James Monroe Presidency: Nationalism and Economic Development

The election of James Monroe as president in 1816 (less than two years after the last battle of the War of 1812) inaugurated what one newspaper editorial characterized as an "Era of Good Feelings." The term gained wide currency and was later adopted by historians to describe Monroe's two terms in office.

I. The Era of Good Feelings

According to the traditional view of the period, the Monroe years were marked by a spirit of nationalism, optimism, and goodwill, chiefly as a result of one party, the Federalists, fading into oblivion and Monroe's party, the Republicans, dominating politics in every section: North, South, and West. This perception of unity and harmony, however, was probably misleading and certainly oversimplified. Throughout the era there were heated debates over tariffs, the national bank, internal improvements, and public land sales. Sectionalist tensions over slavery were becoming ever more apparent. Moreover, a sense of political unity was illusory, since antagonistic factions within the Republican party would soon split that party in two. The actual period of "good feelings" may have lasted only from the election of 1816 to the Panic of 1819.

1. James Monroe

As a young man, James Monroe had fought in the Revolutionary War and suffered through the Valley Forge winter. He had become prominent in Virginia's Republican party and had served in high-level diplomatic roles as President Jefferson's minister to Great Britain and as Madison's secretary of state. His choice as Madison's successor continued what appeared to be a Virginia dynasty of presidents. (Of the first five presidents, four were from Virginia; the exception, John Adams, was from Massachusetts.) In the election of 1816, Monroe defeated his Federalist opponent, Rufus King, by an overwhelming margin—183 electoral votes to King's 34. Four years later, the Federalist party had practically ceased to exist, and Monroe achieved an easy victory in 1820, receiving every electoral vote except one. With no organized political opposition to stand in his way, President Monroe supported the growing nationalism of the American people. His eight-year presidency is noted for the acquisition of Florida, the Missouri Compromise, and of course the Monroe Doctrine.

2. Cultural Nationalism

The popular votes for James Monroe were cast by a younger generation of Americans whose concerns were different from those of the nation's founders. The young were excited about the prospects of the new nation expanding westward and had little interest in European politics now that the Napoleonic wars (as well as the War of 1812) were in the past. As fervent nationalists, they believed their young country was entering an era of unlimited prosperity. Patriotic themes infused every aspect of American society, from paintings to schoolbooks. Heroes of the Revolution were enshrined in the paintings of Gilbert Stuart, Charles Willson Peale, and John Trumball. Parson Mason Weems' fictionalized biography extolling the virtues of George Washington was widely read. The expanding public schools embraced Noah Webster's blue-backed speller, which promoted patriotism long before his famous dictionary was published. Clearly evident were the basic ideas and ideals of nationalism and patriotism, which would dominate most of the 19th century.

3. *Economic Nationalism*

Running parallel with cultural nationalism was a political movement to support the growth of the nation's economy. Subsidizing internal improvements (the building of roads and canals) was one aspect of the movement. Protecting budding U.S. industries from European competition was a second aspect.

Tariff of 1816: Before the War of 1812, Congress had levied low tariffs on imports as a method for raising government revenue. After the war, in 1816, Congress raised the tariff rates on certain goods for the express purpose of protecting U.S. manufacturers from ruin. A number of factories had been erected during the war to supply goods that previously had been imported from Britain. Now in peacetime, American manufacturers feared that British goods would be dumped on American markets and take away much of their business. Congress' tariff of 1816 was the first *protective tariff* in U.S. history—the first of many to come.

New England, which had little manufacturing at the time, was the only section to oppose the higher tariffs. Even the South and West, which had opposed tariffs in the past and would oppose them in the future, generally supported the 1816 tariff, believing that it was needed for national prosperity.

