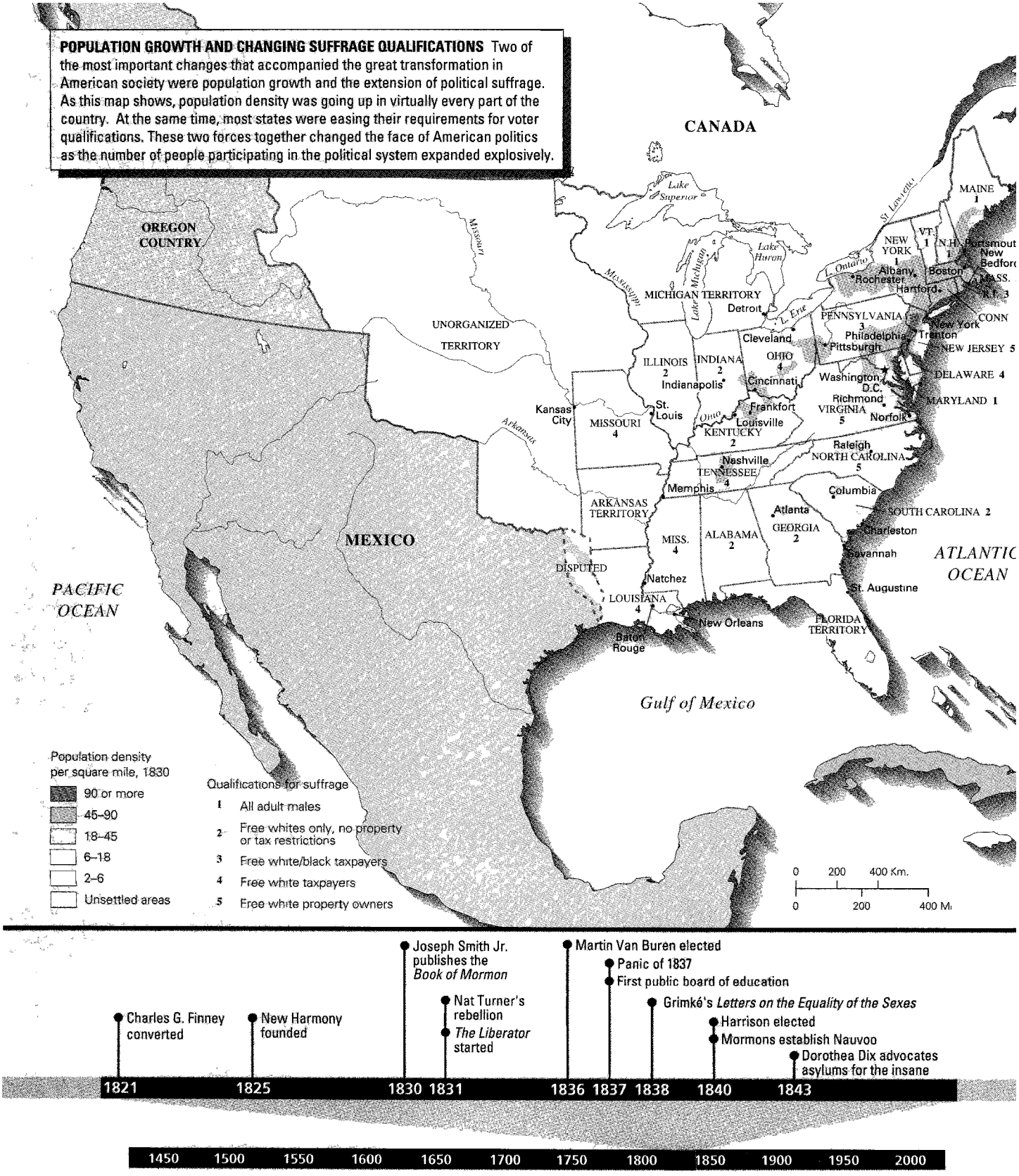


1821 Charles G. Finney converted
1825 New Harmony founded
1830 Joseph Smith Jr. publishes the *Book of Mormon*
1831 Nat Turner's rebellion
1831 *The Liberator* started
1836 Martin Van Buren elected
1837 Panic of 1837
1837 First public board of education
1838 Grimké's *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*
1840 Harrison elected
1840 Mormons establish Nauvoo
1843 Dorothea Dix advocates asylums for the insane

1450 1500 1550 1600 1650 1700 1750 1800 1850 1900 1950 2000

Chapter 11
Responses to the Great

Transformation, 1815-1840

Reactions to Changing Conditions

•What choices did Americans make in dealing with the stresses created by rapid change during the Jacksonian era?

•What was the cultural outcome?

Toward an American Culture

•How did the choices made in American arts and letters reflect the spirit of change during the Jacksonian era?

•What were some other cultural outcomes of the stresses of rapid change during the era?

The Whig Alternative to Jacksonian Democracy

•What expectations did Jackson's opponents have when they built their coalition to oppose the Democrats?

•Was the outcome what they expected? Why or why not?

(INTRODUCTION)

Expectations
Constraints
Choices
Outcomes

The great transformation in American economics and society created vast new opportunities and *expectations* for people during the antebellum period. But new *constraints* arose as quickly as new hopes. A man could amass a fortune one day and find a place among the genteel elite, only to lose it the next and find himself among the mass of hourly wage workers. Some entrepreneurs experienced this cycle many times during their careers. Others experienced no mobility at all; they were stuck either as underpaid urban workers or, worse yet, as slaves.

Different groups of Americans reacted differently to this precarious situation, as their *choices* attest. Some found relief in a new evangelical faith that empowered them to rule their own souls while forging them into close-knit congregations. Others responded more violently, attacking those they believed were responsible for the *constraints* on their lives. Some banded together in tightly organized societies bent on removing from the world sinfulness, drunkenness, ignorance, and a thousand other evils. Others *chose* to escape the world altogether, isolating themselves in communes devoted to anything from socialism to celibacy to free love. The *outcome* was a peculiar mixture of emerging societies that often were at odds with each other, frequently adding to the tensions that had driven them to make particular *choices*.

At the same time, various American cultures were coming into being. The elite and the middle class could *choose* to sip tea and read romantic poems or the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne and James Fenimore Cooper. But the economic and social *constraints* that working-class people faced led them to choose cheap whiskey and rowdy theater performances or athletic competitions. Slaves faced even more serious *constraints, choosing* to stave off the worst effects of their condition by crafting a creative African-American culture. The *outcome* of these various *choices* was the foundation for the rich culture the United States enjoys today.

In politics, too, change was in the air. Old-line nationalists like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster chafed under Andrew Jackson's personal political style. Southerners like John C. Calhoun found Jackson's forcefulness discomforting and a dangerous threat to states' rights. And many Americans, like those who flocked to the Antimasonic movement, were skeptical of politics in general and of Jackson's politics in particular. Seeking to unseat Jackson, these disaffected groups invited reforming evangelicals to join them in a new coalition. In 1840, the Whig party used every political trick it could to woo voters away from the Democrats. The *outcome* of that election was a Whig victory and a new kind of politics that forever changed the way Americans conducted their public business.

