

The Diverse Economy: The Antebellum North, 1800-1860

- I. Diverse Economy: The Market Revolution
 - A. The Market and the Small Farmer
 - 1. Market price—prices now fluctuate from year to year, based on supply/demand.
 - 2. Also, increasing competition means increasing #'s of fences, increasing hostility between large and small farmers.
 - B. Means that farmers are going to be looking for work—some will have to leave the farms.
- II. Factories
 - A. In 1821, some rich guys in Boston, known as the Boston Associates, buy the land around Lowell, Massachusetts. Pretty much useless for farming—very hilly, uneven land. Also useless because someone came along and dug a canal through it (but it's a canal leading more or less nowhere, and had been quickly abandoned). So it's a big ditch with water running through it.
 - B. Quickly start digging lots more canals, also going more or less nowhere.
 - C. Canals are not going to be used primarily for transportation—they're going to be used to turn water-wheels, and run factories.
 - D. Next problem is they've got to get labor. Who needs money in early 1800s? (farmers).
 - E. Going to send their daughters to work in the factories.
 - F. Behold the irony for a minute: these young women are going to work in factories to support farms that are ev. Going to be destroyed by the very forces that led the factories to emerge.
 - G. Other notable thing about Lowell mills: Generally very well-thought-of in these early years: Showcases for industrialization. Women all live in pristine boardinghouses, all have curfew, are relatively well paid and well-treated.
- III. Urban Centers
 - A. Growth of cities:
 - 1. Cities clearly growing VERY rapidly. NYC grew by more than 80% between 1790 and 1800, and tripled by 1825.

2. But still very small: NYC in 1825, after all this tremendous growth, still had only around 160,000 people, and the concentrated areas stretched only as far north as 14th Street.
- B. Why such growth? Not *industrial centers*—commercial centers. Trade is unbelievable.
1. Re-export trade: Goods sent to America, then sent right out again, largely in early 1800s, largely because of Napoleonic wars.
 2. Important as that is, though, it's not the only reason: there's also trade in southern cotton—lots of it. Whether you're talking about the cities (which export cotton to Europe) or the factory centers, southern cotton is in some ways just as important in the northern economy as it is in the southern economy.
- C. Funds an amazing urban world.
- D. Immigrants in the cities
1. Coming from all over, certainly, but mostly from Northern Europe, esp. Ireland.
 2. Especially coming to the cities—New York being the most famous and the most important.
 3. Increasing segregation in the north—both by race and ethnicity.
 4. Different immigrants live in different places.
 5. Most famous neighborhood in America at the time is the Five Points. Very cheap neighborhood, largely because it's built on water. The Fresh Water pond had to be filled in because of pollution, but even so, every time it rains, every house around where the Fresh Water had once stood gets flooded every time it rains. By 1810, people are calling this neighborhood the “Five Points,” and it's well on its way to becoming a world-renowned slum.
- E. Just as in the farms, there's changes going on in the cities' economy
Shift from artisan to worker taking place in this era.
1. Artisan:
Life-cycle unique: No real class divisions.
Work-process unique: No real division of labor.
 2. Then the market revolution hits.

3. Masters vs. journeyman artisans now becomes Bosses vs. workers
4. Now, for the first time in American history you have modern class divisions forming.
5. Important to note that in America, more than in any other country in the world, the market revolution is *separate* from the industrial revolution. One is happening in the big cities, the other is happening out in the countryside, places like Lowell.

IV. But if the industrial revolution isn't happening in the cities, lots of the technological developments that are associated with the industrial revolution *are* happening in the cities.

A. Steam power

1. Robert Fulton. American, but was living in Europe (France, specifically) in the 1790s.
2. In 1802, wealthy New Yorker named Robert Livingston finds Fulton living in France. Make a deal: Fulton, who's been experimenting with steam power for a few years now, will develop the steamboat using Livingston's money, and Livingston and Fulton will then get a monopoly on steam power in New York State.
3. 1806—Fulton moves to NY; 1807, first steam voyage. Leaves Christopher Street dock sailing upstream. Traveled a shocking four-and-a-half miles an hour!
4. Still, *much* faster than any other boat they had (any other boat sailing upstream had to be a horse-drawn boat—*extremely* slow). Result: Fulton and Livingston become very wealthy.
5. Cornelius Vanderbilt emerges to solve the problem. Member of old Dutch elite family, had taken up farming, but abandons that, and becomes professional investor.
6. Vanderbilt buys a steamboat, the *Bellona*, and, with a partner named Thomas Gibbons, illegally begins breaking the monopoly.
7. 1824—*Gibbons v. Ogden*: decides that there can't be a state monopoly on steam boats.
8. Means tremendous expansion in # of steamboats.
9. By 1830s and especially 1840s, steamboats improving *very* rapidly—can now go all the way across the Atlantic, far more quickly than any ship before—19 days.

