution of immigrant men and women for the preponderance of Yankee women and children in early

New England textiles and other manufactures. In Lowell, Lawrence, and other centers of large-scale textile production, the proportion of women mill workers began to fall after 1840 and by the later 1850s had declined substantially. At one Lowell mill, where the proportion of foreign-born workers was below 4 percent in 1836, it grew to 39 percent by 1850 and to 62 percent in 1860. Similarly, in the Rhode Island or family-system mills of southeastern New England, immigrants became a growing part of the workforce. In these cases they were in part replacing Yankee women and families whose own social circumstances and opportunities were shifting after the protests of the 1830s and the depression of the early 1840s. Facing poorer wages and harsher working conditions in textile mills than their mothers or elder sisters had twenty years earlier, fewer rural women were attracted to factory work after the mid-1840s, and mill owners sought new sources of recruits. In New England, as immigrants came to fill more jobs, older practices like the maintenance of paternalistic boardinghouses began to fall into decline, because their function of attracting single female workers from the countryside was no longer as relevant. Immigrant workers, now usually settled with their families in poorer sections of textile towns, filled the labor needs of factory owners whose original employment rationales had been adjusted to fit the subtle variations in New England rural social structures.¹⁷

But immigrants were also extending the size of the industrial labor force. The expansion of textile production in newer centers such as New Bedford and Fall River, Massachusetts, was based on manufacturers' confidence in being able to hire adequate numbers of English and Irish migrant workers to staff large mills. At Fall River by 1850, immigrants represented 59 percent of factory operatives and manual laborers. A comparable pattern emerged after mid-century in the Midwestern regions whose native-born settlers had come largely from the Northeast. In Chicago and other towns, manufacturers were much less likely to recruit women workers than had their predecessors in New England; male workers, many of them immigrants, came to dominate Midwestern industrial workforces.

Nevertheless, even in the new context, mill and factory owners continued to rely on means of recruitment and employment that were

rooted in the family and household patterns of their workers. Kinship and local networks still influenced recruitment as existing workers ensured that cousins or sisters came to the notice of foremen and were hired on, usually to be trained to the task by their more experienced friends or relatives. French Canadians migrating to work in large Maine and New Hampshire textile mills built patterns of recruitment and family support that often included leaving children behind in the care of grandparents or other relatives in Quebec. By the same token, immigrant workers were slower to penetrate areas of employment where existing family structures still supported work patterns. In the 1850s in the eastern Massachusetts shoemaking industry, for example, based in towns such as Lynn, Haverhill, and Walpole, employers still relied heavily on women working in rural households to bind shoe uppers for finishing by male workers in central shops. Rates of employment of immigrants in shoemaking consequently remained lower than in textiles until after the Civil War, when the various stages of production came increasingly to be concentrated in factories. In metals and machinery trades, too, like those in southwestern Connecticut, employment remained dominated for the time being by native-born, skilled workers and by farm families doing tasks on a by-employment basis. The links between existing social and household structures and labor organization in particular industries helped determine their accessibility to immigrant workers.

Nativism and Cultural Conflict

TO A large degree, immigrant workers filled positions that had been vacated by native-born workers or created by the rapid expansion of manufacturing as the economy recovered from depression in the mid-1840s. Boston's population alone rose by an average of five thousand a year throughout mid-century. The demands for new construction and other activities that accompanied this growth helped expand employment in the city. Although there were exceptions, conflicts between native-born and immigrant communities in the 1840s and 1850s tended to arise not directly from employment issues, but over wider cultural, religious, and political differences.¹⁸

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Protestant New England, in particular, had long nursed suspicions of Roman Catholicism, rooted in the fierce religious divisions in seventeenth-century England that had fostered the English Revolution and prompted the Puritan migration to North America. Fears of Catholic subversion of the British monarchy became, in eighteenth-century America, qualms about government tyranny and then, through the Revolution, concern over foreign interference with the affairs of the republic. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, virulent anti-Catholic literature from England, which appeared following Catholic emancipation there in 1829, circulated in American evangelical circles and helped fan smoldering resentments into hatred. Targets of anti-Catholic bigotry included newly established and growing communities of Irish immigrants and, notoriously, a convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, that in 1834 was burned to the ground by a Protestant mob. Further episodes over the next two decades exacerbated the conflict.

Rivalries between Protestant and Catholic fire companies and other civic organizations in Philadelphia fueled serious riots in the early 1840s, including one in 1844 in which churches were destroyed, numbers of people were killed, and military force was required to restore order. The arrival of large numbers of Irish Catholic immigrants, soon followed by the migration of Germans, some half of whom were Catholics, also altered the balance of religious affiliation in some areas and introduced debates over schooling and cultural differences to the politics of several states. Just at the time Northeastern states were introducing common school systems to provide universal elementary education, controversy broke out with the Catholic church over the obligation of Catholic families to use these schools and the right to set up a parallel network of parochial schools that would emphasize Catholic teachings. Schooling debates rocked the politics of New York and Pennsylvania; the 1844 Philadelphia riot had been provoked by Protestant fury at an allegation that the Catholic bishop had disparaged the King James version of the Bible, which many Protestants took literally to be the Word of God.