Modernization and Rising Stress

1806 Journeyman shoemakers strike in New York City

1821 Charles G. Finney experiences a religious conversion

1823 James Fenimore Cooper's *The Pioneers*

1825 Thomas Cole begins Hudson River school of painting
Robert Owen establishes community at New Harmony, Indiana

1826 Shakers have eighteen communities in the United States

1828 weavers Protest and riot in New York City
Andrew Jackson elected president

1830 Joseph Smith, Jr., publishes the Book of Mormon

1831 Nat Turner's Rebellion
William Lloyd Garrison begins publishing *The Liberator*

1832 Jackson reelected

1834 Riot in Charlestown, Massachusetts, leads to the destruction of a Catholic convent

1835 Protestants and Catholics clash in New York City streets

1836 Congress passes the gag rule Martin Van Buren elected president

1837 Horace Mann heads the first public board of education
Panic Hof 1837
Ralph Waldo Emerson's "American Scholar" speech

1838 Emerson articulates transcendentalism

1840 Log-cabin campaign
William Henry Harrison elected president
Mormons build Nauvoo,

1841 Brook Farm established
1842 *Commonwealth v. Hunt*
1843 Dorothea Dix advocates state-funded asylums for the insane

Reactions to Changing Conditions

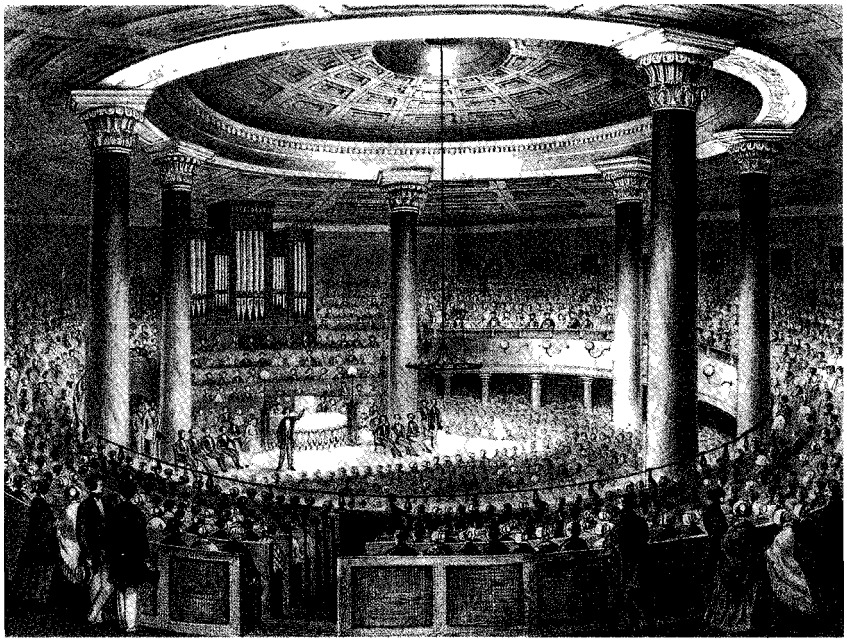
In the grasping, competitive conditions that were emerging in the dynamic new America, an individual's status, reputation, and welfare seemed to depend exclusively on his or her economic position. "It is all money and business, business and money which make the man now-a-days; success is everything," failed entrepreneur Chauncey Jerome lamented. The combination of rapid geographical expansion and new opportunities in business produced a highly precarious social world for all

Americans. Desperate for some stability, many pushed for various reforms to bring the fast-spinning world under control.

A Second Great Awakening

Popular religion was a major counterbalance to rapid change. Beginning in the 1790s, Protestant theologians sought to create a new Protestant creed that would maintain Christian community in an era of increasing individualism and competition.

Mirroring tendencies in society, Protestant thinking during the early nineteenth century emphasized the role of the individual. Traditional



♦ Marking his triumphant arrival in New York City, evangelist Charles G. Finney had this massive tabernacle built to his own specifications. Here he held the same sort of revival meetings he had been leading in rural tents and village churches for years before arriving in the city. *Oberlin College Archives.*

Puritanism had emphasized predestination, the idea that individuals can do nothing to win salvation. Nathaniel Taylor of Yale College created a theology that was consistent with the new secular creed of individualism. According to Taylor, God offered salvation to all who sought it. Thus the individual had "free will" to choose or not choose salvation. Taylor's ideas struck a responsive chord in a restless and expanding America. Hundreds of ministers carried his message of a democratic God.

Most prominent among the evangelists of the **Second Great Awakening** was Charles Grandison Finney. A former schoolteacher and lawyer, Finney experienced a soul-shattering religious conversion in 1821 at the age of 29. Finney performed on the pulpit as a spirited attorney might argue a case in court. Seating those most likely to be converted on a special "anxious bench," he focused his whole attention on them. Many of those on the anxious bench fainted, experienced bodily spasms, or cried out in hysteria. Such dramatic results brought Finney enormous publicity, which he and an army of imitators used to gain access to communities all over the West and the Northeast. This religious revival spread across rural America like wildfire until Finney carried it into Boston and New York in the 1830s.

Revival meetings were remarkable affairs. Usually beginning on a Thursday and continuing until the following Tuesday, they drew crowds of up to twenty-five thousand people. Those attending listened to spirited preaching in the evenings and engaged in religious study during the daylight hours.

The revivals led to the breakdown of traditional church organizations and the creation of various Christian denominations. The Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists split between those who supported the new theology and those who clung to more traditional notions. Such fragmentation worried all denominations that state support of any

predestination The doctrine that God has predetermined everything that happens, including the final salvation or damnation of each person.

Second Great Awakening Series of religious revivals that began around 1800 and were characterized by emotional public meetings and conversions.

revival meeting A meeting for the purpose of reawakening religious faith, often characterized by I impassioned preaching and emotional public testimony by converted sinners.

one church might give that denomination an advantage in the continuing competition for souls. Oddly, those most fervent in their Christian beliefs joined deists and other Enlightenment-influenced thinkers in arguing for even more stringent separation of church and state.

Although religious conversion had become an individual matter, revivalists did not ignore the notion of community. At revival meetings, for example, when individuals were overcome by the power of the spirit, those already saved began "surrounding them with melodious songs, or fervent prayers for their happy resurrection, in the love of Christ." Finney put great emphasis on creating a single Christian community to stand in opposition to sin. As he observed, "Christians of every denomination generally seemed to make common cause, and went to work with a will, to pull sinners out of the fire."

The intimacy forged during revivals gave a generation of isolated individuals a sense of community and a sense of duty. According to the new theology, it was each convert's obligation to carry the message of salvation to the multitudes still in darkness. New congregations, missionary societies, and a thousand other **benevolent** groups rose up to lead America in the continuing battle against sin.

The Middle Class and Moral Reform

The missionary activism that accompanied the Second Great Awakening dovetailed with the inclination toward reform among genteel and middle-class people. The Christian benevolence movement gave rise to voluntary societies that aimed to outlaw alcohol and a hundred other evils. These organizations provided both genteel and middle-class men and women with a purpose missing from their lives. Such activism drew them together in common causes and served as an antidote to the alienation and loneliness common in early nineteenth-century America.

As traditional family and village life broke down, voluntary societies pressed for public intervention to address social problems. The new theology emphasized that even the most depraved might be saved if proper means were applied. This idea had immediate application to crime and punishment. Criminals were no longer characterized as evil but were seen as lost and in need of divine guidance.

Mental illness underwent a similar change in definition. Rather than being viewed as hopeless cases suffering an innate spiritual flaw, the mentally ill were now spoken of as lost souls in need of help. **Dorothea** Dix, a young, compassionate, and reform-minded teacher, learned firsthand about the plight of the mentally ill when she taught a Sunday school class in a Boston-area prison. "I tell what I have seen," she said to the Massachusetts legislature in 1843. "Insane persons confined within the Commonwealth, in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience!" For the balance of the century, Dix toured the country pleading the cause of the mentally ill.

Middle-class Protestant activists targeted many other areas for reform. They insisted on stopping mail delivery and closing canals on Sundays. Others joined Bible and tract societies that distributed Christian literature. They founded Sunday schools or opened domestic missions to win the irreligious and Roman Catholics to what they regarded as the true religion.

Many white-collar reformers were genuinely interested in forging a new social welfare system. A number of their programs, however, appear to have been aimed more at achieving control over others than social reform. Such reformers often tried to force people to conform to a middle-class standard of behavior. Reformers believed that immigrants should willingly discard their traditional customs and learn American ways. Immigrants who clung to familiar ways were suspected of disloyalty. Social control was particularly prominent in public education and **temperance.**

benevolent Concerned with doing good or organized for the benefit of charity.

Dorothea Dix Philanthropist, reformer, and educator who was a pioneer in the movement for specialized treatment of the mentally ill.

irreligious Hostile or indifferent to religion.

temperance Avoidance of alcoholic drinks.

Some communities, like Puritan Boston, had always emphasized compulsory education for children. Most communities, however, did not require children to attend school. The apprenticeship system rather than schools often provided the rudiments of reading, writing, and figuring. But as the complexity of life increased during the early nineteenth century, **Horace Mann** and others came out in favor of formal schooling.

