**Chapter Ten**

**Making of Middle Class America**

**I**n May 12, 1831, two French aristocrats, Alexis de Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont, arrived in New York City from Le Havre. They came, as Tocqueville explained, "to see what a great republic is like."

Tocqueville and Beaumont were perhaps the most insightful of dozens of Europeans who visited the United States in the early nineteenth century to study the 11 natives." Their visit, for example, overlapped with that of Frances Trollope, whose Domestic Manners of Americans (1834) advised English readers that Americans were just as uncouth as they had imagined. A decade later Charles Dickens made what by then had become for foreigners an almost obligatory pass through this crude outpost of civilization, before publishing his report on his "sharp dealing" cousins in American Notes (1842).

**Tocqueville and Beaumont in America**

Unlike Trollope and Dickens, Tocqueville and Beaumont believed that Europe was passing from its aristocratic past into a democratic future. How better to prepare for the change, they believed, than by studying the United States, where democracy was already the "enduring and normal state" of the land. They traveled from New York to Boston, then back through New York in order to inspect the state prison at Auburn, then on to Ohio. They examined conditions on the frontier in Michigan Territory, then sailed down the Mississippi River to New Orleans, where they heard an opera good enough to make them imagine they were back in France. From New Orleans they went on to "semi-barbarous" Alabama before turning north to Washington. They sailed for

France from New York on February 20, 1832. All told, they had met and interviewed some 250 individuals, ranking from President Jackson-Beaumont insisted on referring to Old Hickory as "Monsieur"-to a number of Chippewa Indians.

It had indeed been a "useful" trip for the two Frenchmen. Above all else, the visit provided the material for Tocqueville's classic De la Democratie en Amerique, published in France in 1835 and a year later in an English translation. Democracy in America has been the starting point for virtually all subsequent writers who have tried to describe what Tocqueville called "the creative elements" of American institutions.

**Tocqueville in Judgment**

The gist of Democracy in America is contained in the book's first sentence: "No novelty in the United States struck me more vividly during my stay there than the equality of conditions." Tocqueville meant not that Americans lived in a state of total equality, but that the inequalities that did exist among white Americans were not enforced by institutions or supported by public opinion. Moreover, the inequalities paled when compared with those of Europe. "In America," he concluded, "men are nearer equality than in any other country in the world."

 The circumstances of one's birth meant little, one's education less, and one's intelligence scarcely anything. Economic differences, although real and certainly "paraded" by those who enjoyed "a preeminence of wealth," were transitory. "Such wealth," Tocqueville assured his readers, "is within reach of all."

These sweeping generalizations were simplification. Few modern students of Jacksonian America would accept them without qualification. In the 1830s and 1840s, a wide and growing gap existed between the rich and poor in the eastern cities. The wealthiest 4 percent of the population of New York controlled about half the city's wealth in 1828, about two-thirds in 1845. A similar concentration of wealth was occurring in Philadelphia and Boston.

Moreover, there was substantial poverty in Jacksonian America. Particularly in the cities, bad times forced many unskilled laborers and their families into dire poverty. Tocqueville took little notice of such inequalities. He also had little interest in how industrialization and urbanization were affecting society. When he did take notice of working conditions, he remarked that wages were higher in America than in Europe and the cost of living was lower.

Despite his blind spots, Tocqueville realized that America was undergoing some fundamental social changes. These changes, he wrote, were being made by "an innumerable crowd who are . . . not exactly rich nor yet quite poor [and who] have enough property to want order and not enough to excite envy." In his notes he put it even more succinctly: "The whole society seems to have turned into one middle class."

**A Restless People**

"In America, men never stay still," Tocqueville noted; "Something is almost always provisional about their lives." Frances Trollope thought their "incessant bustling" of a piece with their eating too fast and spitting too often. It stemmed from their "universal pursuit of money," she claimed.

One reason Americans seemed continually on the move was that every year there were more of them. The first federal census in 1790 recorded that there were 3.9 million people in the country. In the early 1850s there were six times as many. The population was doubling every 22 years, just about what Franklin had predicted in 1751.

Yet by European standards, even the settled parts of the United States were sparsely populated in the 1830s and 1840s. But for people accustomed to the wide open spaces, the presence of more than a handful of neighbors was reason enough for moving on. Abraham Lincoln's father Thomas (1778-1851) was typical. He grew up in Kentucky, pioneered in Indiana, and died in Illinois.

The urge to move had an urban dimension as well. For every "young man" who followed the advice of the New York newspaperman Horace Greeley to "go West," several young men and women went instead to town. By the tens of thousands they exchanged the rigors of farming for the uncertain risks and rewards of city life. Boston had 40,000 residents in 1820, nearly 140,000 in 1850. Philadelphia grew even more rapidly, from just under 100,000 in 1820 to almost 400,000 in 1850. New York, which had forged ahead of Philadelphia around 1810, grew from 125,000 in 1820 to more than 500,000 in 1850.

In 1820 the Northeast contained 5 cities with populations above 25,000 and 13 with populations above 10,000. Thirty years later, 26 cities had more than 25,000 residents and 62 had more than 10,000. Although the Old Northwest remained primarily agricultural, its towns grew as fast as its farms. Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Louisville, and Lexington attracted settlers in such numbers that by 1850 all but Lexington had populations of over 35,000.

The trek to town that was transforming the Northeast did not occur in the South. There were four cities of respectable size in the region-Mobile, Savannah, Charleston, and Baltimore-and one large city, New Orleans, which had a population of 120,000 in 1850. Neither Virginia nor North Carolina had an urban center of even modest dimensions. Charleston, the oldest and most typically southern city, scarcely grew at all after 1830.

**Off to Work**

"It is as if all America were but one gigantic workshop," the Austrian Francis Grund remarked in 1838. However enlightening to European readers, the fact that practically all Americans worked for their living must have struck Americans as a blinding glimpse of the obvious. Ever since John Smith's assurances to the Jamestown settlers that if they did not work they would not eat, they had always done the one to assure themselves of the other. What was changing in the 1830s was that they worked outside their homes.

In 1820, despite the growth of cities, three out of every four Americans were still engaged in agriculture. An efficient farming family used the labor of all its members, with chores assigned according to age, strength, and experience. Parents, children, and sometimes grandparents lived in the same house, or in adjoining houses. Except on large southern plantations run by overseers, farming remained a family enterprise.

By 1850, however, fewer than two out of three workers were farmers; in Massachusetts it was one of three. Outside the South, the way people earned a living had been transformed. Until the 1820s and 1830s, the household was also the focus of most nonagricultural pursuits. The typical urban worker was a self-employed artisan who had been apprenticed to a master while still a lad. After five to seven years of training, he became a journeyman and began to earn wages. Eventually, if he was reasonably talented, frugal, and industrious, he could open a shop of his own.

Because an apprentice lived and worked under the same roof as his master and his family, it was natural for the master to have familial as well as occupational authority over him. So intertwined did the life of an apprentice and his master become that the words employee and employer do not describe the' relationship accurately. Apprentices were sometimes exploited and even physically abused, but just as often strong, personal bonds developed.

Forced reliance on domestically manufactured goods during the embargo and the War of 1812 and the improvements in transportation that were steadily taking place in the 1820s and 1830s prompted many master craftsmen and artisans to expand production. They took on more workers, in some cases as apprentices, more often as relatively unskilled wage earners. Work was broken down into separate simple tasks that the unskilled help could learn easily. As a business grew bigger and the division of labor became more complex, the master-turned-businessman spent less time working with his employees and more marketing the product. Elaborate rules evolved regulating the hours of labor and the on-the-job behavior of workers. Drinking on the job, which in an earlier day had been considered normal and even desirable, was by 1850 almost universally forbidden.

Larger operations required more work space, and the need to locate near suppliers, customers, or a source of water power meant that the owner's home could no longer serve as a workplace. During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and other cities sorted themselves into commercial and residential districts. By the 1830s the shoe manufacturers of Lynn, Massachusetts, had shifted from making finely finished shoes for individual customers to mass producing the rough brogans worn by slaves and other farmers. Custom-fitted shoes required the attention of a skilled craftsman, but brogans were made by several unskilled laborers.

**The Family Recast**

The factory system and the growth of cities undermined the importance of home and family as the unit of economic production. This happened first in the cities of the Northeast, then in the West, and eventually wherever nonagricultural jobs occupied a substantial percentage of the work force. More and more people did their work in shops, in offices, or on factory floors. Whether a job was skilled or unskilled, it took the family breadwinner out of the house during working hours six days a week. The labor of the father and any children with jobs came home in the form of cash, thus at least initially in the custody of the individual earners. The social consequences of this change were enormous.

Because he was away so much, the husband had to surrender to his wife some of the power in the family that he had formerly possessed, if for no other reason than the fact that she was always there. This explains why Tocqueville concluded that "a sort of equality reigns around the domestic hearth" in America. It also explains why American men began to place women on a pedestal, presuming them to be by nature selflessly devoted to the care of others.

The new power and prestige that wives and mothers enjoyed was not obtained without cost. Because they were exercising day-to-day control over household affairs, they were expected to tend only to those affairs. Anything that might take them away from the family hearth was frowned on. Where the typical wife had formerly been a partner in a family enterprise, she now left earning a living entirely to her husband. Time spent away from home or devoted to matters unrelated to the care of husband and family was, according to the new doctrine of "separate spheres," time misappropriated.

This trend widened the gap between the middle and lower classes. For a middle class wife and mother to take a job or, still worse, to devote herself to any "frivolous" activity outside the home was considered a dereliction of duty.

Some women objected to the discrimination implicit in what has been called "the cult of true womanhood." Others escaped its more suffocating aspects by forming close friendships with other women. But most women, including such forceful proponents of women's rights as the educator Catharine Beecher and Sarah Hale, the editor of Godey's Ladies Book, subscribed in their writing to the view that a woman's place was in the home. "The formation of the moral and intellectual character of the young is committed mainly to the female hand," Beecher wrote in A Treatise on Domestic Economy for the Use of Young Ladies (1841). "The mother forms the character of the future man."

Another reason for the switch in power and influence from husbands to wives was that women began to have fewer children. People married later, probably because prospective marriage partners were becoming more choosy. On average, women began having their children two or three years later than their mothers had, and they stopped two or three years sooner.

Having fewer children led parents to value children more highly, or so it would seem from the additional time and affection they lavished on them. Here again, the mother provided most of both. Child rearing fell within her "sphere" and occupied the time that earlier generations of mothers had devoted to such tasks as weaving, sewing, and farm chores.

As families became smaller, relations within them became more caring. Parents ceased to think of their children mostly as future workers. The earlier tendency even among loving parents to keep their children at arm's length, yet within reach of the strap, gave way to more intimate relationships. Gone was the Puritan notion that children possessed "a love of what's forbid," and with it the belief that parents were responsible for crushing all juvenile resistance to their authority. In its place arose the view described by Lydia Maria Child in The Motber's Book (1831) that children "come to us from heaven, with their little souls full of innocence and peace." Bronson Alcott, another proponent of gentle child-rearing practices, banished "the rod and all its appendages" from his household, and urged other parents to follow his example.

**The Second Great Awakening**

Belief in the innate goodness of children was, of course, in direct conflict with the Calvinist doctrine of infant damnation, to which most American Protestant churches subscribed. The inclination to set aside other Calvinist tenets, such as predestination, became more pronounced as a new wave of revivalism took shape in the 1790s. This Second Great Awakening began as a counteroffensive to the deistic thinking that New England Congregationalists and southern Methodists alike identified with the French Revolution. Prominent New England ministers, who considered themselves traditionalists but also revivalists, men such as Yale's president, Timothy Dwight, and Dwight's student, the Reverend Lyman Beecher, placed less stress in their sermons on God's arbitrary power over mortals and more on the salvation of sinners because of God's mercy and "disinterested benevolence."

Calvinism came under more direct assault from Charles Grandison Finney. In 1821 Finney abandoned a promising career as a lawyer and became an itinerant preacher. His most spectacular successes occurred during a series of revivals conducted in towns along the Erie Canal, a region Finney called "the burned-over district" because it had been the site of so many revivals before his own.

Finney exhorted his listeners to take their salvation into their own hands. He insisted that people could control their own fate. He dismissed Calvinism as a "theological fiction." But the day of judgment was just around the corner; there was little time to waste. During and after Finney's efforts in Utica, New York, conversions increased sharply. In Rochester, church membership doubled in six months. Elsewhere in the country, churches were packed.

The success of the evangelists of the Second Great Awakening stemmed from the timeliness of their assault on Calvinist doctrines and even more from their methods. Finney, for example, consciously set out to be entertaining as well as edifying. The singing of hymns and the solicitation of personal testimonies provided his meetings with emotional release and human interest. Prominent among his innovations was the "anxious bench," where leading members of the community awaited the final prompting from within before coming forward to declare themselves saved.

But the impact of economic changes on family life had as important effects on the Second Awakening as did the evangelists. The growth of industry and commerce that followed the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 led hundreds of young men to leave family farms to seek their fortunes in towns along the canal. There, uprooted, buffeted between ambition, hope, and anxiety, they found it hard to resist the comfort promised by the revivalists.

But middle-class women were especially receptive to the evangelical message. If salvation was ultimately dependent on human beings rather than God, then no task was more important than guiding people along the path to heaven. Women felt particularly responsible for the Christian education of their children, which fell within their sphere.

Paradoxically, this caused many of them to venture out of that sphere, and in doing so they moved further out of the shadow of their husbands. They did most of the organizing and a good deal of the financing of the climactic years of the Second Awakening. The Female Missionary Society of Oneida County, New York, raised more than $1,000 a year (no small sum at that time) to support the revival in the burned-over district.

**The Era of Associations**

A third pillar of the emerging American middle class was the voluntary association. Unlike the other two, it had neither colonial precedents nor contemporary European equivalents. The leaders of these associations tended to be ministers, lawyers, or merchants, but the rank and file consisted of tradesmen, foremen, clerks, and their wives. Some of these associations were formed around a local cause that some townspeople wished to advance, such as the provision of religious instruction for orphaned children. Others were affiliated with associations elsewhere for the purposes of combating some national evil, such as drunkenness. Some, such as the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, founded in Boston in 1810, quickly became large and complex enterprises. Others lasted only as long as it took to accomplish a specific good work, such as the construction of a school or a library.

In a sense, the associations were assuming functions previously performed in the family, such as caring for old people and providing moral guidance to the young, but without the paternalistic discipline of the old way. They constituted a "benevolent empire," eager to make society over into their members' idea of how God wanted it to be.

**Backwoods Utopias**

Americans frequently belonged to several associations at the same time, and more than a few made reform their life's work. The most adventuresome tested their reform theories by establishing experimental communities. The "communitarian" point of view aimed at "commencing a wholesale social reorganization by first establishing and demonstrating its principles completely on a small scale." The first communitarians were religious reformers. In a sense the Pilgrims also fall into this category, along with a number of other groups in colonial times. But only in the nineteenth century did the idea flourish.