4. Henry Clay's American System: Henry Clay of Kentucky, a leader in the House of Representatives, proposed a comprehensive method for advancing the nation's economic growth. His plan, which he called the American System, consisted of three parts:
(1) protective tariffs, (2) a national bank, and (3) internal improvements. Clay argued that protective tariffs would promote American manufacturing and also raise revenue with which to build a national transportation system of federally constructed roads and canals. A national bank would keep the system running smoothly by providing a national currency. The tariffs would chiefly benefit the East, internal improvements would promote growth in the West and the South, and the bank would aid the economies of all sections. Two parts of Clay's system

were already in place in 1816, the last year of James Madison's presidency. Congress in that year adopted a protective tariff and also chartered the Second Bank of the United States. (The charter of the First Bank—Hamilton's brainchild—had been allowed to expire in 1811.)
On the matter of internal improvements, however, both Madison and Monroe objected that the Constitution did not explicitly provide for the spending of federal money on roads and canals. Throughout his presidency, Monroe consistently vetoed acts of Congress providing funds for road-building and canal-building projects. Thus, the individual states were left to make internal improvements on their own.

5. ***The Panic of 1819***

The Era of Good Feelings was fractured in 1819 by the first major financial panic since the Constitution had been ratified. The economic disaster was largely the fault of the Second Bank of the United States, which had tightened credit in a belated effort to control inflation. Many state banks closed, the value of money became deflated (fell), and there were large increases in unemployment, bankruptcies, and imprisonment for debt. Although every section was hurt, the depression was most severe in the West. In this region, land speculation based on postwar euphoria had placed many people in debt, and in 1819, the Bank of the United States foreclosed on large amounts of western farmland. As a result of the bank panic and depression, nationalistic beliefs were shaken. In the West, the economic crisis changed many voters' political outlook. Westerners began calling for land reform and expressing strong opposition to both the national bank and debtors' prisons.

6. ***Political Changes***

A principal reason for the rapid decline of the Federalist party was its failure to adapt to the changing needs of a growing nation. Having opposed the War of 1812 and presided over a secessionist convention at Hartford, the party seemed completely out of step with the nationalistic temper of the times. After its crushing defeat in the election of 1816, it ceased to be a national party and failed to nominate a presidential candidate in 1820.

Changes in the Republican Party: Meanwhile, the Republican party, as the only remaining national party, underwent serious internal strains as it adjusted to changing times. Certain members of the party, such as John Randolph, clung to the old Republican ideals of limited government and strict interpretation of the Constitution. The majority of Republicans, however, adopted what had once been a Federalist program. Even after the War of 1812, a Republican Congress authorized the maintaining of a large army and navy. In chartering a Second Bank of the United States in 1816, the majority faction of Republicans adopted an institution originally championed by the Federalist leader Alexander Hamilton. On several issues, the political principles of many Republicans were sorely tested during Monroe's presidency, and some even reversed their views from one decade to the next. Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, for example, strongly opposed both the tariffs of 1816 and 1824; he then did an about-face by supporting even higher tariff rates in 1828. John C. Calhoun of South Carolina was another Republican leader who reversed his position. An outspoken war hawk and nationalist in 1812, Calhoun became a leading champion of states' rights after 1828. Political factions and sectional differences became more intense during Monroe's second term. When Monroe, honoring the two-term tradition, declined to be a candidate again, four other Republicans sought election as president in 1824. How this election resulted in the splitting of the Republican party and the emergence of two rival parties.

Marshall's Supreme Court and Central Government Powers

One Federalist official continued to have major influence throughout the years of Republican ascendancy. John Marshall, who had been appointed to the Supreme Court in 1800 by Federalist President John Adams, was still leading the Court as its chief justice. His decisions in many landmark cases consistently favored the central government and the rights of property against the advocates of states' rights. Even when Republican justices formed a majority on the Court, they sided with Marshall because they too were persuaded that the U.S. Constitution had created a Union of states, whose government had strong and flexible powers. Marshall's first landmark decision establishing the principle of judicial review (*Marbury v. Madison,* 1803). Here are other decisions that went a long way toward defining the relationship between the central government and the states.

