

Forging the National Economy, 1790–1860

Take not from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned.

Thomas Jefferson, 1801

Prologue: The Industrial Revolution spawned the factory, and in turn the factory-magnet drew from the hallowed home countless men, women, and even tiny children. Alexander Hamilton himself had stressed the spiritual value of training “the little innocents” in honest habits of industry. But the exploitation of little innocents, as well as their elders, resulted in grave abuses. For more than a century, labor fought an uphill fight against employers for a gradual improvement of its lot. Meanwhile, the spread of the factory was spurred by the canal network, the river steamboat, and then the railroad. The fast-growing states of the Ohio Valley and the Upper Mississippi Valley became less dependent on the mouth of the Mississippi as the outlet for their produce, because the new arteries of transportation carried their exports cheaply and swiftly to the cities of the eastern seaboard. The ties of the Union, conspicuously in an east-west direction, were thus greatly strengthened.

A. The Spread of the Factory

I. Wage Slavery in New England (1832)

Seth Luther, a poorly educated carpenter who helped construct New England textile factories, ranks as one of the most forceful of the early labor reformers. In numerous speeches and pamphlets, he condemned such abuses as paternalistic control, “blacklists” of troublemakers, low wages, and overlong hours. He especially deplored the exploitation of children, who were sometimes dragged to “whipping rooms.” His deadly earnestness and biting sarcasm were partly responsible for the United States’ first law to control child labor, enacted by Massachusetts in 1842. It prohibited children under age twelve from working more than ten hours a day. What were the most serious abuses that Luther here discusses? In what specific ways were they harmful?

¹Seth Luther, *An Address to the Working-Men of New-England . . .*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1833), pp. 17–21.

A [western] member of the United States Senate seems to be extremely pleased with cotton mills. He says in the Senate, “Who has not been delighted with the clockwork movements of a large cotton manufactory?” He had visited them often, and always with increased delight. He says the women work in large airy apartments, well warmed. They are neatly dressed, with ruddy complexions, and happy countenances. They mend the broken threads and replace the exhausted balls or broaches, and at stated periods they go to and return from their meals with light and cheerful step. (While on a visit to that pink of perfection, Waltham [Massachusetts], I remarked that the females moved with a very light step, and well they might, for the bell rang for them to return to the mill from their homes in nineteen minutes after it had rung for them to go to breakfast. Some of these females boarded the largest part of a half a mile from the mill.)

And the grand climax [says the western senator] is that at the end of the week, after working like slaves for thirteen or fourteen hours every day, “they enter the temples of God on the Sabbath, and thank him for all his benefits. . . .” We remark that whatever girls or others may do west of the Allegheny Mountains, we do not believe there can be a single person found east of those mountains who ever thanked God for permission to work in a cotton mill. . . .

We would respectfully advise the honorable Senator to travel incognito when he visits cotton mills. If he wishes to come at the truth, he must not be known. Let him put on a short jacket and trousers, and join the “lower orders” for a short time. . . . In that case we could show him, in some of the prisons in New England called cotton mills, instead of rosy cheeks, the pale, sickly, haggard countenance of the ragged child—haggard from the worse than slavish confinement in the cotton mill. He might see that child driven up to the “clockwork” by the cowskin [whip], in some cases. He might see, in some instances, the child taken from his bed at four in the morning, and plunged into cold water to drive away his slumbers and prepare him for the labors of the mill. After all this he might see that child robbed, yes, robbed of a part of his time allowed for meals by moving the hands of the clock backwards, or forwards, as would best accomplish that purpose. . . . He might see in some, and not infrequent, instances, the child, and the female child too, driven up to the “clockwork” with the cowhide, or well-seasoned strap of American manufacture.

We could show him many females who have had corporeal punishment inflicted upon them; one girl eleven years of age who had her leg broken with a billet of wood; another who had a board split over her head by a heartless monster in the shape of an overseer of a cotton mill “paradise.”

We shall for want of time . . . omit entering more largely into detail for the present respecting the cruelties practiced in some of the American mills. Our wish is to show that education is neglected, . . . because if thirteen hours’ actual labor is required each day, it is impossible to attend to education among children, or to improvement among adults.

2. The Abuse of Female Workers (1836)

The factory girls of Lowell, Massachusetts, were a showpiece for visitors, notably Charles Dickens in 1842. Having seen the miserable working conditions in England, he wrote almost ecstatically of the fresh air in the Lowell mills and of the cheerful faces and blooming health of the "Lowell girls." He also took favorable note of the girls' cleanliness, clothes, thrift, morals, and educational and recreational facilities. Perhaps he was unduly impressed by the contrast with English factories; certainly he did not investigate as carefully the less savory mills. Six years earlier, a reformist writer in a contemporary American journal presented a strikingly different view. How, in the following account, does this writer evaluate the early factory system?

We have lately visited the cities of Lowell [Massachusetts] and Manchester [New Hampshire] and have had an opportunity of examining the factory system more closely than before. We had distrusted the accounts which we had heard from persons engaged in the labor reform now beginning to agitate New England. We could scarcely credit the statements made in relation to the exhausting nature of the labor in the mills, and to the manner in which the young women—the operatives—lived in their boardinghouses, six sleeping in a room, poorly ventilated.

We went through many of the mills, talked particularly to a large number of the operatives, and ate at their boardinghouses, on purpose to ascertain by personal inspection the facts of the case. We assure our readers that very little information is possessed, and no correct judgments formed, by the public at large, of our factory system, which is the first germ of the industrial or commercial feudalism that is to spread over our land. . . .

In Lowell live between seven and eight thousand young women, who are generally daughters of farmers of the different states of New England. Some of them are members of families that were rich in the generation before. . . .

The operatives work thirteen hours a day in the summer time, and from daylight to dark in the winter. At half past four in the morning the factory bell rings, and at five the girls must be in the mills. A clerk, placed as a watch, observes those who are a few minutes behind the time, and effectual means are taken to stimulate to punctuality. This is the morning commencement of the industrial discipline (should we not rather say industrial tyranny?) which is established in these associations of this moral and Christian community.

At seven the girls are allowed thirty minutes for breakfast, and at noon thirty minutes more for dinner, except during the first quarter of the year, when the time is extended to forty-five minutes. But within this time they must hurry to their boardinghouses and return to the factory, and that through the hot sun or the rain or the cold. A meal eaten under such circumstances must be quite unfavorable to digestion and health, as any medical man will inform us. At seven o'clock in the evening the factory bell sounds the close of the day's work.

²*The Harbinger*, November 14, 1836, in H. R. Warfel et al., eds., *The American Mind* (New York and Cincinnati: The American Book Company, 1937), pp. 390–391. In 1847 this journal became the official organ of the Brook Farm colony.

Thus thirteen hours per day of close attention and monotonous labor are exacted from the young women in these manufactories. . . . So fatigued—we should say, exhausted and worn out, but we wish to speak of the system in the simplest language—are numbers of girls that they go to bed soon after their evening meal, and endeavor by a comparatively long sleep to resuscitate their weakened frames for the toil of the coming day.

When capital has got thirteen hours of labor daily out of a being, it can get nothing more. It would be a poor speculation in an industrial point of view to own the operative; for the trouble and expense of providing for times of sickness and old age would more than counterbalance the difference between the price of wages and the expense of board and clothing. The far greater number of fortunes accumulated by the North in comparison with the South shows that hiring labor is more profitable for capital than slave labor.