The Shakers, founded by an Englishwoman, Ann Lee, who came to America in 1774, were among the most important millennial. sects. With a handful of followers she established a community near Albany, New York. The group grew rapidly, and by the 1830s her followers had established about 20 successful communities.

The Shakers practiced celibacy; believing that the millennium was imminent, they saw no reason for perpetuating the human race. Each group lived in a large Family House, the sexes strictly segregated. Property was held in common. Much stress was placed on equality of labor and reward and on voluntary acceptance of the rules.

The Shaker religion, joyful and fervent, was marked by much group singing and dancing, which provided the members with emotional release from their tightly controlled regimen. An industrious, skillful people, they made a virtue of simplicity; their designs for buildings and, especially, furniture achieved a classic beauty seldom equaled among untutored artisans.

There were many other religious colonies, such as the Rappites in western Pennsylvania; the Amana Community, which flourished in New York and Iowa in the 1840s and 1850s; and John Humphrey Noyes's Oneida Community, where the members practiced "complex" marriage-a form of promiscuity based on the principle that every man in the group was married to every woman. They prospered by developing a number of manufacturing skills.

The most important of the religious communitarians were the Mormons. A young farmer, Joseph Smith, founded the religion in western New York in the 1820s. Smith saw visions; he claimed to have discovered and translated an ancient text, the Book of Mormon, written in hieroglyphics on plates of gold, which described the adventures of a tribe of Israelites that had populated America from biblical times.

With his small group of followers, Smith established a community in Ohio in 1831. The Mormons' dedication and economic efficiency attracted numbers of converts, but their unorthodox religious views and their exclusivism, a product of their sense of being a chosen people, caused resentment among unbelievers. The Mormons were forced to move first to Missouri and then back to Illinois, where in 1839 they founded the town of Nauvoo.

Nauvoo flourished-by 1844 it was the largest city in the state-but once again the Mormons ran into trouble. They quarreled among themselves, especially after Smith secretly authorized polygamy (he called it "celestial marriage") and a number of other unusual rites for the top leaders of the church.\* Smith announced that he was a candidate for president of the United States and created a paramilitary organization, the Nauvoo Legion. Rumors circulated that the Mormons intended to take over the entire Northwest for their "empire." Local "gentiles" rose against them. Smith was arrested, then murdered by a mob.

Under a new leader, Brigham Young, the Mormons sought a haven beyond the frontier. In 1847 they marched westward, pressing through the mountains until they reached the desolate wilderness on the shores of the Great Salt, Lake. There, at last, they established their Zion and began to make a significant impact on American history. Irrigation made the desert flourish, precious water wisely being treated as a community asset. Hard, cooperative, intelligently directed effort spelled growth and prosperity; more than 11,000 people were living in the area when it became part of Utah Territory in 18 5 0. In time the communal Mormon settlement broke down, but the Mormon church remained the most powerful single influence in Utah.

Despite many common characteristics, these religious communities varied enormously. Their sexual practices, for example, ranged from the "complex marriage" of the Oneidans through Mormon polygamy and ordinary monogamy to the reluctant acceptance of sexual intercourse by the Amana Community and the celibacy of the Rappites and Shakers. The communities are significant as reflections of the urgent reform spirit of the age.

The communities also influenced reformers who wished to experiment with social organization. When Robert Owen, a British utopian socialist who believed in economic as well as political equality and who considered competition debasing, decided to create an ideal community in America, he purchased the Rappite settlement at New Harmony, Indiana. But Owen's advocacy of free love and "enlightened atheism" did not add to the stability of his group or to its popularity among outsiders. The colony was a costly failure.

**The Age of Reform**

The communitarians were the most colorful of the reformers. More effective, however, were the many individuals who took upon themselves responsibility for caring for the physically and mentally disabled and for the rehabilitation of criminals. The work of Thomas Gallaudet in educating deaf people reflects the spirit of the times. Gallaudet's school in Hartford, Connecticut, opened its doors in 1817; by 1851 similar schools for the deaf had been established in 14 states.

Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe did similar work with the blind, devising means for making books with raised letters and operating a school for the blind in Boston, the pioneering Perkins Institution, which opened in 1832. Howe's success in educating 12-year-old Laura Bridgman, who was deaf, mute, and blind, attracted wide attention. "Every creature in human shape should command our respect," Howe insisted. "The strong should help the weak, so that the whole should advance as a band of brethren."

One of the most striking aspects of the reform movement was the emphasis reformers placed on establishing special institutions for dealing with social problems. In the colonial period, orphans, indigent persons, the insane, and the feebleminded were usually cared for by members of their own families or boarded in a neighboring household. They remained part of the community. Criminals were commonly punished by whipping, being placed in stocks in the town square, or (for serious crimes) by execution. But once persuaded that people were primarily shaped by their surroundings, reformers demanded that deviant and dependent members of the community be placed in institutions where they could be trained or rehabilitated. Almshouses, orphanages, prisons, and lunatic asylums sprang up throughout the United States like mushrooms in a forest after a summer rain.

The rationale for this movement was scientific, the motivating spirit of the founders humane (though many of the institutions seem anything but humane to the modern eye). The highly regarded Philadelphia prison system was based on strict solitary confinement, which was supposed to lead culprits to reflect on their sins and then reform their ways. The prison was literally a penitentiary, a place to repent.

In fact, the system drove some inmates mad, and soon a rival Auburn system was introduced in New York, which allowed for some social contact among prisoners and for work in shops and stone quarries. Absolute silence was required at all times. The prisoners were herded about in lockstep and punished by flogging for the slightest infraction of the rules. Regular "moral and religious instruction" was provided, which the authorities believed would lead inmates to reform their lives. Tocqueville and

Beaumont, in their report on American prisons, concluded that the Philadelphia system produced "the deepest impression on the soul of the convict," whereas the Auburn system made the convict "more conformable to the habits of man in society."

The hospitals for mental patients were intended to cure inmates, not merely to confine them. The emphasis was on isolating them from the pressures of society, on control but not on punishment. The unfortunates were seen as deranged; the task was to arrange their lives in a rational manner. In practice, shortages of trained personnel, niggardly legislative appropriations, and the inherent difficulty of managing violent and irrational patients often produced deplorable conditions in the asylums.

This situation led Dorothea Dix, a woman of almost saintlike selflessness, to devote 30 years of her life to a campaign to improve the care of the insane. She traveled to every state in the Union and as far afield as Turkey and Japan, inspecting asylums and poorhouses. Insane persons in Massachusetts, she wrote, were being kept in cages and closets, "chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience!' Her reports led to some improvement in conditions in Massachusetts and other states, but in the long run the bright hopes of the reformers were never realized. Institutions founded to uplift the deviant and dependent soon became places where "misfits" might safely be kept out of sight.

**"Demon Rum"**

Reformers must of necessity interfere with the affairs of others; thus there is often something of the busybody about them. How they are regarded usually turns on the observer's own attitude toward their objectives. Consider the temperance movement, the most widely supported and successful reform of the age of reform.

Americans in the 1820s consumed prodigious amounts of alcohol. Because neither political nor religious leaders considered drinking dangerous, there was no alcohol "problem." Most doctors recommended the regular consumption of alcohol as healthy. John Adams, certainly the soul of propriety, drank a tankard of hard cider every day for breakfast.

However, alcohol consumption increased markedly in the early years of the new republic, thanks primarily to the availability of cheap corn and rye whiskey distilled in the new states of Kentucky and Tennessee. Many women drank, if mostly at home, and reports of carousing among 14-year-old college freshmen show that youngsters did too. But the bulk of the heavy drinking occurred when men got together-at taverns or grogshops and at work.

Artisans and common laborers regarded their twice-daily "dram" of whiskey as part of their wages. In 1829 Secretary of War John Eaton estimated that three-quarters of the nation's laborers drank at least four ounces of hard liquor a day. Many prominent politicians, including Clay and Webster, were heavy consumers. Webster is said to have kept several thousand bottles of wine, whiskey, and other alcoholic beverages in his cellar.

The foundation of the American Temperance Union in 1826 signaled the start of a national crusade against drunkenness. Employing lectures, pamphlets, rallies, essay contests, and other techniques, the union set out to persuade people to "sign the pledge" not to drink liquor. Primitive sociological studies of the effects of drunkenness (reformers were able to show a high statistical correlation between alcohol consumption and crime) added to the effectiveness of the campaign.

In 1840 an organization of reformed drunkards, the Washingtonians, set out to reclaim alcoholics. One of the most effective Washingtonians was John B. Gough, rescued by the organization after seven years in the gutter. "Crawl from the slimy ooze, ye drowned drunkards," Gough would shout, "and with suffocation's blue and livid lips speak out against the drink!"

Revivalist ministers like Charles Grandison Finney argued that alcohol was one of the great barriers to conversion. Employers announced that their businesses would hence forward be "cold-water" enterprises. Soon the temperance movement claimed one million members.

The temperance people aroused bitter opposition, particularly after they moved beyond calls for restraint to demands for the prohibition of all alcoholic beverages. German and Irish immigrants, for the most part Catholics, and members of Protestant sects where wine was used in religious services, objected to being told by reformers that their drinking would have to stop. By the early 1840s, however, the reformers had secured legislation in many states that imposed strict licensing systems and heavy liquor taxes. In 1851 Maine passed the first effective law prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, and by 1855 a dozen other states had passed laws based on the Maine statute.

**The Abolitionist Crusade**

No reform movement of this era was more significant, more ambiguous, or more provocative of later historical investigation than the drive to abolish slavery. That slavery should have been a cause of indignation to reform-minded Americans was inevitable. Humanitarians were outraged by the master's whip and by the practice of disrupting families. Democrats protested the denial of political and civil rights to slaves. However, well into the 1820s, the abolitionist cause attracted few followers because there seemed to be no way of getting rid of slavery short of revolution. Most people believed that under the Constitution the institution was not subject to federal control.

Particularly in the wake of the Missouri Compromise, antislavery northerners neatly compartmentalized their thinking. Slavery was wrong; they would not tolerate it in their own communities. But because the Constitution obliged them to tolerate it in states where it existed, they felt no responsibility to fight it. People who advocated any kind of forced abolition in states where it was legal were judged irresponsible in the extreme. In 1820 presidential hopeful John Quincy Adams called slavery "the great and foul stain upon the North American Union." "If the Union must be dissolved," he added, "slavery is precisely the question upon which it ought to break." But Adams expressed these opinions in the privacy of his diary, not in a public speech. Most critics of slavery therefore confined themselves to urging "colonization" or persuading slave owners to treat their property humanely.

One of the few Americans in the 1820s to go further was Benjamin Lundy, editor of a Baltimore newspaper, The Genius of Universal Emancipation. Lundy was no fanatic; he urged the use of persuasion rather than interference by the federal government. But he refused to mince words, and consequently he was subject to frequent harassment.

Even more provocative and less accommodating to local sensibilities was Lundy's youthful assistant, William Lloyd Garrison of Massachusetts. Garrison pronounced himself for "immediate" abolition. When his extreme position made continued residence in Baltimore impossible, he returned to Boston, where in 1831 he established his own newspaper, The Liberator. "I am in earnest," he announced in the first issue. "I will not equivocate-I will not excuse-I will not retreat a single inch-and I will be heard."

Garrison's position, and that espoused by the New England Anti-Slavery Society, which he organized in 1831, was absolutely unyielding: Slaves must be freed immediately and treated as equals; compensated emancipation was unacceptable, colonization unthinkable. Because the United States government countenanced slavery, Garrison refused to engage in political activity to achieve his ends. Burning a copy of the Constitution-that "agreement with hell"-became a regular feature at Society sponsored public lectures.

Few white Americans found Garrison's line of argument convincing, and many were outraged by his confrontational tactics. Whenever he spoke in public, he risked being mobbed. In 1835 an angry crowd dragged him through the streets of Boston. In 1837 Elijah Lovejoy, a Garrisonian newspaper editor in Alton, Illinois, first saw his press destroyed by fire and then was himself murdered by a mob.

In the wake of this violence some of Garrison's backers had second thoughts about his strategy of immediatism. The wealthy New York businessmen Arthur and Lewis Tappan, who had subsidized The Liberator, turned instead to Theodore Dwight Weld, a young revivalist minister. Weld and his followers spoke of "immediate" emancipation "gradually" achieved, and they were willing to engage in political activity to achieve that goal.

In 1840 the Tappans and Weld broke with Garrison over the issue of involvement in politics and the participation of female abolitionists as public lecturers. Garrison, ever the radical, supported the women; Weld thought they would needlessly antagonize would-be supporters. The Tappans then organized the Liberty Party, which nominated as its presidential candidate James G. Birney, a Kentucky slaveholder who had been converted to evangelical Christianity and abolitionism by Weld. Running on a platform of universal emancipation to be gradually brought about through legislation, Birney received only 7,000 votes.

Many blacks were abolitionists long before the white movement began to attract attention. In 1830 some 50 black antislavery societies existed, and thereafter these groups grew in size and importance, being generally associated with the Garrisonian wing. White abolitionists eagerly sought out black speakers, especially runaway slaves, whose heartrending accounts of their experiences aroused sympathies and who, merely by speaking clearly and with conviction, stood as living proof that blacks were neither animals nor fools.

Frederick Douglass, a former slave who had escaped from Maryland, was one of the most remarkable Americans of his generation. While a bondsman he had received a full portion of beatings and other indignities; but he had been allowed to learn to read and write and to master a trade, opportunities denied the vast majority of slaves. Settling in Boston, he became an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and a featured speaker at its public meetings.

Douglass was a tall, majestically handsome man who radiated determination and indignation. Slavery, he told white audiences, "brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretense, your Christianity as a lie." In 1845 he published his Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, one of the most gripping autobiographical accounts of a slave's life ever written.

Douglass insisted that freedom for blacks required not merely emancipation but full equality, social and economic as well as political. Not many white northerners accepted his reasoning, but few who heard him or read his works could afterward maintain the illusion that all blacks were dull-witted or resigned to inferior status.

At first Douglass was, in his own words, "a faithful disciple" of Garrison, prepared to tear up the Constitution and destroy the Union to gain his ends. In the late 1840s, however, he changed his mind, deciding that the Constitution, created to "establish justice ... and secure the Blessings of Liberty," as its preamble states, "could not well have been designed at the same time to maintain and perpetuate a system of rapine and murder like slavery." Thereafter he fought slavery and race prejudice from within the system, something Garrison was never willing to do.

Garrison's importance cannot be measured by the number of his followers, which was never large. Unlike more moderately inclined enemies of slavery, he recognized that abolitionism was a revolutionary movement. He also understood that achieving racial equality, not merely "freeing" the slaves, was the only way to reach the abolitionists' professed objective: full justice for blacks. And he saw clearly that few whites, even among abolitionists, believed that blacks were their equals.