Mann, like Charles Finney, was trained as a lawyer but believed that ignorance, not sin, lay at the heart of the nation's problems. He became the nation's leading advocate of publicly funded education for all children. "If we do not prepare children to become good citizens," Mann proclaimed, "if we do not enrich their minds with knowledge, then our republic must go down to destruction, as others have gone before it."

Massachusetts took the lead in formalizing schooling in 1837 when the state founded the country's first public board of education. Appointed head of the board, Mann extended the school year to a minimum of six months and increased teachers' salaries. Gradually, the state board changed the curriculum in Massachusetts schools, replacing classical learning and ministerial training with courses like arithmetic, practical geography, and physical science.

Education reformers were interested in more than knowledge. Mann and others were equally concerned that new immigrants and the urban poor be trained in Protestant values and middle-class habits. Thus schoolbooks emphasized promptness, persistence, discipline, and obedience to authority. In cities with numerous Roman Catholics, Catholic parents resisted the Protestant-dominated school boards by establishing parochial **schools.**

Social control was also evident in the crusade against alcohol. Before the early nineteenth century, the consumption of alcohol was not broadly perceived as a significant social problem. Two factors contributed to a new perception. One was the increasing visibility of drinking and its consequence, drunkenness, as populations became more concentrated in cities. By the mid-1820s, Rochester, New York had nearly a hundred drinking establishments that included groceries, barbershops, and even candy stores.

The changing taste of genteel and middle-class people was the second factor that contributed to a new view of alcohol. As alternatives to alcohol such as clean water and coffee became available or affordable, these people reduced their consumption of alcohol and disapproved of those who did not. By 1829, the middle class saw strong drink as "the cause of almost all of the crime and almost all of the misery that flesh is heir to." Drinking made self-control impossible and endangered morality and industry. Thus behavior that had been acceptable in the late eighteenth century was judged to be a social problem in the nineteenth.

Like most of the reform movements, the temperance movement began in churches touched by the Second Great Awakening and spread outward. Drunkenness earned special condemnation from reawakened Protestants, who believed that people besotted by alcohol could not possibly gain salvation. Christian reformers believed that stopping the consumption of alcohol was necessary not only to preserve the nation but to save people's souls.

The religious appeal of temperance was enhanced by a powerful economic appeal. Factory owners recognized that workers who drank heavily threatened the quantity and quality of production. They rallied around temperance as a way of policing their employees in and out of the factory. By promoting temperance, reformers believed they could increase production and turn the raucous lower classes into clean-living, self-controlled, peaceful workers.

The Rise of Abolitionism

Another reform movement that had profound influence in antebellum America was **abolitionism.**

Horace Mann Educator who called for publicly funded education for all children and was head of the first public board of education in the United States.

parochial school A school supported by a church parish.

abolitionism A reform movement favoring the immediate freeing of all slaves.

Although Quakers had long opposed slavery, there was little organized opposition to it before the American Revolution. During the Revolution, many Americans saw the contradiction between asserting the "unalienable rights" of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and holding slaves (see page 121). By the end of the Revolution, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania had taken steps to abolish slavery. And by the mid-1780s, most states, except those in the Lower South, had active anti-slavery societies. In 1807, when Congress voted to outlaw the importation of slaves, little was said in defense of slavery. But by 1815, the morality of slavery had begun to emerge as a national issue. The profits to be made in cotton made it impossible for many white southerners to even think about ending slavery.

The American Colonization Society, founded in 1817, reflected public feeling about slavery. Humanitarian concern for slaves' well-being was not the only reason for the society's existence. Many members believed that the black and white races could not live together and advocated that emancipated slaves be sent back to Africa. Although the American Colonization Society began in the South, its policies were particularly popular in the Northeast and West. In eastern cities, workers feared that free blacks would lower their wages and take their jobs. Western farmers similarly feared economic competition.

Most evangelical preachers supported colonization, but a few individuals advocated more radical reforms. The most vocal leader was William Lloyd Garrison. A Christian reformer from Massachusetts, Garrison in 1831 founded the nation's first prominent abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator.* In it he advocated immediate emancipation for blacks and no compensation for slaveholders. Garrison founded the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833.

At first, Garrison had few followers. Some Christian reformers joined his cause, but the majority supported colonization. At this early date, radical abolitionists were almost universally ignored or, worse, attacked. Throughout the 1830s, riots often accompanied abolitionist rallies as angry mobs stormed stages and pulpits to silence abolitionist speakers. Still, support for the move ment gradually grew. In 1836, petitions demanding an end to the slave trade in the District of Columbia flooded Congress. Congress responded by passing a gag **rule,** which lasted until 1844, to avoid any discussion of the issue. But debate over slavery could not be silenced.

The Beginnings of Working-Class Culture and Protest

Wretched living conditions and dispiriting poverty encouraged working-class people in northern cities to choose social and cultural outlets that were very different from those of upper- and middle-class Americans. Offering temporary relief from unpleasant conditions, drinking was the social distraction of choice among working people. Whiskey and gin were cheap and available during the 1820s and 1830s as western farmers used the new roads and canals to ship distilled spirits to urban markets. In the 1830s, consumers could purchase a gallon of whiskey for 25 cents.

Even activities that did not center on drinking tended to involve it. While genteel and middle-class people remained in their private homes reading, working people attended popular theaters. **Minstrel shows** featured fast-paced music and raucous comedy. Plays, such as Benjamin Baker's *A Glance at New York in 1848,* depicted caricatures of working-class "Bowery B'hoys" and "G'hals" and of the well-off Broadway "pumpkins" they poked fun at. To put the audience in the proper

American Colonization Society Organization established in 1817 to send free blacks from the United States to Africa; it used government money to buy land in Africa and found the colony of Liberia.

William Lloyd Garrison Abolitionist leader who founded and published *The Liberator,* an antislavery newspaper.

gag rule A rule that limits or prevents debate on an issue.

minstrel show A variety show in which white actors made up as blacks presented jokes, songs, dances, and comic skits.

mood, theater owners sold cheap drinks in the lobby or in basement pubs. Alcohol was usually also sold at sporting events such as bare-knuckle boxing contests.

Stinging from their low status in the urbanizing and industrializing society, and freed from inhibitions by hours of drinking, otherwise rational workingmen pummeled one another to let off steam. Fistfights often turned into brawls and then into riots, pitting Protestants against Catholics, immigrants against the native-born, and whites against blacks.

Working-class women experienced the same dull but dangerous working conditions and dismal living circumstances as working-class men, but their lives were even harder. Single women were particularly bad off. They were paid significantly less than men but had to pay as much and sometimes more for living quarters, food, and clothing. Marriage could reduce a woman's personal expenses—but at a cost. While men congregated in the barbershop or pub during their leisure hours, married women were stuck in tiny apartments caring for children and doing household chores. Social convention banned women from many activities that provided their husbands, boyfriends, and sons some relief.

In view of their working and living conditions, it is not surprising that some manufacturing workers began to organize in protest. Skilled journeymen took the lead in making their dissatisfaction with new methods of production known to factory owners.

Journeyman shoemakers staged the first labor strike in America in 1806 to protest the hiring of unskilled workers to perform work that the journeymen had been doing. The strike failed, but it set a precedent for labor actions for the next half-century. The replacement of skilled workers remained a major cause of labor unrest in the 1820s and 1830s. Journeymen bemoaned the decline in craftsmanship and their loss of power to set hours, conditions, and wages. Industrialization was costing journeymen their independence and forcing some to become wage laborers.

Instead of attacking or even criticizing industrialization, however, journeymen simply asked for decent wages and working conditions. To achieve these goals, they banded together in **trade unions.** During the 1830s, trade unions from different towns formed the beginnings of a national trade union movement. In this way, house carpenters, shoemakers, hand-loom weavers, printers, and comb makers attempted to enforce national wage standards in their industries. In 1834, many of these merged to form the National Trades' Union, which was the first labor union in the nation's history to represent many different crafts.

The trade union movement accomplished little during the antebellum period. Factory owners, bankers, and others who wanted to keep labor cheap used every device available to prevent unions from gaining the upper hand. Employers formed their own associations to resist union activity. They also used the courts to keep unions from disrupting business. A series of local court decisions upheld employers and threatened labor's right to organize.