There was also a growing and long-running divide over alcohol. Although it was not mapped precisely on religious differences, this became an index of cultural persuasion. The evangelical revivals had fostered voluntary movements for temperance that won widespread support (if not always observance), particularly in rural areas. The labor radicalism of

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the 1830s and the slump following the 1837 panic had prompted many Protestant workingmen to sponsor efforts for total abstinence. The Washington Total-Abstinence Societies that spread rapidly in some cities and rural working communities from 1840 on represented a strong assertion of the view that social equity would proceed from self-discipline and self-restraint. As the depression faded and the Washingtonians lost some of their influence, evangelical-backed efforts to secure legal curbs on alcohol consumption gathered weight. Cultural issues of law and self-control become linked with the political anxieties prompted by the growth of Catholicism.¹⁹

The influx of large numbers of immigrants had led political parties to organize newly arrived men to vote. Except in Rhode Island, where property qualifications for voting still applied, poverty was not a hindrance to the enfranchisement of new citizens. Democrats, especially in the larger towns and cities, were quick to enroll immigrants as citizens and obtain their votes. The newcomers became an important part of the Democratic power base, often to the fury of Whig opponents who disdained such approaches or expressed frustration at the effects on their political influence. Controversy over measures to restrain the sale and consumption of alcohol reflected allegiances in many localities. Although there were Catholic temperance advocates and organizations as well as Irish and German temperance societies, these could be a minority in their own communities. Democrats, often supported by Irish or German Catholic voters, largely opposed curbs on drinking while the currency of unpleasant stereotypes, particularly of Irish fondness for the bottle, helped fuel Protestant and Whig support for restrictions. From the mid-1840s on, conflicts over alcohol and other issues provoked virulent nativist sentiment among some urban and rural Protestant voters, who urged a longer qualification time for citizenship and conjured up visions of a political system manipulated by priest-led Catholic voters. For a period in the mid-1850s in the Northeast and parts of the Midwest, nativism attained statewide and even national prominence in the temporary success of the American (or Know-Nothing) party, though its efforts to restrict the citizenship and voting rights of immigrant men largely failed.

In larger towns and in the rural Midwest, religion, cultural attitudes, and political allegiances were important aspects of social division as

some Protestants sought to make temperance and related values a test of "Americanism" and to restrain or exclude alternative influences. From their perspective, the measure of immigrants' entitlement to participation in politics and culture was the extent of "assimilation" to the norms they claimed as traditional. But many immigrants sought to achieve American citizenship and the loyalties it entailed while also identifying with other religious or cultural traditions. In matters of religion, schooling, and political allegiances—especially to the Democratic party—they wanted to be part of the national fabric without abandoning their own loyalties to community or principle.

Urbanization and Urban Society

ETHNIC TENSIONS also played out against the background of important shifts in the native-born white populations of the North following the Panic of 1837. Aspects of these changes, most visible in towns, were related to the functions and emerging power of urban centers in the national economy. The displacement caused by the panic and depression helped fuel greater migrations to cities and towns from rural localities where livelihoods became harder to sustain. Rural migrants thus joined the streams of European migrants who were swelling urban populations from 1840 on.

The consequent rapid growth of towns and cities transformed parts of the Northeast. In 1790 between 5 and 10 percent of the region's population had lived in urban areas (defined as settlements of 2,500 or more inhabitants). By 1850 this proportion had reached 38 percent in Massachusetts; even in New York State, with its massive rural interior, the figure rose to 19 percent. Ten years later, Massachusetts' proportion had reached 60 percent, New York's 39 percent, and Connecticut's 27 percent; in Rhode Island, the most urbanized state, two-thirds of the population lived in towns.

Towns and cities fulfilled a range of functions, usually shaped by their location and their surrounding regional economies. The port cities of the East Coast remained the chief points of U.S. contact with the Atlantic economy, while Midwestern cities like Cincinnati and Louisville emerged as conduits and suppliers to expanding frontier settlements. As

commerce, both internal and external, grew, cities became increasingly important centers for coordinating and handling transactions. In many cases, that coordination included the processing of primary materials into manufactures, so that most large urban areas also became manufacturing centers. In towns like Pittsburgh, where ironworking and other metals trades expanded on the confluence of demand from East and West, manufacturing played a predominant role in the city's economy. Philadelphia's relative decline in commercial importance was more than balanced by the growth of manufacturing there, and the city remained strong in textiles and other long-standing major trades. Boston's involvement in textile production, as noted, was more tangential; in New England this sector was dominated by dispersed rural mill sites and by growing specialist manufacturing towns. But Boston's own manufacturing activities expanded in a range of areas that involved coordinating or supplying a growing demand from wealthy and middling households. New York and its smaller neighbor Brooklyn expanded rapidly on the growth of overseas trade and domestic production, forging large manufacturing centers in clothing, printing, and other trades while also emerging as the nation's leading financial and commercial center.