At the same time, Garrison seemed utterly indifferent to what effect the "immediate" freeing of the slaves would have on the South. He said he would rather be governed by "the inmates of our penitentiaries" than by southern congressmen, whom he characterized as "desperadoes." The life of the slave owner, he wrote, is "one of unbridled lust, of filthy amalgamation, of swaggering braggadocio, of haughty domination, of cowardly ruffianism, of boundless dissipation, of matchless insolence, of infinite self-conceit, of unequaled oppression, of more than savage cruelty."

Both Garrison's insights into the limits of northern racial egalitarianism and his blind contempt for southern whites led him to the conclusion that American society was rotten to the core. He was hated in the North as much for his explicit denial of the idea that a constitution that supported slavery merited respect as for his implicit denial of the idea that a professed Christian who tolerated slavery for even an instant could hope for salvation. He was, in short, a perfectionist, a trafficker in moral absolutes who wanted his Kingdom of Heaven in the here and now. By contrast, most American reformers were willing to settle for perfection on the installment plan.

**Women's Rights**

The question of slavery was related to the crusade for women's rights. The relationship was personal and ideological, direct and indirect, simple and profound. Superficially, the connection can be explained in this way: Women were as likely as men to find slavery offensive and to protest against it. When they did so, they ran into even more adamant resistance, the prejudices of those who objected to abolitionists being reinforced by their feelings that women should not speak in public or participate in political affairs. Thus female abolitionists, driven by the urgencies of conscience, were almost forced to become advocates of women's rights. "We have good cause to be grateful to the slave," the feminist Abby Kelley wrote. "In striving to strike his irons off, we found most surely, that we were manacled ourselves."

At a more profound level, the reference that abolitionists made to the Declaration of Independence to justify their attack on slavery radicalized women with regard to their own place in society. Were only all men created equal? For many women the question was a consciousness-raising experience; they began to believe that, like blacks, they were imprisoned from birth in a caste system, legally subordinated and assigned menial social and economic roles that prevented them from developing their full potentialities. Such women considered themselves in a sense worse off than blacks, who had at least the psychological advantage of confronting an openly hostile and repressive society rather than one concealed behind the cloying rhetoric of romantic love.

Nearly all the leading advocates of equal rights for women began their public careers in the abolitionist movement. Among the first were Sarah and Angelina Grimke, South Carolinians who abandoned their native state and the domestic sphere to devote themselves to speaking out against slavery. (In 1841 Angelina married Theodore Dwight Weld.) Male objections to the Grimkes' activities soon made them advocates of women's rights. Similarly, the refusal of delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in 1840 to let women participate in their debates precipitated the decision of two American abolitionists, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, to turn their attention to the women's rights movement.

Slavery aside, there were other aspects of feminist consciousness-raising. Some women rejected the idea that they should confine themselves to a "sphere" consisting of child rearing and housekeeping. The very effort to enforce this kind of specialization made women aware of their second-class citizenship and thus more likely to be dissatisfied. They lacked not merely the right to vote, of which they did not make a major issue, but if married, the right to own property or to make a will. Lydia Maria Child, a popular novelist, claimed that this last restriction excited her "towering indignation." "I was indignant for womankind made chattels personal from the beginning of time."

When women sought to involve themselves in reform, they became aware of perhaps the most serious handicap that society imposed on them-the conflict between their roles as wives and mothers and their urge to participate in the affairs of the larger world. Elizabeth Cady Stanton has left a striking description of this dilemma. When, stimulated by her interest in abolition and women's rights, she sought to become active in the movements, her family responsibilities made it almost impossible even to read about them. "I now fully understood the practical difficulties most women had to contend with," she recalled in her autobiography, Eighty Years and More (1898). "The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic condition into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women, impressed Me with the strong feeling that some active measures should be taken."

Together with Lucretia Mott and a few others of like mind, she organized a meeting, the Seneca Falls Convention (July 1848), and drafted a Declaration of Sentiments patterned on the Declaration of Independence. "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal," it stated, and it went on to list the "injuries and usurpations" of men, just as Jefferson had outlined those of George III.

From this seed the movement grew. During the 1850s a series of national conventions was held, and more and more reformers, including William Lloyd Garrison, joined the cause. Of the recruits, Susan B. Anthony was the most influential, for she was the first to see the need for thorough organization if effective pressure was to be brought to bear on male-dominated society. The feminists achieved very few practical results during the age of reform. Their leaders, however, were persevering types, most of them extraordinarily long-lived. Their major efforts lay in the future.

Despite the aggressiveness of many reformers and the extremity of some of their proposals, little social conflict blighted these years. Most citizens readily accepted the need for improving society and showed a healthy tolerance for even the most harebrained schemes. When Sylvester Graham, inventor of the graham cracker, traveled up and down the land praising the virtues of hard mattresses, cold showers, and homemade bread, he was mobbed by professional bakers, but otherwise he was free to speak his mind.

Americans argued about everything from prison reform to vegetarianism, but they seldom came to blows. Even the abolitionist movement might not have caused serious social strife if the territorial expansion of the late 1840s had not dragged the slavery issue back into politics. When that happened, politics again assumed center stage, public discourse grew embittered, and the first great age of reform came to an end.

**Domestic Tastes**

Architecture flourished in the northern cities chiefly as a result of the work of Charles Bulfinch and some of his disciples. Bulfinch was influenced by British architects, but he developed a manner all his own. His "Federal" style gave parts of Boston a dignity and charm equal to the finest sections of London. The State House, numerous other public buildings, and, best of all, many of Bulfinch's private houses-austere yet elegant, solid yet airy and graceful-gave the town a distinction it had lacked before the Revolution.

In the 1830s and 1840s, new techniques made it possible to weave colored patterns into cloth by machine and to produce rugs and hangings that looked like tapestries. Combined with the use of machine methods in the furniture business, these inventions had a powerful impact on public taste.

Wood-turning machinery added to the popularity of the elaborately decorated "Gothic" style of architecture. The irregularity and uniqueness of Gothic buildings suited the prevailing romanticism, their aspiring towers, steeples, and arches and their flexibility (a new wing or extension could always be added without spoiling the effect) made them especially attractive to a people enamored of progress. The huge pile of pink masonry of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, with its nine distinct types of towers, represents American Gothic at its most giddy and lugubrious stage. The building, which has confounded generations of architects, has aptly been called "the nation's attic."

Increasingly, Americans of the period were purchasing native art. George Catlin, who painted hundreds of pictures of Indians and their surroundings, displayed his work before admiring crowds in many cities. Genre painters (artists whose canvases told stories, usually drawn from everyday life) were wildly popular. The best were William Sidney Mount of New York and George Caleb Bingham of Missouri.

The more academic artists of the period were popular as well. The "luminists" and members of the romantic Hudson River school specialized in grandiose pictures of wild landscapes. In the 1840s Thomas Doughty regularly collected $500 each for his paintings. The works of Asher B. Durand, John Kensett, and Thomas Cole were in demand. The collector Luman Reed commissioned five large Cole canvases for an allegorical series, The Course of Empire, and crowds flocked to see another of Cole's series, The Voyage of Life, when it was exhibited in New York.

In 1839 the American Art-Union was formed in New York to encourage native art. The Art-Union hit on the ingenious device of selling what were in effect lottery tickets and using the proceeds to purchase paintings, which became the prizes in the lottery. Annual "memberships" sold for $5; 814 people subscribed in 1839, nearly 19,000 did 10 years later. The organization had to disband after a New York court outlawed the lottery in 1851, but in 1854 a new Cosmopolitan Art-Union was established in Ohio. In the years before the Civil War it boomed, reaching a peak of 38,000 members and paying as much as $6,000 for an individual work the sculptor Hiram Powers's boneless female nude, The Greek Slave.

Beginning in the late 1850s, the prints of the firm of Currier and Ives brought a crude but charming kind of art to a still wider audience. Currier and Ives lithographs portrayed horse racing, trains, rural landscapes, and "every tender domestic moment, every sign of national progress, every regional oddity, every private or public disaster from a cut finger to a forest fire." They were issued in very large editions and sold for as little as 15 cents.

**Education for Democracy**

Except on the edge of the frontier and in the South, most youngsters between the ages of 5 and 10 attended a school for at least a couple of months of the year. These schools, however, were privately run and charged fees. Attendance was not required and fell off sharply once children learned to read and do their sums. The teachers were usually young men waiting for something better to turn up.

All this changed with the rise of the common school movement, which resulted from the belief that a democratic government must provide the means, as Jefferson put it, to "diffuse knowledge throughout the mass of the people." This meant free tax-supported schools for all and thus an educational system administered on a statewide basis. It also made teaching a profession that required formal training.

The most effective leaders of the common school movement were Henry Barnard and Horace Mann. They shared an unquenchable faith in the improvability of the human race through education. Barnard served in educational posts in Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York in the 1840s and 1850s. Mann drafted the 1837 Massachusetts law creating a state school board, and then became its first secretary.

Over the next decade Mann's annual reports carried the case for common schools to every corner of the land. Seldom given to understatement, Mann called common schools "the greatest discovery ever made by man." In his reports he criticized wealthy parents who sent their children to private academies rather than bring them into contact with their poorer neighbors in the local school. He encouraged young women to become teachers while commending them to school boards by claiming that they could get along on lower salaries than men.

By the 1850s every state outside the South provided free elementary schools and supported institutions for training teachers. Many extended public education to include high schools, and Michigan and Iowa even established publicly supported colleges.

Historians differ in explaining the success of the common school movement. Some stress the arguments Mann used to win support from employers by appealing to their need for trained and well- disciplined workers. Others see the schools as designed to "Americanize" the increasing numbers of non-English and non-Protestant immigrants who were flooding into the country. Still others argue that middle-class reformers favored public elementary school on the theory that they would instill the values of hard work, punctuality, and submissiveness to authority in children of the laboring classes.

All these reasons played a part in advancing the cause of the common schools. Yet the most compelling argument for common schools was cultural; more effectively than any other institution, they brought Americans of different economic circumstances and ethnic backgrounds into early and mutually beneficial contact with one another. They were, as Mann said, "the great equalizer."

**Reading and the Dissemination of Culture**

As the population grew and became more concentrated, popular concern for "culture" increased. Industrialization made it easier to satisfy this new demand for culture. Improved printing techniques reduced the cost of books, magazines, and newspapers. The first penny newspaper was the New York Sun (1833), but James Gordon Bennett's New York Herald, founded in 1835, brought the cheap new journalism to perfection. The penny newspapers depended on sensation, crime stories, and society gossip to attract readers, but they covered important national and international news too.

In the 1850s the moralistic and sentimental "domestic" novel entered its prime. The most successful writers in this genre were women, which prompted Hawthorne to complain bitterly that "a mob of scribbling women" was taking over American literature. Typical were Susan Warner's book The Wide, Wide World (1850), a sad tale about a pious, submissive girl who cried "more readily and more steadily than any other tormented child in a novel at the time," and Maria Cummins's book The Lamplighter (1854), the story of little Gerry, an orphan rescued by a kindly lamplighter, appropriately named Trueman Flint.

Philanthropists contributed large sums to charity and other good causes; Stephen Girard left $6 million for "educating poor white orphan boys" in his adopted Philadelphia; John Jacob Astor of New York and George Peabody of Massachusetts endowed libraries; John Lowell, son of the pioneer cotton manufacturer, left $500,000 to establish the Lowell Institute in Boston to sponsor free public lectures. Mechanics' libraries sprang up in every industrial center and attracted many readers. In 1848 Massachusetts led the way by authorizing the use of public money to back the Boston Public Library, and soon several states were encouraging local communities to found tax-supported libraries.

The desire for knowledge and culture in America is well illustrated by the success of the mutual improvement societies known as lyceums. The first was organized by Josiah Holbrook in 1826. Lyceums conducted discussions, established libraries, and lobbied for better schools. Soon they began to sponsor lecture series on topics of every sort. Many of the nation's political and intellectual leaders, such as Webster, Emerson, Melville, and Lowell, regularly graced their platforms.

**Chapter Eleven**

**Expansion and Slavery**

President John Tyler, the new president, was a thin, rather delicate-appearing man with pale blue eyes and a long nose. Courteous, tactful, soft-spoken, he gave the impression of being weak. This was a false impression; John Tyler was stubborn and proud, and these characteristics combined with an almost total lack of imagination to make him worship consistency, as so many second-raters do. He had turned away from Jackson because of the aggressive way the president had used his powers of appointment and the veto, but he also disagreed with Senator Henry Clay and the northern Whigs about the Bank, protection, and federal internal improvements. Being a states' rights southerner, Tyler considered such measures to be unconstitutional. Nevertheless, he was prepared to cooperate with Clay as the leader of what he called the "more immediate representatives" of the people, the members of Congress. But he was not prepared to be Clay's puppet. He asked all of Harrison's Cabinet to remain in office.

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**Tyler's Troubles**

Tyler and Clay did not get along and for this Clay was chiefly to blame. He behaved in an overbearing manner that was out of keeping with his nature, probably because he resented having been passed over by the Whigs in 1840. He considered himself the real head of the Whig Party and intended to exercise his leadership.

In Congress Clay announced a comprehensive "program" that ignored Tyler's states' rights view of the Constitution. Most important was his plan to set up a new Bank of the United States. A bill to repeal the Independent Treasury Act caused no difficulty, but when Congress passed a new Bank bill, Tyler vetoed it. The entire Cabinet except Secretary of State Webster thereupon resigned in protest.

Abandoned by the Whigs, Tyler attempted to build a party of his own. He failed to do so, and for the remainder of his term the political squabbling in Washington continued. Clay wanted to distribute the proceeds from land sales to the states, presumably to bolster their sagging finances, but actually to reduce federal revenues in order to justify raising the tariff. To win western votes for distribution, he agreed to support the Preemption Act of 1841 legalizing the right of squatters to occupy unsurveyed land and to buy it later at $1.25 an acre without bidding for it at auction. However, the southerners insisted on an amendment pledging that distribution would be stopped if the tariff were raised above the 20 percent level, and when the Whigs blithely tried to push a high tariff through Congress without repealing the Distribution Act, Tyler vetoed the bill. Finally, the Distribution Act was repealed and Tyler signed the new Tariff Act of 1842, raising duties to about the levels of 1832.

**The Texas Question**

In the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819 with Spain, the boundary of the United States had been drawn in such a way as to exclude Texas. This seemed unimportant at the time, yet within months of the ratification of the treaty in February 1821, Americans led by Stephen F. Austin had begun to settle in the area. Almost simultaneously Mexico threw off the last vestiges of Spanish rule. Cotton flourished on the fertile Texas plains, and, and for a time, the new Mexican authorities offered free land and something approaching local autonomy to groups of settlers from the United States. By 1830 there were some 20,000 white Americans in Texas, together with about 2,000 slaves, but only a few thousand Mexicans lived there.