A breakthrough for trade unions finally came in 1842. The Massachusetts Supreme Court decided in *Commonwealth v. Hunt* that Boston's journeyman boot makers had the right to organize and to call strikes. By that time, however, the Panic of 1837, which threw many people out of work for long periods of time, had so undermined the labor movement that legal protection became somewhat meaningless.

Not all labor protests were peaceful. In 1828, for example, immigrant weavers protested the low wages paid by Alexander Knox, New York City's leading textile employer. Demanding higher pay, they stormed and vandalized his home. The weavers then marched to the homes of weavers who had not joined the protest and destroyed their looms.

More frequently, however, working men took out their frustrations not on their employers but on other ethnic groups. Ethnic riots shook New York, Philadelphia, and Boston during the late 1820s and 1830s. In 1834, rumors that innocent girls were be-

trade union A labor organization whose members work in a specific trade or craft.

National Trades' Union The first national association of trade unions in the United States; it was formed in 1834.

ing held captive and tortured in a Catholic convent near Boston led a Protestant mob to burn the convent to the ground. A year later, as many as five hundred native-born Protestants and immigrant Irish Catholics clashed in the streets of New York. These ethnic tensions were the direct result of declining economic power and terrible living conditions. Native-born journeymen blamed immigrants for lowered wages and loss of status. Immigrants hated being treated like dirt.

Apart from drinking and fighting among themselves, working people in America during the early nineteenth century did little to protest their fate. Why were American workers so unresponsive? One reason may be that as poor as conditions were, life was better than in Ireland and Germany. Another reason is that workers did not see themselves staying poor. As one English observer commented, women in America's factories were willing to endure boring twelve-hour days because "none of them consider it as their permanent condition." Men expected to "accumulate enough to go off to the West, and buy an estate at 11/4 dollar an acre, or set up in some small way of business at home."

Culture, Resistance, and Rebellion Among Southern Slaves

Like their northern counterparts, slaves fashioned for themselves a culture that helped them survive and maintain their humanity under inhumane conditions. The degree to which African practices endured in America is remarkable, for slaves seldom came to southern plantations directly from Africa. That many African practices were passed on from one generation to another demonstrates the strength of slave families, religion, and folklore. What evolved was a unique African-American culture.

Traces of African heritage were visible in slaves' clothing, entertainment, and folkways. Often the plain garments that masters provided were supplemented with colorful head scarves and other decorations similar to those worn in Africa. Hairstyles often resembled those characteristic of African tribes. Music, dancing, and other forms of public entertainment and celebration also showed strong African roots. Musical instruments were copies of traditional ones, modified only by the use of New World materials. Other links to Africa abounded. Healers used African ceremonies, Christian rituals, and both imported and native herbs to effect cures. These survivals and adaptations of African traditions provided a strong base on which blacks erected a solid African-American culture.

Strong family ties helped make possible this cultural continuity. Slave families endured despite a precarious life. Husbands and wives could be sold to different owners or be separated at the whim of a master, and children could be taken away from their parents. Families that remained intact, however, remained stable. When families did suffer separation, the **extended family** of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives offered emotional support and helped maintain some sense of continuity.

Relationships within slave families closely resembled relationships among white families. As in southern white families, black women, when not laboring at the assigned tasks of plantation work, generally performed domestic work and tended children while the men hunted, fished, did carpentry, and performed other "manly" tasks. Children were likely to help out by tending family gardens and doing other light work until they were old enough to join their parents in the fields or learn skilled trades.

Religion was another means for preserving African-American traits. White churches virtually ignored the religious needs of slaves until the Great Awakening (see pages 75-76), when many white evangelicals turned their attention to the spiritual life of slaves. In the face of slaveowners' negligence, evangelical Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists took it upon themselves to carry the Christian message to slaves.

The Christianity that slaves practiced resembled the religion practiced by southern whites but also differed from it in many ways. Slave preachers

extended family A family group consisting of various close relatives as well as the parents anc children.

untrained in white theology often equated Christian and African religious figures, creating unique African-American religious symbols. The joining of African musical forms with Christian lyrics gave rise to a new form of Christian music: the spiritual. Masters often encouraged such worship, thinking that the Christian emphasis on obedience and meekness would make slaves better and more peaceful servants. Some, however, discouraged religion among their slaves, fearing that large congregations of slaves might be moved to rebellion. Thus some religious slaves had to meet in secret to practice their own particular form of Christianity.

Despite the hopes of white masters, slaves did resist and rebel, sometimes subtly and sometimes quite openly and violently. Slaves adopted clever strategies for getting extra food, clothing, and other supplies and developed sly techniques for manipulating their masters. Slaves often stole food simply to fluster their masters. Farm animals disappeared mysteriously, tools broke in puzzling ways, and people fell ill from unknown diseases.

The importance of clever resistance is evident in the tales that slaves told among themselves. Perhaps the best known are the stories of Br'er Rabbit (Brother Rabbit), the physically weak but shrewd character who uses deceit to get what he wants. One particularly revealing tale tells of Br'er Rabbit's being caught by Br'er Fox. Unable to get a fire started to cook the helpless rabbit, Fox threatens Rabbit with all sorts of horrible tortures. Rabbit replies that Fox can do anything he wants so long as he does not throw him into the nearby briar patch. Seizing on Rabbit's apparent fear, Fox pitches him deep into the briar patch, expecting to see Rabbit die amid the thorns. But Br'er Rabbit had been raised in a briar patch, and so he scampers away, laughing at how he has tricked Br'er Fox into doing exactly what he wanted him to do. Such stories taught slaves how to deal with powerful adversaries.

Not all slave resistance took covert forms. Perhaps the most common form of active resistance was running away (see Map 11.1). An average of about a thousand slaves made their way to freedom each year between 1840 and 1860. Most of them lived in the border states or Texas, where freedom lay not far away. Most were also young male slaves between the ages of 16 and 35. Artisans and other slaves with special skills became fugitive slaves more frequently than other slaves.

Runaway slaves left few documents explaining why they were willing to face hounds, patrollers, hunger, and other dangers. Frederick Douglass, who became a famous abolitionist leader, ran away because he grew tired of turning his wages over to his master. Many ran away to be with wives who had been sold. But contemporary observers thought that fear of punishment was the most common motivation for running away. One former slave disagreed with this explanation: "They didn't do something and run. They run before they did it, 'cause they knew that if they struck a white man there wasn't going to be a nigger."

