Chapter 13: Meeting the Challenges of the New Age:
Immigration, Urbanization, Social Reform 1820s–1850s

Chapter Review

I. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES Women Reformers of Seneca Falls Respond to the Market Revolution

Charlotte Walker and six friends attended the Seneca Falls Convention on July 19 and 20, 1848, a gathering of approximately 300 women who met to discuss important issues of their time. After hearing speeches from Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the Convention issued a Declaration of Sentiments, a petition for women’s rights based on the Declaration of Independence. The struggle for women’s rights was only one of many reform movements that emerged from the United States in the wake of the market revolution. Americans like Charlotte Walker gathered together in reform organizations to try to solve the problems posed by the market revolution.

MHL document: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Declaration of Sentiments (1848) at www.myhistorylab.com

II. IMMIGRATION AND THE CITY

The market revolution’s most noticeable impact was in the major cities, where a majority of new immigrants to America lived.

a. The Growth of Cities

The market revolution increased the size of American cities, particularly the seaport cities. In addition to increasing the size of existing cities, the market revolution brought about “instant” cities, like Utica and Chicago, which were located at critical points on the new transportation network.

b. Patterns of Immigration

Increasing numbers of immigrants to the United States also contributed to rapid urban growth. Most of the immigrants to the United States from the 1820s to the 1860s were from Ireland and Germany. New industries needed workers and many of the changes in industry and transportation that accompanied the market revolution would not have been possible without the use of immigrant labor. Other states in the Midwest actively recruited settlers to farm. Life for new immigrants was often hard as they adjusted to America, but American cities struggled with the influx.

c. Irish Immigration
The Potato Famine of 1845–46 brought the first major wave of Irish immigrants to American cities. The new immigrants, who were relatively poor, remained in the cities. Living in crowded and unsanitary conditions and desperate for work, they created ethnic enclaves in the cities where they lived that provided familiar, if foreign to outsiders, pastimes and religious services. While New York City got the largest numbers, Boston, a smaller city, was overwhelmed by Irish, who made up one quarter of the population by 1850.

MHL document: *Irish Laborers Get an Endorsement in 1833* at www.myhistorylab.com

d. German Immigration

German immigrants were typically small farmers or artisans. They were not as poor as the Irish and were able to afford to settle inland and begin farming. Germans moved through the Ohio valley into the Midwest and some settled as far afield as Texas. German agricultural communities fostered cultural continuity by forming predominantly German towns.

e. The Chinese in California

The Gold Rush and later railroad construction brought large numbers of Chinese immigrants to California after 1848. San Francisco’s Chinatown is the oldest Chinese ethnic enclave in America.

f. Ethnic Neighborhoods

Almost all new immigrants preferred to live in ethnic neighborhoods where they had family ties, familiar ways, and community support. Germans who settled in urban areas built ethnic enclaves, much like the Irish and Chinese. The Germans formed church societies, benefit societies, and fire companies in these new communities. Ethnic clustering allowed immigrants to a new country to preserve their cultural traditions, but Native Americans viewed ethnic communities with suspicion and questioned immigrants’ commitment to American values.

III. URBAN PROBLEMS

New American political and social forms began to emerge from the rapid growth and economic competition of the new urban environment.

a. New Living Patterns in the Cities

Immigration caused urban growth and a sharpening of class differences within major urban centers. It became clear that the benefits of the market revolution were not distributed equally. Cities in the early nineteenth century lacked clean municipal water supplies, sewers, and garbage collection. As a result, every American city suffered
epidemics of sanitation-related diseases like yellow fever and cholera. This lack of municipal services encouraged residential segregation. As the middle class left the cities, the urban poor clustered in poor slum neighborhoods. Increasing residential segregation came to embody larger issues of class and citizenship.

b. Ethnicity in Urban Popular Culture

Immigrants to American cities contributed to the new urban popular culture. Irish immigrants faced not only discrimination but also cultural denigration. Their response was to insist on their “whiteness” through an urban popular culture characterized by violence and mockery. Popular urban working-class amusements included theater shows, a venue prone to violence, and black face “Jim Crow” minstrel shows. From 1820–1860, a combination of economic depression, overcrowding, and a vast influx of immigrant labor resulted in working-class amusements becoming rougher and rowdier.

c. The Labor Movement and Urban Politics

By the 1830s, the status of artisans had greatly deteriorated in the nation’s cities. Worker protest against changing conditions first took shape in the form of party politics. The Workingmen’s Party, in Philadelphia in 1827, campaigned for a ten-hour work day and the preservation of the artisan shop system. In 1833, craft group members formed the General Trades Union of New York. One year later, representatives from several local GTUs organized the National Trades Union. The pressures of the Panic of 1837 caused the union’s collapse but the emergence of such unions was a visible sign of class-based community interest among workers. Urban politics were dominated by strong political organizations. In New York City, Irish and German participation in party politics virtually destroyed the Whig Party that had controlled New York prior to the immigrants’ arrival. With immigrant support, the Democratic Tammany Hall organization controlled the city by the 1850s.