President John Quincy Adams had offered Mexico $1 million for Texas, and Jackson was willing to pay $5 million, but Mexico would not sell. Nevertheless, by the late 1820s the flood of American settlers was giving the Mexican authorities second thoughts. The immigrants apparently felt no loyalty to Mexico. Most were Protestants, though Mexican law required that all immigrants be Catholics. Few attempted to learn more than a few words of Spanish. When Mexico outlawed slavery in 1829, they evaded the law by "freeing" their slaves and then signing them to lifetime contracts as indentured servants. In 1830 Mexico prohibited further immigration of Americans into Texas, though again the law proved impossible to enforce.

As soon as the Mexican government began to restrict them, the Texans began to seek independence. In 1835 a series of skirmishes escalated into a full-scale rebellion, as Texans were receiving much military and financial aid from American "volunteers." The Mexican president, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, marched north with 6,000 soldiers to subdue the rebels. Late in February 1836 he reached San Antonio.

A force of 187 men under Colonel William B. Travis held the city. They took refuge behind the stout walls of a former mission called the Alamo. For 10 days they beat off Santa Anna's assaults, inflicting terrible casualties on the attackers. Finally, on March 6, the Mexicans carried the walls. Once inside, they killed everyone, even the wounded, then soaked the corpses in oil and burned them. Among the dead were the legendary Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie, who is especially remembered for his characteristic Bowie knife.

After the carnage in the Alamo, the Texans declared their independence. Sam Houston, a former congressman and governor of Tennessee and an experienced Indian fighter, was placed in charge of the rebel army. On April 21, 1836, at San Jacinta shouting "Forward! Charge! Remember the Alamo!" he ordered the attack. His troops routed the Mexican army, which soon retreated across the Rio Grande. In October Houston was elected president of the Republic of Texas, and a month later a plebiscite revealed that an overwhelming majority favored annexation by the United States.

President Jackson hesitated. To take Texas might lead to war with Mexico. Certainly it would stir up the slavery controversy. On his last day in office he recognized the republic, but he made no move to accept it into the Union, nor did his successor, Van Buren. Texas thereupon went its own way, which involved developing friendly ties with Great Britain. An independent Texas suited British tastes perfectly, for it could provide an alternative supply of cotton and a market for manufactures unfettered by tariffs.

These events caused alarm in the United States, especially among southerners, who dreaded the possibility that a Texas dominated by Great Britain might abolish slavery. As a southerner, Tyler shared these feelings; he saw in annexation a chance to revive his fortunes. In the West and even the Northeast the patriotic urge to add such a magnificent new territory to the national domain was great. Counting noses, Abel P. Upshur, Tyler's secretary of state, convinced himself that the Senate would approve annexation by the necessary two-thirds majority. He negotiated a treaty in February 1844, but before he could sign it, he was killed by the accidental explosion of a cannon on the USS Princeton during a weapons demonstration.

To ensure the accession of Texas, Tyler appointed John C. Calhoun secretary of state. This was a blunder; by then Calhoun was so closely associated with the South and with slavery that his appointment alienated thousands of northerners who might otherwise have welcomed annexation. Suddenly Texas became a hot political issue. Clay and Van Buren, who seemed assured of the 1844 Whig and Democratic presidential nominations, promptly announced that they opposed annexation, chiefly on the ground that it would probably lead to war with Mexico. With a national election in the offing, northern and western senators refused to vote for annexation, and in June the Senate rejected the treaty, 35 to 16.

**Manifest Destiny**

The Senate, Clay, and Van Buren had all misinterpreted public opinion. For two centuries Americans had been gradually conquering a continent. The westward march from the seventeenth-century to the 1840s had seemed fraught with peril, the prize golden but attainable only through patient labor and fearful hardships. Wild animals and wild men, mighty forests and mighty foreign powers beset the path. John Adams wrote of "conquering" the West "from the trees and rocks and wild beasts." He was "enflamed" by the possibilities of "that vast scene which is opening in the West," but to win it the nation would have to "march intrepidly on."

Quite rapidly (as historians measure time) the atmosphere changed. Each year of national growth increased the power and confidence of the people, and every forward step revealed a wider horizon. Now the West seemed a ripe apple, to be picked almost casually. Where pioneers had once stood in awe before the majesty of the Blue Ridge, then hesitated to venture from the protective shadows of the forest into the open prairies of Illinois, they now shrugged their shoulders at great deserts and began to talk of the Rocky Mountains as "mere molehills" along the road to the Pacific. After 200 years of westward expansion had brought them as far as Missouri and Iowa, Americans suddenly perceived their destined goal. The whole continent was to be theirs! Theirs to exploit, theirs to make into one mighty nation, a land of opportunity, a showcase to display the virtues of democratic institutions, living proof that Americans were indeed God's chosen people. A New York journalist, John L. O'Sullivan, captured the new mood in a sentence. Nothing must interfere, he wrote in 1845, with "the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions."

The politicians did not sense the new mood in 1844. In fact, the expansion, stimulated by the natural growth of the population and by a revived flood of immigration, was going on in every section and with little regard for political boundaries. New settlers rolled westward in hordes. Between 1830 and 1835, 10,000 entered "foreign" Texas, and this was a trickle compared to what the early 1840s were to bring. By 1840 many Americans had also settled far to the west in California, which was unmistakably Mexican territory, and in the Oregon country, jointly claimed by the United States and Great Britain.

**Life on the Trail**

The romantic myths attached to this mighty human tide have obscured the adjustments forced on the pioneers and focused attention on the least significant of the dangers they faced and the hardships they endured. Pioneers were more likely to complain that the Indians they encountered were dirty, lazy, and thieving than to worry about the danger of Indian attack. Far more dangerous was the possibility of accidents, particularly to children, and also unsanitary conditions.

"Going west" had always been laborious, but in the 1840s the distances covered were longer by far. Moving west disrupted the new pattern of family life; there were few, if any, "separate spheres" on the trail. Women learned to load wagons, pitch tents, and chase stray cattle. Men, for their part, had to keep an eye on children and help with tasks like cooking and washing.

Travel on the plains west of the Mississippi was especially taxing for women. Guidebooks did not prepare them for having to collect dried buffalo dung for fuel; for the heat and choking dust of summer; for enduring a week of steady rain; for the monotony, the dirt, and the cramped quarters. Caring for an infant or a two-year-old in a wagon could be torture week after week on the trail, for there were limits to what the average husband could or would do on the way west. Pioneer women mostly complained of being bone weary and about the difficulties of day-to-day existence. "It is impossible to keep anything clean," one recorded, and it is not hard to envisage the difficulty of doing so while living for weeks on end on the trail. "Oh dear," another wrote in her journal, "I do so want to get there."

**California and Oregon**

By 1840 many Americans had settled in California, which was Mexican territory, and in the Oregon country, jointly claimed by the United States and Great Britain, and they went to these distant regions in increasing numbers as the decade progressed.

California was inhabited by some 7,000 Spanish-speaking ranchers, a handful of "Anglo" settlers from the United States, and many thousands of Indians. Until the 1830s, when their estates were broken up by the anticlerical Mexican government, 21 Catholic missions controlled more than 30,000 Indian converts, who were little better off than slaves.

Richard Henry Dana, a Harvard College student, sailed around South America to California as an ordinary seaman in 1834. His book, Two Years Before the Mast (1840), describes what life was like in California: "There is no working class (the Indians being practically serfs and doing all the hard work) and every rich man looks like a grandee, and every poor scamp like a broken-down gentleman."

Oregon, a vaguely defined area between California and Russian Alaska, proved still more alluring to Americans. In 1811 John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company had established trading posts on the Columbia River. Some two decades later Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic missionaries began to find their way into the Willamette Valley, a green land of rich soil, mild climate, and tall forests teeming with game. Gradually a small number of settlers followed, until by the year 1840 there were about 500 Americans in the Willamette area.

In the early 1840s, fired by the spirit of manifest destiny, the country suddenly burned with "Oregon fever." Land hunger (stimulated by the glowing reports of those on the scene) drew the new migrants most powerfully, but the patriotic concept of manifest destiny gave the trek across the 2,000 miles of wilderness separating Oregon from the western edge of American settlement in Missouri the character of a crusade. In 1843 nearly 1,000 pioneers made this long trip.

The Oregon Trail began at the western border of Missouri and followed the Kansas River and the Platte River past Fort Laramie to the Rockies. It crossed the Continental Divide by the relatively easy South Pass then ran through the valley of the Columbia to Fort Vancouver, a British post guarding the entrance to the Willamette Valley.

Over this tortuous path wound the canvas-covered caravans with their scouts and their accompanying herds. Each group became a self-governing community on the march, with regulations democratically agreed on "for the purpose of keeping good order and promoting civil and military discipline." Most wagon trains consisted of young families of middling wealth; the trip for a family of four cost about $600, a considerable sum. For large groups, the Indians posed no great threat, though constant vigilance was necessary. Naturally, the five-month trip was full of labor, discomfort, and uncertainty, an "unending, weather scoured, nerve-rasping plod on and on and on and on, foot by aching foot." At the end lay the regular tasks of pioneering. The spirit of the trailblazers is caught in an entry from the diary of James Nesmith:

Friday, October 27.-Arrived at Oregon City at the falls of the Willamette.

Saturday, October 28.-Went to work.

Behind the dreams of the Far West as an American Eden lay the commercial importance of the three major West Coast harbors: San Diego, San Francisco, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca leading into Puget Sound. Eastern merchants considered these harbors the keys to the trade of the Orient. The fact that San Diego and San Francisco were Mexican and the Puget Sound district was claimed by Great Britain only heightened their desire to possess them.

**The Election of 1844**

In the spring of 1844 expansion did not seem likely to affect the presidential election. The Whigs nominated Clay unanimously and ignored Texas in their party platform. When the Democrats gathered in convention at Baltimore in May, Van Buren appeared to have the nomination in his pocket. He too, wanted to keep Texas out of the campaign. However, John C. Calhoun was determined to prevent this. With the aid of a few northern expansionists, southern delegates forced through a rule requiring that the choice be by a two-thirds majority. This Van Buren could not muster. After a brief deadlock, a "dark horse," James K. Polk of Tennessee, swept the convention.

Polk was a good Jacksonian; his supporters called him "Young Hickory." He opposed high tariffs and was dead set against establishing another national bank. But he believed in taking Texas, and he favored expansion generally. To mollify the Van Burenites, the convention nominated Senator Silas Wright of New York for vice president, but Wright was Van Buren's friend and equally opposed to annexation. When the word was flashed to him in Washington over the new "magnetic telegraph" that Samuel F. B. Morse had just installed between the convention hall in Baltimore and the Capitol, he refused to run. The delegates then picked an annexationist, George M. Dallas of Pennsylvania. The Democratic platform demanded that Texas be "reannexed" (implying that it had been part of the Louisiana Purchase) and that all of Oregon be "reoccupied" (suggesting that the joint occupation of the region with Great Britain, which had been agreed to in the Convention of 1818, be abrogated).

When Clay sensed the new expansionist sentiment of the voters, he tried to hedge on his opposition to annexation, but by doing so he probably lost as many votes as he gained. The election was extremely close. Polk carried the country by only 38,000 of 2.7 million votes. In the electoral college the vote was 170 to 105.

The decisive factor was the Liberty Party, an antislavery splinter group organized in 1840. Only 62,000 voters supported candidate James G. Birney, a "reformed" Kentucky slaveholder, but nearly 16,000 of them lived in New York, most in the western part of the state, a Whig stronghold. Because Polk carried New York by barely 5,000, the votes for Birney probably cost Clay the state. Had he won New York's 36 electoral votes, he would have been elected, 141 to 134.

Polk's victory was nevertheless taken as a mandate for expansion. Tyler promptly called on Congress to take Texas by joint resolution, which would avoid the necessity of obtaining a two-thirds majority in the Senate. This was done a few days before Tyler left the White House. Under the resolution if the new state agreed, as many as four new states might be carved from its territory, but only with its approval. Polk accepted this arrangement, and in December 1845 Texas was admitted to the Union.

**Polk as President**

Polk's mind was not of the first order, for he was too tense and calculating to allow his intellect free rein. He was an efficient, hard worker with a strong will and a tough skin, qualities that stood him in good stead in the White House, and he made politics his whole life. It was typical of the man that he developed a special technique of handshaking in order better to cope with the interminable reception lines that every leader has to endure. "When I observed a strong man approaching," he once explained, "I generally took advantage of him by ... seizing him by the tip of his fingers, giving him a hearty shake, and thus preventing him from getting a full grip upon me." In four years in office he was away from his desk in Washington for a total of only six weeks.

Polk was uncommonly successful in doing what he set out to do as president. He persuaded Congress to lower the Tariff of 1842 and to restore the independent treasury. He opposed federal internal improvements and managed to have his way. He made himself the spokesman of American expansion by committing himself to obtaining, in addition to Texas, both Oregon and the great Southwest. Here again, he succeeded.

Oregon was the first order of business. In his inaugural address Polk stated the American claim to the entire region in the plainest terms, but he informed the British minister in Washington, Richard Pakenham, that he would accept a boundary following the 49th parallel to the Pacific. Pakenham rejected this proposal without submitting it to London, and Polk thereupon decided to insist again on the whole area. When Congress met in December 1845, he asked for authority to give the necessary one-year's notice for abrogating the 1818 treaty of joint occupation. "The only way to treat John Bull," he told one congressman, "was to look him straight in the eye." Following considerable discussion, Congress complied, and in May 1846 Polk notified Great Britain that he intended to terminate the joint occupation.

The British then decided to compromise. Officials of the Hudson's Bay Company had become alarmed by the rapid growth of the American settlement in the Willamette Valley. By 1845 some 5,000 persons lived there, whereas the country north of the Columbia contained no more than 750 British subjects. A clash between the groups could have but one result; the company decided to shift its base from the Columbia to Vancouver Island. And British experts outside the company reported that the Oregon country could not possibly be defended in case of war. Thus, when Polk accompanied the one-year notice with a hint that he would again consider a compromise, the British foreign secretary, Lord Aberdeen, suggested dividing the Oregon territory along the 49th parallel. Polk, abandoning his belligerent attitude, agreed. The treaty followed that line from the Rockies to Puget Sound, but Vancouver Island, which extended below the line, was left entirely to the British, so both nations retained free use of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Although some northern Democrats accused Polk of treachery because he had failed to fight for all of Oregon, the treaty so obviously accorded with the national interest that the Senate approved it by a large majority in June 1846. Polk was then free to tackle the Texas question in earnest.

**War with Mexico**

One reason for the popularity of the Oregon compromise was that the country was already at war with Mexico and wanted no trouble with Great Britain. The expansionist spirit and the confidence born of its overwhelming advantages of size and wealth had encouraged the United States to bully Mexico. In addition, Mexico had defaulted on debts owed the United States, which caused some people to suggest using force to obtain the money. But from the Mexican perspective, national pride was at stake. Texas had been independent for the better part of a decade. Although Mexico had made no serious effort to reconquer it, the Mexican government had never recognized Texas's independence and broke off diplomatic relations as soon as the United States annexed the republic in 1845.