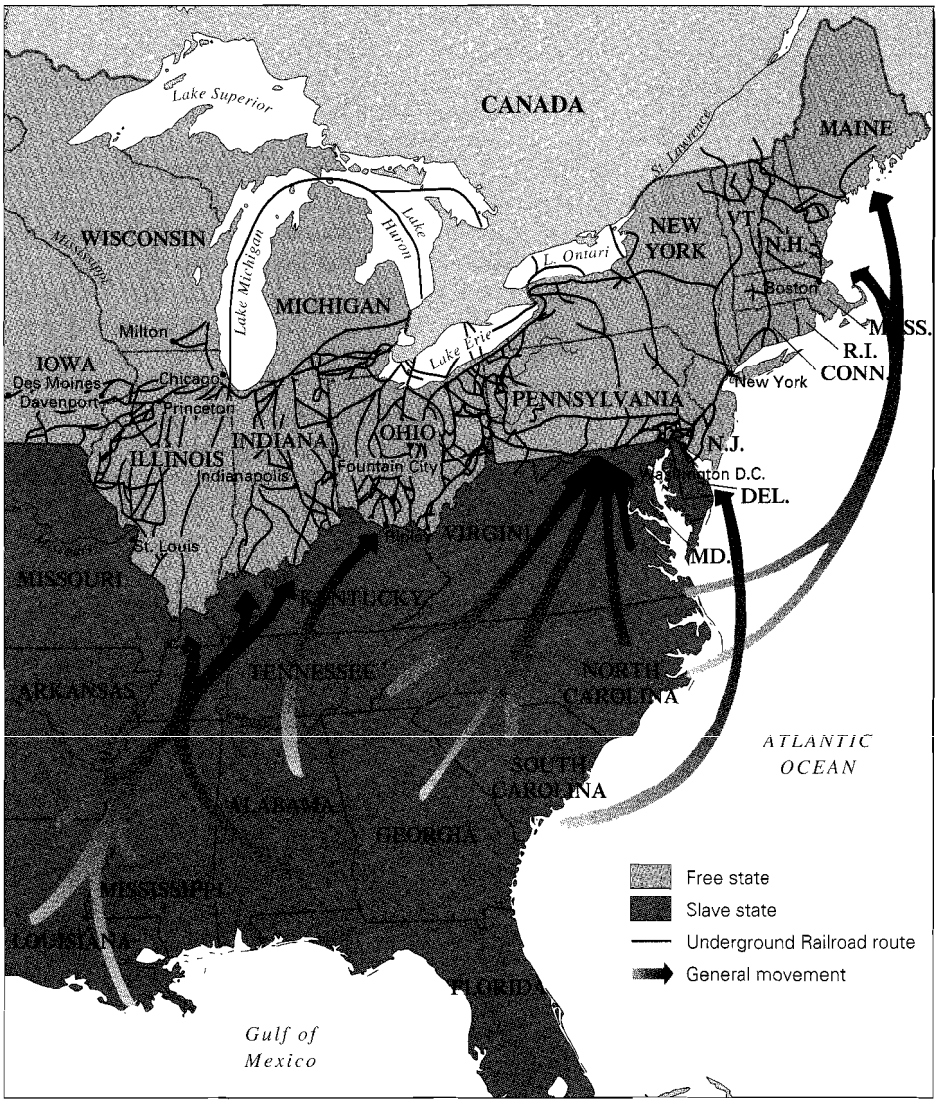
To southerners, the most frightening form of slave resistance was armed revolt. The nineteenth-century South saw very few actual rebellions, although a number of planned uprisings were betrayed before they could take place. Such was the fate of Gabriel Prosser 's rebellion in Richmond, Virginia, in 1800, and the Denmark Vesey conspiracy in Charleston in 1822.

Nat Turner, a black preacher, carried out the most serious and violent of the antebellum slave revolts. In 1831, Turner led about seventy slaves in a predawn raid against the slaveholding households in Southampton County, Virginia. During the four days of Nat Turner's Rebellion, the slaves slaughtered fifty-five white men, women, and children. Angry whites finally captured and executed Turner and sixteen of his followers.

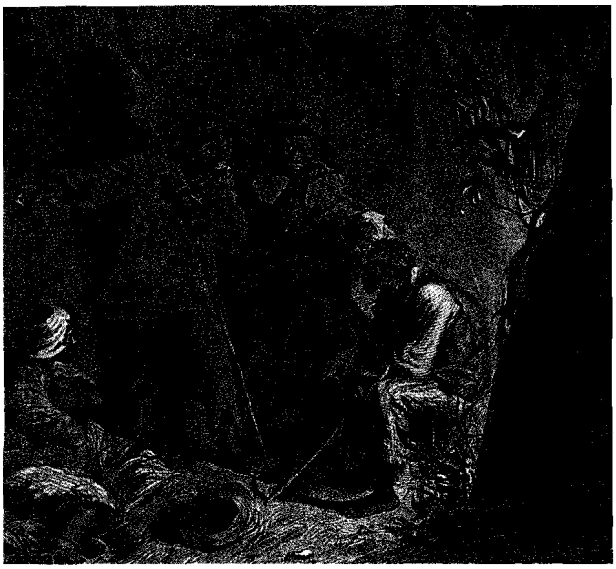
In the wake of such frightening revolts, southern courts and legislatures clapped stricter controls on slaves and free blacks. In most areas, free blacks were denied the right to own guns, to buy liquor, and to hold public assemblies. Slaves were forbidden to attend unsupervised worship services and to learn reading and writing. The new

spiritual A religious folksong originated by African Americans, often expressing a longing for deliverance from the constraints and hardships of their lives.

border states The slave states of Delaware, Mary- land, Kentucky, and Missouri, which shared a border with states in which slavery was illegal.



♦ **MAP 11.1 Escaping from** Slavery Running away was one of the most prominent forms of slaves resistance during the antebellum period. Success often depended on help from African Americans who had already gained their freedom and from sympathetic whites. Beginning in the 1820s, an informal and secret network called the Underground Railroad provided escape routes for slaves who were daring enough to risk all for freedom. The routes shown here are based on documentary evidence, but the network's secrecy makes it impossible to know whether they are all drawn accurately.



♦ No pictures of famed slave revolt leader Nat Turner are known to exist, but this nineteenth-century painting illustrates how one artist imagined the appearance of Turner and his fellow conspirators. White southerners lived in terror of scenes such as this and passed severe laws designed to prevent African Americans from having such meetings. *Library of Congress.*

laws virtually eliminated slaves as unsupervised urban craftsmen after 1840.

Fear of slave revolts reached paranoid levels in areas where slaves outnumbered whites. Whites felt justified in passing strong restrictions and using harsh methods to enforce them. White citizens formed local vigilance **committees,** which rode armed through the countryside to intimidate slaves. Local authorities pressed court clerks and ship captains to limit the freedom of blacks. White critics of slavery, who had been numerous and well respected before the birth of King Cotton, were harassed and sometimes beaten into silence. Increasingly, the extension of slavery limited the freedom of both whites and blacks.

Toward an American Culture

The profound political, social, and economic changes of the early nineteenth century gave birth to a distinctly American culture by 1840. One of the distinguishing characteristics of this culture was a widely shared commitment to individualism. Americans came to believe that the individual was responsible for his or her destiny. They stressed the power of the individual self, not fate or accidents of birth. The popularity of Andrew Jackson, whom Americans regarded as a self-made man, reflected this belief in individualism.

American emphasis on the individual also reflected a decline in community and family ties. Such ties simply could not survive the corrosive effects of social and geographical mobility. The desire to get ahead often took precedence over everything else. As the visiting French nobleman Alexis de Tocqueville observed, Americans seemed to be "animated by the most selfish cupidity [greed]."

Romanticism and Genteel Culture

Romanticism, a European import, was another major ingredient in shaping contemporary American culture. In Europe, the Romantics had rebelled against Enlightenment rationalism, stressing the heart over the mind, the wild over the controlled, the mystical over the mundane. The United States, with its millions of uncharted acres, its wild animals, and its colorful frontier myths, was the perfect setting for romanticism to flourish.

American intellectuals combined individualism and romanticism to celebrate the positive aspects of life in the United States. This combination won broad acceptance among the genteel and middle classes.

vigilance committees Groups of armed private citizens who use the threat of mob violence to enforce their own interpretation of the law.

Alexis de Tocqueville French aristocrat who toured the United States in 1830-1831 to investigate and write about political and social conditions in the new democracy.

romanticism Artistic and intellectual movement characterized by interest in nature, emphasis on emotion and imagination, and rebellion against social conventions.

Romanticism and individualism had their greatest spokesman in Ralph **Waldo Emerson.** Emerson by 1829 had become pastor of the prestigious Second Unitarian Church in Boston. He was thrown into a religious crisis, however, when his young wife, Ellen Louisa, died in 1831 after only two years of marriage.

Emerson could find no consolation in the rationalism of Unitarianism. He sought alternatives in Europe, where he met the famous Romantic poets William Wordsworth and Thomas Carlyle. They taught Emerson to seek truth in nature and spirit rather than in reason and order. Building from their insights, Emerson created a new philosophy and religion called **transcenden**talism. Recovered from his grief, he returned to the United States to begin a new career as an essayist and lecturer.

The problem with historical Christianity, Emerson told students at the Harvard Divinity School in 1838, is that it treated revelation as "long ago given and done, as if God were dead." Emerson, however, believed that revelation could happen at any time and that God was everywhere. Only through direct contact with the transcendent power in the universe could men and women know the truth. "It cannot be received at second hand," Emerson insisted, but only through the independent working of the liberated mind.

Although Emerson emphasized nonconformity and dissent in his writings, his ideas were in tune with the economic currents of his day. In celebrating the individual, Emerson validated the surging individualism of Jacksonian America. Rather than condemning the "selfish cupidity" that Alexis de Tocqueville said characterized Jacksonian America, Emerson stated that money represented the "prose of life." Little wonder, then, that Emerson's ideas found a wide following among young people of means in the Northeast.