Now let us examine the nature of the labor itself, and the conditions under which it is performed. Enter with us into the large rooms, when the looms are at work. The largest that we saw is in the Amoskeag Mills at Manchester. . . . The din and clatter of these five hundred looms, under full operation, struck us on first entering as something frightful and infernal, for it seemed such an atrocious violation of one of the faculties of the human soul, the sense of hearing. After a while we became somewhat inured to it, and by speaking quite close to the ear of an operative and quite loud, we could hold a conversation and make the inquiries we wished.

The girls attend upon an average three looms; many attend four, but this requires a very active person, and the most unremitting care. However, a great many do it. Attention to two is as much as should be demanded of an operative. This gives us some idea of the application required during the thirteen hours of daily labor. The atmosphere of such a room cannot of course be pure; on the contrary, it is charged with cotton filaments and dust, which, we are told, are very injurious to the lungs.

On entering the room, although the day was warm, we remarked that the windows were down. We asked the reason, and a young woman answered very naïvely, and without seeming to be in the least aware that this privation of fresh air was anything else than perfectly natural, that “when the wind blew, the threads did not work well.” After we had been in the room for fifteen or twenty minutes, we found ourselves, as did the persons who accompanied us, in quite a perspiration, produced by a certain moisture which we observed in the air, as well as by the heat. . . .

The young women sleep upon an average six in a room, three beds to a room. There is no privacy, no retirement, here. It is almost impossible to read or write alone, as the parlor is full and so many sleep in the same chamber. A young woman remarked to us that if she had a letter to write, she did it on the head of a bandbox, sitting on a trunk, as there was no space for a table.

So live and toil the young women of our country in the boardinghouses and manufactories which the rich and influential of our land have built for them.

3. The “Utopian” Lowell Looms (1844)

Charles Dickens recorded three facts about the Lowell girls that he was sure would startle his English readers. First, many of the boardinghouses had joint-stock pianos; second, “nearly all” of the young women subscribed to circulating libraries; third, the operatives—ultimately about seventy of the more literate—published a journal called The Lowell Offering. The factory owners, no doubt conscious of its public-relations value, encouraged it—and probably censored it as well. Actually, the matrons of the boardinghouses went to great lengths to keep “fallen women” from entering this “paradise” and tainting the virginal farm girls. The following imaginary and stilted conversation, published in The Lowell Offering, is a piece of propaganda probably inspired by the employers and certainly representing the employers’ point of view. What serious grievances does it omit mentioning?

Miss S: I am very happy to see you this evening, Miss Bartlett, for I have something particular to say to you. Now do tell me if you still persist in your resolution to return to your factory employment?

Miss B: I do. I have no objection, neither have I heard any sufficiently strong to deter me.

Miss S: The idea that it is degrading, in the opinion of many, would be objection enough for me without taking into account its real tendency to promote ignorance and vice.

Miss B: By whom is factory labor considered degrading? It is by those who believe all labor degrading—by those who contemptuously speak of the farmer, the mechanic, the printer, the seamstress, and all who are obliged to toil as belonging to the lower orders—by those who seem to think the condition of labor excludes all the capacities of the mind and the virtues of humanity. They forget that circumstances, over which they have little or no control, place them above the necessity of labor; and that circumstances may yet compel them to engage in that at which they now scoff and spurn.

Miss S: There are objections to factory labor, which serve to render it degrading—objections which cannot be urged against any other kind of female employment. For instance, to be called and to be dismissed by the ringing of a bell savors of compulsion and slavery, and cannot cease to produce mortification without having been destructive to self-respect.

Miss B: In almost all kinds of employment it is necessary to keep regular established hours: more particularly so where there are so many connected as in the factories. Because we are reminded of those hours by the ringing of a bell, it is no argument against our employment, any more than it would be against going to church or to school. Our engagements are voluntarily entered into with our employers, with the understanding that they may be dissolved at our pleasure. However derogatory to our dignity and liberty you may consider factory labor, there is not a tinge of slavery existing in it, unless there be in every kind of labor that is urged upon us by the force of circumstances.

³From *American Issues*, vol. 1, *The Social Record*, Revised, edited by Willard Thorp, Merle Curti, and Carlos Baker (Chicago: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1955), pp. 410–411. Copyright, 1955 by J. B. Lippincott Company.

Miss S: Objections have been brought up against the boardinghouses, and, I think, with much plausibility. The large number of females who are there thrown together are, unavoidably, intimately connected with each other. It cannot be denied that some, guilty of immoralities, find their way into the factories and boardinghouses. The example and influence of such must be pernicious, and terminate in the increase of vice.

Miss B: It is true that the example and influence of immorality, wherever it exists, cannot be otherwise than evil. We know, also, that some exceptionable characters occasionally find a place among those employed in factories. We know it from the fact that dismissals do, now and then, occur as the consequence. But, my dear Miss S, did you ever know or hear of a class of people who could boast of perfection? among whom wrong of any description was never known?

Miss S: O, no! And, as I am no perfectionist, I never expect to know one.

Miss B: Then, if in one case the guilt of a few has not corrupted the whole, why should it in the other? Living in a factory boardinghouse, and working in a factory, changes not “human nature”: it is susceptible of good, and also of evil, there, as it is elsewhere.

Miss S: I agree with you in thinking that among all classes, and in every condition in life, evil influences are at work. But in some situations in life is not the exposure to these influences much more extensive, and, therefore, more dangerous, especially to the young?

Miss B: I believe there are many kinds of female employment offered in our large towns and cities far more dangerous in this respect than factory employment, although they may be considered more desirable and respectable. . . .

Miss S: You will not acknowledge that factory labor is degrading, or that it is productive of vice, but you must own that it fosters ignorance. When there are so many hours out of each day devoted to labor, there can be no time for study and improvement.

Miss B: It is true that too large a portion of our time is confined to labor. But, first, let me remark that this is an objection which cannot be said to exist only in factory labor. . . . We have abundant proof that unremitting toil is not always derogatory to improvement. A factory girl’s work is neither hard nor complicated. She can go on with perfect regularity in her duties while her mind may be actively employed on any other subject. There can be no better place for reflection, when there must be toil, than the factory. The patronage which newspapers and periodicals find in our city, our well-worn libraries, evening schools, crowded churches and sabbath schools, prove that factory operatives find leisure to use the means of improvement both in mind and heart.

4. “Slavers” for New England Girls (1846)

Many of the Lowell girls toiled only a few years—perhaps to help needy parents, to pay off a farm mortgage, to accumulate a dowry, or to send a brother through college. Dickens noted that 978 women workers had deposits in the Lowell Savings Bank

⁴*Voice of Industry*, January 2, 1846, in H. R. Warfel et al., eds., *The American Mind* (New York and Cincinnati: the American Book Company, 1937), p. 392.

totaling an estimated \$100,000. But conditions in other factories were less wholesome, and the following account in a labor journal, though no doubt overdrawn, contains a large element of truth. How free were these New England women to quit their jobs? In what respects is the comparison with slavery plausible?

We were not aware, until within a few days, of the *modus operandi* of the factory powers in this village of forcing poor girls from their quiet homes to become their tools and, like the Southern slaves, to give up their life and liberty to the heartless tyrants and taskmasters.

Observing a singular-looking “long, low, black” wagon passing along the street, we made inquiries respecting it, and were informed that it was what we term a “slaver.” She makes regular trips to the north of the state [Massachusetts], cruising around in Vermont and New Hampshire, with a “commander” whose heart must be as black as his craft, who is paid a dollar a head for all he brings to the market, and more in proportion to the distance—if they bring them from such a distance that they cannot easily get back.

This is done by “hoisting false colors,” and representing to the girls that they can tend more machinery than is possible, and that the work is so very neat, and the wages such that they can dress in silks and spend half their time in reading. Now, is this true? Let those girls who have been thus deceived, answer.