Commercial connections with their hinterlands and market zones were central to the functions of all cities, and regional economies became the chief determinants of their size and structure. Generally speaking, the larger the city, the more varied were the occupations of the people who lived there or visited. Most striking was the extraordinary range of activity. On New York's Broadway in 1856, Walt Whitman observed the passing of a day's crowd and its succession of different social groups. First came early-morning delivery carts, then construction workers who set out at 5 a.m., then "shop-girls, chatty and laughing or outworn and weary" heading "to many a bindery and tailor-shop, to attics and back-rooms innumerable." They were succeeded by clerks, who were in turn followed by "their employers, merchants and money traders," the last to head to work. During the day the street filled with a kaleidoscope of passersby: women promenading in town, and a mass of beggars, gamblers, paperboys, dandies, glass menders, tradesmen, country louts, policemen, militia companies, funerals—all surging up and down the wide street "in an undistinguishable and hopeless confusion." From their docksides and warehouses to their main streets and

manufacturing districts, cities presented a picture of continual bustle and movement. City growth added to this impression. Between 1830 and 1870, for example, and within the 1830 boundaries of their city, Bostonians built more than sixteen thousand new dwellings, more than trebling the area's housing stock and averaging almost eight new houses a week throughout the period.²⁰

One tradition in social studies has been to portray cities as unstable environments in which individuals remain strangers to one another. On the face of it, the restlessness of urban populations would seem to underscore that view. Historians have confirmed the impression of contemporary observers that cities were places of great movement. Individuals traveled in and out at astounding rates; persistence over extended periods was often limited, and when combined with the comings and goings of traders and visitors, the populations of cities like Boston could appear to turn over completely within relatively short periods. In comparison with the seemingly less anonymous countryside, cities appeared as centers of social distance and remoteness for those who lived in them.

But it is important to qualify this impression that cities were merely agglomerations of strangers. Patterns of social connections within them were often strong, just as they were in the countryside. Churches, voluntary organizations, and work activities all created networks within which individuals and families developed and maintained ties. Migrants to cities from the countryside often had contacts or family connections they followed and sustained, and many overseas immigrants established similar contacts. Migrants from home and abroad often followed common patterns in the evolution of their urban experience. Boardinghouses, many of them specializing in particular ethnicities or regional groups, were a frequent first recourse for single men or families moving into a city. Contacts might then be made with co-workers, and housing arranged by groups of unrelated men or families connected with occupation or workplace. Urban experience was often shaped by previous circumstances. A group of emigrants from an estate in County Clare in Ireland sustained rental accommodations in one of New York's poorest neighborhoods as they adapted to life in the city and continued to use their older social ties as a means of mutual cooperation and support. According to one observer, "whole streets in East Boston were the domains

of towns or groups of towns in Maine or New Hampshire," from which migrants had arrived to work in the neighborhood's shipyards.²¹

Local attachments of this kind played a significant role in town formation. They also figured in the creation of suburbs at the edges of cities, which became communities not just of residences but of local occupations and services that recreated urban functions on a smaller scale, geographically distinct from city centers. The village of Jamaica Plain on the outskirts of Boston, for example, between 1840 and 1850 shifted from being predominantly a farming community to a suburban area as its agricultural population fell from two-thirds to one-third of the total. But a recent study of this shift also noted the mixture of middle-class, artisan, and laboring occupations that grew up there in the process, and the lending patterns and networks of association, including taverns and voluntary organizations, that emerged.²²

Even so, just because they were not always anonymous places did not mean that cities were models of friendly egalitarianism. Harsh living conditions and social divisions made them highly unequal, more so than nonslave rural regions and as much (in a purely quantitative sense) as many plantation districts. Wealth distribution was more uneven in urban areas than in most rural regions, so as urban populations expanded, inequality grew with them. In the United States as a whole in 1860, the richest 1 percent of the population controlled 29 percent of total personal wealth. In urban areas, however, the top 1 percent owned 45 percent of total wealth. This discrepancy in part reflected the commercial and exchange functions of towns and cities: part of the wealth held there was controlled by the movers and shakers among their commercial elites. But the discrepancy also reflected the depths of poverty and lack of resources among portions of the urban populations.

In Boston, 1 percent of the population held 65 percent of aggregate wealth recorded in tax lists in 1860, and the richest 10 percent held more than 95 percent of recorded wealth. The remaining 5 percent of wealth was held by the middling 40 percent of the population, and the bottom half of the city's population had none at all. Although tax records are, for various reasons, imperfect reflections of wealth distribution, they offer a rough indication of the ways property and resources were owned. Across the U.S. population as a whole in 1860, about 30 percent of free nonfarming men owned real estate—usually the homes

they lived in; a similar proportion held true in four medium-sized cities studied by Michael Katz. In larger East Coast cities, however, the proportions were usually smaller than this. In Philadelphia about 13 percent of men owned their own homes, and in crowded, poorer city neighborhoods the proportion could be much smaller. In New York City's Fourteenth Ward in 1850, for example, only 125 of 3,700 household heads (3.3 percent) owned any real estate at all. Various studies also suggest that native-born urban dwellers were more likely to own property than immigrants. In Boston in 1860, 46 percent of New England-born residents were taxed on some real or personal estate, considerably higher than the 31 percent for the city's population as a whole. In-migrants from other regions, and particularly the foreign-born, had lower rates of access to wealth and property.