Emerson's declaration of literary independence from European models in an 1837 address titled "The American Scholar" set a bold new direction for American literature. During the next twenty years, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and others spread the transcendentalist message, emphasizing the uniqueness of the individual and the role of literature as a vehicle for self-discovery. "I celebrate myself, and sing myself," Whitman proclaimed in *Leaves of Grass,* published in 1855. Like the romantics, the transcendentalists celebrated the primitive and the common. Longfellow wrote of the legendary Indian chief Hiawatha and sang the praises of the village blacksmith. In "I Hear America Singing," Whitman made poetry of the everyday speech of mechanics, carpenters, and other common folk.

Perhaps the most radical of the transcendentalists was Emerson's good friend **Henry David** Thoreau. Emerson advocated self-reliance, but Thoreau embodied it. He lived for several years at Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts, where he did his best to live independently of the rapidly modernizing market economy. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately," Thoreau wrote, "and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived."

James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe pushed American literature in a romantic direction. Even before Emerson's "American Scholar," Cooper had launched a new sort of American novel and American hero. In *The Pioneers* (1823), Cooper introduced Natty Bumppo, a frontiersman whose honesty, independent-mindedness, and skill as a

Ralph Waldo Emerson Philosopher, writer, and poet whose essays and poems made him a central figure in the transcendentalist movement and an important figure in the development of literary expression in America.

Unitarianism Christian religious association that considers God alone to be divine; it holds that all people are granted salvation and that faith should be based on reason and conscience.

transcendentalism A philosophical and literary movement asserting the existence of God within human beings and in nature and the belief that intuition is the highest source of knowledge.

transcendent Lying beyond the normal range of experience.

nonconformity Refusal to accept or conform to the beliefs and practices of the majority.

Henry David Thoreau Writer, naturalist, and friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson; his best-known work is *Walden* (1854).

marksman represented the rough-hewn virtues so beloved by romantics. Altogether, Cooper wrote five novels featuring the plucky Bumppo.

Like Cooper, Herman Melville emphasized primitive scenes and noble savages in his adventure novels. Beginning with *Typee* (1846), Melville's semiautobiographical accounts of an American seaman among the natives of the South Pacific became overnight best sellers. Melville followed these with hís most famous novel, *Moby Dick* (1851), an allegorical tale of a good man turned bad by his obsession for revenge against a whale he believed to be evil. Literary critics and the public hated *Moby Dick.*

Nathaniel Hawthorne had more financial success than Melville in exploring the contest between good and evil. In his first famous work, *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), Hawthorne presented readers with a collection of moral allegories stressing the evils of pride, selfishness, and secret guilt. He brought these themes to fruition in his 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter,* in which adulteress Hester Prynne overcomes shame to gain redemption and her secret lover, Puritan minister Arthur Dimmesdale, is destroyed by his hidden sins.

Edgar Allan Poe excelled in telling Gothic tales of pure terror. For Poe, the purpose of writing was to stir the passions of the reader. Poe tried to instill fear, which he believed was the strongest emotion. Haunting short stories like "The Tell-Tale Heart," "The Masque of the Red Death," and "The Pit and the Pendulum" did precisely that.

The drive to celebrate America and American uniqueness also influenced the visual arts during this period. Greek and Roman themes had dominated American art through the first decades of the nineteenth century. Horatio Greenough's statue of George Washington, for example, depicted the nation's first president wrapped in a toga.

After 1825, however, American scenes gradually replaced classical ones. Thomas Cole, a British immigrant painter, was the dominant force in this movement. Cole fell in love with the landscapes he saw in New York's Hudson River valley. The refreshing naturalness and Americanness of Cole's paintings created a large following known as the Hudson River school, who lived in and painted landscapes of this valley.

George Caleb Bingham started a different artistic trend in his realistic pictures of common people engaged in everyday activities. He departed from traditional portrait artists, who painted the well-to-do posed in their finery. The flatboatmen, marketplace dwellers, and electioneering politicians in Bingham's paintings were artistic testimony to the emerging democratic style of America in the Jacksonian period.

The Jacksonian era also saw a proliferation of women writers. Some, like Sarah Moore Grimké, the sister of abolitionist Angelina Grimké, deplored the status of women in American society in her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women* (1838). Margaret Fuller, who edited the influential transcendentalist magazine *The Dial,* explored the same theme in *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). The most popular women writers of the day, however, depicted the new genteel woman in an approving, sentimental fashion. Lydia Sigourney, one of the first women to carve out an independent living as a writer, was contributing regularly to more than thirty popular magazines by 1830. Poe, who dismissed her work as shallow, nevertheless solicited her to write for his magazine. She wrote two best sellers in 1833, *How to Be Happy* and *Letters to Young Ladies,* both of which glorified women in their domestic roles.

Radical Attempts to Regain Community

Some religious groups and thinkers tried to ward off the excesses of Jacksonian individualism by

allegorical Having the characteristics of an allegory, a literary device in which characters and events stand for abstract ideas.

Gothic A style of fiction that emphasizes mystery, horror, and the supernatural; it is so named because the action often takes place in gloomy, ghost-infested castles built in the medieval Gothic style of architecture.

Hudson River school The first native school of landscape painting in the United States (1825-1875); it attracted artists rebelling against the neoclassical tradition.

forming communities that experimented with various living arrangements and ideological commitments. Nearly all of these experiments were in the North, where the unsettling effects of a market-driven economy were felt most acutely. Those who joined these communes hoped to strike a new balance between self-sufficiency and community support.

Brook Farm, a commune near Boston founded by transcendentalist George Ripley in 1841, was such a community. Ripley's goal in establishing Brook Farm was to "permit a more wholesome and simple life than can be led amidst the pressure of our competitive institutions." Each member of the community was expected to work on the farm to make the group self-sufficient. Brook Farm attracted few residents during its first few years. The adoption in 1844 of the socialist ideas of Frenchman Charles Fourier, however, attracted numerous artisans and farmers. Fourierism emphasized community self-sufficiency but also called for the equal sharing of earnings among members of the community. A disastrous fire in 1845 cut the experiment short. Brook Farm was one of nearly a hundred Fourierist communities founded during this period from Massachusetts to Michigan. All ended in failure.

So did Robert Owen's community at New Harmony, Indiana. Owen, a wealthy Welsh industrialist, believed that the solution to poverty was to collect the unemployed into self-contained and self-supporting villages. In 1825, Owen attempted to put his ideas into practice when he purchased an existing agricultural commune. At New Harmony, Owen opened a textile factory in which ownership was held communally and decisions were made by group consensus. Despite such innovations, internal dissent and economic difficulties forced New Harmony to close in 1827.

Communal experiments based on religious ideas fared much better than those founded on secular theories. The **Oneida Community,** established in central New York in 1848, reflected the religious ideas of its founder, John Humphrey Noyes. No church was willing to ordain him because of his beliefs that Christ had already returned to earth and had commanded his followers to live communally and to practice group marriage. Unlike Brook Farm and New Harmony, the Oneida Community was financially successful, establishing thriving logging, farming, and manufacturing businesses. It finally disbanded in 1881 because of local outcries about the "free love" practiced by its members.

The Shakers avoided the Oneida Community's problems by banning sex altogether. Called the "Shaking Quakers" because of the ecstatic dances they performed as part of their worship services, they grew steadily after their founder, Ann Lee, emigrated from Great Britain in 1774. By 1826, there were eighteen Shaker communities in eight states. The Shakers at one time claimed nearly six thousand members. Their emphasis on celibacy stemmed from their belief that sexuality promoted selfishness and sinfulness. Farming activities and the manufacture and sale of widely admired furniture and handicrafts brought them success. After 1860, however, recruiting new members became difficult. The Shakers' rules of celibacy ultimately spelled their demise.

Brook Farm An experimental farm based on cooperative living; established in 1841, it first attracted transcendentalists and then serious farmers before fire destroyed it in 1845.

socialist Someone who believes in the public ownership of manufacturing, farming, and other forms of production so that they benefit society rather than create individual profit.

Fourierism Social system advanced by Charles Fourier, who argued that people were capable of living in perfect harmony under the right conditions, which included communal life and republican government.