MHL document: Preamble of the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations (1827) at www.myhistorylab.com

d. Civic Order

As overcrowded urban centers gave rise to crime and violence, it became apparent that Americans were fascinated by such violence. Walt Whitman’s poetry and Edgar Allen Poe’s stories drew from the urban experience. Increasing working-class “rowdyism” frightened middle-class and wealthy city residents. In colonial times, members of a city could be counted on to keep the peace and deal with civil disturbances. However, the size of modern cities like New York made such practices impossible. In 1845, New York City created a permanent police force to keep order amongst the poor, but anti-foreign and anti-Catholic riots remained a common occurrence.

e. Free African Americans in the Cities
By 1860, there were nearly 500,000 free African Americans in the United States. More than half of these people lived in the North, most often in large cities. Free African Americans living in Northern cities faced residential segregation, job discrimination, segregated public schools, and severely limited civil rights. To protect themselves from the larger community, African Americans, like the German and Irish, created their own communities. The focus of the African American community was the church. Employment opportunities for black men continued to deteriorate from 1820 to 1850 and many blacks found themselves the targets of urban violence.

**IV. SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENTS**

New middle-class attitudes embraced a passion for reform focused on solving the problems of the nation’s cities. Thus, middle-class people dealt with the social changes in their communities by joining organizations devoted to reform.

a. Religion, Reform, and Social Control

Evangelical religion was a central aspect of social reform. Evangelists such as Charles Finney hoped to convert others in the process of creating a perfect moral community on earth. Originally, reform movements sprang from the realization that traditional small-scale local relief efforts were no longer working. Reformers believed in the basic goodness of human nature and saw the overcrowded, unsanitary living conditions of the city as a major culprit of demoralization. Although well-intentioned, reformers held a dogmatic belief that they knew what was right and they were determined to see the reforms and improvements they suggested enacted. The reform movement was not all good. Reformers wanted to reform unfit members of society whether they wanted to be reformed or not. Additionally, the reform movement promoted a dangerous hostility toward Catholic immigrants and the temperance movement targeted immigrants in particular because of their free drinking habits.

b. Education and Women Teachers

Women became deeply involved in reform efforts through their churches, supporting missionary work as well as educational reforms. Horace Mann and other educational reformers believed that children were born innocent and that they needed proper nurturing and encouragement from public, tax supported schools, to succeed in life. In the 1830s compulsory education laws were enacted throughout the North. As more children went to school, more teachers were hired to teach them. Teachers were commonly young, single women. Teaching offered women their first real career opportunity.

**MHL document:** *Noted Educator Speaks on Public Schooling in 1848* at

[www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)

**MHL video:** *Who was Horace Mann and why are so many schools named after him?* at

[www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)
c. Temperance

The largest reform organization of the period was the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance. The group, which was predominantly evangelical, saw excessive drinking as a national problem. They argued that men hurt their families by drinking not only because of physical violence but also because they spent the family’s income on liquor. The new middle class, with its focus on respectability and morality, found excessive drinking unacceptable. Temperance thus became both a social and a political movement. By the 1840s, alcohol consumption had been halved, making the temperance movement one of the most successful of nineteenth-century reforms.

**MHL video: Drinking and the Temperance Movement in Nineteenth-Century America at [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)**

d. Moral Reform, Asylums, and Prisons

Reformers attacked other “social evils” as well, including prostitution, asylums, and the prison system. To solve the problem of prostitution, reformers tried to offer prostitutes work as domestic servants, a low-paying and unappealing career. Where reformers realized that prostitution was an economic rather than moral issue, they quickly organized charities and work for poor women. The asylum movement, led by Dorothea Dix, led to the establishment of a state asylum for the insane in Massachusetts and similar institutions in other states. Model penitentiaries were built in Auburn and Ossining, New York. These prisons were supposed to reform their inmates through strict order and discipline. They were not always as successful as reformers had hoped.

e. Utopianism and Mormonism

Rapid social change often results in apocalyptic religious movements. The depression resulting in the Panic of 1837 and the market revolution proved a fertile environment for such religious movements. The Millerites believed that the Second Coming of Christ would occur on October 22, 1843. Although that did not happen, they revised their beliefs and formed what is today known as the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The Shakers, founded by “Mother” Ann Lee in 1774, were an offshoot of the Quakers and the oldest utopian religious movement. The Shakers called for a radical social philosophy that included the abolition of the traditional family. Other cooperative communities such as Oneida and New Harmony enjoyed only short-term success. In 1830, Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which was based on the book of Mormon, which Smith claimed had been given to him by an angel. The church flourished after Smith’s murder when his successor, Brigham Young, led the Mormons to settle in Utah. Mormonism was distinctive in the extraordinary unity of its members and is a rare example of communal settlement proving successful.