Polk then ordered General Zachary Taylor into Texas to defend the border. However, the location of that border was in dispute. Texas claimed the Rio Grande; Mexico insisted that the boundary was the Nucces River, which emptied into the Gulf about 150 miles to the north. Taylor reached the Nueces in July 1845 with about 1,500 troops and crossed into the disputed territory. He stopped on the southern bank at Corpus Christi, not wishing to provoke the Mexicans by marching to the Rio Grande.

In November Polk sent an envoy, John Slidell, on a secret mission to Mexico to try to obtain the disputed territory by negotiation. Polk authorized Slidell to cancel the Mexican debt in return for recognition of the annexation of Texas and acceptance of the Rio Grande boundary. The president also empowered Slidell to offer as much as $30 million if Mexico would sell to the United States all or part of New Mexico and California.

It would probably have been to Mexico's advantage, at least in the short run, to have made a deal with Slidell. The area Polk wanted, lying in the path of American expansion, was likely to be engulfed as Texas had been, without regard for the actions of the American or Mexican governments. But the Mexican government refused to receive Slidell. Amid a wave of anti-American feeling, a military coup occurred, and General Mariano Paredes, the new head of state, promptly reaffirmed his country's claim to all of Texas. Slidell returned to Washington convinced that the Mexicans would not give an inch until they had been "chastised."

Polk had already ordered Taylor to advance to the Rio Grande. By late March of 1846 the army, swelled to about 4,000, had taken up positions near the Mexican town of Matamoros. The Mexicans crossed the river on April 25 and attacked an American mounted patrol. They were driven back easily, but when news of the fighting reached Washington, Polk asked Congress to declare war. He treated the matter as a fait accompli: "War exists," he stated flatly. Without declaring war, Congress voted to raise and supply an additional 50,000 troops. For the first time (but not the last) a president had led the nation into war without the formal declaration required by the Constitution.

From the first battles, the outcome of the Mexican War was never in doubt. At Palo Alto, north of the Rio Grande, 2,300 Americans scattered a Mexican force of more than twice their number. Then, hotly pursuing, 1,700 Americans routed 7,500 Mexicans at Resaca de la Palma. Within a week of the declaration of war the Mexicans had been driven across the Rio Grande, and General Taylor had his troops firmly established on the southern bank.

The Mexican army was poorly equipped and, despite a surfeit of high-ranking officers, poorly led. The well-supplied American forces had a hard core of youthful West Pointers eager to make their reputations and regulars trained in Indian warfare to provide the leadership needed to turn volunteer soldiers into first-rate fighting men. Yet Mexico was a large, rugged country with few decent roads; conquering it proved to be a formidable task.

**To the Halls of Montezuma**

President Polk insisted not only on directing grand strategy but on supervising hundreds of petty details, down to the purchase of mules and the promotion of enlisted men. But he allowed politics to influence his choice of generals. This partisanship caused unnecessary turmoil in army ranks. Try as he might, he could not find a good Democratic general. Both Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, the commanding general in Washington, were Whigs. Polk, who suspected the motives of people who disagreed with him, feared that one or the other would make political capital of his popularity as a military leader.

Polk's concern was heightened because domestic opposition to the war was growing. Many northerners feared that the war would lead to the expansion of slavery. Others (including an obscure Illinois congressman named Abraham Lincoln) felt that Polk had misled Congress about the outbreak of fighting and that the United States was the aggressor. The farther from the Rio Grande one went in the United States, the less popular "Mr. Polk's War" became; in New England opposition was almost as widespread as it had been to "Mr. Madison's War" in 1812.

Polk's design for prosecuting the war consisted of three parts. First, he would clear the Mexicans from Texas and occupy the northern provinces of Mexico. Second, he would take possession of California and New Mexico. Finally, he would march on Mexico City. Proceeding west from the Rio Grande, Taylor swiftly overran the northern provinces. In June 1846 American settlers in the Sacramento Valley seized Sonoma and raised the "Bear Flag" of the Republic of California. Another group, headed by Captain John C. Fremont, clashed with the Mexican authorities around Monterey, California, and then joined with the Sonoma rebels. A naval squadron under Commodore John D. Sloat captured Monterey and San Francisco in July 1846, and a squadron of cavalry commanded by General Stephen Watts Kearny joined the other American units in mopping-up operations around San Diego and Los Angeles. By February 1847 the United States had won control of nearly all of Mexico north of the capital city.

The campaign against Mexico City was the most difficult of the war. Polk put Winfield Scott in charge of the offensive. Scott was nearly six and a half feet tall; in uniform his presence was commanding. He was intelligent and cultivated, though somewhat pompous, as his nickname, Old Fuss and Feathers, indicated. After a sound but not spectacular record in the War of 1812, he had added to his reputation by helping to modernize military administration and to strengthen the professional training of officers.

Scott landed his army south of Veracruz, Mexico, on March 9, 1847; laid siege to the city; and obtained its surrender in less than three weeks with the loss of only a handful of his 10,000 men. Marching westward through hostile country, he maintained effective discipline, avoiding atrocities that might have inflamed the countryside against him. At Cerro Gordo, where the national road rose steeply toward the central highlands, Scott outflanked the Mexican position and then carried it by storm, capturing more than 3,000 prisoners and much equipment. By mid-May he had advanced to Puebla, only 80 miles southeast of Mexico City. After delaying until August for the arrival of reinforcements, he pressed on, won two hard-fought victories at the outskirts of the capital and on September 14 hammered his way into the city.

**The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo**

The Mexicans were thoroughly beaten, but they refused to accept the situation. As soon as the news of the capture of Veracruz reached Washington, Polk sent Nicholas P. Trist, chief clerk of the State Department, to accompany Scott's army and to act as peace commissioner after the fall of Mexico City. Because of the confused state of affairs after the fall of Mexico City, Trist was unable to open negotiations with Mexican peace commissioners until January 1848. Polk, unable to understand the delay, became impatient. He had authorized Trist to pay $30 million for New Mexico, Upper and Lower California, and the right of transit across Mexico's narrow Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Now, observing the disorganized state of Mexican affairs, he began to consider demanding more territory and paying less for it. He summoned Trist home.

Trist, with Scott's backing, ignored the order. He realized that unless a treaty was arranged soon, the Mexican government might disintegrate, leaving no one in authority to sign a treaty. He wrote a long letter to Polk, in effect refusing to be recalled, and proceeded to negotiate. Early in February the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was completed. By its terms Mexico accepted the Rio Grande as the boundary of Texas and ceded New Mexico and Upper California to the United States. In return the United States agreed to pay Mexico $ 15 million and to take on the claims of American citizens against Mexico, which by that time amounted to another $3.25 million.

When he learned that Trist had ignored his orders, the president seethed. Trist was "contemptibly base," he said, an "impudent and unqualified scoundrel." He ordered him placed under arrest and fired him from his State Department job.\* Yet Polk had no choice but to submit the treaty to the Senate, for to have insisted on more territory would have meant more fighting, and the war had become increasingly unpopular. The relatively easy military victory made some people ashamed that their country was crushing a small neighbor. Abolitionists called it an "invasion ... waged solely for the detestable and horrible purpose of extending and perpetuating American slavery." The Senate, subject to the same pressures as the president, ratified the agreement by a vote of 38 to 14.

**Fruits of Victory: Further Enlargement of the United States**

The Mexican War, won quickly and at relatively small cost in lives and money, brought huge territorial gains. The Pacific Coast from south of San Diego to the 49th parallel and all the land between the coast and the Continental Divide had become the property of the American people. Immense amounts of labor and capital would have to be invested before this new territory could be made to yield its bounty, but the country clearly had the capacity to accomplish the job.

In this atmosphere came what seemed a sign from the heavens. In January 1848, while Scott's veterans rested after their victorious campaign in Mexico City, a mechanic named James W Marshall was building a sawmill on the American River in the Sacramento Valley cast of San Francisco. One day, while supervising the deepening of the millrace, he noticed a few flecks of yellow in the bed of the stream. These he gathered up and tested. They were pure gold.

Other strikes had been made in California and been treated skeptically or as matters of local curiosity; since the days of Jamestown, too many pioneers had run fruitlessly in search of El Dorado, too much fool's gold had been passed off as the real thing. Yet this discovery produced an international sensation. The gold was real and plentiful, but equally important was the fact that everyone was ready to' believe the news. The gold rush reflected the heady confidence inspired by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo; it seemed the ultimate justification of manifest destiny. Surely an era of continental prosperity and harmony had dawned.

**Slavery: The Fire Bell in the Night Rings Again**

Prosperity came in full measure but not harmony, for once again expansion brought the nation face to face with the divisive question of slavery. This giant chunk of North America, most of it vacant, its future soon to be determined-should it be slave or free? The question, in one sense, seems hardly worth the national crisis it provoked. Slavery appeared to have little future in New Mexico and California, none in Oregon. Why did the South fight so hard for the right to bring slaves into a region that seemed so poorly suited to their exploitation?

Narrow partisanship provides part of the explanation. In districts where slavery was entrenched, a congressman who watched over the institution with the eyes of an eagle, ever ready to defend it against the most trivial slight, usually found himself a popular hero. In the northern states representatives who were vigilant in what they might describe as "freedom's cause" seldom regretted it on election day. But slavery raised a moral question that most Americans tried to avoid confronting. As patriots, they assumed that any sectional issue could be solved by compromise. Although the majority of whites had little respect for blacks, slave or free, few persons, northern or southern, could look on the ownership of one human being by another as simply an alternative form of economic organization and argue its merits as they would those of the protective tariff or a national bank. Twist the facts as they might, slavery was either right or it was wrong; being on the whole honest and moral, they could not, having faced that truth, stand by unconcerned while the question was debated.

The question could come up in Congress only indirectly because the Constitution did not give the federal government any control over slavery in the states. But Congress could decide the fate of slavery in the territories. For foes of slavery, the fact that the institution had no future in the Mexican Cession was an advantage. By attacking it where it could probably never exist, they could conceal from the slaveholders-and perhaps even from themselves-their hope ultimately to extinguish the institution everywhere.

Slavery had complicated the Texas problem from the start, and it beclouded the future of the Southwest even before the Mexican flag had been stripped from the staffs at Santa Fe and Los Angeles. On August 8, 1846, during the debate on a bill appropriating money for the conduct of the war, Democratic Congressman David Wilmot of Pennsylvania introduced an amendment that provided "as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico" that "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted."

Southerners found the Wilmot Proviso particularly insulting. Nevertheless, it passed the House but met defeat in the Senate, where southerners held the balance of power. To counter it, Calhoun, again senator from South Carolina, introduced resolutions in February 1846 that argued that Congress had no right to bar slavery from any territory; because territories belonged to all the states, slave and free, all should have equal rights in them. From this position it was only a step (soon taken) to demanding that Congress guarantee the right of slave owners to bring slaves into the territories and establish federal slave codes in the territories. Most northerners considered this proposal as repulsive as southerners found the Wilmot Proviso.

Calhoun's resolutions could never pass the northern-dominated House of Representatives, and Wilmot's Proviso had no chance in the Senate. Yet their existence threatened the Union. They were like the blades of a scissors-ineffective separately, an efficient cutting tool taken together.

To resolve the territorial problem, two compromises were offered. One, backed by President Polk, would extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. The majority of southerners; were willing to go along with this scheme, but most northerners would no longer agree to the reservation of any new territory for slavery. The other possibility, advocated by Senator Lewis Cass of Michigan, called for organizing new territories without mention of slavery, thereby leaving it to local territorial legislatures to determine their own institutions. Cass's "popular sovereignty," known more vulgarly as "squatter sovereignty," had the superficial merit of appearing to be democratic. Its virtue for the members of Congress, however, was that it allowed them to escape the responsibility of deciding the question themselves.

**The Election of 1848**

Plainly the time had come, in a democracy, to go to the people. The coming presidential election seemed to provide an ideal opportunity. The opportunity was missed. The politicians of both parties hedged, fearful of losing votes in one section or another. With the issues blurred, the electorate had no real choice. The Whigs nominated Zachary Taylor for president. They chose the general despite his total lack of political sophistication and after he had flatly refused to state his opinion on any current subject. The party offered no platform.

The Democratic Party had little better to offer. The nominee was Lewis Cass, the father of popular sovereignty, but the party did not endorse that or any other solution to the territorial question. Cass was at least an experienced politician, having been governor of Michigan Territory, secretary of war, minister to France, and senator. Nevertheless, he was vain, aloof, and extremely conservative.

The Van Buren wing of the Democratic Party was now known as the "Barnburners" to call attention to their radicalism-supposedly they would burn down the barn to get rid of the rats. The Barnburners could not stomach Cass, in part because he was willing to countenance the extension of slavery into new territories and in part because he had led the swing to Polk in the 1844 Democratic Convention. Combining with the proslavery Liberty Party, they formed the Free Soil Party and nominated Van Buren.

Van Buren knew he could not be elected, but he believed the time had come to take a stand. The Free Soil Party polled nearly 300,000 votes, about 10 percent of the total. Offered a choice between the honest ignorance of Taylor and the cynical opportunism of Cass, the voters-by a narrow margin-chose the former. Taylor received 1.36 million votes against Cass's 1.22 million. Taylor carried 8 of the 15 slave states and 7 of the 15 free states, proof that the sectional issue had been avoided.

**The Gold Rush**

It was now clear that the question of slavery in the territories had to be faced. The discovery of gold had brought an army of prospectors into California. Armed with pickaxes and shovels, with washing pans, even with knives and spoons, they hacked and dug and sifted, each accumulating a hoard of gleaming yellow metal, some of them great, some small. During 1849, 25,000 Americans made their way to California from the East by ship; more than 55,000 others crossed the continent by overland routes. About 8,000 Mexicans, 5,000 South Americans, and uncounted Europeans joined the rush.

The rough limits of the gold country had been quickly marked out. For 150 miles and more along the western slope of the Sierra stretched the great mother lode. Along any stream or canyon or gravel bed might be a treasure in nuggets, flakes, or dust.

The impact on the region was enormous. Between 1849 and 1860 about 200,000 people, nearly all males, flocked to California. Almost overnight the Spanish-American population was reduced to the status of a minority. Disregarding justice and reason alike, the newcomers from the East referred to everyone of Latin American origin as a "greaser" and sought by law and by violence to keep them from mining for gold. Even the local Californians (now American citizens) were discriminated against. The African Americans who came to California in search of gold were treated no better. As for the 150,000 Indians in California in 1849, they were almost exterminated. Only 35,000 remained by 1860.