***Fletcher v. Peck* (1810):** In a case involving land fraud in Georgia, Marshall concluded that a state could not pass legislation invalidating a contract. This was the first time that the Supreme Court declared a state law to be unconstitutional and invalid. (Remember that in *Marbury v. Madison* it was a federal law that had been ruled unconstitutional.)

***Martin v. Hunter's Lease* (1816):** In this case, the Supreme Court established the principle that it had jurisdiction over state courts in cases involving constitutional rights.

***Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819):** This case involved a law of New Hampshire that changed Dartmouth College from a privately chartered college into a public institution. The Marshall Court struck down the state law as unconstitutional, arguing that a contract for a private corporation could not be altered by the state.

***McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819):** Did Congress have the power to create a bank even if no clause in the Constitution mentioned a bank? Could a state place a tax on a federally created bank? These were the two questions involved in a case concerning a tax that the state of

Maryland tried to collect from the Second Bank of the United States. Using a loose interpretation of the Constitution, Marshall ruled that the federal government had the *implied power* to create the bank. Furthermore, a state could *not* tax a federal institution because "the power to tax is the power to destroy," and federal laws are supreme over state laws.

***Cohens v. Virginia* (1821):** In Virginia, the Cohens were convicted of selling Washington, D.C., lottery tickets authorized by Congress. Marshall and the Court upheld the conviction. More important, this case established the principle that the Supreme Court could review a state court's decision involving any of the powers of the federal government.

***Gibbons v. Ogden* (1821):** Could the state of New York grant a monopoly to a steamboat company if that action conflicted with a charter authorized by Congress? In ruling that the New York monopoly was unconstitutional, Marshall established the federal government's broad control of interstate commerce.

7. **Western Settlement and the Missouri Compromise**

Less than ten years after the start of the War of 1812, the population west of the Appalachian Mountains had doubled. Much of the nationalistic and economic interest in the country was centered on the West, which presented both opportunities and new questions.

Reasons for Westward Movement

A number of factors combined to stimulate rapid growth along the western frontier during the presidencies of Madison and Monroe.

Acquisition of Native Americans' lands: Large areas were open for settlement after Native Americans were driven from their lands by the victories of Generals William Henry Harrison in the Indiana Territory and Andrew Jackson in Florida and the South.

Economic pressures: The economic difficulties in the Northeast from the embargo and the war caused people from this region to seek a new future across the Appalachians. In the South, tobacco planters needed new land to replace the soil exhausted by years of poor farming methods. They found good land for planting cotton in Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas.

Improved transportation: Pioneering families had an easier time reaching the frontier as a result of the building of roads and canals, steamboats and railroads.

Immigrants: More Europeans were being attracted to America by speculators offering cheap land in the Great Lakes region and the Ohio, the Cumberland, and the Mississippi River valleys.

New Questions and Issues

Despite their rapid growth, the new states of the West had small populations relative to those of the other two sections. To enhance their limited political influence in Congress, western representatives bargained with politicians from other sections to obtain their objectives. Of greatest importance to the western states were: (1) "cheap money" (easy credit) from state banks rather than from the Bank of the United States, (2) land made available at low prices by the government, and (3) improved transportation.

On another issue, slavery, westerners could not agree whether to permit it or to exclude it. Those settling territory to the south wanted slavery for economic reasons (labor for the cotton fields), while those settling to the north had no use for slavery. In 1819, when the Missouri Territory applied to Congress for statehood, the slavery issue became a subject of angry debate.

The Missouri Compromise

Ever since 1791–1792, when Vermont entered the Union as a free state and Kentucky entered as a slave state, politicians in Congress had attempted to preserve a sectional balance between the North and the South. Population in the North grew more rapidly than in the South, so that by 1818 the northern states held a majority of 105 to 81 in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, however, the votes were divided evenly, since in 1819 there was an even balance of 11 slave and 11 free states. So long as this balance was preserved, southern senators could block legislation that threatened the interests of their section.