Let us say a word in regard to the manner in which they are stowed in the wagon, which may find a similarity only in the manner in which slaves are fastened in the hold of a vessel. It is long, and the seats so close that it must be very inconvenient.

Is there any humanity in this? Philanthropists may talk of Negro slavery, but it would be well first to endeavor to emancipate the slaves at home. Let us not stretch our ears to catch the sound of the lash on the flesh of the oppressed black while the oppressed in our very midst are crying out in thunder tones, and calling upon us for assistance.

5. *Disaster in a Massachusetts Mill (1860)*

The lot of women factory workers in New England seemed less idyllic after an appalling accident in the five-story Pemberton textile mill, described next. George T. Strong, a prominent New York lawyer and public-spirited citizen, poured his indignation into his diary. Who was at fault? Why might the South have taken some secret satisfaction in the tragedy?

January 11 [1860]. News today of a fearful tragedy at Lawrence, Massachusetts, one of the wholesale murders commonly known in newspaper literature as accident or catastrophe. A huge factory, long notoriously insecure and ill-built, requiring to be patched and bandaged up with iron plates and braces to stand the introduction of its machinery, suddenly collapsed into a heap of ruins yesterday afternoon without the smallest provocation. Some five or six hundred operatives went down with

⁵Reprinted with the permission of Scribner, an imprint of Simon & Schuster Adult Publishing Group, from *The Diary of George Templeton Strong* by Allan Nevins & Milton Halsey Thomas. Copyright © 1952 by Macmillan Publishing Company, copyright renewed © 1980 by Milton Halsey Thomas.

it—young girls and women mostly. An hour or two later, while people were working frantically to dig out some two hundred still under the ruins, many of them alive and calling for help, some quite unhurt, fire caught in the great pile of debris, and these prisoners were roasted. It is too atrocious and horrible to think of.

Of course, nobody will be hanged. Somebody has murdered about two hundred people, many of them with hideous torture, in order to save money, but society has no avenging gibbet for the respectable millionaire and homicide. Of course not. He did not want to or mean to do this massacre; on the whole, he would have preferred to let these people live. His intent was not homicidal. He merely thought a great deal about making a large profit and very little about the security of human life. He did not compel these poor girls and children to enter his accursed mantrap. They could judge and decide for themselves whether they would be employed there. It was a matter of contract between capital and labor; they were to receive cash payment for their services.

No doubt the legal representatives of those who have perished will be duly paid the fractional part of their week's wages up to the date when they became incapacitated by crushing or combustion, as the case may be, from rendering further service. Very probably the wealthy and liberal proprietor will add (in deserving cases) a gratuity to defray funeral charges. It becomes us to prate about the horrors of slavery! What Southern capitalist trifles with the lives of his operatives as do our philanthropes of the North?

B. The Flocking of the Immigrants

I. An English Radical Praises America (1818)

Economic hardship, begotten by the Industrial Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, laid a withering hand on England. Political reaction under the Tories was hardly less blighting; the Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867 lay in the future. Of the 24 million souls in the British Isles in 1831, only 400,000 were qualified voters. "Pocket boroughs," controlled by the crown or by aristocratic landowners, sent members to Parliament, while newly mushroomed industrial cities, like Manchester and Birmingham, enjoyed no direct representation. The tax-supported state Church of England rode high. Thomas Hulme, an English radical, here tells his story. Despairing of parliamentary reform and chafing under the rule of "the great insolent" families, he decided to bring his children to America before he should die and leave them "the slaves of such a set of beings." What were his most violent prejudices, and what features of America appealed to him most?

I was well pleased with America, over a considerable part of which I traveled. I saw an absence of human misery. I saw a government taking away a very, very small portion of men's earnings. I saw ease and happiness and a fearless utterance of thought everywhere prevail. I saw laws like those of the old laws of England, everywhere obeyed with cheerfulness and held in veneration. I heard of no mobs,

¹In William Cobbett, *A Year's Residence in America* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1819), pp. 201–204 (Part 3).

no riots, no spies, no [penal] transportings, no hangings. I saw those very Irish, to keep whom in order such murderous laws exist in Ireland, here good, peaceable, industrious citizens. I saw no placemen and pensioners riding the people under foot. I saw no greedy Priesthood fattening on the fruits of labor in which they had never participated, and which fruits they seized in despite of the people. I saw a debt, indeed, but then it was so insignificant a thing; and, besides, it had been contracted for the people's use, and not for that of a set of tyrants who had used the money to the injury of the people. In short, I saw a state of things precisely the reverse of that in England, and very nearly what it would be in England if the Parliament were reformed. . . .

During the spring and early part of the summer of 1817, I made preparations for the departure of myself and family, and when all was ready, I bid an everlasting adieu to boroughmongers, sinecure placemen and placemen, pensioned lords and ladies, standing armies in time of peace, and (rejoice, oh! my children) to a hireling, tithing-devouring Priesthood.

We arrived safe and all in good health, and which health has never been impaired by the climate. We are in a state of ease, safety, plenty; and how can we help being so happy as people can be? The more I see of my adopted country, the more gratitude do I feel towards it for affording me and my numerous offspring protection from the tyrants of my native country. There I should have been in constant anxiety about my family. Here I am in none at all. Here I am in fear of no spies, no false witnesses, no blood-money men. Here no fines, irons, no gallowses await me, let me think or say what I will about the government. Here I have to pay no people to be ready to shoot at me, or run me through the body, or chop me down. Here no vile priest can rob me and mock me in the same breath. . . .

I could mention numerous instances of Englishmen, coming to this country with hardly a dollar in their pocket, and arriving at a state of ease and plenty and even riches in a few years. And I explicitly declare that I have never known or heard of an instance of one common laborer who, with common industry and economy, did not greatly better his lot. Indeed, how can it otherwise be, when the average wages of agricultural labor is double what it is in England, and when the average price of food is not more than half what it is in that country? These two facts, undeniable as they are, are quite sufficient to satisfy any man of sound mind.

As to the manners of the people, they are precisely to my taste: unostentatious and simple. Good sense I find everywhere, and never affectation; kindness, hospitality, and never-failing civility. I traveled more than four thousand miles about this country, and I have never met with one single insolent or rude native American.

2. *The Coming of the Irish (1836)*

Charles J. Latrobe was a Londoner who achieved some fame as a minor poet, a travel writer, and a mountain climber in Switzerland. On his two extensive trips to America in 1832 and 1834, he observed the "swarming" of the Irish even in those pre-potato famine days. How did their situation resemble that of later immigrant groups?

²C. J. Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1836), vol. 2, pp. 222–223.

Here comes a shipload of Irish. They land upon the wharfs of New York in rags and open-knee'd breeches, with their raw looks and bare necks. They flourish their cudgels, throw up their torn hats, and cry, "Hurrah for General Jackson!" They get drunk and kick up a row, lend their forces to any passing disturbance, and make early acquaintance with the interior of the lock-ups [jails].

From New York they go in swarms to the canals, railroads, and public works, where they perform that labor which the Americans are not inclined to do. Now and then they get up a fight among themselves in the style of old Ireland, and perhaps kill one another, expressing great indignation and surprise when they find that they must answer for it though they are in a free country. By degrees, the more thrifty get and keep money, and diving deeper into the continent, purchase lands; while the intemperate and irreclaimable vanish from the surface.

The Americans complain, and justly, of the disorderly population which Ireland throws into the bosom of the Union, but there are many reasons why they should be borne with. They, with the poor Germans, do the work which without them could hardly be done. Though the fathers may be irreclaimable, the children become good citizens—and there is no finer race in the world, both for powers of mind and body, than the Irish, when favored by education and under proper control.