The ethnic conflict was only part of the problem. Rough, hard men, separated from women, lusting for gold in a strange wild country where fortunes could be made in a day, gambled away in an hour, or stolen in an instant-such a lawless situation demanded the establishment of a territorial government. President Taylor, after weighing matters, in his gruff, simple-hearted way, suggested an uncomplicated answer: admit California directly as a state, letting the Californians decide for themselves about slavery. The rest of the Mexican Cession could be formed into another state.

The Californians reacted favorably to Taylor's proposal. They opposed slavery, though not for humanitarian reasons. They regarded blacks as poorly as they did Mexicans and feared that if slavery were permitted, white gold seekers would be disadvantaged. By October 1849 California had drawn up a constitution that outlawed slavery, and by December the new state government was functioning.

At this the South stood aghast. Taylor was the owner of a large plantation and more than 100 slaves. But being a military man, he was above all a nationalist; he disliked the divisiveness that partisan discussion of the issue was producing. Southerners were horrified by the president's reasoning. To admit California would destroy the balance between free and slave states in the Senate; to allow all the new land to become free would doom the South to wither in a corner of the country, surrounded by hostile free states. Should that happen, how long could slavery sustain itself even in South Carolina?

**The Compromise of 1850**

This was no longer a squabble over territorial governments. With the Union itself at stake, Senator Henry Clay rose to save the day. He had been as angry and frustrated when the Whigs nominated Taylor as he was when they passed him over for Harrison. Now, well beyond 70 and in ill health, he put away his ambition and his resentment and for the last time concentrated his remarkable vision on a great, multifaceted national problem. California must be free and soon admitted to the Union, but the South must have some compensation. For that matter, why not seize the opportunity to settle every outstanding sectional conflict related to slavery? Clay pondered long and hard, drew up a plan, then consulted his old Whig rival Webster and obtained his general approval. On January 29, 1850, he laid his proposal, "founded upon mutual forbearance," before the Senate. A few days later he defended it on the floor of the Senate in the last great speech of his life.

California should be brought directly into the Union as a free state, he argued. The rest of the Southwest should be organized as a territory without mention of slavery: The southerners would retain the right to bring slaves there, while in fact none would do so. The empty lands in dispute along the Texas border should be assigned to New Mexico Territory, Clay continued, but in exchange the United States should take over Texas' preannexation debts. The slave trade should be abolished in the District of Columbia (but not slavery itself ), and a more effective federal fugitive slave law should be enacted and strictly enforced in the North.

Clay's proposals occasioned one of the most magnificent debates in the history of the Senate. Every important member had his say; every possible viewpoint was presented, argued, rebutted, and rehashed. The majority clearly favored some compromise. But nothing could have been accomplished without the death of President Taylor on July 9. Obstinate, probably resentful because few people paid him half the heed they paid Clay and other prominent members of Congress, he had insisted on his own plan to bring both California and New Mexico directly into the Union. When Vice President Millard Fillmore, who was a politician, not an ideologue, succeeded him, the deadlock between the White House and Capitol Hill was broken. Even so, each part of the compromise had to be voted on separately, for too many stubborn congressmen were willing to overturn the whole plan because they objected to specific parts of it.

The final congressional maneuvering was managed by a relative newcomer, Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, who took over when Washington's summer heat prostrated the exhausted Clay. Partisanship and economic interests complicated Douglas's problem. According to rumor, Clay had persuaded an important Virginia newspaper editor to back the compromise by promising him a $100,000 government printing contract. This inflamed many southerners. New York merchants, fearful of the disruption of their southern business, submitted a petition bearing 25,000 names in favor of compromise, a document that had a favorable effect in the South. The prospect of the federal government's paying the debt of Texas made ardent compromisers of a horde of speculators. Between February and September, Texas bonds rose erratically from 29 to over 60, while men like W. W. Corcoran, whose Washington bank held more than $400,000 of these securities, entertained legislators and supplied lobbyists with large amounts of cash.

In the Senate and then in the House, tangled combinations pushed through the separate measures one by one. California became the thirty-first state. The rest of the Mexican Cession was divided into two territories-New Mexico and Utah-each to be admitted to the Union when qualified, "with or without slavery as [its] constitution may prescribe." Texas received $10 million to pay off its debt in return for accepting a narrower western boundary. The slave trade in the District of Columbia was abolished as of January 1, 1851. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 was amended to provide for the appointment of federal commissioners with authority to issue warrants, summon posses, and compel citizens under pain of fine or imprisonment to assist in the capture of fugitives. Commissioners who decided that an accused person was a runaway received a larger fee than if they decided the black was legally free. The accused could not testify in their own defense. They were to be returned to the South without jury trial merely on the submission of an affidavit by their "owner."

Only four senators and 28 representatives voted for all these bills. The two sides did not meet somewhere in the middle, as is usual with compromises. A large number of congressmen absented themselves when parts of the settlement unpopular in

their home districts came to a vote; 21 senators and 36 representatives failed to commit themselves on the new fugitive slave bill. Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi voted for the fugitive slave measure and the bill creating Utah Territory, remained silent on the New Mexico bill, and opposed the other measures. Senator Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, an abolitionist, supported only the admission of California and the abolition of the slave trade.

In this piecemeal fashion the Union was preserved. The credit belongs mostly to Clay, whose original conceptualization of the compromise enabled lesser minds to understand what they must do.

Everywhere sober and conservative citizens sighed with relief. When Congress met again in December, it seemed that party asperities had been buried forever. "I have determined never to make another speech on the slavery question," Senator Douglas told his colleagues. "Let us cease agitating, stop the debate, and drop the subject." If this were done, he predicted, the compromise would be accepted as a "final settlement." With this bit of wishful thinking, the year 1850 passed into history.

**Chapter Twelve**

**The Sections Go Their Own Ways**

A nation growing as rapidly as the United States in the (71 middle decades of the nineteenth century changed continually in hundreds of ways. The country was developing a national economy marked by the dependence of each area on all the others, the production of goods in one region for sale in all, the increased specialization of agricultural and industrial producers, and the growth in size of the average unit of production.

**The South**

The South was less affected than the other sections by urbanization, by European immigration, by the transportation revolution, and by industrialization. The region remained chiefly agricultural; cotton was still king, slavery the most distinctive southern institution. But important changes were occurring. Cotton continued to march westward until, by 1859, 1.3 million of the 4.3 million bales grown in the United States came from beyond the Mississippi. In the Upper South, Virginia held its place as the leading tobacco producer, but states beyond the Appalachians were raising more than half the crop. The older sections of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina shifted to the kind of diversified farming usually associated with the Northeast. By 1849 the wheat crop of Virginia was worth twice as much as the tobacco crop.

Edmund Ruffin introduced the use of marl, an earth rich in calcium, to counteract the acidity of worn-out tobacco fields. Ruffin discovered that dressings of marl, combined with the use of fertilizers and with proper drainage and plowing methods, doubled and even tripled the yield of corn and wheat. In the 1840s some southerners began to import Peruvian guano, a high-nitrogen fertilizer of bird droppings, which also increased yields. Others experimented with contour plowing to control erosion, with improved breeds of livestock, and with new types of plows and other agricultural machinery.

**The Economics of Slavery**

The increased importance of cotton in the South strengthened the hold of slavery on the region. The price of slaves rose until by the 1850s a prime field hand was worth as much as $1,800, roughly three times the cost in the 1820s. In the cotton fields of the Deep South, slaves brought several hundred dollars per head more than in the older regions; thus the tendency to sell them "down the river" continued. Mississippi took in some 10,000 slaves a year throughout the period; by 1830 the black population of the state exceeded the white. The westward shift of cotton cultivation was accompanied by the forcible transfer of more than a million African American slaves from the seaboard states to the dark, rich soil of regions watered by the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers and their tributaries. This "second great migration" of blacks was far greater than the original uprooting of blacks from Africa to the United States. Slave trading became a big business. There were about 50 dealers in Charleston in the 1850s and 200 in New Orleans.

The brisk internal slave trade resulted in the destruction of many slave families. According to one study, one-third of all first slave "marriages" in the upper South were broken by forced separation; and nearly half of all slave children were separated from at least one parent. Families were torn apart less frequently in the lower South, where far more slaves were bought than sold.

As blacks became more expensive, the ownership of slaves became more concentrated. In 1860 only about 46,000 of the 8 million white residents of the slave states had as many as 20 slaves. When one calculates the cost of 20 slaves and the land to keep them profitably occupied, it is easy to understand why this figure is so small. On the eve of the Civil War only one family in four owned any slaves at all.

There were few genuine economics of scale in southern agriculture. Small farmers grew the staple crops, and many of them owned a few slaves, often working beside them in the fields. These yeomen farmers were hardworking, self-reliant, and moderately prosperous, quite unlike the "poor white trash" of the pine barrens and the remote valleys of the Appalachians who scratched a meager subsistence from substandard soils and lived in ignorance and squalor.

Well-managed plantations yielded annual profits of 10 percent and more, and in general, money invested in southern agriculture earned at least a modest return. Considering the way the workforce was exploited by the masters, this is not surprising. However, the South failed to develop locally owned marketing and transportation facilities, and for this slavery was at least partly responsible. New York capitalists gradually came to control much of the South's cotton from the moment it was picked, and a large percentage of the crop found its way into New York warehouses before being sold to manufacturers. The same middlemen supplied most of the foreign goods that the planters purchased with their cotton earnings.

Southerners complained about this state of affairs, but did little to correct it. Capital tied up in the ownership of labor could not be invested in anything else, and social pressures in the South militated against investment in trade and commerce. Ownership of land and slaves yielded a kind of psychic income not available to any middleman. As one British visitor pointed out, the southern blacks were "a nonconsuming class." Still more depressing, under slavery the reservoir of intelligence and skill that the blacks represented was almost entirely wasted.

**Antebellum Plantation Life**

A medium-to-large plantation employing 20 or more slaves was more like a small village than a northern-type agricultural unit, but at the same time it resembled more a self-sufficient colonial farm than a nineteenth-century commercial operation. In addition to the master's house with its complement of barns and stables, there would usually be a kitchen, a smokehouse, a wash house, a home for the overseer should one be employed, perhaps a schoolhouse, a gristmill, a forge, and of course the slave quarters.

Slaveholding families were also quite different from northern families of similar status because of their "peculiar institution." Husbands and wives did not function in separate spheres to nearly the same extent, though their individual functions were different and gender related.

Although planter families purchased their clothing, furniture, and china as well as products such as sewing machines, books, and musical instruments, plantations were busy centers of household manufacture, turning out most of the clothing of slaves, except for shoes, and the everyday clothing of their own children, along with bedding and other textiles. Spinning, weaving, and sewing were women's work, both for whites and blacks. Nearly all the food consumed was raised on the land; only tea and coffee and a few other food items were commonly purchased.

The master was in general charge and his word was law, but his wife nearly always had immense responsibilities. Running the household meant supervising the servants (and punishing them when necessary), nursing the sick, planning meals, and seeing to the education of her own children and the training of young slaves. It could also involve running the entire plantation on the frequent occasions when her husband was away on business. At the same time, her role entailed being refined, graceful, and supposedly untroubled by worldly affairs. Most slaveholding women had to learn all these things by doing; in general, unmarried "young ladies" had few responsibilities beyond caring for their own rooms and persons and perhaps such "ladylike" tasks as arranging flowers.

The majority of the slaves of both sexes labored on the land from dawn to dusk. Household servants and artisans might also be called on for such labor when needed. Slave women were expected to cook for their own families and do other chores after working in the fields.

Children-both free and slave-were cared for by slaves, the former by household servants, the latter usually by an elderly woman'. Infants were brought to their mothers in the fields for nursing several times a day, for after a month or two after birth at most, slave mothers were required to go back to work. Until they were six or seven, slave children were given only small tasks such as feeding the chickens or minding a smaller child. Black and white youngsters played together and were often cared for by the same nursemaid.

Slave cabins were simple and crude; most consisted of a single room, dark, with a fireplace for cooking and heat. Usually the flooring was raised above ground level. Though certainly spartan, these quarters compared favorably with those of European peasants of the time and the poorest white American farmers. In 1827 Basil Hall, a British naval officer, reported that in a large South Carolina plantation, 140 slaves lived in 28 cottages or huts. These were "uncommonly neat and comfortable, and might have shamed those of many countries I have seen." Yet Hall dismissed the claims of white southerners that slaves were happier than the peasantry of England. Slavery was, above all, a "humiliation" imposed upon "the whole mass of the labouring population" of the South.

**The Sociology of Slavery**

It is difficult to generalize about the peculiar institution because so much depended on the individual master's behavior. The plantation environment forced the two races to live in close proximity. From this circumstance could rise the most paradoxical human relationships. One planter, using the appropriate pseudonym Clod Thumper, might write: "Africans are nothing but brutes, and they will love you better for whipping, whether they deserve it or not." Another, describing a slave named Bug, might say: "No one knows but myself what feeling I have for him. Black as he is we were raised together." Such diametrically conflicting sentiments often existed within the same person. Certainly almost all white southerners had no difficulty exploiting the labor of slaves for whom they felt genuine affection.

The United States was the only nation in the Western Hemisphere where the slave population grew by natural increase. After the ending of the slave trade in 1808, the black population increased at nearly the same rate as the white. Put differently, during the entire period from the founding of Jamestown to the Civil War only a little more than half a million slaves were imported. Yet in 1860 there were about four million blacks in the country. Surely this proves that American slaves were not driven to extinction. Most owners provided adequate clothing, housing, and food for their slaves, for only a fool or a sadist would fail to take care of such valuable property. But the slave diet (chiefly corn and hog fat) was deficient in protein, and this could make slaves disease prone. Infant mortality among slaves was twice the white rate, life expectancy at least five years less.

**Slaves were without rights;** they developed a distinctive way of life by attempting to resist oppression and injustice while adjusting to the system. Their marriages had no legal status, but their partnerships seem to have been as loving and stable as those of their masters, and they were acutely conscious of family relationships and responsibilities. Slave religion, a form of Christianity tinctured with African survivals, seemed to most slave owners a useful instrument for teaching meekness and resignation and for providing harmless emotional release, which it sometimes was and did. However, religious meetings provided slaves with the opportunity to organize, which sometimes led to riotous ways of resisting white domination. Religion also sustained the slaves' sense of their own worth as beings made in the image of God, and it taught them, therefore, that although human beings can be enslaved in body, their spirits cannot be enslaved without their consent.

Nearly every white observer claimed that slaves were congenitally lazy; George Washington, for example, wrote that "when an overlooker's back is turned, the most of them will slight their work, or be idle altogether." Sarah Gayle convinced herself that her "indulgence" made her slaves "idle and full of complaints," a charge that her description of what they actually did totally disproves. If the typical slave was indeed lazy, it can be explained as a rational response to forced, uncompensated labor. "Laziness" was also a reflection of a peasantlike view of the world, one that was a product of their surroundings, not of their servile status. Moreover, it must be remembered that under slavery the "overlooker's back" was rarely turned. Slaves worked long and hard.