Those with little or no access to property usually lived in overcrowded, mean, often unsanitary conditions. Early public health reports on East Coast cities like Boston drew attention to the serious health hazards of poor, packed, insalubrious tenements, the apartments often crammed into small spaces in back courts with little access to air, light, and water. Mortality data suggest that adult death rates rose between 1840 and 1860 as poor urban populations increased and harsh disease environments probably grew too. Infant mortality rates in cities were also considerably higher than in most rural areas. In the Northeast, urban fertility rates rose above those in the countryside, largely as a reflection of the size of urban immigrant populations among whom fertility had yet to begin falling. Across American society, mean life expectancy and the average heights of adults—further measures of a population's well-being—both declined in the period while the share of the population receiving some kind of assistance rose by 76 percent in the 1850s. Even in sound financial times, urban poverty reached significant levels. In Boston during 1853, a good year for business, 26,000 people were on some kind of poor relief, including one in ten of all children under fourteen. The following year, 1854, marked a brief period of depression. Philadelphia officials estimated that 700 people were begging on the city's streets, which were also home to some 1,800 vagrant children.²³

Low wages for male laborers and fluctuations in the availability of much unskilled employment accentuated these conditions. While labor

advocates and middle-class ideology fostered the ideal of the "family wage," with which a male breadwinner could support his family without assistance from other members, this was an unreal prospect for most working-class men and women. Women and children were usually involved in income-earning activities as part of or in addition to their household responsibilities: taking in outwork sewing for clothing manufacturers, or operating their homes as boardinghouses for other laborers and their families. Taking in lodgers and boarders often fitted with other household obligations for women and provided more regular income than could be obtained by taking on wage work outside the home. The demand for and supply of boarding places in working-class households contributed to the crowding of many urban neighborhoods. But women also undertook a whole variety of functions, from working as domestic servants and laundresses to running their own eating places or other small businesses that sold goods.

Class Divisions

THE CONTRASTS between these circumstances of the poor and the vast wealth of the larger cities' richest citizens attracted the notice of writers skeptical of the directions urban life was taking. Exponents of the wage system trumpeted the opportunities for saving that careful and economical living could achieve for poor people, and the press repeatedly published examples of men and women who had saved out of their earnings. But when a Dedham, Massachusetts, newspaper claimed in 1847 that a woman factory worker there had worked for forty years and accumulated two or three thousand dollars in savings, the New York editor Walt Whitman exclaimed: "To be shut up in a cotton prison for forty years—only to support life during that time, and save a paltry pittance at the end of it!" Manufacturers, he pointed out, could "make" that kind of sum in a week. Philadelphian George Lippard, writing in his 1864 novel about New York, *The Empire City*, noted the contrast between its "huts and palaces," often directly juxtaposed, where "lofty mansions and miserable huts stand near each other." "The great wealth of the great city," Lippard declared, "was only a Golden Shroud, mocking the misery and wretchedness which it could not hide."²⁴

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In the 1840s journalists seeking to measure and report on the wealth and influence of their cities' richest residents established a tradition of subjecting urban elites to critical appraisal. Awareness of the existence of great fortunes was emerging in the boom and bust of the 1830s and 1840s, and as elite groups such as the families who dominated Boston society, or who rivaled one another for control in New York, grew more prominent. The term "millionaire" was first coined around 1840; Moses Yale Beach, who compiled a collective biography of wealthy New Yorkers, estimated that the city already had 10 of them in 1845, and the number would grow to around 115 by 1860. Beach, with his contemporaries in other cities, traced the origins of these and smaller fortunes to the commercial, financial, and industrial activities that were either centered in the cities or fostered by them.

These journalists sought to understand whether wealth had been generated by self-made men who struggled up from poverty, and in many cases they found this to be so. But they also noted two other phenomena that gave them pause in contemplating the future of a supposedly egalitarian republican society. One was the influence of inheritance, the other was the effect of rising real estate values as cities grew. In an 1846 compilation on the holdings of Philadelphians with estates of \$50,000 or more, 121 of 942 individuals for whom details were available were listed as having wealth derived wholly or partly from real estate. In New York, Moses Beach wrote of the nation's richest man, John Jacob Astor (whose wealth he put at \$25 million), that though his operations in the fur trade and other businesses had certainly been valuable, "the greatest source of his wealth has resulted from the increased value of real estate consequent on the continued growth of the city." Astor had landholdings in frontier Missouri, Wisconsin, and Iowa, but New York City property was his greatest investment. By buying up the mortgages of others held on city land, Beach claimed, Astor could benefit both from the rise in values and from frequent foreclosures for nonpayment. Abner Forbes and J. W. Greene, in their 1851 compilation on the wealthy of Massachusetts, concluded that "many of [Boston's] existing fortunes have been created without the slightest effort, or participation even, on the part of the present holders, by the rise in the value of real estate."²⁵