Missouri's bid for statehood alarmed the North because slavery was well established there. If Missouri came in as a slave state, it would tip the political balance in the South's favor. Furthermore, Missouri was the first part of the Louisiana Purchase to apply for statehood. Southerners and northerners alike

worried about the future status of other new territories applying for statehood from the rest of the vast Louisiana Purchase.

Tallmadge amendment: Representative James Tallmadge from New York ignited the debate about the Missouri question by proposing an amendment to the bill for Missouri's admission. The amendment called for (1) prohibiting the further introduction of slaves into Missouri and (2) requiring the children of Missouri slaves to be emancipated at the age of 25. If adopted, the Tallmadge Amendment would have led to the gradual elimination of slavery in Missouri. The amendment was defeated in the Senate as enraged southerners saw it as the first step in a northern effort to abolish slavery in all states.

Clay's proposals: After months of heated debate in Congress and throughout the nation, Henry Clay won majority support for three bills that, taken together, represented a compromise:

1. Missouri was to be admitted as a slaveholding state.
2. Maine was to be admitted as a free state.
3. In the rest of the Louisiana Territory north of latitude 36° 30_, slavery was prohibited.

Both houses passed the compromise plan, and President Monroe added his signature in March 1820 (one full year after the Tallmadge Amendment had touched off the controversy).

Aftermath: Sectional feelings on the slavery issue subsided after 1820. The Missouri Compromise preserved sectional balance for over 30 years and provided time for the nation to mature. Nevertheless, if an era of good feelings existed, it was badly damaged by the storm of sectional controversy over Missouri. After this political crisis, Americans were torn between feelings of nationalism (loyalty to the Union) on the one hand and feelings of sectionalism (loyalty to one's own region) on the other.

8. Foreign Affairs

Following the War of 1812, the United States adopted a more aggressive, nationalistic approach it its relations with other nations. During Madison's presidency, when problems with the Barbary pirates again developed, a fleet under Stephen Decatur was sent in 1815 to force the rulers of North Africa to allow American shipping the free use of the Mediterranean. President Monroe and Secretary of State John Quincy Adams continued to follow a nationalistic policy that actively advanced American interests while maintaining peace.

Canada: Although the Treaty of Ghent of 1814 had ended the war between Britain and the United States, it left unresolved most of their diplomatic differences, including many involving Canada.

Rush-Bagot Agreement (1817): During Monroe's first year as president, British and American negotiators agreed to a major disarmament pact. The Rush-Bagot Agreement strictly limited naval armament on the Great Lakes. In time the agreement was extended to place limits on border fortifications as well. Ultimately, the border between the United States and Canada was to become the longest unfortified boundary in the world.

Treaty of 1818: Improved relations between the United States and Britain continued in a treaty that provided for (1) shared fishing rights off the coast of Newfoundland; (2) joint occupation of the Oregon Territory for ten years; and (3) the setting of the northern limits of the Louisiana Territory at the 49^{th} parallel, thus establishing the western U.S.-Canada boundary line.

Florida: During the War of 1812, U.S. troops had occupied western Florida, a strip of land on the Gulf extending all the way to the Mississippi delta. Previously, this land had been held by Spain, Britain's ally. After the war, Spain had difficulty governing the rest of Florida (the peninsula itself) because its troops had been removed from Florida to battle revolts in the South American colonies. The chaotic conditions permitted groups of Seminoles, runaway slaves, and white outlaws to conduct raids into U.S. territory and retreat to safety across the Florida border. These disorders gave Monroe and General Andrew Jackson an opportunity to take military action in Spanish Florida, a territory long coveted by American expansionists.