**MHL map: Utopian Communities before the Civil War at [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com)**
V. ANTISLAVERY AND ABOLITIONISM

The antislavery sentiments that would play such a large role in America’s future in the 1840s and 1850s also had their start in religious reform movements.

a. African Americans against Slavery

Free African Americans instinctively opposed slavery and formed more than 50 antislavery groups by 1850. Black abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth, wrote and spoke against slavery. David Walker’s 1829 *Appeal* went further and called for a slave rebellion and was blamed by many Southerners for Nat Turner’s Rebellion.

b. The American Colonization Society

The American Colonization Society, formed in 1817 by Northern Quakers and border state slave owners, formulated the first national plan to “solve” the slavery question. Their idea was to gradually emancipate and relocate slaves in Africa.

c. White Abolitionists

A third group led by William Lloyd Garrison condemned slavery as sinful and demanded its immediate abolition. The moral horrors of slavery successfully involved many Northerners in the efforts of the abolitionist movement. The initial impact of the abolition movement in the South was to stifle dissent and make the lives of slaves even harder. Even in the North, the movement was controversial and met resistance, leading to riots, attacks on black churches and the murder of Illinois abolitionist publisher Eliza P. Lovejoy in 1837.

d. Abolitionism and Politics
Abolitionism soon became a national political issue. Southerners, with the help of President Jackson, passed a gag rule in Congress prohibiting the discussion of antislavery petitions. Many Northerners viewed the gag rule as illegal censorship and the rule was repealed in 1844. A major victory came with John Quincy Adams’ 1839 defense of slaves captured from the Spanish ship Amistad, but abolitionists failed to achieve the moral unity as a movement that they had hoped to achieve. In 1840, the abolitionist movement formally split, with political activists forming the Liberty Party and later supporting the Republican Party in the 1850s.

VI. THE WOMEN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Touched by the reform movements and the religious revival of the time, middle-class women with the luxury of time enthusiastically joined these reform movements.


a. The Grimké Sisters

Sarah and Angelina Grimké, although members of the southern slaveholding elite, rejected slavery and became Quakers. They became the first female public speakers in America and spoke on many occasions to groups about the evils of the southern slave system. Like many women in the antislavery movement, the Grimkés were criticized for their failure to assume the more traditional roles of women. Despite groups like the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, men assigned women a subordinate role in the movement.

b. Women’s Rights

The first women’s rights convention in American history was the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. The convention, which called for universal woman suffrage, was an outgrowth of nearly 20 years of women’s participation in various social reform movements. Although conventions were held, nearly every year after 1848, it would be another 72 years before women would be guaranteed the right to vote. Only recently have historians acknowledged the importance of women in the reform movements of the “Age of the Common Man.”

MHL document: Sojourner Truth, Address to Woman’s Rights Convention (1851) at www.myhistorylab.com

VII. CONCLUSION

The market revolution, immigration, and the reform movements that formed in response to these new challenges led Americans to take change for granted and strengthened their faith in human progress. The uncompromising stance of many reformers foreshadowed the failure of compromise in American politics in the 1850s.
Learning Objectives:

Students should be able to answer the following questions after studying Chapter 13:

1. What caused the immigration of the 1840s and 1850s, and what were the responses to it?
2. Why were cities so unable to cope with rapid urbanization?
3. What motivated reform movements?
4. What were the origins and political effects of the abolitionist movement?
5. How were women involved in reform efforts?

Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers

1. What impact did the new immigration of the 1840s and 1850s have on American cities?

   **Answer:** Rapid growth of the cities led to unplanned and uncontrolled development and expansion, the emergence of new political machines to address the needs of the people, the growth of industrial centers, the emergence of the earliest suburbs, and increased commerce.

2. Why did urbanization produce so many problems?

   **Answer:** The cities grew faster than the politicians and services could handle, as well as a rise in ethnic conflicts as various groups emerged to benefit their own people and came into conflict with other groups. The political machines became increasingly corrupt, and unchecked industrialism led to overcrowding, pollution, and substandard infrastructure.