New Harmony Utopian community that Robert Owen established in Indiana in 1825; economic problems and discord among members led to its failure two years later.

Oneida Community A religious community established in central New York in 1848; its members shared property, practiced group marriage, and reared children under communal care.

Shakers A mid-eighteenth-century offshoot of the Quakers, the Shakers practiced communal living and strict celibacy; they gained members only by conversion or adoption.

By far the most successful of these communal groups were the Mormons. They harnessed the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening, the romantics' appeal to the primitive, and the inclination to communal living displayed by the Shakers and other groups. This peculiarly American movement was founded by Joseph Smith, Jr., a New York farmer. Smith claimed in 1827 that an angel had led him to a set of golden plates inscribed in a strange hieroglyphic language. Smith's translation of these plates resulted in the Book of Mormon, printed in 1830.

Smith then founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also called the Mormon church, after the prophet Mormon, who had written the golden plates. A revelation inspired Smith in 1831 to lead his congregation out of New York to Kirtland, Ohio. Stressing community, faith, and hard work, the Mormons thrived there for a while. More traditional Protestants, however, regarded Smith's followers with suspicion, envy, and hostility. Their misgivings increased markedly after 1840, when Smith and other elders in the church began to practice polygamy. Increasing persecution convinced Smith to lead his followers farther west into Missouri.

The Mormons found Missouri frontiersmen no less resentful than easterners. Smith then decided to lead his congregation to Illinois, founding the city of Nauvoo in 1840. Continuing conversions to the new faith brought a flood of Mormons to Smith's Zion in Illinois. In 1844, Nauvoo, with a population of fifteen thousand Mormons, dwarfed every other Illinois city.

The Whig Alternative to Jacksonian Democracy

Although Andrew Jackson was perhaps the most popular president since George Washington, not all Americans agreed with his philosophy, policies, or political style. Men like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster opposed Jackson in and out of Congress. Gradually, anger over Jackson's policies and anxiety about the changing character of the nation convinced dissidents to combine into a new national party.

The End of the Old Party Structure

Jackson's enemies were deeply divided among themselves. Henry Clay had started the Bank War (see page 202) to rally Jackson's opponents behind a political cause. Southern politicians like John C. Calhoun, however, feared and hated Clay's nationalistic policies as much as they did Jackson's assertions of federal power. And political outsiders like the Antimasons distrusted all political organizations.

The Antimasons kicked off the anti-Jackson campaign in September 1831 when they held a national nominating convention in Baltimore. The convention drew a wide range of people who were disgusted with politics as usual. Thurlow Weed cajoled the convention into nominating William Wirt, a respected lawyer from Maryland, as its presidential candidate. Weed fully expected that the Republicans would later rubber-stamp the Antimasonic nomination and present a united front against Jackson. But the Republicans, fearful of the Antimasons' odd combination of machine politics and antiparty philosophy, nominated Clay for president.

Even having two anti-Jackson parties in the running did not satisfy some. Distrustful of the Anti-masons and hating Clay's nationalist philosophy, some southerners refused to support any of the announced candidates. They backed nullification advocate John Floyd of Virginia.

Lack of unity spelled disaster for Jackson's opponents. The president received 219 electoral votes to Clay's 49, Wirt's 7, and Floyd's 11. Despite un-

Joseph Smith, Jr. Founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, also known as the Mormon church; he led his congregation westward from New York to Illinois, where he was murdered by an anti-Mormon mob.

Mormons Members of the church founded by Joseph Smith in 1830; Mormon doctrines are based on the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and revelations made to church leaders.

polygamy The practice of having more than one husband or wife at a time.

machine politics The aggressive use of influence, favors, and tradeoffs by a political organization, or "machine," to mobilize support among its followers.

♦ Calling themselves Whigs after the British political party that opposed royal authority, Henry Clay, John E. Calhoun, and Daniel Webster joined forces to oppose what they characterized as Andrew Jackson's kingly use of power. This lithograph from 1834, depicting Jackson in royal dress stepping on the Constitution, expresses their view quite vividly. *Tennessee Historical Society.*

The New Political Coalition

If one lesson emerged clearly from the election of 1832, it was that Jackson's opponents needed to unite if they expected to challenge the Democrats successfully. By 1834, the various factions opposing Jackson had formed the Whig party. The term "Whig" referred to the party in opposition to the British king. In adopting it, Clay and his associates called attention to Jackson's growing power and what they saw as his monarchical pretensions. They took to calling Jackson "King Andrew."

Clay's supporters formed the heart of the Whigs. The nullifiers, however, quickly came around. Late in 1832, Clay and Calhoun joined forces in opposing Jackson's appointment of Martin Van Buren, whom Jackson had picked as his political successor, as American minister to Britain. The Antimasons joined the Whig coalition prior to the 1834 congressional elections. Not only was Jackson a Mason, but his use of patronage and back-alley politics disgusted the Antimasons sufficiently to overcome their distrust of Clay's party philosophy. Christian reformers who wanted to eliminate alcohol, violations of the Sabbath, and dozens of other perceived evils also joined the Whigs. Evangelicals disapproved of Jackson's lifestyle and his views on issues ranging from slavery to alcohol.

The new Whig coalition proved its ability to challenge Jacksonian Democrats in the 1834 election. In their first electoral contest, the Whigs won nearly 40 percent of the seats in the House and over 48 percent in the Senate.

Van Buren in the White House

Jackson had seemed to be a tower of strength when he was first elected to the presidency in 1828, but he was aging and ill by the end of his second term. Nearly 70 years old and plagued by various ailments, Old Hickory decided not to run for a third term. Instead, he did all that was within his power to ensure that Martin Van Buren would win the Democratic presidential nomination in 1836.

Meanwhile, Clay and the Whigs were hatching a novel strategy. Rather than holding a national

Whig party Political party that came into being in 1834 as an anti-Jackson coalition and that charged "King Andrew" with executive tyranny.

convention and nominating one candidate, the Whigs let each region's party organization nominate its own candidates. As a result, four favorite **sons** ran on the Whig ticket: Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee, W. P. Mangum of North Carolina, and William Henry Harrison of Ohio. Whig leaders hoped the large number of candidates would confuse voters and throw the election into the House of Representatives. This strategy failed narrowly. Van Buren squeaked by in the Electoral College, winning by a margin of less than 1 percent.

Van Buren's entire presidency was colored by the economic collapse that occurred just weeks after he took office. Although the Panic of 1837 was a direct outcome of the Bank War and Jackson's money policies, Van Buren bore the blame. The crisis had begun with bank president Nicholas Biddle's manipulation of credit and interest rates in an effort to have the Second Bank rechartered. Jackson had added to the problem by issuing the Specie Circular on August 15, 1836. The intent of the Specie Circular was to make it more difficult for speculators to obtain public land by requiring payment in specie, or hard money. The effect was to remove paper money from the economy.

The contraction in credit and currency had the same impact in 1837 as in 1819: the national economy collapsed. By May 1837, New York banks were no longer accepting any paper currency, a policy soon followed by all other banks. Hundreds of businesses, plantations, farms, factories, canals, and other enterprises were thrown into bankruptcy by the end of the year. Over a third of Americans lost their jobs. Those fortunate enough to keep their jobs found their pay reduced by as much as 50 percent. The nation sank into an economic and an emotional depression.

As credit continued to collapse through 1838 and 1839, President Van Buren tried to address the problems but only made them worse. His first mistake was to continue Jackson's hard-money policy of accepting payment only in specie. The outcome was more contraction in the economy. Then, to keep the government solvent, Van Buren cut federal spending to the bone, accelerating the downward economic spiral. The public began referring to him as Martin Van Ruin.

The Log-Cabin and Hard-Cider Campaign of 1840

The Whigs had learned their lesson in 1836: only a party united behind one candidate could possibly beat the Democrats. For that candidate, they selected William Henry Harrison, the hero of Tippecanoe. The general had a distinguished military record and few enemies. John Tyler, a Virginian who had bolted from the Democrats during the Bank War, was chosen as his running mate.