As slaves rose in price and as northern opposition to the institution grew more vocal, the system hardened perceptibly. White southerners made much of the danger of insurrection. When a plot was uncovered or a revolt took place, instant and savage reprisals resulted. In 1822, after the conspiracy of Denmark Vesey was exposed by informers, 37 slaves were executed and another 30-odd deported, although no overt act of rebellion had occurred. After a rising in Louisiana, 16 blacks were decapitated, their heads left to rot on poles along the Mississippi as a grim warning.

The Nat Turner revolt in Virginia in 1831 was the most sensational of the slave uprisings; 57 whites lost their lives before it was suppressed. White southerners treated runaways almost as brutally as rebels, though they posed no real threat to whites. The authorities tracked down fugitives with bloodhounds and subjected captives to merciless lashings.

After Nat Turner's uprising, interest in doing away with slavery simply vanished in the white South. The southern states made it increasingly difficult for masters to free their slaves. During 1859 only about 3,000 in a slave population of nearly four million were given their freedom. Slavery goes a long way toward explaining why the South was so rural and why it had so little industry. Blacks were much harder to control in cities. In the United States, slavery and urban development had proven to be incompatible.

**Psychological Effects of Slavery**

The injustice of slavery needs no proof; less obvious is the fact that it had a corrosive effect on the personalities of southerners, slave and free alike. The system bore heavily on all slaves' sense of their own worth. Some found the condition absolutely unbearable. These individuals became the habitual runaways who collected whip scars like medals; the "loyal" servants who struck out in rage against a master, knowing that the result would be quick and certain death; and the leaders of slave revolts.

Denmark Vesey of South Carolina, even after buying his freedom, could not stomach the subservience demanded of slaves by the system. For years he preached resistance to his fellows, drawing his texts from the Declaration of Independence and the Bible and promising help from black Haiti. He planned his uprising for five years, patiently working out the details, only to see it aborted at the last moment when a few of his recruits lost their nerve and betrayed him. For Denmark Vesey, death was probably preferable to living with such rage as his soul contained.

Yet Veseys were rare. Most slaves appeared to be, if not contented, at least resigned to their fate. Many seemed even to accept the whites' evaluation of their inherent abilities and place in society. Of course in most instances, it is impossible to know whether or not this apparent subservience was feigned in order to avoid trouble.

Slaves had strong family and group attachments and a complex culture, maintained, so to speak, under the noses of their masters. By a mixture of subterfuge, accommodation, and passive resistance, they erected subtle defenses against exploitation, achieving a sense of community that helped sustain the psychic integrity of individuals. But slavery discouraged independence of judgment and self-reliance. These qualities are difficult enough to develop in human beings under the best circumstances; when every element in white society encouraged slaves to let others do their thinking for them, to avoid questioning the status quo, and to lead a simple, animal existence, many did so willingly enough. Was this not slavery's greatest shame?

Slavery also warped the whites, whose stereotypical views of slave nature were nonetheless insistent for being contradictory. White southerners described black men either as "Sambos" (lazy and subservient) or "Bucks" (superpotent and aggressive), females as "Mammies" (nurturing and faithful) or "jezebels" (wanton and seductive). The Sambo image proved the superiority of the owners and legitimated their use of whips to exact labor from the "lazy" slaves. The Buck was a reversal of the white ideal of a southern cavalier, morally inferior, thus properly kept in bondage. And by picturing black men as sexual threats to white women, slaveholders could avoid facing the fact that they could and often did take advantage of their power to avail themselves of black women. The "Mammy" stereotype assured whites of the slave women's underlying suitability for domestic duties and child care, whereas the "Jezebel" stereotype legitimated the white master's sexual advances toward his slaves: "she asked for it," so to speak. The harm done to the slaves by such mental distortions is obvious. More obscure is the effect on the masters: self-indulgence is perhaps only contemptible; self-delusion is pitiable and ultimately destructive.

Probably the large majority of owners respected the most fundamental personal rights of their slaves. For those of exceptional character, the responsibilties of ownership could be ennobling, and as far as sexual behavior is concerned, there are countless known cases of lasting relationships based on love and mutual respect between owners and what law and the community defined as their "property." But for hotheads, alcoholics, and others with psychological problems, the power could be brutalizing. Slavery provided the weak, the shiftless, and the unsuccessful with a scapegoat that made their own miserable state easier to bear but harder to escape. Even those whites who abhorred slavery sometimes let it corrupt their thinking: "I consider the labor of a breeding woman as no object, and that a child raised every 2 years is of more profit than the crop of the best laboring man." This cold calculation came from the pen of the author of the Declaration of Independence, a man who, it now seems likely, fathered at least one child by a slave.

**Manufacturing in the South**

Although the temper of southern society discouraged business and commercial activity, considerable manufacturing developed. Small flour and lumber mills flourished. Iron and coal were mined in Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. The availability of the raw material and the abundance of waterpower along the southern Appalachian slopes made it possible to manufacture textiles profitably. By 1825 a thriving factory was functioning at Fayetteville, North Carolina, and soon others sprang up elsewhere in North Carolina and in adjoining states.

William Gregg's factory at Graniteville, South Carolina, established in 1846, was a consistent moneymaker. An able propagandist as well as a good businessman, Gregg saw the textile business not only as a source of profit, but also as a device for improving the lot of the South's poor whites. He worked hard to weaken the southern prejudice against manufacturing and made his plant a model of benevolent paternalism similar to that of the early mills of Lowell. As with every other industry, however, southern textile manufacturing amounted to very little when compared with that of the North. Gregg employed only about 300 textile workers in 1850, the whole state of South Carolina fewer than 900. Lowell, Massachusetts, had more spindles turning in 1860 than did the entire South. Less than 15 percent of all the goods manufactured in the United States in 1860 came from the South; the region did not really develop an industrial society. Its textile manufacturers depended on the North for machinery, for skilled workers, for financing, and for insurance.

**The Northern Industrial Juggernaut**

The most obvious change in the North in the decades before the Civil War was the rapid growth of industry. The best estimates suggest that immediately after the War of 1812 the United States was manufacturing annually less than $200 million worth of goods. In 1859 the northeastern states alone produced $1.27 billion of the national total of almost $2 billion.

Manufacturing expanded in so many directions that it is difficult to summarize its evolution. The factory system made great strides. The development of rich anthracite coalfields in Pennsylvania was particularly important in this connection. The coal could be floated cheaply on canals to convenient sites and used to produce both heat for smelting and metalworking and steam power to drive machinery. Steam permitted greater flexibility in locating factories and in organizing work within them, and because waterpower was already being used to capacity, steam was essential for the expansion of output.

American industry displayed a remarkable receptivity to technological change. A society in flux put a premium on resourcefulness; an environment that offered so much freedom to the individual encouraged experimentation. The expanding market inspired businessmen to use new techniques. With skilled labor always in short supply, the pressure to substitute machines for trained hands was great.

In the 1820s a foreign visitor noted: "Everything new is quickly introduced here, and all the latest inventions.... The moment an American hears the word 'invention' he pricks up his ears." Twenty years later a Frenchman wrote: "if they continue to work with the same ardor ... all the mountains will be flattened, the valleys filled, all matter rendered productive." By 1850 the United States led the world in the manufacture of goods that required the use of precision instruments; American clocks, pistols, rifles, and locks were outstanding.

The American exhibits at the London Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851 so impressed the British that they sent two special commissions to the United States to study manufacturing practices. The British visitors were amazed by the lock and clock factories of New England and by the plants where screws, files, and similar metal objects were turned out in volume by automatic machinery.

Invention alone does not account for the industrial advance. Every year new natural resources were discovered and made available by the westward march of settlement, and the expansion of agriculture produced an ever larger supply of raw materials for the mills and factories. Of the 10 leading industries in 1860, 8 (flour milling, cotton textiles, lumber, shoes, men's clothing, leather, woolen goods, and liquor) relied on farm products for their raw materials.

In the 1850s the earlier prejudice against corporations began to break down; by the end of the decade the northern and northwestern states had all passed general incorporation laws. Of course the corporate device made possible larger accumulations of capital.

Industrial growth caused an increase in the demand for labor. The effects, however, were mixed. Skilled artisans, technicians, and toolmakers earned good wages and found it relatively easy to set themselves up first as independent craftsmen, later as small manufacturers. The expanding frontier drained off much agricultural labor that might otherwise have been attracted to industry, and the thriving new towns of the West absorbed large numbers of eastern artisans of every kind. At the same time, the pay of an unskilled worker was never enough to support a family decently, and the new machines weakened the bargaining power of artisans by making skill less important.

Many other forces acted as stimulants to manufacturing. Immigration increased rapidly. An avalanche of strong backs and willing hands and thousands of keen minds descended on the country from Europe. European investors poured large sums into the booming American economy, and the savings of millions of Americans and the hoard of new California gold added to the supply of capital. Improvements in transportation, the growth of the population, the absence of internal tariff barriers, and the relatively high per capita wealth of the people all meant an ever-expanding market for manufactured goods.

**Self generated Expansion**

**A Nation of Immigrants**

Rapid industrialization influenced American life in countless ways, none more significant than its effect on the character of the workforce and consequently on the structure of society. The jobs created by industrial expansion attracted European immigrants by the tens of thousands. It is a truism that America is a nation of immigrants-even the ancestors of the Indians came to the New World from Asia. But only with the establishment of the independent United States did the word immigrant, meaning a foreign-born resident, come into existence.

The flow of newcomers was slow for several decades, first because of European wars and then because of bad times following the defeat of Napoleon. Fewer than 300,000 people entered the United States between 1775 and 1820. As late as 1840 less than 8 percent of the population was foreign born or the children of immigrants. Then 1.5 million people came to the United States in the 1840s and 2.6 million in the 1850s. In proportion to the population, this was the heaviest period of immigration in American history.

Most of this human tide came from two countries-Ireland and Germany. This was especially true between 1847 and 1854, when the Irish potato blight and a series of crop failures in Germany drove thousands to try their luck in America. Many thousands of substantial Germans and Scandinavians pushed on directly into the western regions.

But the poorer immigrants could not afford to do this; farming required capital that the majority did not have. The Irish in particular tended to settle in the large eastern seaports. For the first time the nation had a culturally distinctive working class with its own habits and values. Irish immigrants were so desperately poor that they would accept whatever wage employers offered them. They thus roused resentment among native workers, resentment exacerbated by the unfamiliarity of the Irish with city ways and by their Roman Catholic faith, which the Protestant majority associated with Old World authoritarianism and corruption.

The Irish, in turn, developed prejudices against African Americans, with whom they often competed for work. And of course blacks responded with equal bitterness. "Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room for some newly arrived emigrant from the Emerald Isle, whose hunger and color entitle him to special favor," one of them complained. Antiblack prejudice was less noticeable among other immigrant groups, but by no means absent.

Social and racial rivalries aside, unskilled immigrants caused serious disruptions of economic patterns wherever they appeared. Their absorption into the factories of New England speeded the disintegration of the system of hiring young women. Already competition and technical advances in the textile industry were increasing the pace of the machines and reducing the number of skilled workers needed to run them. Fewer young farm women were willing to work under these conditions. Recent immigrants, who required less "coddling" and who seemed to provide the mills with a "permanent" working force, replaced the women. By 1860 Irish immigrants alone made up more than 50 percent of the labor force in the New England mills.

**How Wage Earners Lived**

The influx of immigrants does not entirely explain the low standard of living of industrial workers during this period. Low wages and the crowding that resulted from the swift expansion of city populations produced slums that would make the most noisome modern ghetto seem a paradise. A Boston investigation in the late 1840s described one district as "a perfect hive of human beings ... huddled together like brutes." In New York tens of thousands of the poor lived in dark, rank cellars; those in the waterfront districts were often invaded by high tides. Tenement houses like great gloomy prisons rose back to back, each with many windowless rooms and often without heat or even running water.

Out of doors, city life for the poor was almost equally squalid. Slum streets were littered with garbage and trash. Recreational facilities were almost nonexistent; work on Central Park in New York City, the country's first important urban park, did not begin until the mid-1850s. Police and fire protection were pitifully inadequate. "Urban problems" were less critical than a century later only because they affected a smaller part of the population; for those who experienced them they were, all too often, crushing. There were child beggars in New York City who had to scavenge for food and who took shelter at night in coal bins and empty barrels.

In 1851 the New York Tribune published a minimum weekly budget for a family of five. The budget, which allowed nothing for recreation, savings, medical bills, or other amenities-it did include 12 cents a week for newspapers-came to $10.37. Because the weekly pay of a factory hand seldom reached $5, the wives and children of most workers labored in the factories merely to survive. And child labor in the 1850s differed fundamentally from child labor in the 1820s. The pace of the machines had become much faster by then, the working environment more depressing.

Nevertheless, skilled workers improved their lot somewhat in the 1840s and 1850s. The working day declined from about 12.5 hours to 10 or 11 hours. Most states enacted effective mechanic's lien laws, giving workers first call on the assets of bankrupt and defaulting employers, and the Massachusetts court's decision in the case of Commonwealth v. Hunt (1842), establishing the legality of labor unions, became a judicial landmark when other state courts followed the precedent.

**Progress and Poverty**

Any investigation of American society before the Civil War reveals a paradox that is obvious but difficult to resolve. The United States was a land of opportunity, a democratic society with a prosperous, expanding economy and few class distinctions. Its people had a high standard of living in comparison with the citizens of European countries. Yet within this rich, confident nation there existed a class of miserably underpaid and depressed unskilled workers, mostly immigrants, who were worse off materially than nearly any southern slave.

The middle-class majority seemed indifferent to or at best unaware of these conditions. Some skilled workers protected their own interests by organizing trade unions, but did not consider themselves permanent members of any wage-earning class. To many, working for wages seemed almost un-American, a rejection of the republican values of freedom and independence that had triumphed in the Revolution.

There were reformers who conducted investigations, published exposes, and labored to help the victims of urbanization and industrialization. They achieved very little. Great fires burned during these decades to release the incredible energies of America. The poor were the ashes, sifting down silent and unnoticed beneath the dazzle and the smoke. Industrialization produced poverty (in Marxian terminology, a proletarian class) and an aristocracy of capitalists. Tenements sprang up cheek by jowl with the urban palaces of the new rich and the tree-lined streets of the prosperous middle class.

Economic opportunities were great, taxation minimal. Little wonder that as the generations passed, the rich got richer. Industrialization accelerated the process and, by stimulating the immigration of masses of poor workers, skewed the social balance still further. Society became more stratified, differences in wealth and status among citizens greater. But the ideology of egalitarian democracy held its own. This situation endured for the rest of the century, and in some respects it still endures.