Other commentators noted or lamented the apparent effects of increasing class divisions. Churches and other organizations that had once

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catered to constituencies across class were criticized when they appeared to step toward greater exclusivity. Reverend Stephen Olin, the president of Wesleyan University, condemned the rich of New York and other towns in 1846 for constructing new, "magnificent churches in which sittings are too expensive for any but people of fortune." "Instead of associating themselves with their more humble fellow Christians, where their money as well as their influence and counsels are so much needed," Olin charged, they were intent on creating comfortable places of worship that owed more to the standards of the wealthy drawing room than the tradition of Christian egalitarianism. Observers of the Astor Place theater riot of 1849, in which a New York crowd protested the presence of an English rival to a popular American actor, saw it as a symbol of social division. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* claimed that the riot revealed "an opposition of classes" between elitists and the majority, that "leaves behind . . . a feeling that there is now in our country . . . what every good patriot has hitherto considered it his duty to deny—a *high* class and a *low* class." Successive riots in the city in the 1850s were often blamed on the poor, but in 1855 the editor Horace Greeley attacked the rich for their greed, and New York's populist mayor, Fernando Wood, provoked outrage among the wealthy in 1857 when he asserted that "those who produce everything get nothing, and those who produce nothing get everything."²⁶

A New Middle Class

BUT WHILE divisions between rich and poor grew wider in the 1840s and 1850s, they were masked to some extent by the continued expansion of the modestly prosperous proprietary, professional, and trade groups that made up the urban and small-town middle class. During the 1850s the prominent Massachusetts editor Samuel Bowles, of the *Springfield Republican*, wrote of "the great middling interest class," who "work with their hands, who live and act independently, who hold the stakes of home and family, of farm and workshop, of education and freedom." He urged them to oppose the Northern "aristocrats" and Southern slaveholders who constituted the nation's wealthy elites. Yet Bowles's appeal to a group who "work with their hands . . . and act independently" was

only a partial description of the composition of this class in the aftermath of the Panic of 1837. Bowles's language harked back to an earlier phase in which direct "producers" were their own proprietors and could be contrasted with "nonproducers." Many such people did, of course, still exist. But by mid-century the middle class was also being augmented with new groups whose relationships to manual work and skill, and to proprietary ownership, were subtly different from those of previous decades.²⁷

The ranks of "professional men," especially lawyers, physicians, and the clergy, had expanded steadily since the Revolution. While there were about 1,800 clergymen in 1800, for example, by 1845 there were almost 40,000 who more or less formally occupied the roles of pastors or preachers. But it was the expansion of commerce that produced the most notable growth in the numbers of nonmanual, nonproprietary workers. When in 1826 the Philadelphia printer Mathew Carey published advice to European emigrants who were contemplating moving to the United States, he suggested that such nonmanual workers would find little opportunity because their places were already taken up with Americans. Laborers who crossed the Atlantic would find work in plenty, Carey suggested, building roads and canals, but shopkeepers and clerks should be discouraged from migrating because "there is at all times a superabundance" of such people. As cities and towns grew, however, their commercial activities recruited larger numbers of clerks and functionaries. The 1840 Census counted more than 57,000 retail stores in the United States, of which almost 58 percent were in New England and the Mid-Atlantic region. But many "middling" occupations were dominated by small proprietors who, until the Panic of 1837, expanded along with inflationary prosperity and with confidence in their standing as "independent" republican citizens.²⁸

The events of the 1830s and 1840s by no means eliminated this group, and they continued to accumulate in numbers and social significance. But two circumstances helped alter the composition of the middle class. First, a reorganization of capital that began with the emergence of new railroads, factories, and financial systems in the 1830s increased demand for clerical and equivalent types of labor that were not manual crafts but were mainly hired rather than independent in status. The effects of the 1837 panic speeded these institutional shifts, particu-

larly in the North, emphasizing the role of corporations and large investors, and introducing commercial innovations such as credit reporting and new accounting methods. Second, the panic's upheavals, and the many bankruptcies it triggered, undermined the confidence of some independent proprietors that they could sustain their own way in business. Failure rates remained high after the early 1840s. Some contemporary accounts suggested that as many as nine of ten businesses would fail over a twenty-year period. In Columbia County, New York, between 1843 and 1849, half the businesses either failed or left the area within five years. In Hampshire County, Massachusetts, the rate of failures was lower but may still have reached 50 percent over the years between 1843 and 1861, in addition to those whose owners removed or died during the period. As recovery from the panic spread during the mid-1840s, many individuals sought more secure alternatives to self-employment. With the growing demand for employed nonmanual labor, these men and their sons emerged to supply it.²⁹

Factories required machine tenders. Railroads and other construction activities needed labor to build them and produced a heavy demand for manual workers to operate and maintain them. But all these organizations also needed administrative staff. Corporate-owned factories employed managers or agents who might or might not have investments in the business but were primarily acting on behalf of the owners, not for themselves. These men hired clerks and bookkeepers to help run the business and keep track of materials, labor, and finished goods. Railroads required managers and superintendents, station agents, clerks, train conductors, and other functionaries. Railroad companies were not only organizations of unparalleled size but by their nature were geographically dispersed in an unprecedented manner, so new business and bureaucratic methods were needed to manage them effectively.