B. Telegraph

1. Samuel Morse: 1837—Develops a telegraph in his office at the University (over Washington Square), and sends a line of dots from one end of his shop to the other.
2. Not exactly a dramatic event. Nobody's especially excited.
3. Even less excited when he decides to demonstrate that it can transmit messages across water. 1842—Morse takes a two-mile long wire and lays it under New York Harbor to Governor's Island. Then the next morning he starts transmitting messages from the southern tip of NY to the Island and back again.
4. Works for about two hours, and a crowd gathers, and then a ship's propeller hits the wire and breaks it, and suddenly the machine goes dead.
5. Typical New York moment: everyone starts throwing things at Morse and his machine.

C. Nativism

1. Morse famous for other reasons as well: leader in Nativist movement. Throughout early 1800s, growing anti-immigrant movement in just about all the northern cities.
2. Somewhat connected, in very strange ways, to abolitionism and other reform movements.
3. Basic idea: immigrants are (a) Catholic, (b) not really white, (c) easily corruptible [machine politics]. Therefore, kick them out, deprive them of rights, etc.
4. Not really successful, but it is going to mean *intense* antagonism between immigrants and native-born types in the cities throughout the first half of the 1800s.
5. Heard about one this morning, but maybe even more interesting one in NY: The Astor Place Riot.

V. May 7, 1849: Astor Place Riot

- A. Macready—famous British actor, invited to appear in a play of Macbeth at the Astor Place Opera House.
- B. Some audience members very happy, but others—particularly working-class Irish people—start throwing things at him.

- C. Macready ran out the back door.
- D. Scholarly approach to art, very restrained, very refined. Wanted acting (which had long had a very seedy reputation) to be viewed as a fine and noble art.
- E. Meanwhile, Edwin Forrest was the hero of NY's immigrants. He had begun his acting on the Bowery, and had a very histrionic style—lots of energy, lots of passion.
- F. Two actors start feuding in the late 1840s. Forrest had toured England in 1846 and had actually gone to a performance of Macready's and hissed; and Macready attacked Forrest as tasteless and vulgar.
- G. Macready comes to America to give a tour in 1849, and Forrest immediately sets up a competing tour, that will visit all the same cities. Culminates in May 1849 with Macready's opening in NY, while Forrest is performing the same play down in the Bowery.
- H. Also, notice: Macready is *English*. Irish more than willing to assemble against him.
- I. Aftermath
 - 1. NY's most prominent citizens circulate a petition and beg Macready to come back, promising him that they will maintain order.
 - 2. May 10—Macready agrees, and will perform that very night.
 - 3. Forrest immediately goes out and buys a lot of tickets and gives them to people from the Bowery.
 - 4. Play begins at 7:30 at night.
 - 5. By 7:31, anti-Macready forces in the audience have disrupted it.
 - 6. Crowd has gathered outside now, and they start hurling cobblestones at the theater, some of which break windows and actually hit audience members, and the theater becomes the site of a major riot.
 - 7. Cops immediately call for the militia to step in and restore order.
 - 8. 18 bystanders wind up dying; the next day immigrant crowd gathers to march back to Astor Place and teach the militia a lesson. Trouble is, militia are armed and trained, and they lower their muskets and charge the crowd.
 - 9. Crowd disperses; the riot is over.

10. Important, nonetheless: class conflict is continuing to be a major part in the north, and it will remain so.

11. (By the way, as I suggested earlier, Southerners look at this, and say, “See? Our system *definitely* better: No class antagonism, no immigrants, etc.)

VI. That’s kind of the important point of both these discussions: Two *very* different systems.

Both have plenty of inequality, plenty of conflict, plenty of trouble. But fundamentally different assumptions about economics, equality, race—all things that are eventually going to explode into the American Civil War.