In one thing the emigrant Irish of every class distinguish themselves above the people of other nations, and that is in the love and kindly feeling which they cherish towards their native land, and towards those whom they have left behind—a fact proved by the large sums which are yearly transmitted from them to the mother country, in aid of their poverty-stricken relatives.

3. The Burning of a Convent School (1834)

The swelling tide of Irish-Catholic immigrants in the Boston area intensified a long-festering prejudice against the Catholic Church. A half-dozen riots occurred before public indignation vented itself against an Ursuline convent school in Charlestown, outside Boston. Responding to ill-founded tales of abuse suffered by incarcerated nuns, a well-organized mob of about fifty men sacked and burned the four-story brick building on August 11, 1834. (Ironically, more than half of the fifty-seven pupils were Protestant girls.) Neither the authorities nor the hundreds of approving spectators made any attempt to restrain the mob. In retaliation, angry Irish laborers began to mobilize, but were restrained by Bishop Fenwick. The following editorial from the Boston Atlas expresses the widespread condemnation voiced in the press and among responsible citizens. What did this journal find most disturbing about the outrage?

From all we can learn, the violence was utterly without cause. The institution was in its very nature unpopular, and a strong feeling existed against it. But there was nothing in the vague rumors that have been idly circulating to authorize or account for any the least act of violence. We should state, perhaps, that during the violent scenes that were taking place before the convent—while the mob were

³Quoted in *Niles' Weekly Register* 46 (August 23, 1834): 437.

breaking the windows and staving in the doors of the institution—and while the fire was blazing upon the hill as a signal to the mob—one or two muskets were discharged from the windows of the nunnery, or some of the buildings in the vicinity.

What a scene must this midnight conflagration have exhibited—lighting up the inflamed countenances of an infuriated mob of demons—*attacking a convent of women, a seminary for the instruction of young females*; and turning them out of their beds half naked in the hurry of their flight, and half dead with confusion and terror. And this drama, too, to be enacted on the very soil that afforded one of the earliest places of refuge to the Puritans of New England—themselves flying from religious persecution in the Old World—that their descendants might wax strong and mighty, and in their turn be guilty of the same persecution in the New!

We remember no parallel to this outrage in the whole course of history. Turn to the bloodiest incidents of the French Revolution . . . and point us to its equal in unprovoked violence, in brutal outrage, in unthwarted iniquity. It is in vain that we search for it. In times of civil commotion and general excitement . . . there was some palliation for violence and outrage—in the tremendously excited state of the public mind. But here there was no such palliation. The courts of justice were open to receive complaints of any improper confinement, or unauthorized coercion. The civil magistrates were, or ought to be, on the alert to detect any illegal restraint, and bring its authors to the punishment they deserve. But nothing of the kind was detected. The whole matter was a cool, deliberate, systematized piece of brutality—unprovoked—under the most provoking circumstances totally unjustifiable—and visiting the citizens of the town, and most particularly its magistrates and civil officers, with indelible disgrace.

[Local sentiment undoubtedly supported the mobsters. The subsequent trial of the ringleaders was a farce: insults were showered on the prosecution, the nuns, and the Catholic Church. Only one culprit was convicted, and he was pardoned following a petition by forgiving Catholics. The Massachusetts legislature, bowing to intimidation, dropped all efforts to provide financial recompense. Catholic churches in the area were forced to post armed guards, and for a time insurance companies refused to insure Catholic buildings built of inflammable materials. The Ursuline sisters of Charlestown finally moved to Canada, and for thirty-five years the blackened brick ruins of the school remained a monument to religious bigotry.]

4. A Southerner Defends the Catholics (1854)

The great flood of Irish Catholics, uprooted by the potato famine of the mid-1840s, further aroused many “native Americans.” The newcomers not only worsened already stinking slums but became willing voting tools of the corrupt political machines. “Nativist” resentment found vent in the powerful Know-Nothing (American) party, which undertook to elect only “natives” to office; to raise the residence requirement for naturalization from five to twenty-one years; and to exclude Roman Catholics from office, on the popular assumption that orders from the pope took

⁴*Congressional Globe*. 33rd Congress, 2d session, Appendix, pp. 58–59.

precedence over their oath to support the Constitution. Yet Know-Nothingism found little support in the South. Relatively few Catholic immigrants went there; and in addition the Catholic Church did not cry out against slavery, as did the leading Protestant denominations of the North. Representative William T. S. Barry of Mississippi, a Presbyterian with Episcopalian leanings and one of the South's great orators, here defends the Catholics in a justly famous speech. In the light of his remarks, assess the following statements: persecution strengthens the persecuted; proscriptionists become the proscribed; intolerance has no logical halfway stopping point.

The last purpose to be achieved by the Know-Nothings is the exclusion of all Catholics from office. . . . How dare we talk of freedom of conscience, when more than a million of our citizens are to be excluded from office for conscience sake!

Yesterday, to have argued in favor of religious toleration in this country would have been absurd, for none could have been found to deny or question it. But today there is a sect [Know-Nothings] boasting that it can control the country, avowing the old Papist and monarchical doctrine of political exclusion for religious opinions' sake. The arguments by which they sustain themselves are those by which the Inquisition justified their probing the consciences and burning the bodies of men five hundred years ago, and against which Protestantism has struggled since the days of Luther.

You, sir, and I, and all of us, owe our own right to worship God according to our consciences to that very doctrine which this new [Know-Nothing] order abjures; and if the right of the Catholic is first assailed and destroyed, you, sir, or another member who believes according to a different Protestant creed, may be excluded from this House, and from other preferment, because of your religious faith.

The security of all citizens rests upon the same broad basis of universal right. Confederates who disfranchise one class of citizens soon turn upon each other. The strong argument of general right is destroyed by their united action, and the proscriptionist of yesterday is the proscribed of tomorrow. Human judgment has recognized the inexorable justice of the sentence which consigned Robespierre and his accomplices [of the French Revolution] to the same guillotine to which they had condemned so many thousand better men.

No nation can content itself with a single act of persecution; either public intelligence will reject that as unworthy of itself, or public prejudice will add others to it. If the Catholic be untrustworthy as a citizen, and the public liberty is unsafe in his keeping, it is but a natural logical consequence that he shall not be permitted to disseminate a faith which is adjudged hostile to national independence; that he shall not be allowed to set the evil example of the practice of his religion before the public; that it shall not be preached from the pulpit; that it shall not be taught in the schools; and that, by all the energy of the law, it shall be utterly exterminated.

If this [Catholic] faith be incompatible with good citizenship, and you set about to discourage it—destroy it utterly, uproot it from the land. Petty persecution will but irritate a sect which the Know-Nothings denounce as so powerful and so dangerous. This was the course which England pursued when she entertained the same fears of the Catholics three hundred years ago, and which she has lived to see the absurdity of, and has removed almost, if not quite, every disability imposed. Per-

haps, however, this new [Know-Nothing] sect will not startle the public mind by proposing too much at once, and holds that it will be time enough to propose further and more minute persecution when the national sentiment is debauched enough to entertain favorably this first great departure from the unbounded toleration of our fathers.

It is the experience of this country that persecution strengthens a new creed. . . . Perhaps it is true of all times and countries. . . . In my judgment, this attempt at proscription will do more to spread Catholicism here than all the treasures of Rome, or all the Jesuitism of the Cardinals.

