CHAPTER 10

*The Making of Middle-Class America*

**ANTICIPATION/REACTION**

*Directions:* Before you begin reading this chapter, place a check mark beside any of the following seven statements with which you *now* agree. Use the column entitled “Anticipation.” When you have completed your study of this chapter, come back to this section and place a check mark beside any of the statements with which you *then* agree. Use the column entitled “Reaction.” Note any variation in the placement of check marks from *anticipation* to *reaction* and explain why you changed your mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anticipation</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_____ 1. In the early nineteenth century, foreign visitors to the United States were impressed by the degree of economic equality they found.</td>
<td>_____ 1.</td>
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<td>_____ 2. In the early nineteenth century, all sections of the United States experienced rapid population and urban growth.</td>
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<td>_____ 3. Within their own families, the power and prestige of middle-class women declined in the early nineteenth century.</td>
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<td>_____ 4. Most early-nineteenth-century women agreed with their husbands that a woman’s place is in the home.</td>
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<td>_____ 5. Unlike the original, the early-nineteenth-century’s Second Great Awakening was a largely unsuccessful evangelical revival movement.</td>
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<td>_____ 6. The most widely supported and successful of early-nineteenth-century reforms was the antislavery movement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>_____ 7. Most of those who wanted to abolish slavery also believed in racial equality</td>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading Chapter 10 you should be able to:

1. Summarize Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations about early-nineteenth-century America.
2. State how early industrialization changed the American family and describe how Americans compensated for these changes.
3. Explain the attraction of the message in the Second Great Awakening, and demonstrate the Awakening’s impact on social thought and social reform activity in the early nineteenth century.
4. Explain why so many early-nineteenth-century Americans were drawn to communitarianism, and describe some of the peculiarities of communal life.
5. State the origins of early-nineteenth-century social reform movements, list the most significant of these, and evaluate their impact on early-nineteenth-century American life.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Tocqueville and Beaumont in America

In 1831, Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville toured the new American republic and wrote of his observations in Democracy in America, a classic description and interpretation of early-nineteenth-century America.

Tocqueville in Judgment

Tocqueville was captivated by the theme of equality in America. In the United States, wages were higher and the cost of living was lower than in Europe, and inequalities that did exist were not institutionally enforced or supported by public opinion. In spite of the fact that there was at the time a wide and growing gap between rich and poor and substantial poverty in American cities, from Tocqueville’s European perspective, America seemed to be an undifferentiated middle-class society.

A Restless People

Visitors to early-nineteenth-century America were struck by the mobility of Americans, partly the result of the high rate of population growth—the population was doubling about every 22 years. Many moved to seek opportunity in the West, from which five new states entered the Union in the 1830s and 1840s. Others moved to towns and cities. Population movement from farms to cities produced both spectacular growth in the large cities and the emergence of new
towns, especially in the Northeast and Northwest. However, only the perimeter of the South experienced significant urban growth.

**The Family Recast**

The factory system and the growth of cities diminished the importance of home and family as the unit of economic production. More and more breadwinners worked outside the home, and this had an enormous impact on traditional family roles. In the absence of their husbands, middle-class wives and mothers exercised more authority and enjoyed more prestige within their homes. Still, the doctrine of “separate spheres” and the “cult of womanhood” confined middle-class women to the home, where they were expected to tend only to family matters. Some resisted, but most women subscribed to the view that a woman’s place was in the home.

The middle class made a conscious effort to limit family size. People married later and waited longer to have children, and the birth rate declined. As families became smaller, relations within them became more caring. Children in the smaller family were lavished with attention and affection by mothers who had little opportunity to direct their attention or passions outside the home and family.

**The Second Great Awakening**

The growing belief in the innate goodness of children was but one attack on orthodox Calvinist doctrine. A new evangelical revivalism, the Second Great Awakening, also set aside the doctrine of predestination and the arbitrary power of God. Evangelist Charles Grandison Finney urged his followers to take their salvation into their own hands; because of God’s mercy, salvation was available to all. This optimistic message and the entertaining methods of the evangelists enormously increased church membership. Those uprooted by the growth of industry and commerce were attracted to this comforting message of personal salvation. Women, charged with the spiritual education of their children, were also drawn to evangelical revivalism. In upstate New York, they founded the Female Missionary Society and even moved outside their homes and paternalistic, authoritarian churches to organize the salvation of their loved ones.

**The Era of Associations**

Voluntary associations joined the family and church as an institutional pillar of the middle class. Some of these uniquely American associations formed around local issues such as care for orphans and old people; others joined with associations elsewhere to combat some national evil such as drunkenness. Together, they formed a “benevolent empire” of aid and comfort for those without families to provide for them.
Backwoods Utopias

Determined groups of reformers tested their reform theories by withdrawing from society and establishing experimental communities. Some of these communitarians were religious reformers such as the Shakers, and the Oneida community. These religious communities varied enormously in matters of sexual practices, labor requirements, rights of individuals, etc. The most important religious communitarians were the Mormons. Their unorthodox views, such as polygamy and their sense of being a chosen people, forced them to migrate eventually to the Great Salt Lake where they irrigated the desert, and the faith has flourished ever since.