Jackson's military campaign: In late 1817, the president commissioned General Jackson to stop the raiders and, if necessary, pursue them across the border into Spanish west Florida. Jackson carried out his orders with a vengeance and probably went beyond his instructions. In 1818, he led a force of militia into Florida, destroyed Seminole villages, and hanged two Seminole chiefs. Capturing Pensacola, Jackson drove out the Spanish governor, and even hanged two British traders accused of aiding the Seminoles. Many members of Congress feared that Jackson's overzealousness would precipitate a war with both Spain and Britain. However, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams persuaded Monroe to support Jackson, and the British decided not to intervene.

Florida Purchase Treaty (1819): Spain worried that the United States would seize Florida by force. Preoccupied with troubles in Latin America, the Spanish government decided to get the best possible terms for Florida. By treaty in 1819, Spain turned over the rest of western Florida along with all of the east and its own claims in the Oregon Territory to the United States. In exchange, the United States agreed to assume $5 million in claims against Spain and give up any U.S. territorial claims to the Spanish province of Texas.

9. The Monroe Doctrine

Although focused on its own growth, the United States could not ignore the ambitions of Europe as they affected the future of the Western Hemisphere. The restoration of a number of monarchies in Europe after the fall of Napoleon produced a backlash against republican and democratic movements. The restored monarchies (France, Austria, and Prussia), together with Russia, cooperated with one another in suppressing liberal elements in Italy and Spain. They also considered helping Spain to return to power in South America, where a number of republics had recently declared their independence. Russia's presence in Alaska posed a special problem that worried British and Americans alike. Using their trading posts in Alaska as a base, Russian seal hunters had spread southward and established a trading post at San

Francisco Bay. British and U.S. leaders decided they had a common interest in protecting North and South America from the possible aggression of a European power.

British initiative: The power of the British navy was most important in deterring the Spanish monarchy from attempting a comeback in Latin America. Also important was the diplomacy of British Foreign Secretary George Canning, who wanted to maintain British trade with the Latin American republics. Canning suggested to Richard Rush, the U.S. minister in London, the idea of issuing a joint Anglo-American warning to the European powers not to intervene in South America.

American response: Monroe and most of his advisers thought Canning's idea of a joint declaration made sense. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, however, argued against such a move. Adams believed that joint action with Britain would restrict U.S. opportunities for further expansion in the hemisphere. He reasoned as follows: (1) If the United States acted alone, Britain could be counted upon to stand behind the U.S. policy. (2) No European power would risk going to war in South America, and if it did, the British navy would surely defeat the aggressor. Changing his mind, the president decided to act as Adams advised—in short, to issue a statement to the world that did not have Britain as a coauthor.

The doctrine: On December 2, 1823, President Monroe inserted into his annual message to Congress a declaration of U.S. policy toward Europe and Latin America. The Monroe Doctrine, as it came to be called, asserted as a principle in which the rights and interests of the United States are involved, that the American continents, by the free and independent condition which they have assumed and maintain, are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers. Monroe declared further that the United States was opposed to attempts by a European power to interfere in the affairs of any republic in the Western Hemisphere.

Impact: Monroe's bold words of nationalistic purpose were applauded by the American public but soon forgotten, as most citizens were more concerned with domestic issues. In Britain, Canning was annoyed by the doctrine because he recognized that it applied, not just to the other European powers, but to his country as well. In effect, the British too were warned not to intervene and not to seek new territory in the Western Hemisphere. The European monarchs reacted angrily to the president's message; but they recognized full well that their purposes were thwarted, not by a few high-sounding words, but by the might of the British navy. The Monroe Doctrine had less significance at the time than in later decades, when it would be hailed by politicians and citizens alike as the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy toward Latin America. In the 1840s, President James Polk was the first of many presidents to justify his foreign policy by referring to Monroe's warning words.

10. A National Economy

In the early 1800s, the Jeffersonian dream of a nation of independent farmers remained strong in rural areas. As the century progressed, however, an increasing percentage of the American people were swept up in the dynamic economic changes of the Industrial Revolution. Political conflicts over tariffs, internal improvements, and the Bank of the United States reflected the importance to people's lives of a national economy that was rapidly growing and changing.