**Foreign Commerce**

Changes in the pattern of foreign commerce were less noticeable than those in manufacturing but nevertheless significant. After increasing erratically during the 1820s and 1830s, both imports and exports leaped forward in the next 20 years. The nation remained primarily an exporter of raw materials and an importer of manufactured goods, and in most years it imported more than it exported. Cotton continued to be the most valuable export, in 1860 accounting for a record $191 million out of total exports of $333 million. Despite America's own thriving industry, textiles still held the lead among imports, with iron products second. As in earlier days, Great Britain was both the best customer of the United States and its leading supplier.

The increase in the volume and value of trade and its concentration at larger ports had a marked effect on the construction of ships. By the 1850s the average vessel was three times the size of those built 30 years earlier. Startling improvements in design, culminating in the long, sleek, white-winged clipper ships, made previously undreamed-of speeds possible. Appearing just in time to supply the need for fast transportation to the California gold fields, the clippers cut sailing time around the Horn to San Francisco from five or six months to three, the record of 89 days being held jointly by the Andrew Jackson and by Donald McKay's famous Flying Cloud. Another McKay-designed clipper, aptly named Champion of the Seas, once logged 465 nautical miles in 24 hours. To achieve such speeds, cargo capacity had to be sacrificed, making clippers uneconomical for carrying bulky produce. But for specialty goods the clippers were unsurpassed in their brief heyday.

The reign of the clipper ship was short. Like so many other things, ocean commerce was being mechanized. Steamships conquered the high seas more slowly than the rivers because early models were unsafe in rough waters and uneconomical. However, by the late 1840s steamships were capturing most of the passenger traffic, mail contracts, and first-class freight. By 1860 the Atlantic had been crossed in less than 10 days.

The steamship, and especially the iron ship, which had greater cargo-carrying capacity and was stronger and less costly to maintain, took away the advantages that American shipbuilders had held since colonial times. American lumber was cheap, but the British excelled in iron technology. Although the United States invested about $14.5 million in subsidies for the shipping industry, the funds were not employed intelligently and did little good. In 1858 government aid to shipping was ended.

The combination of competition, government subsidy, and technological advance drove down shipping rates. Between the mid twenties and the mid fifties the cost of moving a pound of cotton from New York to Liverpool fell from one cent to about one-third of a cent. Transatlantic passengers could obtain the best accommodations on the fastest ships for under $200 and good accommodations on slower packets for as little as $75.

Rates were especially low for European emigrants willing to travel to America on cargo vessels. Conditions on these ships were crowded and foul. Frequently epidemics took a fearful toll among steerage passengers. Yet without this cheap means of transportation, thousands of poor immigrants would simply have remained at home. Bargain freight rates also help explain the clamor of American manufacturers for high tariffs, for transportation costs added relatively little to the price of European goods.

**Canals and Railroads**

Another dramatic change was the shift in the direction of the nation's internal commerce and its immense increase. From the time of the first settlers in the Mississippi Valley, the Great River had controlled the flow of goods from farm to market. The completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 heralded a shift, speeded by the feverish canal construction of the following decade. In the late 1830s the bulk of the trade of the valley still flowed down to New Orleans, but each year saw more western produce moving to market through the canals. The volume of western commerce over the Erie in 1851 amounted to more than 20 times what it had been in 1836, whereas the value of western goods reaching New Orleans in this period increased only two and a half times.

The expanding traffic and New York's enormous share of it caused businessmen in other eastern cities whose canal projects had been unsuccessful to respond promptly when a new means of transport, the railroad, became available. The first railroads were built in England in the 1820s. In 1830 the first American line, the ambitiously named Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, carried 80,000 passengers in its first year over a 13-mile stretch of track. By 1833 Charleston, South Carolina, had a line reaching 136 miles to Hamburg, on the Savannah River. Two years later the cars began rolling on the Boston and Worcester Railroad. The Panic of 1837 slowed construction, but by 1840 the United States had 3,328 miles of track, equal to the canal mileage and nearly double the railroad mileage of all Europe.

The first railroads did not compete with the canals for intersectional traffic. The through connections needed to move goods economically over great distances materialized slowly. Of the 6,000 miles of track operating in 1848, nearly all lay east of the Appalachians, and little of it had been coordinated into railroad systems.

Engineering problems held back growth. Steep grades and sharp curves-unavoidable in many parts of the country if the cost of the roads were not to be prohibitive-required more powerful and flexible engines than yet existed. Sparks from wood-burning locomotives caused fires. Wooden rails topped with strap iron wore out quickly and broke loose under the weight and vibration of heavy cars. In time the iron T-rail and the use of cross tics set in loose gravel to reduce vibration increased the durability of the tracks and made possible heavier, more efficient equipment. Modifications in the design of locomotives enabled the trains to negotiate sharp curves. Engines that could burn hard coal appeared, thereby eliminating the danger of starting fires along the tracks and reducing fuel costs.

Between 1848 and 1852 railroad mileage nearly doubled. Three years later it had doubled again, and by 1860 the nation had 30,636 miles of track. During this extraordinary burst of activity, four companies drove lines of gleaming iron from the

Atlantic seaboard to the great interior valley. In 1851 the Erie, longest road in the world with 5 37 miles of track, linked the Hudson River north of New York City with Dunkirk on Lake Eric. Late the next year the Baltimore and Ohio reached the Ohio River at Wheeling, and in 1853 a banker named Erastus Corning consolidated eight short lines connecting Albany and Buffalo to form the New York Central. Finally, in 1858 the Pennsylvania Railroad completed a line across the mountains from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. By 1855 passengers could travel from Chicago or St. Louis to the East Coast at a cost ranging from about $20 to $30; the trip took, with luck, less than 48 hours. A generation earlier such a trip required two to three weeks.

**Financing the Railroads**

Railroad building required immense amounts of labor and capital at a time when many other demands for these resources existed. Immigrants or (in the South) slaves did most of the heavy work. Raising the necessary money proved a more complex task.

Private investors supplied about three-quarters of the money invested in railroads before 1860. Much of this capital came from local merchants and businessmen and from farmers along the proposed routes. Funds were easy to raise because subscribers seldom had to lay out the full price of their stock at one time; instead they were subject to periodic "calls" for a percentage of their commitment as construction progressed. If the railroad made money, much of the additional mileage could be paid for out of earnings from the first sections built. The Utica and Schenectady Railroad, one of the lines that became part of the New York Central, was capitalized in 1833 at $2 million (20,000 shares at $100). In 1844 the track had been completed, shares were selling at $129, and shareholders were receiving handsome cash dividends.

The Utica and Schenectady was a short railroad in a rich territory; for less favorably situated lines, stocks were hard to sell. Of the lines connecting the seaboard with the Middle West, the New York Central alone needed no public aid, chiefly because it ran through prosperous, well-populated country and across level terrain. The others were all "mixed enterprises," drawing about half their capital from state and local governments and the rest from bonds sold to American and foreign investors.

Public aid took many forms. Towns, counties, and the states themselves lent money to railroads and invested in their stock. Special privileges, such as exemption from taxation and the right to condemn property, were often granted, and in a few cases states built and operated railroads as public corporations.

As with earlier internal improvement proposals, federal financial aid to railroads was usually blocked in Congress by a combination of eastern and southern votes. But in 1850 a scheme for granting federal lands to the states to build a line from Lake Michigan to the Gulf of Mexico passed both houses. The main beneficiary was the Illinois Central Railroad, which received a 200-foot right of way and alternate strips of land along the track one mile wide and six miles deep, a total of almost 2.6 million acres. By mortgaging this land and by selling portions of it to farmers, the Illinois Central raised nearly all the $23.4 million it spent on construction. The success of this operation led to additional grants of almost 20 million acres in the 1850s, benefiting more than 40 railroads. Far larger federal grants were made after the Civil War, when the transcontinental lines were built.

Frequently the capitalists who promoted railroads were more concerned with making money out of the construction of the lines than with operating them. The banker Erastus Corning was a good railroad executive; his lines were well maintained and efficiently run. Yet he was also mayor of Albany, an important figure in New York and national politics, and a manufacturer of iron. He accepted no salary as president of the Utica and Schenectady, "asking only that he have the privilege of supplying all the rails, running gear, tools and other iron and steel articles used." When he could not himself produce rails of the proper quality, he purchased them in England, charging the railroad a commission for his services.

Corning's actions led to stockholder complaints, and a committee was appointed to investigate. He managed to control this group easily enough, but it did report that "the practice of buying articles for the use of the Railroad Company from its own officers might in time come to lead to abuses of great magnitude." The prediction proved all too accurate in the generation following the Civil War.

Corning was basically honest; others in the railroad business were not. Some issued stock to themselves without paying for it and sold it to gullible investors. Others used inside information to make killings in the stock market; still others set up special construction companies and awarded themselves contracts at inflated prices. At the same time that the country was developing a truly national economy, it was also producing its first really big-time crooks.

**Railroads and the Economy**

The effects of so much railroad construction were profound. Although the main reason that farmers put more land under the plow was an increase in the price of agricultural products, the railroad helped determine just what land was utilized and how profitably it could be farmed.

Much of the fertile prairie through which the Illinois Central ran had been available for settlement for many years before 1850, but development had been slow because it was remote from navigable waters and had no timber. In 1840 the three counties immediately northeast of Springfield, Illinois, had a population of about 8,500. They produced about 59,000 bushels of wheat and 690,000 bushels of corn. In the next decade the region grew slowly by the standards of that day: The three counties had about 14,000 inhabitants in 1850 and produced 71,000 bushels of wheat and 2.2 million bushels of corn. Then came the railroad and with it an agricultural revolution. By 1860 the population of the three counties had soared to over 38,000, wheat production had topped 550,000 bushels, and corn 5.7 million bushels. "Land-grant" railroads such as the Illinois Central stimulated agricultural expansion by advertising their lands widely and selling farm sites at low rates on liberal terms.

Access to world markets gave the farmers of the upper Mississippi Valley an incentive to increase output. Land was plentiful and cheap, but wages rose sharply, especially after 1850. New tools and machines appeared in time to ease the labor shortage. First came the steel plowshare, invented by John Deere, a Vermont-born blacksmith who had settled in Illinois in 1854. The prairie sod was tough and sticky, but Deere's smooth metal plows cut through it easily. By 1857 he was selling 10,000 plows a year.

Still more important was the perfection of the mechanical reaper. The major figure in the development of the reaper was Cyrus Hall McCormick. McCormick's horse-drawn reaper bent a swath of grain against the cutting knife and then deposited it neatly on a platform, whence it could easily be raked into windows. With this machine, two workers could cut 14 times as much wheat as with scythes. By 1860 nearly 80,000 reapers had been sold; their efficiency helps explain why wheat output rose by nearly 75 percent in the 1850s.

The railroad had an equally powerful impact on American cities. The eastern seaports benefited and so did countless intermediate centers such as Buffalo and Cincinnati. By 1855 Chicago was terminal for 2,200 miles of track and controlled the commerce of an imperial domain. The railroads, like the textile industry, stimulated other kinds of economic activity. They transformed agriculture, as we have seen; both real estate values and buying and selling of land increased whenever the iron horse puffed into a new district. The railroads spurred regional concentration of industry and an increase in the size of business units. Their insatiable need for capital stimulated the growth of investment banking. The complexity of their operations made them the first modern business enterprise, a vast bureaucracy staffed by salaried managers responsible for different aspects of the operation.

By 1860 railroad construction consumed nearly half the nation's output of bar and sheet iron. Probably more labor and more capital were occupied in economic activities resulting from the development of railroads than in the railway business itself-another way of saying that the railroads were immensely valuable internal improvements.

The proliferation of trunk lines and the competition of the canal system (for many products the slowness of canal transportation was not a serious handicap) led to a sharp decline in freight and passenger rates. Periodically, railroads engaged in "Wars" to capture business. At times a person could travel from New York to Buffalo for as little as $4; anthracite was being shipped from the Pennsylvania mines to the coast for $1.50 a ton.

Cheap transportation had a revolutionary effect on western agriculture. Farmers in Iowa could now raise grain to feed the factory workers of Lowell and even of Manchester, England. Two-thirds of the meat consumed in New York City was soon arriving by rail from beyond the Appalachians. Success bred success for farmers and for the railroads. Profits earned carrying wheat enabled the railroads to build feeder lines that opened up still wider areas to commercial agriculture and made it easy to bring in lumber, farm machinery, household furnishings, and the settlers themselves at a low cost.

**Railroads and the Sectional Conflict**

Increased production and cheap transportation boosted the western farmer's income and standard of living. The days of isolation and self-sufficiency, even for the family on the edge of the frontier, rapidly disappeared. Pioneers quickly became businessmen and, to a far greater extent than their forebears, consumers, buying all sorts of manufactured articles that their ancestors had either made for themselves or done without. This development had its costs. Like southern planters, western farmers became dependent on middlemen and lost some of their feeling of self-reliance. Overproduction became a problem. It began to take more capital to buy a farm, for as profits increased, so did the price of land. Machinery was an additional expense. The proportion of farm laborers and tenants increased.

The linking of East and West had fateful effects on politics. The increased case of movement from section to section and the ever more complex social and economic integration of East and West stimulated nationalism and thus became a force for the preservation of the Union. Without the railroads and canals, Illinois and Iowa would scarcely have dared to side against the South in 1861. When the Mississippi ceased to be essential to them, citizens of the upper valley could afford to be more hostile to slavery and especially to its westward extension. Economic ties with the Northeast reinforced cultural connections.

The South might have preserved its influence in the Northwest if it had pressed forward its own railroad-building program. It failed to do so because of the scattered population of the South, the paucity of passenger traffic, the seasonal nature of much of the freight business, and the absence of large cities. Southerners placed too much reliance on the Mississippi: The fact that traffic on the river continued to be heavy throughout the 1850s blinded them to the precipitous rate at which their relative share of the nation's trade was declining. But the fundamental cause of the South's backwardness in railroad construction was the attitude of its leaders. Southeners of means were no more interested in commerce than in industry; their capital found other outlets.

**The Economy on the Eve of Civil War**

Between the midforties and the mid fifties, the United States experienced one of the most remarkable periods of growth in the history of the world. Every economic indicator surged forward: manufacturing, grain and cotton production, population, railroad mileage, gold production, sales of public land. The building of the railroads stimulated business, and by making transportation cheaper the completed lines energized the nation's economy. The "American System" that Henry Clay had dreamed of arrived with a rush just as Clay was passing from the scene.

Inevitably this growth caused dislocations, which were aggravated by the boom psychology that once again infected the popular mind. In 1857 there was a serious

collapse. People called this abrupt downturn the Panic of 1857. Yet the vigor of the economy was such that the bad times did not last long. The South, somewhat out of the hectic rush to begin with, was affected very little by the collapse of 1857, for cotton prices continued high. This gave planters the false impression that their economy was immune to downturns. Some began to argue that the South would be better off out of the Union.

Before the revival of the national economy was complete, however, the sectional crisis between North and South shook people's confidence in the future. Then the war came and with it a new set of forces shaped economic development.