Chapter 14 Lesson 2

People of the North

ESSENTIAL QUESTION How do people adapt to their environment?

Industrialization in the North changed the way people lived and worked as well as where they lived and worked.

The Factories of the North

Why did many Americans push for reform in the workplace during this era?

The factory system combined several steps of an item's production under one roof. In the mid-1800s, machines took over more and more manufacturing tasks. The range of goods manufactured this way also increased. American factories began to turn out everything from fabric and clothing to shoes, watches, guns, sewing machines, and agricultural machinery.

Conditions for Factory Workers

Working conditions worsened as the factory system developed. Employees worked long hours. By 1840, the average workday was 11.4 hours. Longer days caused fatigue—and on-the-job accidents. Many factory machines had rapidly moving belts and other parts. These belts had no shields for protection, and many workers, especially children, suffered injuries from these belts. Belts were just one of the many hazards of factory work.

Employees often worked under harsh conditions. In the summer, factories were hot and stifling. The machines gave off heat, and there was no such thing as air-conditioning at that time. Likewise, in the winter workers were often cold because most factories had no heating.

No laws existed to control working conditions or protect workers. Factory owners were often more concerned about profits than about employees' comfort and safety.

Child labor was also a serious problem. Children in factories often worked six days a week and 12 hours or more a day. The work was dangerous and hard. Young workers tended machines in mills and worked underground in coal mines. Reformers called for laws to regulate child labor, shorten work hours, and improve conditions. Many years passed before child labor regulations became law.

Workers' Attempts to Organize

Workers tried various ways to gain better conditions in the workplace. By the 1830s, they began organizing into unions. Skilled workers formed trade unions. These were groups of workers with the same trade, or skill. The idea was that by working together, union members would have more power than they would as individuals.

In New York City, skilled workers wanted to receive higher wages and limit their workday to 10 hours. Groups of skilled workers formed the General Trades Union of the City of New York. The workers staged a series of strikes in the mid-1830s. A strike is a refusal to work in order to put pressure on employers.

Going on strike was illegal in the early 1800s. In addition to the threat of losing their jobs, workers who went on strike faced punishment for breaking the law. In 1842 a Massachusetts court ruled that workers did have the right to strike. However, workers would not receive other legal rights for many more years.

African Americans in the North

In the North, slavery had largely disappeared by the 1830s. Still, racial prejudice (PREH • juh • duhs)—an unfair opinion of a group—and discrimination (dihs • krih • muh • NAY • shuhn)— unfair treatment of a group—remained. White men in New York no longer had to own property in order to vote. Few African Americans enjoyed this right. Rhode Island and Pennsylvania passed laws to keep African Americans from voting.

In addition, most communities in the North did not allow African Americans to attend public schools. Many communities also kept them from using other public services. African Americans often had to attend poor-quality schools and go to hospitals that were reserved only for them.

In the business world, a few African Americans found success. In New York City, Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm founded Freedom's Journal, the first African American newspaper, in 1827. In 1845 Macon B. Allen became the first African American licensed, or given official authority, to practice law in the United States. Most African Americans, however, lived in poverty in the mid-1800s.

Women Workers

Women also faced discrimination in the workplace. Employers often paid women half as much as they paid male workers. Men kept women from joining unions and wanted them kept out of the workplace.

In the 1830s and 1840s, some female workers tried to organize. Sarah G. Bagley, a weaver from Massachusetts, founded the Lowell Female Labor Reform Organization. In 1845 her group petitioned for a 10-hour workday. Because most of the workers were women, the legislature did not consider the petition. However, movements like the one Sarah Bagley led paved the way for later movements to help working women.

Describing How did conditions for workers change as the factory system developed?

The Growth of Cities

What challenges did European immigrants face in Northern cities?

Industrialization had a big impact on cities. Factories were usually in urban areas. Because factories drew workers, Northern cities grew in size in the early 1800s.

Urban Populations Grow

Some major cities developed between 1820 and 1840 from Midwestern villages located along rivers. St. Louis sits on the banks of the Mississippi River just south of where that river meets the Illinois and Missouri Rivers. By the mid-1800s, steamboats from north and south lined up along the docks of St. Louis. Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and Louisville also profited from their locations on waterways. These cities became centers of trade that linked Midwest farmers with cities of the Northeast.

Increased Immigration

Between the years 1840 and 1860, immigration to the United States grew sharply. The greatest number of immigrants came from Ireland. A plant disease, the potato blight, destroyed most of the Irish food supply in the 1840s. The people of Ireland faced famine, an extreme shortage of food. More than a million people died during what was called the Great Irish Famine. Another 1.5 million Irish emigrants—people who leave their home to move elsewhere—left for the United States between 1846 and 1860.

The second largest group of immigrants in the United States between 1820 and 1860 came from Germany. Some sought work and opportunity. Others fled to escape political problems at home.

Immigration's Impact

European immigrants brought languages, customs, religions, and traditions to their new country. Some of their ways of living changed American culture.

Immigrants Face Prejudice

In the 1830s and 1840s, some people began to resist immigration. They were known as nativists (NAY • tih • vihsts). Nativists believed that immigration threatened the future of "native"—American-born—citizens. They often blamed immigrants for problems in society. Some nativists accused immigrants of taking jobs from "real" Americans and were angry that immigrants would work for lower wages. Others accused immigrants of bringing crime and disease to U.S. cities.

The Know-Nothing Party

In 1849 nativists formed a new political party. Because party members often answered questions about their group with the statement "I know nothing," the party came to be known as the Know-Nothing Party. The Know-Nothings called for stricter citizenship laws. In 1854 the Know-Nothings became known as the American Party.

"Americans must rule America; and to this end native-born citizens should be selected for all State, Federal and municipal offices of government employment, in preference to all others."

—American Party platform, from the American National Convention, 1856

Identifying From which two nations did most immigrants come in the mid-1800s?