Population Growth: Population growth was vital if the nation was to have both the laborers and the consumers required for industrial development. Between 1800 and 1825, the U.S. population doubled; in the next 25 years it doubled again. A high birthrate accounted for most of this growth, but it was strongly supplemented after 1830 by immigrants arriving from Europe, particularly from Great Britain and Germany. The nonwhite population—African Americans and Native Americans—grew despite the ban on the importation of slaves after 1808. As a percentage of the total population, however, nonwhites declined from almost 20 percent in 1790 to 15 percent in the 1850s. By the 1830s, almost one-third of the population lived west of the Alleghenies. At the same time, both old and new urban areas were growing rapidly.

Transportation: Vital to the development of both a national and an industrial economy was an efficient network of interconnecting roads and canals for moving people, raw materials, and manufactured goods.

Roads: Pennsylvania's Lancaster Turnpike, built in the 1790s, connected Philadelphia with the rich farmlands around Lancaster. Its success stimulated the construction of other privately built and relatively short toll roads that, by the mid-1820s, connected most of the country's major cities. Despite the need for interstate roads, states' righters blocked the spending of federal funds on internal improvements. Construction of highways that crossed state lines was therefore unusual. One notable exception was the National, or Cumberland Road, a paved highway and major route to the west extending more than a thousand miles from Maryland to Illinois. It was begun in 1811 and completed in the 1850s, using both federal and state money, with the different states receiving ownership of segments of the highway.

Canals: The completion of the Erie Canal in New York State in 1825 was an event of major importance in linking the economies of western farms and eastern cities. The success of this canal in stimulating economic growth touched off a frenzy of canal-building in other states. In little more than a decade, canals joined together all of the major lakes and rivers east of the Mississippi. Improved transportation meant lower food prices in the East, more immigrants settling in the West, and stronger economic ties between the two sections.

Steamboats: The age of mechanized, steam-powered travel began in 1807 with the successful voyage up the Hudson River of the *Clermont,* a steamboat developed by Robert Fulton. Commercially operated steamboat lines soon made round-trip shipping on the nation's great rivers both faster and cheaper.

Railroads: Even more rapid and reliable links between cities became possible with the building of the first U.S. railroad lines in the late 1820s. The early railroads were hampered at first by safety problems, but by the 1830s they were competing directly with canals as an alternative method for carrying passengers and freight. Combined with the other major improvements in transportation (especially steamboats and canals), the railroad swiftly changed small western towns such as Cleveland, Cincinnati, Detroit, and Chicago into booming commercial centers of the expanding national economy.

11. Growth of Industry

At the start of the 19th century, a manufacturing economy had barely begun in the United States. By midcentury, however, U.S. manufacturing surpassed agriculture in value, and by century's end, it was the world's leader. This rapid industrial growth was the result of a unique combination of factors.

Mechanical inventions: Protected by patent laws, inventors looked forward to handsome rewards if their ideas for new tools or machines proved practical. Eli Whitney was only the most famous of hundreds of Americans whose long hours of tinkering in their workshops resulted in improved technology. Besides inventing the cotton gin in 1793, Whitney devised a system for making rifles out of interchangeable parts during the War of 1812. Interchangeable parts then became the basis for mass production methods in the new northern factories.

Corporations for raising capital: In 1811, New York passed a law that made it easier for a business to incorporate and raise capital (money) by selling shares of stock. Other states soon imitated New York's example. Owners of a corporation risked only the amount of money that they invested in a venture. Changes in state corporation laws facilitated the raising of the large sums of capital necessary for building factories, canals, and railroads.