C. Mounting Labor Unrest

I. A One-Sided Labor Contract (c. 1832)

The plight of the factory worker in the 1830s was such as to justify the term wage slavery. Work contracts—often a precondition of employment—gave the employer blank-check power. The following contract was used by a textile company in Dover, New Hampshire. What feature of it would be most offensive to an active trade unionist today?

We, the subscribers [the undersigned], do hereby agree to enter the service of the Cocheco Manufacturing Company, and conform, in all respects, to the regulations which are now, or may hereafter be adopted, for the good government of the institution.

We further agree to work for such wages per week, and prices by the job, as the Company may see fit to pay, and be subject to the fines as well as entitled to the premiums paid by the Company.

We further agree to allow two cents each week to be deducted from our wages for the benefit of the sick fund.

We also agree not to leave the service of the Company without giving two weeks' notice of our intention, without permission of an agent. And if we do, we agree to forfeit to the use of the Company two weeks' pay.

We also agree not to be engaged in any combination [union] whereby the work may be impeded or the Company's interest in any work injured. If we do, we agree to forfeit to the use of the Company the amount of wages that may be due to us at the time.

We also agree that in case we are discharged from the service of the Company for any fault, we will not consider ourselves entitled to be settled with in less than two weeks from the time of such discharge.

Payments for labor performed are to be made monthly.

¹Seth Luther, *An Address to the Working-Men of New-England* . . . (Boston, 1833), p. 36.

2. Agitation for the Ten-Hour Day (1835)

A reduction of daily working hours from thirteen or more was a primary goal of labor in the 1830s. During a third unsuccessful strike for the ten-hour day, the Boston artisans issued the following circular. It led to the successful general strike in Philadelphia on the coal wharves. What was the employers' main objection to the ten-hour day, and how did the workers try to meet it?

... In the name of the Carpenters, Masons, and Stone Cutters [we] do respectfully represent—

That we are now engaged in a cause which is not only of vital importance to ourselves, our families, and our children, but is equally interesting and equally important to every mechanic in the United States and the whole world. We are contending for the recognition of the natural right to dispose of our own time in such quantities as we deem and believe to be most conducive to our own happiness and the welfare of all those engaged in manual labor.

The work in which we are now engaged is neither more nor less than a contest between money and labor. Capital, which can only be made productive by labor, is endeavoring to crush labor, the only source of all wealth.

We have been too long subjected to the odious, cruel, unjust, and tyrannical system which compels the operative mechanic to exhaust his physical and mental powers by excessive toil, until he has no desire to eat and sleep, and in many cases he has no power to do either from extreme debility. . . .

It is for the rights of humanity we contend. Our cause is the cause of philanthropy. Our opposers resort to the most degrading obloquy to injure us—not degrading to us, but to the authors of such unmerited opprobrium which they attempt to cast upon us. They tell us, “We shall spend all our hours of leisure in drunkenness and debauchery if the hours of labor are reduced.” We hurl from us the base, ungenerous, ungrateful, detestable, cruel, malicious slander, with scorn and indignation. . . .

To show the utter fallacy of their idiotic reasoning, if reasoning it may be called, we have only to say they employ us about eight months in the year during the longest and the hottest days, and in short days hundreds of us remain idle for want of work for three or four months, when our expenses must of course be the heaviest during winter. When the long days again appear, our guardians set us to work, as they say, “to keep us from getting drunk.” No fear has ever been expressed by these benevolent employers respecting our morals while we are idle in short days, through their avarice. . . . Further, they threaten to starve us into submission to their will. Starve us to prevent us from getting drunk!! Wonderful wisdom!! Refined benevolence!! Exalted philanthropy!!

²Quoted in Irving Mark and E. I. Schwaab, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (1952), pp. 342–343.

3. The Tailors Strike in New York (1836)

Under existing laws, a strike for higher wages was a criminal conspiracy. The courts dealt harshly with strikers, especially before the pro-labor decision in Massachusetts in the case of Commonwealth v. Hunt (1842). Philip Hone, a wealthy and conservative New York businessman, approved of keeping laborers in their place, particularly the New York tailors, as the following diary entry reveals. In the light of present-day standards, who expresses the more extreme views: Hone or the strikers?

June 6 [1836].—In corroboration of the spirit of faction and contempt of the laws which pervades the community at this time is the conduct of the journeymen tailors, instigated by a set of vile foreigners (principally English), who, unable to endure the restraints of wholesome law well administered in their own country, take refuge here, establish trades-unions, and vilify Yankee judges and juries. Twenty odd of these were convicted at the Oyer and Terminer [Court] of a conspiracy to raise their wages and to prevent any of the craft from working at prices less than those for which they struck. Judge Edwards gave notice that he would proceed to sentence them this day. But, in consequence of the continuance of Robinson's trial, the Court postponed the sentence until Friday.

This, however, being the day on which it was expected, crowds of people have been collected in the park, ready for any mischief to which they may have been instigated, and a most diabolical and inflammatory hand-bill was circulated yesterday, headed by a coffin. The Board of Aldermen held an informal meeting this evening, at which a resolution was adopted authorizing the Mayor to offer a reward for the discovery of the author, printer, publisher, or distributor of this incendiary publication. The following was the hand-bill:

The Rich Against the Poor!

Judge Edwards, the tool of the aristocracy, against the people! Mechanics and working men! A deadly blow has been struck at your liberty! The prize for which your fathers fought has been robbed from you! The freemen of the North are now on a level with the slaves of the South! with no other privilege than laboring, that drones may fatten on your lifeblood! Twenty of your brethren have been found guilty for presuming to resist a reduction of their wages! And Judge Edwards has charged an American jury, and, agreeably to that charge, they have established the precedent that workingmen have no right to regulate the price of labor, or, in other words, the rich are the only judges of the wants of the poor man. On Monday, June 6, 1836, at ten o'clock, these freemen are to receive their sentence, to gratify the hellish appetites of the aristocrats!

On Monday, the liberty of the workingmen will be interred! Judge Edwards is to chant the requiem! Go! Go! Go! every freeman, every workingman, and hear the hollow and melancholy sound of the earth on the coffin of equality! Let the courtroom, the City Hall, yea! the whole park, be filled with mourners. But remember, offer no violence to Judge Edwards, bend meekly, and receive the chain wherewith you are to be bound! Keep the peace! Above all things, keep the peace!

[Judge Edwards fined the president of the "unlawful club" of tailors \$150 and the other defendants \$50 or \$100. In passing sentence, he scolded them for having "craftily" entered into "a conspiracy" to "injure trade" and declared: "The law

⁴Bayard Tuckerman, ed., *Diary of Philip Hone* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1889), pp. 210–211.

leaves every individual [the] master of his own individual acts. But it will not suffer him to encroach upon the rights of others. He may work or not, as suits his pleasure, but he shall not enter into a confederacy with a view of controlling others, and take measures to carry it into effect.” Contrary to this dictum, the tailors had not only resorted to a strike but had also harassed the employers with picketing and other demonstrations, and had brought various kinds of pressures to bear on the strike-breakers.]

4. Chattel Slavery Versus Wage Slavery (1840)

Orestes A. Brownson, a self-taught Vermonter, made his mark as a preacher, magazine editor, lecturer, reformer, socialist, transcendentalist, and writer (twenty volumes). Fearless and uncompromising, he began as a Presbyterian minister and wound up as a convert to Catholicism. While preaching to groups of workers, he had become deeply interested in labor reform, and his blast, given here, was music to the ears of southern slaveowners. What are his most obvious exaggerations? Was the slaveowner or the mill owner the greater hypocrite?