Broader commercial developments also created demand for new types of workers. The simple expansion of banks and multiplication of mercantile firms required more clerks and officers to run and supervise them, and the quantity of such work in large cities created clerical jobs on a large scale—in brokerage firms, insurance, and other activities. In New York City by the mid-1850s, it is estimated, there were almost 14,000 mercantile clerks alone. Across New York State, meanwhile, the number of retail stores, urban and rural, had grown from an estimated

12,207 in 1840 to just over 23,000 in 1855, many of which provided clerical employment. The growth of nationwide markets in manufactured goods also produced new methods of selling and dispatching products to distant purchasers. From the 1830s to the 1850s there emerged the "drummer" or traveling salesman, whose task was to arrange for the sale of goods from manufacturers to regional wholesalers, or from wholesalers to retailers. By the eve of the Civil War there were tens of thousands of such men. In New York City by 1855, in a total population of about 630,000, about 30 percent lived in households supported by these "new middle class" occupations.³⁰

As the historian Edward Balleisen has suggested, the dangers of personal financial failure and the shattering experience of bankruptcy during the depression encouraged many men to seek salaried positions that could provide security without great financial risk. Balleisen concluded that access to such employment was "crucially influenced" by "family connections and class position." Recruitment to nonmanual employment was initially skewed toward the American-born, the sons of farmers and of urban or small-town tradesmen whose businesses were most disrupted by the 1837 panic, and who could use local knowledge or personal connections to seek out newly created jobs. Of the five sons of Elijah W. Carpenter, a physician in the rural town of Bernardston, Massachusetts, two were placed in traditional artisan apprenticeships with a firm of cabinetmakers in the nearby county seat of Greenfield. But neither of them went into the trade they had been taught. One, Edward J. Carpenter, went into business for himself as a newspaper agent and periodical dealer; his fellow apprentice and three other brothers all found work from the expanded demand for nonmanual employees, two as retail clerks and two as conductors on the New York Central Railroad. Family contacts, kinship, and neighborhood all contributed to the finding of clerical and other employment, just as they had earlier guided men and women to apprenticeships and clerical positions in stores. The result was that new immigrants, or members of ethnic groups without the same connections, were for the time being disproportionately excluded from the expansion in such work. Without the same networks of social contacts as their American-born neighbors, immigrants had to rely on finding manual wage work. The forging of ethnic divisions in a new class structure was under way.³¹

Meanwhile another group of men was using economic expansion to find more independent work for themselves in the opportunities presented by growing urban centers. Many men once bankrupted by the panic remade themselves as "brokers," dealing in a range of paper financial instruments, acting as agents for insurance companies, and handling sales of urban and suburban real estate. William Bassett of Lynn, Massachusetts, after failing as a shoe manufacturer in the early 1840s depression and trying unsuccessfully to restart as a retail grocer, reemerged as such a "broker," handling all the functions just mentioned. In Bassett's case, however, this proved to be a step toward other things. Local contacts and knowledge enabled him to run successfully for office in Lynn's new city government in the early 1850s, and to secure a salaried position as "cashier" in one of the town's banks. It was the armies of men like Bassett and the Carpenter brothers who, as clothing styles changed with shifting job functions in the mid-nineteenth century, brought about the emerging distinction between "blue collar" or manual, and "white collar" or nonmanual work—an enduring mark of class distinction in America that has lasted in language and consciousness ever since.³²

Evidence indicates that in many parts of the country these new "white-collar" workers were able to achieve a measure of prosperity and social advancement. In mid-nineteenth-century Boston, clerks were the most likely among wage-earning groups to be able to accumulate property; skilled manual workers who did so usually took longer and expended more effort. Elsewhere by 1860 a significant proportion of nonmanual employees owned some real estate, usually the houses they lived in, and many had more personal estate than many farmers. In a small town like Jacksonville, Illinois, a measure of white-collar success was the extent to which members of this group remained residents in the town over a period of years. Whereas overall persistence rates here in the 1850s were between 20 and 30 percent, men in white-collar occupations were, at 47 percent, considerably more likely than average to remain in town, and they accounted for about three in four of the men who did so.³³

As white-collar occupations demonstrated some success in providing stability and modest prosperity, so methods of gaining access to them began to evolve. Courses or curricular programs in mercantile skills had been taught in some academies and secondary schools since at least the start of the century, but the 1840s and 1850s witnessed the emergence

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of formal institutions that specialized in such training. Mercantile or business colleges sprouted in the main commercial cities. One early example was Folsom's Mercantile College, established in Cleveland, Ohio, around 1848. A few years later Folsom's formed the model for a college in Buffalo that would grow into Bryant and Stratton business colleges, a significant chain of such institutions. Among the students in Folsom's business courses in 1855 was the sixteen-year-old son of a modestly prosperous family that had lived in various rural areas and small towns in upstate New York before moving west to Cleveland in 1853. This student would demonstrate that, for an exceptional few, the new route through commercial training, clerkships, and into business partnership could lead toward more than prosperous security. His name was John D. Rockefeller.