Secular communitarians included the utopian socialists Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. Owen’s advocacy of free love and atheism doomed his communes, but Fourier’s cooperative phalanxes enjoyed some temporary success.

The Age of Reform

Other reformers, less colorful but more effective than the communitarians, assumed the responsibility for caring for the physically and mentally disabled and for the rehabilitation of criminals. These reformers, convinced that people were primarily shaped by their surroundings, established specialized institutions (orphanages, prisons, asylums) for dealing with social problems. Life in these institutions was highly disciplined and aimed toward repentance and rehabilitation.

“Demon Rum”

The temperance movement was the most widely supported and successful reform movement of the time. Americans in the 1820s consumed prodigious amounts of alcohol—per capita consumption was twice what it is today. Men routinely drank at work and in taverns after work. The American Temperance Union and the Washingtonians conducted educational campaigns against drunkenness—which they considered the root of crime and social decay. Temperance organizers eventually reached beyond exhortation to demand legal prohibition of alcohol. Their major success came in the Maine Law of 1851 that prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages in that state.

The Abolitionist Crusade

The most significant and provocative reform movement of this era was abolitionism—the drive to abolish slavery. In the first third of the nineteenth century, most northerners believed slavery was wrong, but they also believed the Constitution obliged them to tolerate its existence in the South. Then, in 1831, William Lloyd Garrison, a moral absolutist, began publication of The Liberator newspaper, where he pronounced himself against colonization and in favor of
uncompensated and immediate abolitionism and racial equality. His radical brand of abolitionism incensed southern whites—whom he held in contempt—and provoked opposition even in the North. Most abolitionists took a more moderate approach, settling for gradual abolition of slavery through political means. This wing of abolitionism founded the Liberty party and in 1840 nominated a former slaveholder, James G. Birney, for president.

Frederick Douglass, a former slave, was the most visible of the many free blacks who participated in the abolitionist movement. Like Garrison, he demanded the end of slavery and full equality for blacks, but Douglass was willing to work within the political system. Unlike Garrison, but like most other abolitionists, Douglass was not a moral perfectionist and did not denounce the Constitution even though it countenanced slavery.

**Women’s Rights**

The women’s rights movement was closely related to abolitionism. Women came to see that, like blacks, they were discriminated against by a social and legal system that subordinated them and prevented them from achieving their full potential. Thus, most women’s rights activists began their reform careers as abolitionists, but, faced with sexual discrimination in that movement, they turned their efforts to women’s rights. They campaigned for more liberal divorce laws, the right to own property, and the opportunity to participate in affairs outside the home. Like other reformers, they held a belief in progress, a sense of personal responsibility, and a conviction that corrupt institutions could be changed but the time for changing them was limited. They stated their movement’s principles in the Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. Feminists achieved few practical results at the time, but their leaders were long-lived and they persevered.

**PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS**

Define the following:

- separate spheres
- cult of true womanhood
- benevolent empire
Describe the following:

Democracy in America

Second Great Awakening

American Temperance Union

Washingtonians

Maine Law

The Liberator
Liberty party

Seneca Falls Convention

Identify the following:

Alexis de Tocqueville

Charles Grandison Finney

Ann Lee

Shakers

Mormons

Joseph Smith

Brigham Young

Robert Owen
Charles Fourier  

Dorthea Dix  

William Lloyd Garrison  

Theodore Dwight Weld  

James G. Birney  

Frederick Douglass  

Sarah and Angelina Grimke  

Elizabeth Cady Stanton  

Susan B. Anthony  

Locate the following places. Write in both the place name and its map location number.

1. America’s three largest cities in 1830.  

________________________________________________________    ______________
2. Five new towns that developed in the Ohio-Mississippi River Valley as population moved west in the 1820s and 1830s.

3. The five major cities in the South in the 1820s and 1830s.
4. The “burned-over district” evangelized by Second Great Awakening revivalists in the 1820s and 1830s.

5. Site of the Mormon settlement in the Far West.

SELF-TEST

Multiple-Choice Question

1. Alexis de Tocqueville was most captivated by the evidence of _______ he observed in early-nineteenth-century America.
   A. racism
   B. poverty
   C. equality
   D. patriotism

2. In early-nineteenth-century American cities, inequalities of wealth
   A. were narrowing.
   B. were widening.
   C. remained stable.
   D. began to appear for the first time.

3. Most early-nineteenth-century Americans moved frequently in search of
   A. peace and solitude.
   B. economic opportunity.
   C. close and lasting social relationships.
   D. a healthier climate.

4. All of the following accompanied the industrial revolution in early-nineteenth-century America EXCEPT
   A. rapid population growth.
   B. growth in the size and number of cities.
   C. increase in the size of families.
   D. a declining birthrate.
5. Which one of the following was NOT a reason for the switch in power and influence from husbands to wives in early-nineteenth-century homes?
   A. women began to have fewer children
   B. cities began to grow
   C. nonagricultural jobs occupied a growing percent of the workforce
   D. women began to pursue independent careers

6. Which one of the following LEAST influenced women’s role in early-nineteenth-century America?
   A. the doctrine of separate spheres
   B. the women’s rights movement
   C. the cult of true womanhood
   D. their economic class

7. The early-nineteenth-century’s expectations of true womanhood included all of the following EXCEPT
   A. religious education.
   B. marital submissiveness.
   C. the nurture of children.
   D. public service.