In regard to labor, two systems obtain: one that of slave labor, the other that of free labor. Of the two, the first is, in our judgment, except so far as the feelings are concerned, decidedly the least oppressive. If the slave has never been a free man, we think, as a general rule, his sufferings are less than those of the free laborer at wages. As to actual freedom, one has just about as much as the other. The laborer at wages has all the disadvantages of freedom and none of its blessings, while the slave, if denied the blessings, is freed from the disadvantages.

We are no advocates of slavery. We are as heartily opposed to it as any modern abolitionist can be. But we say frankly that, if there must always be a laboring population distinct from proprietors and employers, we regard the slave system as decidedly preferable to the system at wages.

It is no pleasant thing to go days without food; to lie idle for weeks, seeking work and finding none; to rise in the morning with a wife and children you love, and know not where to procure them a breakfast; and to see constantly before you no brighter prospect than the almshouse.

Yet these are no infrequent incidents in the lives of our laboring population. Even in seasons of general prosperity, when there was only the ordinary cry of “hard times,” we have seen hundreds of people in a not very populous village, in a wealthy portion of our common country, suffering for the want of the necessaries of life, willing to work and yet finding no work to do. Many and many is the application of a poor man for work, merely for his food, we have seen rejected. These things are little thought of, for the applicants are poor; they fill no conspicuous place in society, and they have no biographers. But their wrongs are chronicled in heaven.

¹*Boston Quarterly Review* 3 (1840): 368–370.

It is said there is no want in this country. There may be less in some other countries. But death by actual starvation in this country is, we apprehend, no uncommon occurrence. The sufferings of a quiet, unassuming but useful class of females in our cities, in general seamstresses, too proud to beg or to apply to the almshouse, are not easily told. They are industrious; they do all that they can find to do. But yet the little there is for them to do, and the miserable pittance they receive for it, is hardly sufficient to keep soul and body together.

And yet there is a man who employs them to make shirts, trousers, etc., and grows rich on their labors. He is one of our respectable citizens, perhaps is praised in the newspapers for his liberal donations to some charitable institution. He passes among us as a pattern of morality and is honored as a worthy Christian. And why should he not be, since our Christian community is made up of such as he, and since our clergy would not dare question his piety lest they should incur the reproach of infidelity and lose their standing and their salaries? . . .

The average life—working life, we mean—of the girls that come to Lowell, for instance, from Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, we have been assured, is only about three years. What becomes of them then? Few of them ever marry; fewer still ever return to their native places with reputations unimpaired. “She has worked in a factory” is almost enough to damn to infamy the most worthy and virtuous girl. . . .

Where go the proceeds of their labors? The man who employs them, and for whom they are toiling as so many slaves, is one of our city nabobs, reveling in luxury; or he is a member of our legislature, enacting laws to put money in his own pocket; or he is a member of Congress, contending for a high tariff to tax the poor for the benefit of the rich; or in these times he is shedding crocodile tears over the deplorable condition of the poor laborer, while he docks his wages 25 percent. . . . And this man too would fain pass for a Christian and a republican. He shouts for liberty, stickles for equality, and is horrified at a Southern planter who keeps slaves.

One thing is certain: that, of the amount actually produced by the operative, he retains a less proportion than it costs the master to feed, clothe, and lodge his slave. Wages is a cunning device of the devil, for the benefit of tender consciences who would retain all the advantages of the slave system without the expense, trouble, and odium of being slaveholders.

5. Regulations at the Lowell Mills (1830s)

Factory life was a novelty to all involved in the early nineteenth century, employers as well as employees. Manufacturers often worried about both the efficiency and the moral character of their workers. At the Lawrence Manufacturing Company in Lowell, Massachusetts, the following regulations were designed to guide the work and the very lives of the mill workers. Why did the company lay such emphasis on the religious practices of its workers? What do these regulations suggest were the employer's greatest concerns? What can be inferred from these rules of conduct about the backgrounds from which the workers came?

⁵Smithsonian Institution.

REGULATIONS

TO BE OBSERVED BY ALL PERSONS EMPLOYED BY THE

LAWRENCE MANUFACTURING COMPANY.

The Overseers are to be punctually in their rooms at the starting of the mill, and not to be absent unnecessarily during working hours.

They are to see that all those employed in their rooms are in their places in due season, and keep a correct account of their time and work.

They may grant leave of absence to those employed under them, when there are spare hands in the room to supply their places; otherwise they are not to grant leave of absence except in cases of absolute necessity.

All persons in the employ of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company, are required to observe the Regulations of the room where they are employed. They are not to be absent from their work without consent, except in case of sickness, and then they are to send the Overseer word of the cause of their absence.

They are to board in one of the boarding houses belonging to the Company, and to conform to the regulations of the house where they board.

The Company will not employ any one who is habitually absent from public worship on the Sabbath.

All persons entering into the employ of the Company are considered as engaged to work twelve months.

All persons intending to leave the employment of the Company, are to give two weeks' notice of their intention to their Overseer, and their engagement with the Company is not considered as fulfilled unless they comply with this regulation.

Payments will be made monthly, including board and wages, which will be made up to the second Saturday of every month, and paid in the course of the following week.

Any one who shall take from the mills or the yard, any yarn, cloth or other article belonging to the Company, will be considered guilty of stealing, and prosecuted accordingly.

These Regulations are considered a part of the contract with all persons entering into the employment of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company.

JOHN AIKEN, Agent.

Printed by James Atkinson, Office of the Daily Courier.

D. Steamboats and Canals

I. The First "Fire Canoe" in the West (1811)

Less well known than Robert Fulton's epochal steamboat trip up the Hudson in 1807, but hardly less significant, was the first steamboat on the Mississippi. The New Orleans was built at Pittsburgh by Nicholas J. Roosevelt, an associate of Fulton and a distant relative of two future presidents. The vessel made the historic voyage from Pittsburgh to New Orleans in fourteen days, despite low water at the falls of the Ohio, a fire on board, the birth of a baby, and a series of tremendous earthquakes that changed the course of the river in places and so destroyed landmarks as to confuse the pilot. The story is here told by J. H. B. Latrobe, whose eldest sister, married to Roo-

¹J. H. B. Latrobe, *The First Steamboat Voyage on the Western Waters* (Baltimore: J. Murphy, 1871), pp. 13–28, passim.

sevelt, made the trip. What does this account reveal about the conditions of early steamboat travel?

As the *New Orleans* approached completion, and when it came to be known that Mrs. Roosevelt intended to accompany her husband on the voyage, the numerous friends she had made in Pittsburgh united in endeavoring to dissuade her from what they regarded as utter folly, if not absolute madness. Her husband was appealed to. The criticisms that had been freely applied to the boat by the crowds of visitors to the shipyard were now transferred to the conduct of the builder. He was told that he had no right to peril his wife's life, however reckless he might be of his own. Mrs. Roosevelt, too, expected before long to become a mother; and this was held to enhance the offense which the good people of Pittsburgh fancied he was committing. But the wife believed in her husband; and in the latter part of September, 1811, the *New Orleans*, after a short experimental trip up the Monongahela, commenced her voyage . . . the voyage which changed the relations of the West—which may almost be said to have changed its destiny. . . .

On the second day after leaving Pittsburgh, the *New Orleans* rounded to opposite Cincinnati, and cast anchor in the stream. Levees and wharf boats were things unknown in 1811. Here, as at Pittsburgh, the whole town seemed to have assembled on the bank, and many of the acquaintances of the former visit came off in small boats. "Well, you are as good as your word; you have visited us in a steamboat," they said; "but we see you for the last time. Your boat may go *down* the river; but, as to coming up it, the very idea is an absurd one." This was one of those occasions on which seeing was not believing. . . .