Two Elites

THE EMERGENCE of a new middle class in the commercial towns of the North and Midwest was in some respects matched by a similar development in the South. In small Southern commercial centers such as Charlottesville, Virginia, and Vicksburg, Mississippi, similar patterns of mercantile clerkships and comparable occupations also grew in number and importance in the 1840s and 1850s. To some extent also, employment in new corporate concerns like railroads expanded in the South as they did elsewhere. But although the character of this expansion was similar across regions, its scale was not. Southern towns remained fewer in number and generally smaller in proportion to total population. Southern commercial enterprises and transport developments remained on a smaller scale and less thoroughly developed than in the North. The range of financial and commercial services offered by the major Northern cities was rarely matched in the South; indeed, Northern businesses made significant inroads in the handling and financing of Southern exports and imports. Just as with the smaller scale of Southern manufacturing, the more modest size of the Southern white-collar middle class reflected key differences in social structures between the regions.³⁴

Central to those differences were patterns of elite power and authority. Crucial to those patterns, in turn, was the availability of labor

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and—since agriculture and rural occupations continued to predominate in the South—labor's relationship particularly to the land. Slaveholders in the South controlled labor that produced profits and wealth for them directly from the cultivation of crops. Most slaveholders owned only one or a handful of slaves, but the minority of larger slaveholders who established and ran plantations emerged as the chief figures in the economies and politics of the slave states. Their ownership and control of slaves gave planters the means both to be the only significant group in American society to make large profits directly from cultivation, and the only important landed group to exercise effective political influence in their own states and in national government. Even in areas of the South where slavery was relatively weak, the ethos of a planter aristocracy could hold sway. The Ohioan William Cooper Howells, whose family moved across the Ohio River to Wheeling, Virginia, in the mid-1830s, recollected that even though there were only fifty or so slaves in the town, "the old slaveholding families exerted a great deal of control over the place, and they affected [i.e., copied] the manner and prejudices of the slaveholding part of the state." In plantation districts, both in older and newer-settled parts of the South, this control by slaveholders was even more palpable.

Outside slave-plantation regions the relationships between landownership, labor, and power were different from those enjoyed by planters. Because their access to labor power was limited and their ability to cultivate land therefore more subject to constraints, most family farmers were not able to generate great prosperity from farming. Farming remained a combination of a business and a way of life that was sustained less by its lucrativeness than by the hope and belief that it could provide comfort and security for farm families and their offspring. As had been true since the colonial period, wealth and power evolved in nonslave regions not from the direct control of the land and its production but in the shipping, processing, and marketing of farm products, in the sale of goods to farm families in return, and in the financing and organizing of the range of commercial and other functions that complemented the farm economy. Successful creation of wealth in the North and Midwest lay to some extent in profits from the trading-up of land prices during the course of settlement, but in the long run it derived to a greater degree from shipping, transporting, and supplying goods than

from growing crops. While slave regions' elites were planters, in non-slave regions they were merchants, bankers, in some cases manufacturers, and in many cases the lawyers who constructed the commercial system and worked at making it function. Although the mid-century economist Henry C. Carey could assert that "the landowners of the world are the great capitalists," and "the exchangers are the small ones," he quickly noted that it was the "exchangers . . . and their machinery [who] absorb the chief part of the profits of the land." As Langdon Byllesby had remarked in the 1820s, middlemen seemed to receive a disproportionately large share of profits from the labor of others. Just as slaveowners in the South profited from the work of their slaves, commercial elites in the North profited from the productions of multitudes of farm families and small craft producers.³⁵

These different means of earning profits also created different relationships to political power. In the South, the historian Francis Parkman would write in the 1860s, the "slave oligarch" was taught to hold and defend his "place of power and peril" by participating in both political and economic leadership. In the North and Midwest this connection between wealth and politics was weaker. By the time of de Tocqueville's tour of the United States in the early 1830s, it appeared that a substantial divorce between economic and political leadership had taken place in Northern states. Most merchants and financiers, Tocqueville suggested, did not participate directly in politics. Instead, lawyers had emerged as a group who frequently took their places in political institutions, and with the emergence of well-organized party politics were often represented in an emerging group of professional politicians. Parkman, who identified himself with the social elites of Northeastern cities, followed Tocqueville in noting that wealth and politics had become separated. "[T]he best instructed classes," Parkman claimed, were distinct from the "swarm of professed politicians," whom he looked down upon and distrusted. Drawing on an argument that reached back through Tocqueville to the Federalists of the turn of the century, Parkman asserted that in the North, "worth and character had withdrawn from public life," leaving it to be conducted by "mediocrity." Other contemporaries reflected on this perception. "Whoever may hold the reins of power," claimed *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, a leading commercial journal, in 1856, merchants "really rule. . . . The counting-house should be

conscious of its nobility, and . . . zealously labor . . . to compel all the world to acknowledge the virtue and value of its lessons."³⁶

