

Article 1: *Industry in the United States* (Thomas P. Kettel, mid 1800s)

1. What natural resources encouraged the growth of industry in New England?
 2. What affect did increases in population and acquisition of new territory have on industry?
 3. How was industry affected by improvements in transportation?
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Article 2: *Discontent in Lowell* (Harriet Hanson Robinson – 1836)

1. Describe the working conditions in the Lowell Mill.
 2. Why did the workers decide to strike?
 3. Why did the strike fail? How could you argue that the strike “succeeded”?
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Article 3: *The Hard Lot of the Irish* [Irish writer (sarcastic) – mid 1840s]

1. How did the “famine Irish” differ from immigrants of earlier times?
2. How did the nativists compare blacks and the famine Irish?

Article 1: *Industry in the United States* (Thomas P. Kettel, 1860s)

The Northern or New England States are endowed by nature with a mountainous and barren soil, which poorly rewards the labor of the farmer. However, its wooded slopes, and tumbling streams, which fall into spacious harbors, showed the first settlers the direction in which their industry was to be employed. Shipbuilding and navigation at once became the leading industry, bringing with it wealth.

The harsh rule of the mother country forbade a manufacturing development, and that branch of industry never got a footing in the colonies. Independence from Britain opened up manufacturing, and also provided a large market for the sale of manufactures to the agricultural laborers of the more fertile fields of the Middle and Southern States.

The genius of Northern industry was quick in applying the profits earned in commerce to the development of manufacturing. With every increase in population, and every extension of national territory, the New England States gained a larger market for their wares, while the foreign competing supply has been restricted by high duties on imports.

The mountain rivers of New England have become motors, by which annually improving machinery has been driven. These machines require only the attendance of females, but a few years since a non-producing class, to turn out immense quantities of textile fabrics. In the hands of the male population, other branches of industry have multiplied, in a manner which shows the stimulant of an ever-increasing demand.

At about the time that New England became free to manufacture, the discoveries in navigation brought about that change in commerce by which Charleston, S.C., was no longer regarded as the nearest port to Europe, and New York assumed its proper position, as the leading seaport. The commerce of the Middle States rapidly increased, and with that increase a larger demand for the manufactures of New England was created.

When population spread west of the Allegheny Mountains, and the annexation of Louisiana opened the Mississippi River to a market for western produce, a new demand for New England manufactures was felt. This was further enhanced by the opening of the Erie Canal. In later years, the vast foreign immigration, pouring over new lands opened up by railroads, has given a further stimulus to the demand for New England manufactured goods.

Adapted from Thomas P. Kettel, *Southern Wealth and Northern Profits*, 1860.

Article 2: *Discontent in Lowell* (Harriet Hanson Robinson – 1898)

One of the first strikes of cotton-factory workers that ever took place in this country was in Lowell, in October 1836. When it was announced that the workers' wages were to be cut, there was great anger. The workers decided to strike.

Cutting the wages was not the only grievance, nor the only cause of this strike. Up till now the corporation had paid 25 cents a week toward the board of each worker. Now it intended to have the girls pay the sum. This, in addition to the cut in wages, would make a difference of at least one dollar each week.

It was estimated that as many as 1,500 girls went on strike and walked as a group through the streets. They had neither flags nor music; instead, they sang songs, a favorite one being:

Oh! Isn't it a pity, such a pretty girl as I—
Should be sent to the factory to pine away
and die?

Oh! I cannot be a slave,
I will not be a slave,
For I'm so fond of liberty
That I cannot be a slave.

My own memory of this strike (or "turn out," as it was called) is very vivid. I worked in a lower room, where I had heard the proposed strike discussed. I had been an eager listener to what was said against this attempt at "oppression" on the part of the corporation. Naturally I took sides with the strikers. When the day came on which the girls were to strike, those in the upper rooms started first. So many of them left that our mill was at once shut down. But the girls in my room stood about, uncertain what to do. They asked each other, "Would you?" or "Shall we strike?" Not one of them had the courage to lead off. I began to think they

would not go out after all their talk. Growing impatient, I started on ahead, saying, with childish bravado, "I don't care what you do, I am going to turn out, whether anyone else does or not?" So I marched out, and was followed by the others.

As I looked back at the long line that followed me, I was more proud than I have ever been since at any success I may have achieved, and more proud than I shall ever be again until my own beloved state gives to its women citizens the right to vote.