Factory system: When Samuel Slater emigrated from Britain, he took with him the British secrets for building cotton-spinning machines, and he put this knowledge to work by helping establish the first U.S. factory in 1791. Early in the next century, the embargo and the War of

1812 stimulated domestic manufacturing, and the tariffs enacted by Republican congresses allowed the new factories to prosper. In the 1820s, New England emerged as the country's leading manufacturing center due to the region's abundant waterpower for driving the new machinery and good seaports for shipping goods. Also, the decline of New England's maritime industry made capital available for manufacturing, while the decline of farming in the region yielded a ready labor supply. Other northern states with similar resources and problems—New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—followed New England's lead. As the factory system expanded, it encouraged the growth of financial businesses such as banking and insurance.

Labor: At first, finding workers for the mills and factories was a major problem, because factories had to compete with the lure of cheap land in the West. Textile mills in Lowell, Massachusetts, recruited young farm women and housed them in company dormitories. In the 1830s, the Lowell System was widely imitated. Many factories also made extensive use of child labor. (Children as young as seven left home to work in the new factories.) Only toward the middle of the century did northern manufacturers begin to employ immigrants in large numbers.

Unions: Trade (or craft) unions were organized in major cities as early as the 1790s and increased in number as the factory system took hold. Many skilled workers (shoemakers and weavers, for example) had to seek employment in factories because their earlier practice of working in their own shops (the discontent among factory workers. A prime goal of the early unions was to reduce the workday to ten hours. The obstacles to union success, however, were many: (1) immigrant replacement workers, (2) state laws outlawing unions, and (3) frequent economic depressions with high unemployment.

Commercial Agriculture: In the early 1800s, farming became more of a commercial enterprise and less a means of providing subsistence for the family. This change to cash crops was brought about by a blend of factors.

Cheap land and easy credit: Large areas of western land were made available at low prices by the federal government. State banks also made it easy to acquire land by providing farmers with loans at low interest rates.

Markets: Initially, western farmers were limited to sending their products down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to southern markets. The advent of canals and railroads opened new markets in the growing factory cities in the East.

Cotton and the South: Throughout the 19th century, the principal cash crop in the South was cotton. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in 1793 transformed the agriculture of an entire region. Now that they could easily separate the cotton fiber from the seeds, southern planters found cotton more profitable than tobacco and indigo, the leading crops of the colonial period. They invested their capital in the purchase of slaves and new land in Alabama and Mississippi and shipped most of their cotton crop overseas for sale to British textile factories.

12. Effects of the Market Revolution

Specialization on the farm, the growth of cities, industrialization, and the development of modern capitalism meant the end of self-sufficient households and a growing interdependence among people. All combined to bring about a revolution in the marketplace. The farmers fed the workers in the cities, who in turn provided farm families with an array of mass-produced goods. For most Americans, the standard of living increased. At the same time, however, adapting to an impersonal, fast-changing economy presented challenges and problems.

Women: As American society became more urban and industrialized, the nature of work and family life changed for women, many of whom no longer worked next to their husbands on family farms. Women seeking employment in a city were usually limited to two choices: domestic service or teaching. Factory jobs, as in the Lowell System, were not common. The overwhelming majority of working women were single. If they married, they left their jobs and took up duties in the home. In both urban and rural settings, women were gaining relatively more control over their lives. Marriages arranged by one’s parents were less common, and some women elected to have fewer children. Nevertheless, legal and political restrictions on women (not being able to vote, for example) remained.

Economic and social mobility: Real wages improved for most urban workers in the early 1800s, but the gap between the very wealthy and the very poor increased. Social mobility (moving upward in income level and social status) did occur from one generation to the next, and economic opportunities in the United States were greater than in Europe. Extreme examples of poor, hard-working people becoming millionaires, however, were rare.

Slavery: At the outset of the 19th century, there were many people throughout the nation who felt that slavery would gradually disappear. Economically, it was becoming unfeasible due to both the exhausted soil of the coastal lands of Virginia and the Carolinas and the constitutional ban on the importation of slaves after 1808. Hopes for a quiet end to slavery were ended by the rapid growth of the cotton industry. As the arguments over the Missouri Compromise suggested, slavery was an issue that defied clear answers.