3. To what extent were the motivations of the social reformers of the period benevolent or dictatorial?

   **Answer:** While most reformers had altruistic and benevolent intentions, those intentions often resulted in actions that were dictatorial in nature, forcing those who were the target of the reforms to conform to a middle-class, white, religious expectation that left little room for exceptions.

4. In what ways were abolitionism and antislavery different?

   **Answer:** Antislavery was often expressed in terms that sought to correct the injustices of the practices of slavery (such as the slave trade, slave markets, and the most abusive practices) but did not necessarily have to result in the end of slavery. Abolitionists, however, made demands that called for the eradication of slavery, sometimes without the possibility of economic compensation and threatened not only the institution but also the southern way of life.
5. Why did women enjoy an unusual degree of participation as active members of almost every reform group?

**Answer:** Women made up the vast majority of members of religious groups, which were often the groups leading the reform causes, and women were also those who were most negatively affected by the developments within society—the rise in poverty, male drunkenness, ethnic tensions, and more.

**Lecture Outline**

**American Communities: Women Reformers at Seneca Falls**
- Immigration and the City
  - Growth and immigration
  - Irish and German immigration
  - The Chinese in California
  - Ethnic Neighborhoods

**Urban Problems**
- Living Patterns
- Ethnicity and Popular Culture
- The Labor Movement
- Civic Order
- Free African Americans

**Social Reform Movements**
- Religion, Reform and Social Control
- Education and Women Teachers
- Temperance
- Asylums and Prisons
- Utopianism, Shakers and Mormons

**Abolitionism**
- Free African Americans and Slavery
- The American Colonization Society
- Garrison and White Abolitionists
- Abolitionism and Politics

**The Women’s Rights Movement**
- The Grimké Sisters
- Women and Reform
Resources (Web, Films/Video)

Web
The African-American Mosaic:  [http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam002.html](http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/afam002.html) presents a history, bibliography, and primary sources that detail the origins, development, and accounts of the colonization movement.

*Enfield Shaker Village: [http://www.shakermuseum.org/](http://www.shakermuseum.org/)* details the history of one particular village, but also the United Society of Believers in general.

*The Mormons: [http://www.pbs.org/mormons/history/](http://www.pbs.org/mormons/history/)* provides historical and contemporary accounts of the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including timelines, maps, historical biographies, and historical documents.

*Religion and the Founding of the American Republic: [http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html](http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel07.html)* provides an overview of the role of religion as a central force in the creation and conduct of organized benevolence throughout America’s first 50 years.

Films/Video
*The Mormons* (240 minutes). PBS, 2007. Traces the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from its inception with Joseph Smith in upstate New York to its modern growth and challenges, including offshoots and misperceptions.

*Prince Among Slaves* (120 minutes). PBS, 2008. Follows the life of Abdul Rahman, an African, Muslim prince who survived 40 years of slavery in the U.S. before being returned to Africa.

*The Shakers* (90 minutes). PBS, 1997. Traces the history of the United Society of Believers from the arrival of Mother Ann prior to the Revolution through its expansionist history and heyday during the late nineteenth century to the last four remaining Shakers who today live at Sabbath-day Lake.

My History Lab Connections

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at [www.myhistorylab.com](http://www.myhistorylab.com).

Read and Review

**Read the Documents**

*Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Declaration of Sentiments (1848)*

*Irish Laborers Get an Endorsement in 1833 Preamble of the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations (1827)*

*Noted Educator Speaks on Public Schooling in 1848*

*Visit to the Shakers, Lowell Offering (1841)*
O. A. Brownson, Brook Farm (1842)
An African American Abolitionist Advocates Racial Action in 1829
William Lloyd Garrison, First Issue of the Liberator (1831)
Sojourner Truth, Address to Woman’s Rights Convention (1851)
National Convention of Colored People, Report on Abolition (1847)

See the Maps
Utopian Communities before the Civil War

Research and Explore

Read the Documents
Exploring America: Angelina Grimké

Read the Biographies
Mother Ann Lee
Walt Whitman

See the Videos
Religious Troublemakers of the 19th Century
Drinking and the Temperance Movement in Nineteenth-Century America
Who was Horace Mann and why are so many schools named after him?
The Women’s Rights Movement in Nineteenth-Century America

Critical Thinking Exercises

Students should be asked to consider the extent to which the various reform movements sought to transform all of society or were focused on only select segments—either regionally, racially, or ethnically. To what extent were the objectives part of a utopian vision compared to simply adjusting social expectations? How is it that a religious society that demanded a departure from traditional American society would end up growing into the fastest-growing denomination in American history?