The agent of the corporation where I then worked took revenge on those thought to be the strike leaders. My mother was evicted from her boarding house. The agent said, "Mrs. Hanson, you could not prevent the older girls from turning out. But your daughter is a child, and *her* you could control."

So far as results were concerned, this strike did no good. The dissatisfaction of the workers burned itself out. Though the authorities did not give in to their demands, most of them returned to their work, and the corporation went on cutting the wages.

Adapted from *Harriet Hanson Robinson, Loom and Spindle: Life Among the Early Mill Girls, 1898.*

Article 3: *The Hard Lot of the Irish* [Irish writer (sarcastic) – mid 1840s]

It is no secret that the Irish were not especially welcomed when they entered the United States. One can understand this reaction. Most earlier immigrants had been, if not wealthy, at least reasonably skilled workers or artisans. They were the most ambitious and vigorous of the Europeans seeking to make new lives for themselves in a richer country. But the famine Irish were poor, uneducated, and confused. They fled not to a better life but from almost certain death. They were dirty, undernourished, disease-ridden, and incapable of anything but the most unskilled labor. That they arrived in great numbers and filled up whole sections of cities almost overnight did not go unnoticed by native Americans. They saw that when the Irish moved in, the neighborhood went to pieces. They did not take care of property, and foolishly allowed great overcrowding in their houses. Nor did they understand how important it was to keep clean, especially when there was almost no provision made for sewage disposal. They failed to understand the importance of health and seemed satisfied to live in crowded, dark basements.

If the Irish were to be accepted into American society they must be sober, industrious, and ambitious, like the Protestant immigrants who had come before them. There, of course, was the heart of the problem. Not only were they poor, sick, dirty, and uneducated. They were also Catholic.

The Irish Catholics, with their unmarried clergy, had an equally strange tendency not to want to send their children to public schools, where every effort would be made to turn them into good Americans—this meant, of course, good Protestant Americans. From the nativist point of view, it was no wonder that churches were burned and that Catholics were occasionally murdered in riots.

The nativists were fond of comparing the Irish with the blacks. If they were northern Protestant abolitionists, they were especially fond of such a pastime. The comparison was always favorable to the blacks. The freed blacks “knew their place” and the Irish did not. The blacks were properly grateful for what the abolitionists had done for them, and the Irish seemed not at all grateful for their second-class citizenship. On the contrary, hardly had they been permitted to become citizens when they promptly joined with others of their kind in political organizations which threatened native American control of the cities. The Irish, then, were not only bigoted Catholics, they also

were organizers of political “machines” that were a direct challenge to the established powers. The Know-Nothings and other nativist organizations gained much of their support from their strong appeals to anti-Catholic sentiment.

Practically every charge that has been made against the American blacks was also made against the Irish. They had no ambition. They did not keep up their homes. They drank too much. They were not responsible. They had no morals. It was not safe to walk through their neighborhoods at night. They voted the way crooked politicians told them to vote. They were not willing to pull themselves up by their own efforts. They were not capable of education. They could not think for themselves. They would always remain social problems for the rest of the country.

It was extremely difficult for us to understand what life in the early immigrant ghettos must have been like. There are practically no Americans today who live in anything even resembling the immigrant sections in Boston and New York. The psychological degradation of the Irish was certainly no worse than that to which blacks have been subjected. But it must also be said that from 1850 to 1950 there were no dissenting voices raised on the subject of the American Irish. No one suggested that Irish might be beautiful. No one argued that their treatment was both unjust and bigoted.

The Irish crawled out of the mud huts and wooden hovels in which they lived, and left behind the day labor and domestic service by which they made a living. They managed to do this not because American society offered special opportunities (as the native Americans would like to believe), nor because of a superior merit which enabled them to overcome obstacles (as the Irish would like to believe). The Irish “made it” because the American economy was growing at a fantastic rate, and the Irish were a large group of workers with knowledge of English. The growing economy and the almost unlimited number of jobs allowed the American Irish to move first into the respectable working class, then into the lower middle class, and more recently into the upper middle class. An occasional well-to-do Irish family like the Kennedys shows that even the Irish can become aristocrats.

From canal workers and railroad builders they became police officers, streetcar conductors, schoolteachers, and clerks. From the coal