The morning after the arrival of the vessel at Louisville, Mr. Roosevelt's acquaintances and others came on board, and here the same things were said that had been said at Cincinnati. Congratulations at having descended the river were, without exception, accompanied by regrets that it was the first and last time a steamboat would be seen above the Falls of the Ohio. Still, so far, certainly, Mr. Roosevelt's promises had been fulfilled; and there was a public dinner given to him a few days after his arrival. . . .

Not to be outdone in hospitality, Mr. Roosevelt invited his hosts to dine on board the *New Orleans*, which still lay anchored opposite the town. The company met in the forward or gentlemen's cabin, and the feast was at its height when suddenly there were heard unwonted rumblings, accompanied by a very perceptible motion in the vessel. The company had but one idea. The *New Orleans* had escaped from her anchor, and was drifting towards the Falls, to the certain destruction of all on board. There was an instant and simultaneous rush to the upper deck, when the company found that, instead of drifting towards the Falls of the Ohio, the *New Orleans* was making good headway up the river and would soon leave Louisville in the distance downstream. As the engine warmed to its work, and the steam blew off at the safety valve, the speed increased. Mr. Roosevelt, of course, had provided this mode of convincing his incredulous guests, and their surprise and delight may readily be imagined. After going up the river for a few miles, the *New Orleans* returned to her anchorage. . . .

Hitherto the voyage had been one of pleasure. Nothing had marred the enjoyment of the travelers. The receptions at Louisville and Cincinnati had been great

events. But now were to come, to use the words of the letter already referred to, “those days of horror.” The comet of 1811 had disappeared, and was followed by the earthquake of that year . . . and the earthquake accompanied the *New Orleans* far on her way down the Mississippi. . . .

Sometimes the Indians attempted to approach the steamboat; and, again, fled on its approach. The Chickasaws still occupied that part of the state of Tennessee lying below the mouth of the Ohio. On one occasion, a large canoe, fully manned, came out of the woods abreast of the steamboat. The Indians, outnumbering the crew of the vessel, paddled after it. There was at once a race, and for a time the contest was equal. The result, however, was what might have been anticipated. Steam had the advantage of endurance; and the Indians with wild shouts, which might have been shouts of defiance, gave up the pursuit, and turned into the forest from whence they had emerged. . . .

Sometimes Indians would join the wood choppers [seeking fuel]; and occasionally one would be able to converse in English with the men. From these it was learned that the steamboat was called the “Penelore” or “Fire Canoe” and was supposed to have some affinity with the comet that had preceded the earthquake—the sparks from the chimney of the boat being likened to the train of the celestial visitant. Again, they would attribute the smoky atmosphere of the steamer and the rumbling of the earth to the beating of the waters by the fast-revolving paddles.

To the native inhabitants of the boundless forest that lined the river banks, the coming of the first steamboat was an omen of evil; and as it was the precursor of their own expulsion from their ancient homes, no wonder they continued for years to regard all steamboats with awe. As late as 1834, when the emigration of the Chickasaws to their new homes, west of the river, took place, hundreds refused to trust themselves in such conveyances but preferred making their long and weary pilgrimage on foot.

2. The Impact of the Erie Canal (1853)

The Erie Canal, completed in 1825, wrote epochal new chapters in the history of American transportation and industry. Projected by western-minded New Yorkers, it was bitterly opposed by New York City, which shortsightedly clung to its seaboard orientation. When the issue was debated in the state legislature, and the question arose of filling the canal with water, one eastern member exclaimed, “Give yourself no trouble—the tears of our constituents will fill it!” The most immediate result of the canal was to reduce sharply the cost of moving bulk shipments. Further results were analyzed as follows in a graphic report by the secretary of the Treasury in 1853. Why did other cities lose out in competition with New York? Which section of the United States gained the most from the canal?

Although the rates of transportation over the Erie Canal, at its opening, were nearly double the present charges . . . it immediately became the convenient and favorite route for a large portion of the produce of the Northwestern states, and se-

²*Senate Executive Documents*, 32d Congress, 1st session, no. 112, pp. 278–279.

cured to the City of New York the position which she now holds as the emporium of the Confederacy [Union].

Previous to the opening of the Canal, the trade of the West was chiefly carried on through the cities of Baltimore and Philadelphia, particularly the latter, which was at that time the first city of the United States in population and wealth, and in the amount of its internal commerce.

As soon as the [Great] Lakes were reached, the line of navigable water was extended through them nearly one thousand miles farther into the interior. The Western states immediately commenced the construction of similar works, for the purpose of opening a communication, from the more remote portions of their territories, with this great water-line. All these works took their direction and character from the Erie Canal, which in this manner became the outlet for almost the greater part of the West.

It is difficult to estimate the influence which this Canal has exerted upon the commerce, growth, and prosperity of the whole country, for it is impossible to imagine what would have been the state of things without it.

But for this work, the West would have held out few inducements to the settler, who would have been without a market for his most important products, and consequently without the means of supplying many of his most essential wants. That portion of the country would have remained comparatively unsettled up to the present time; and, where now exist rich and populous communities, we should find an uncultivated wilderness.

The East would have been equally without the elements of growth. The Canal has supplied it with cheap food, and has opened an outlet and created a market for the products of its manufactures and commerce.

The increase of commerce, and the growth of the country, have been very accurately measured by the growth of the business of the Canal. It has been one great bond of strength, infusing life and vigor into the whole. Commercially and politically, it has secured and maintained to the United States the characteristics of a homogeneous people.

3. Steamboats Lose to the Railroads (c. 1857)

*Samuel Clemens, whose pen name, "Mark Twain," was a depth measurement, became apprenticed as a Mississippi pilot in 1857, when he was only twenty-two. Emerging as a full-fledged pilot, he remained on the river until the Civil War interrupted traffic in 1861. In 1883, at the height of his powers, he published his classic *Life on the Mississippi*, in which he described the spectacular races between river queens that foamed perilously against the current at an average of more than fourteen miles an hour. What does the following brief episode, as related by Clemens, reveal about the pace of technological change?*

The locomotive is in sight from the deck of the steamboat almost the whole way from St. Louis to St. Paul—eight hundred miles. These railroads have made havoc with the steamboat commerce. The clerk of our boat was a steamboat clerk

³Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1883), chap. 58.

before these roads were built. In that day the influx of population was so great, and the freight business so heavy, that the boats were not able to keep up with the demands made upon their carrying capacity; consequently the captains were very independent and airy—pretty “biggity,” as Uncle Remus would say. The clerk nut-shelled the contrast between the former time and the present, thus:

“Boat used to land—captain on hurricane roof—mighty stiff and straight—iron ramrod for a spine—kid gloves, plug tile [hat], hair parted behind—man on shore takes off hat and says:

“‘Got twenty-eight tons of wheat, cap’n—be great favor if you can take them.’

“Captain says:

“‘I’ll take two of them’—and don’t even condescend to look at him.

“But nowadays the captain takes off his old slouch [hat], and smiles all the way around to the back of his ears, and gets off a bow which he hasn’t got any ramrod to interfere with, and says:

“‘Glad to see you, Smith, glad to see you—you’re looking well—haven’t seen you looking so well for years—what you got for us?’

“‘Nuth’n,’ says Smith; and keeps his hat on, and just turns his back and goes to talking with somebody else.

