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# Market Revolution

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The **Market Revolution** (1793–1909) in the United States was a drastic change in the manual labor system originating in the South (and soon moving to the North) and later spreading to the entire world. Traditional commerce was made obsolete by improvements in transportation and communication. This change prompted the reincarnation of the mercantilist ideas that were thought to have died out. This is thought to have been caused by increasing industrialization, such as Eli Whitney's invention, the Cotton Gin. As a result of the revolution, isolationism became dominant and North America was left waiting to explode into the American Civil War. Northern cities started to have a more powerful economy that was starting to challenge the economies of some mid-sized European cities at the time.

It also was in part influenced by the need for national mobility, shown a problem in the War of 1812, after which the government increased production of roads, canals, and later railroads.

Following the War of 1812, the American economy was altered from an economy party dependent on imports from Europe to an economy that evolved into an empire of internal commerce. In 1817 James Monroe replaced James Madison as president of the U.S. The Republicans continued policies begun in Jefferson's administration. With a new generation of leaders the Republican Party came to embrace the principles of government activism and the development of large-scale domestic manufacturing. Despite all of the promises that characterized the United States, discrepancies loomed: the survival of slavery, treatment of the Indians, the deterioration of some urban areas, and a mania for speculation. The nation was not just growing through the addition of land, but population shifts brought about new states to the Union and when Missouri petitioned for statehood in 1819, the issue of slavery was thrust on the national agenda. Thomas Jefferson wrote that the issue awakened him "like a firebell in the night." That the Missouri question coincided with the nation's worst financial crisis awakened anxieties in many Americans. By the 1820s Americans recognized a rough regional specialization: plantation-style export agriculture in the south, a north built on business and trade, and a frontier west. The regions were interdependent but in time their differences would become more obvious, more important, and increasingly more incompatible.

The market revolution also brought about a change in industry and agriculture. Eli Whitney perfected a system of producing muskets with interchangeable parts. Prior to Whitney's invention, most muskets—and all other goods—had been handmade with parts especially designed for each particular musket. The trigger of one musket, for example, could not be used to replace a broken trigger on another musket. With interchangeable parts, however, all triggers fit the same model of musket, as did all ramrods, all flash pans, all hammers, and all bullets. Manufacturers in many different industries soon took advantage of Whitney's invention to make a variety of goods with interchangeable parts.

Many new products revolutionized agriculture in the West. John Deere, for example, invented a horse-pulled steel plow to replace the difficult oxen-driven wooden plows that farmers had used for centuries. The steel plow allowed farmers to till soil faster and more cheaply without having to make repairs as often.

In the 1830s, Cyrus McCormick invented a mechanical mower-reaper that quintupled the efficiency of wheat farming. Prior to the mower-reaper, wheat farming had been too difficult, so farmers had instead produced corn, which was less profitable. As in the South after the cotton gin, farmers in the West raked in huge profits as they acquired more lands to plant more and more wheat. More important, farmers for the first time began producing more wheat than the West could consume. Rather than let it go to waste, they began to transport crop surpluses to sell in the manufacturing Northeast.<sup>[1]</sup>

An excerpt from Charles Sellers's book *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* talks more about the changes and events during the era.

By the 1830s and 1840s, trade and specialization among the four port/hinterland regions were creating an integrated sectional market embracing the northeast as a whole. Meanwhile commercial agriculture spread

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over the west and the south; and during the second half of the nineteenth century, the northeast market reached out to incorporate these sections into an integrated national market. By mid century, capital and technology were converting enough central workshops into mechanized factories to convert the market revolution into a staggeringly productive industrial revolution.<sup>[2]</sup>

Here's an excerpt from John Lauritz Larson's book *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* talks about the events and progression into the revolution.

At the end of its war for independence, the United States comprised thirteen separate provinces on the coast of North America. Nearly all of 3.9 million people made their living through agriculture while a small merchant class traded tobacco, timber, and foodstuffs for tropical goods, useful manufactures, and luxuries in the Atlantic community. By the time of the civil war, eight decades later, the United States sprawled across the North American continent. Nearly 32 million people labored not just on farms, but in shops and factories making iron and steel products, boots and shoes, textiles, paper, packaged foodstuffs, firearms, farm machinery, furniture, tools, and all sorts of housewares. Civil War-era Americans borrowed money from banks; bought insurance against fire, theft, shipwreck, commercial losses, and even premature death; traveled on steamboats and in railway carriages; and produced 2 to 3 billion of goods and services, including exports of 400 million. this dramatic transformation is what some historians of the U.S. call the market revolution. For antebellum Americans, the revolution stood near the center of the experience of what happened to the United States during its grand experiment in republican government. For many modern historians, it does so still.<sup>[3]</sup>

## References

- [1] <http://www.sparknotes.com/history/american/precivilwar/section6.rhtml>
- [2] Charles Seller, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*
- [3] John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good*

## Further reading

- Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History*, Norton Seagull Ed. 2005.
- Charles Seller, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*
- John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good*

# Article Sources and Contributors

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