8. In the early nineteenth century, America’s birth rate began to fall for all the following reasons EXCEPT
   A. young people began marrying later.
   B. the willful practice of sexual abstinence.
   C. the overall slower growth of the population.
   D. couples waiting longer to have children.

9. The leading evangelist of the Second Great Awakening was
   A. William Lloyd Garrison.
   B. Charles Grandison Finney.
   C. James G. Birney.
   D. Theodore Dwight Weld.

10. The Second Great Awakening evangelists expressed the belief that
    A. each individual could make a personal choice for his or her own salvation.
    B. infants were born in innate sin.
    C. God predetermined who would receive his grace.
    D. God revealed his Word by divine revelation.
11. Early-nineteenth-century middle-class families were becoming all the following EXCEPT
   A. smaller in size.
   B. a more intimate and caring group.
   C. more a unit of economic productivity.
   D. more socially active.

12. The “three pillars” of early-nineteenth-century American middle-class life included all the following EXCEPT
   A. church.
   B. family.
   C. voluntary associations.
   D. political parties.

13. The most important and long-lasting religious communitarian movement of the early nineteenth century was the
   A. utopian socialists.
   B. Shakers.
   C. Mormons.
   D. abolitionists.

14. Robert Owen’s New Harmony and Charles Fourier’s phalanxes were both experiments in
   A. economic classicism.
   B. utopian socialism.
   C. religious communalism.
   D. evangelical revivalism.

15. Most early-nineteenth-century reformers believed that people’s lives were primarily shaped by
   A. predestination.
   B. their social environment.
   C. human nature.
   D. fate.

16. The most widely supported and successful reform movement on the early nineteenth century was
   A. temperance.
   B. abolition.
   C. women’s rights.
   D. communalism.
17. Which one of the following is LEAST related to the other three?
   A. Washingtonian societies
   B. Maine law
   C. abolitionism
   D. temperance

18. Immediate abolitionists argued that the best way to end slavery was by
   A. persuading Americans that slavery was a moral evil.
   B. colonizing freed slaves back to Africa.
   C. freeing slaves’ children as they reached maturity.
   D. compensating slaveowners for freeing their slaves.

19. Match the names on the left with their role in abolitionism.
   A. William Lloyd Garrison  1. black abolitionist
   B. Frederick Douglass  2. radical abolitionist
   C. James G. Birney  3. abolitionist financier
   4. abolitionist candidate
   A. A-1, B-2, C-3
   B. A-2, B-4, C-1
   C. A-2, B-1, C-4
   D. A-3, B-1, C-2

20. The principles of the women’s rights movement that were formulated at the Seneca Falls convention came in a document patterned after the
   A. Magna Carta.
   B. Constitution.
   C. Declaration of Independence.
   D. The Liberator.

Essay Questions

1. Assess the accuracy of Tocqueville’s view of early-nineteenth-century America as a land of equality. Cite evidence of unusual equality as well as the absence of equality in various aspects of American life at the time.

2. Assume the role of the head of a middle-class household in the 1820s. Describe how the changes taking place in the national economy affect your family’s life and how you are coping with those changes.

3. Explain how evangelical churches and voluntary associations compensated for changes the industrial revolution brought to the American family.
4. Choose one of the communitarian experiments mentioned in the chapter, assume the role as one of its members, and describe a day in your life in the commune.

5. Choose what you think were the two most significant early-nineteenth-century reform movements, tell why you chose those two, and assess their importance to American history.

**Critical Thinking Exercise**

**Cause and Effect**

In earlier chapters you completed exercises on causal chains and contributory causes to a single effect. Often, however, there will be several *effects* to a given cause or complex of causes.

![Diagram of cause and effect relationships]

Chapter 10 focuses on the effects of economic change and social reform in the early nineteenth century. In the several groups below, mark out the items that were *not* effects of the stated cause(s), then write a sentence that expresses the cause and effect relationship in each group.

1. **Cause:** Population mobility
   **Effects:** transformation of southern society, increase in the number of towns, population growth in the West, reduction in the gap between rich and poor, growth in size of large cities

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
2. Cause: Growth of industry
   Effects: increased family income, improved living standards, new economic opportunities for women, decline of child labor, emergence of an organized working class

3. Causes: Growth of the factory system and cities
   Effects: overall increase in family size, increased family intimacy, reduced economic importance of the family, ending of the “cult of true womanhood,” increased prestige and authority for wives/mothers

4. Cause: Second Great Awakening
   Effects: mobilization of women to social action, increasing church membership, renewal of the doctrine of predestination, decline of Calvinist theology, heightened hopes for personal salvation

5. Cause: Abolitionist movement
   Effect: caused some to question the morality of slavery, dramatically increased popular commitment to racial equality, provoked controversy among antislavery northerners, softened southern views on slavery, spawned a women’s rights movement