“Oh, yes! eight years ago the captain was on top; but it’s Smith’s turn now. Eight years ago a boat used to go up the river with every stateroom full, and people piled five and six deep on the cabin floor; and a solid deckload of immigrants and harvesters down below, into the bargain. To get a first class stateroom, you’d got to prove sixteen quarterings of nobility and four hundred years of descent, or be personally acquainted with the nigger that blacked the captain’s boots. But it’s all changed now; plenty staterooms above, no harvesters below—there’s a patent self-binder now, and they don’t have harvesters any more; they’ve gone where the woodbine twineth—and they didn’t go by steamboat, either; they went by the train.”

E. The Coming of the Iron Horse

I. A Canal Stockholder’s Outburst (1830)

New methods of transportation naturally alarmed entrenched interests. Turnpike investors fought the canals; canal investors and teamsters fought the railroads; railroad investors were later to fight the motor trucks and airlines. In particular, teamsters objected to “the damned railroad” because it cut up farms; ruined the horse and hay market; deprived wheelwrights, blacksmiths, and mechanics of their employment; and brought in hordes of pick-and-shovel Irishmen, with ready fists, to work on the roadbeds. Canal boatmen and canal investors voiced similar grievances. What real substance is there in these obviously overdrawn objections that appeared in an Indiana newspaper?

The following humorous argument was advanced by a canal stockholder, for the purpose of putting down railways:

¹Vincennes [Indiana] *Western Sun*, July 24, 1830.

"He saw what would be the effect of it; that it would set the whole world a-gadding. Twenty miles an hour, sir.—Why, you will not be able to keep an apprentice boy at his work! Every Saturday evening he must have a trip to Ohio to spend a Sunday with his sweetheart. Grave, plodding citizens will be flying about like comets. All local attachments will be at an end. It will encourage flightiness of intellect. Veracious people will turn into the most immeasurable liars: all conceptions will be exaggerated by the magnificent notions of distance.—Only a hundred miles off!—Tut, nonsense, I'll step across, madam and bring your fan! 'Pray, sir, will you dine with me today, at my little box on the Allegheny?' 'Why indeed I don't know—I shall be there, but you must let me off in time for the theater.'

"And then, sir, there will be barrels of pork, cargoes of flour, chaldrons of coal, and even lead and whiskey, and such-like sober things that have always been used to slow traveling—whisking away like a sky rocket. It will upset all the gravity of the nation. If a couple of gentlemen have an affair of honor, it is only to steal off to the Rocky Mountains and there is no jurisdiction that can touch them. And then, sir; think of it—flying for debt! A set of bailiffs mounted on bombshells would never overtake an absconding debtor, only give him a fair start.

"Upon the whole, sir, it is a pestilential, topsy-turvy, harum-scarum whirligig. Give me the old, solemn, straightforward, regular Dutch canal—three miles an hour for expresses, and two-rod jogtrot journeys—with a yoke of oxen for heavy loads! I go for beasts of burden, it is more firmative and scriptural, and suits a moral and religious people better. None of your hop-skip-and-jump whimsies for me."

2. *Railroads Link East and West (1849)*

Alexander Mackay, a gifted British journalist and barrister, published in 1849 a three-volume description of his American travels. It ranks as the finest work of its kind for the era. Liberal, sympathetic, and friendly, Mackay struck up enlightening conversations with Americans, as the following passage attests. How much logic was there in his prognosis of an East-West split? Why did such a division not occur in actual practice?

"It is a common thing in Europe," said I [Mackay], "to speculate upon the probabilities of a speedy dissolution between the Northern and Southern divisions of the Union. But I confess that, for myself, I have for some time back been of opinion that, should a disseverance ever take place, the danger is that it will be between the East and the West."

"On what do you base such an opinion?" inquired my [American] companion.

"On referring to the map," replied I, "it will be found that fully one-third of the members [states] of the Confederation are situated in the same great basin, having one great interest in common between them, being irrigated by the same system of navigable rivers, and all united together into one powerful belt by their common artery, the Mississippi."

²Alexander Mackay, *The Western World, or Travels in the United States in 1846–1847* (London: R. Bentley, 1849), vol. 1, pp. 236–240.

“Admitting this,” observed my friend, “what danger arises therefrom to the stability of the Union?”

“Only that arising from a probable conflict of interests,” replied I. “The great region drained by the Mississippi is pre-eminently agricultural, whilst much of the seaboard is manufacturing and commercial. The first-named region is being rapidly filled with an adventurous and energetic population, and its material resources are being developed at a ratio unexampled in the annals of human progress. The revolution [passing] of a very few years will find it powerful enough to stand by itself, should it feel so inclined. And then nothing can prevent a fatal collision of interests between it and the different communities on the seaboard but the recognition and adoption of a commercial policy which will afford it an ample outlet for its vast and varied productions.” . . .

“I am free to admit,” cried my friend, “the necessity for such an adjustment as an essential condition to the stability of the Union. . . . Antagonistic as they are in many respects in their interests, were the East and the West to be left physically isolated from each other, the difficulties in the way of a compromise of interests would indeed be insurmountable. Had the East no direct hold upon the West, and had the West no communication with the rest of the world but through the Mississippi, one might well despair of a permanent reconciliation. It is in obviating the physical obstructions . . . that the great barrier to a permanent good understanding between the East and the West has been broken down. It is by rendering each more necessary to the other that the foundation has been laid for that mutual concession which alone can ensure future harmony and give permanence to the Union.”

“And how have you done this?” inquired I.

“We have tapped the West,” replied he. . . .

“By tapping the West, then, you mean opening direct communications between the East and the West?”

“Exactly so,” said he. “Had matters been left as nature arranged them, the whole traffic of the Mississippi valley would have been thrown upon the Gulf of Mexico. . . .”

“When I consider,” said I, “the many parallel lines of artificial communication which you have established between the East and the West, I must say that, in tapping the latter, you have tapped it liberally.”

“We have taken, or are taking, advantage of all our opportunities in this respect,” replied he [referring to the East-West network of canals and railroads]. . . .

“And to these you look,” observed I, “as your securities for the integrity of the republic?”

“As bonds,” said he, “the existence of which renders improbable the severance of the East from the West. These four great parallel lines of intercommunication have effectually counteracted the political tendencies of the Mississippi. . . . Everything, too, which improves the position of the West, as regards the Atlantic seaports, renders the mutual dependence between the two sections of the Union, as respects their home trade, more intimate and complete. In addition to this, it strengthens more and more the sentiment of nationality, by bringing the denizens of the West and the East in constant communication with each other. They freely traverse each other’s fields, and walk each other’s streets, and feel equally at home, whether they

are on the Wabash, the Arkansas, the Potomac, the Susquehanna, the Genesee, or the St. John's.

"This is what we have effected by tapping the West. We have united it to us by bonds of iron, which it cannot, and which, if it could, it would not, break. By binding it to the older states by the strong tie of material interests, we have identified its political sentiment with our own. We have made the twain one by our canals, our railroads, and our electric telegraphs, by making the Atlantic more necessary to the West than the Gulf; in short," said he, "by removing the Alleghenies."

Thought Provokers

1. What were the principal effects of industrialization on women and the family?
2. Compare the ways in which anti-foreignism manifests itself in the United States today with those of the 1850s and 1860s. Has the nation grown more tolerant?
3. Were the rich of the 1830s really exploiting the workers, or were they providing them with job opportunities? Would you rather have been a black slave in the South or a wage slave in a New England factory? Argue both sides. In what noteworthy respects is labor better off today than it was in the 1830s, and why?
4. Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of canals, river waterways, and railroads, and draw conclusions. Why could some canals, including the Erie Canal, continue to compete with the railroads?
5. Why can it be asserted with plausibility that the Erie Canal won the Civil War for the North? Would there have been a Civil War if there had been no Erie Canal? Do contrasting economies tend to divide sections or to unite them because of their dependence on one another?