Two Paths to Growth

NOT ONLY did the two kinds of elite groups—South and North—have different relationships to labor and politics, they also came to hold different notions of economic development. Since Hamilton's financial plan of the early 1790s and the fierce disputes of that decade over the desirability of closer trade links with Britain or with France, political opinions had divided over economic policies and over government's role in economic life. Advocates of a more interventionist, developmental process, associated with the "American system" of the Kentucky politician Henry Clay, had crystallized in the 1830s into the Whig party. Exponents of greater laissez-faire, of downplaying federal involvement in the economy, and of emerging provincial commercial elites, were from the 1820s to the 1840s often aligned with the Jacksonian Democratic party. Although there was a greater degree of Democratic support in the South and a greater degree of Whig adherence in the Northeast, party affiliations around these elements of developmental policy crossed sectional and social divisions before the mid-1840s. There were many planter Whigs and more Northern merchant Democrats. During the 1840s, however, a crucial realignment of political allegiances was becoming apparent. As we shall see in the next chapter, this realignment was primarily connected with the emerging debates over slavery. But it had other dimensions too, not least because slave and nonslave regions and their respective elites were beginning to reach differing views on other aspects of the nation's economic and political development. These views, also rooted in elites' relationships to slavery, labor, and commerce, helped align divisions over slavery itself, and slavery's extension, with divisions over national policies for the extension of the economy.

Among the early observers of this debate, the Pennsylvania economist Henry C. Carey in the late 1840s put his finger on some of the critical consequences of having slave and nonslave societies operating in parallel under the same political system. Carey's argument was not at first directly concerned with slavery, but he noted in 1847 that there

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were distinctions between economic trends that led, on one hand, to the dispersal of settlements over the landscape, and, on the other, to what he called the "concentration" of social and economic activities. Dispersal was generated by the tendency of agricultural-based societies to occupy larger and larger areas of land. Both the desire among farm families for land for legacies to provide to their children, and planters' search for land that could be worked by their slaves, created an expansive pressure that resulted in the distribution of population over wide areas and the dispersion of economic activity. Concentration, which Carey favored, was accomplished by the more intensive cultivation of land, by the diversification of activities in farming regions, and by the close connection between farming, manufacturing, and commerce that he argued would best foster prosperity. Recognizing a mounting tension between these two paths to economic growth, Carey sought to promote what he called a "harmony of interests" between agriculture, industry, and commerce.³⁷

As events would turn out, however, the interests of America's two principal elite groups, Southern planters and Northern merchants, would continue to generate tension between these two approaches to growth. By 1854, Henry Carey himself would associate expansion and concentration directly with regional differences: "Northern men seek no enlargement of territory, but they desire to render productive what they have. . . . Southern men seek additions to their territory, but they do not seek to render productive what they have." While planters continued to promote the concept of extensive development across the land, many members of commercial elites came to favor policies that would promote the more intensive development of existing regions, hence increasing their productivity and potential commercial profitability. During the late 1840s and 1850s these divisions over patterns of economic development became associated with divisions, first, about national expansion and, second, about slavery itself. In the process, the differences between elites and between patterns of economic growth became instruments of regional and sectional division.³⁸

✧ CHAPTER 6 ✧

From Regional Differences to Sectional Divide

THE TRANS-APPALACHIAN population of the United States, which had already reached 2.4 million in 1820, continued to grow rapidly, to some 15 million by 1860. The calculated geographical center of U.S. population, which in 1820 had lain about forty miles from Washington, D.C., by 1860 was in Pike County, in southeastern Ohio. Henry C. Carey's writings after 1847, advocating economic consolidation and diversification, appeared in the context of a sharp national debate over this expansionism.

The 1844 presidential election took place as the American leaders of independent Texas, strongly influenced by the republic's slaveholding planters, were petitioning for admission to the Union as a state. Many New Englanders and upper Midwesterners, including supporters of the abolition movement, opposed Texas annexation on the grounds that it would add a slaveholding state and potentially increase the power of the South in national affairs. The Whig party's candidate for the presidency, Henry Clay of Kentucky, also opposed annexation and had the support of considerable numbers of mercantile and financial leaders who favored curbing the Union's territorial expansion. Carey's arguments for consolidation, and for the more intensive development of existing U.S. territory, were directed partly at this group who, as merchants rather than landholders, were likely to benefit more from an intensification of production and markets than from the continued expansion of low-density,