Although the economy was in bad shape, the Whigs avoided addressing any serious issues. Instead, they launched a smear campaign against Van Buren. The Whig press portrayed Van Buren, the son of a tavern keeper, as an aristocrat with expensive tastes in clothes, food, and furniture. Harrison, by contrast, had been born into the Virginia aristocracy, but the Whigs characterized him as a simple frontiersman who had risen to greatness through his own efforts. Whig claims were so extravagant that the Democratic press soon satirized Harrison in political cartoons as a rustic hick rocking on the porch of a log cabin and swilling hard cider. The satire backfired. Whig newspapers and speechmakers sold Harrison, the long-time political insider, as a simple man of the people who truly lived in a log cabin. At campaign rallies, Whigs passed out cider to voters while they chanted, "Van, Van, Van, Oh! Van is a used-up man."

Unfortunately for Van Buren, the slogan was on target. By the time the cider had been drunk and the votes counted, Harrison was swept out of his log cabin and into the White House.

favorite **son** A candidate nominated for office by delegates from his or her own region or state.

Specie Circular Order issued by President Jackson in 1836 stating that the federal government would accept only gold and silver as payment for public land.

John Tyler Virginia senator who left the Democratic party after conflicts with Andrew Jackson; he was elected vice president in 1840 and became president when Harrison died.

SUMMARY

Expectations
Constraints
Choices
Outcomes

William Henry Harrison inherited a deeply troubled country from outgoing president Martin Van Buren. Economic *constraints* triggered by Andrew Jackson's unwise *choice* in issuing the Specie Circular were worsened by Van Buren's error in revamping the treasury system, and both were compounded by Nicholas Biddle's malevolence. The new party system that emerged promised excitement but not much in the way of solutions. Still, Americans must have had great *expectations* from the new politics: nearly twice as many men *chose* to vote in the 1840 election as had done so in any other presidential contest.

This *outcome* came on top of a number of other *choices* Americans made in response to the many unsettling changes that had been taking place as part of the great transformation. Different economic classes responded by creating their own cultures and by *choosing* specific strategies for dealing with anxiety. Some *chose* violent protest, some passive resistance. Some looked to heaven for solutions and others to earthly utopias. And out of this complex swirl of new *expectations* and *constraints,* something entirely new and unexpected emerged. The *outcome* was a new America, on its way to being socially, politically, intellectually, and culturally modern.

In the election of 1840, a man who had become a national figure by fighting against Indian sovereignty and for westward expansion swept a new sentiment into national politics. Increasingly, Americans shared the *expectation* that the West would provide the solutions to the problems raised by the great transformation. In the short term, the *outcome* was an exciting race by Americans toward the Pacific. But new *constraints* pared down available *choices,* propelling the nation toward a sectional crisis.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Genovese, Eugene D. *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (1979).

Although it focuses somewhat narrowly on confrontation, as opposed to more subtle forms of resistance, this study traces the emergence of African-American political organization from its roots in antebellum slave revolts.

Haltunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (1982).

A wonderfully well-researched study of an emerging class defining and shaping itself in the evolving world of early-nineteenth-century urban space.

Pessen, Edward. *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (1967).

A look at the early labor movement and reform by one of America's leading radical scholars.

Wallace, Anthony F. E. *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (1978).

A noted anthropologist's reconstruction of a mill town and the various class, occupational, and gender cultures that developed there during its transition from a traditional village.

Walters, Ronald G. *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (1978).

The best overview of the reform movements and key personalities who guided them during this difficult period in American history.

Wilentz, Sean. *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (1984).

An insightful view of working-class culture and politics in the dynamic setting of New York City during the heyday of the Erie Canal.

♦ Prescribing Middle-Class Expectations

The Context

Chapter 11 discusses the emergence of a new economic and social class in the United States: the middle class. Being a new class and living under new circumstances, these people had to figure out new rules for appropriate behavior, proper appearance, and desirable relationships. Those rules then had to be communicated. What emerged was a flood of what historians call "prescriptive literature," writing that recommends certain modes of behavior, dress, and social conduct. Through mass-publishing syndicates like the American Tract Society, literature prescribing middle-class cultural values spread to every class in America. (For further information on the context, see pages 229-230.)

The Historical Question

Few historians would dispute that a major cultural shift took place during the forty-six years that separated the War of 1812 and the Civil War, but many questions remain concerning the causes for this shift, the exact nature of it, and the media by which it spread. Examining prescriptive literature from the period is one way to approach those questions. What did the prescríptive literature have to say about class roles, gender roles, and roles for different age groups? How does advice given to one such group help to inform us about desírable roles for the other groups? What expectations were being formed about people's behavior, dress, and social relations?

The Challenge

Using the sources provided, along with other information you have read, write an essay or hold a discussion on the following question. Cite evidence in the sources to support your conclusions. What roles and responsibilities were being prescribed for middle-class men, women, and children during the early nineteenth century? How do these roles reflect new economic and social realities during the period?

The Sources

1 Prescriptive literature for young women took many forms—ranging from parables to sentimental poetry. Catherine Beecher was inclined to write manifestoes. In *The Duty of American Women to Their Country* (1845), she said:

Women, then, are to be educated for teachers, and sent to the destitute children of this nation by hundreds and by thousands. This is the way in which a profession *is to be created for women—a profession as honourable and as lucrative for her as the legal, medical, and theological are for men. . . .*

And who else, in such an emergency as this, can so appropriately be invoked to aid? It is woman whois the natural and appropriate guardian of childhood. It is woman who has those tender sympathies which can most readily feel for the wants and sufferings of the young. . . . It is woman, too, who has that conscientiousness and religious devotion which, in any worthy cause, are the surest pledges of success.

Every woman has various duties pressing upon her attention. It is right for her, it is her duty, to cultivate her own mind by reading and study, not merely for her own gratification or credit, but with the great end in view of employing her knowledge and energies for the good of others. It is right, and a duty for a woman to attend to domestic affairs; but,

except in cases of emergency, it is not right to devote all her time to this alone. It is a duty for her to attend to religious efforts and ordinances; but it is not right for her to give all her time to these alone. . . .

2 Prescriptive literature for men usually avoided the sentimental and took on an air of friendly conversation. T. S. Arthur's *Advice to*

Young Men on Their Duties and Conduct in Life

(1853) was one such advice manual. Arthur wrote:

. . . It is no light task which a man takes upon himself—that of sustaining, by his single efforts, a whole family. . . . You have an education that enables you to take a respectable position in society; you have a groundwork of good principles; habits of industry; in fact, all that a young man need ask for in order that he may rise in the world; and for these you are indebted to your father. To give you such advantages, cost him labor, self-denial, and much anxious thought. Many times has he been pressed down with worldly difficulties. . . . He has seen his last dollar, it may be, leave his hand, without knowing certainly where the next was to come from. But still, his love for his children has urged him on. . . .

. . . you should make it a point of duty always to go with your sisters into company, and to be their companion, if possible, on all public occasions. By so doing, you can prevent the introduction of men whose principles are bad; or, if such introductions are forced upon them in spite of you, can throw in a timely word of caution. . . . The great thing is to guard, by every means in your power, these innocent

ones from the polluting presence of a bad man. You cannot tell how soon he may win the affections of the most innocent, confiding, and loving of them all, and draw her off from virtue. And even if his designs be honorable . . . he cannot make her happy, for happy no pure-minded woman ever has been, or even can be made by a corrupt, evil-minded, and selfish man.

. . . But not only should you seek to guard them from the danger just alluded to,—your affection for them should lead you to enter into their pleasures as far as in your power to do so; to give interest and variety to the home circle; to afford them, at all times, the assistance of your judgment in matters of *trivial as well as grave importance.*

3 Probably more prescriptive words were written to and about children than about any other subject during the antebellum period. An anonymous pamphlet issued by the American Tract Society advised:

Be careful in the formation of intimate friendships. Attach yourself to those chiefly who are diligent, thoughtful, and amiable. Behave always in the most respectful manner to your teachers, and to all that occasionally visit you. Avoid the extremes of bashfulness and bold presumption; frankness and modesty form a happy union. In diet be moderate; in apparel neat; among your companions, cheerful and kind. . . . Never tell a lie, nor conceal the truth when it is your duty to make it known; at the same time remember that a tale-bearer in a school is an odious character.