

1789-1830

Overview

Jefferson had warned of the evils of an industrialized society where wealth separated men. He and his supporters hoped America would remain a rural agricultural society where equality and a man's dignity could be maintained by tying men to the land. An industrial class system would erode democracy and equality. The Jeffersonians lost this struggle to retain their vision of America in the face of industrialization. Yet there were some who sought to blend these competing interests. A fine example of this is the experiment at Lowell. The founders of the Lowell experiment sought to preserve America's agricultural base by employing rural women who would supplement the income on the farm. The experiment failed and soon Jefferson's vision would be relegated to the history books (or curriculum).

Labor Related Issues of the Period

- The debate and struggle between agrarian democrats and industrial interests.
- Pattern of economic hard times (depression and recession) followed by periods of prosperity began to emerge. Labor was weak in each period of hard times.
- Sweatshops begin to form in eastern cities.
- Growth of northern textile industry.
- Cordwainer Conspiracy Cases weaken the union movement by ruling that organizations of workers were conspiracies.

Labor Related Events of the Period

- 1790 Population of the young nation is counted at 3,929,214 in the first national census. Cabinet and chairmakers in Philadelphia fight an attempt by employers to blacklist union members.
First textile mill is established in Pawtucket, Rhode Island by Samuel Slater for Ezekial Carpenter. All the workers are under age 12 -seven boys and two girls.
- 1791 Philadelphia carpenters struck unsuccessfully for a 10 hour day and overtime pay. First building trades strike
Alexander Hamilton praises women workers in his Report on Manufactures of December 5.
- 1792 Philadelphia shoemakers form the first local craft union for collective bargaining. Disband within a year.
- 1793 Cotton gin invented which makes cotton production easier and helps perpetuate slavery.
- 1794 The Typographic Society organized in New York by printers. Lasted over 10 years. The Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers formed in Philadelphia by shoemakers. Tried for Conspiracy in 1806.

- 1797 Philadelphia carpenters go on strike.
- 1800 Gabriel Prosser organized an unsuccessful slave revolt near Richmond, Virginia.
- 1805 A Journeymen Cordwainers union in New York City included a closed shop clause in its constitution.
- 1806 Members of Philadelphia Journeymen Cordwainers tried for conspiracy after a strike for higher wages. Charged with combining to raise wages and to injure others. Forced to disband after being fined and going bankrupt. First union to be tried for conspiracy.
- 1808 Federal law prohibits the importation of slaves into the United States. Smuggling continued to bring in a small number of slaves until just before the Civil War.
- 1810 First American cigar factory opens in Suffield, Connecticut. All the workers are women. 90% of Americans do not live in cities. 66% of the clothing worn by non-urban Americans made from home manufacture according to US Treasury secretary.
- 1814 Power loom invented which makes weaving a factory occupation.
- 1817 New York state legislature passes a law that frees slaves born before 4 July 1799.
- 1819 Panic causes a six year depression. Manufacturers secure a tariff to protect them from foreign competition.
- 1820 Industrial organization experiment begun in Lowell, Mass. Missouri Compromise admits Missouri as a slave state but bans slavery in the northern Louisiana Territory.
- 1823 Hatters in New York City were tried and convicted of conspiracy.
- 1824 First reported strike of women workers when they join male weavers protesting wage reduction and extension of the workday in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.
- 1825 Robert Owen founds utopian community in Illinois and Indiana. Fails in three years. The United Tailoresses of New York, women only trade organization, formed.(New York City). To demand a wage increase, they struck in the first all women strike.
- 1827 The Mechanics Union of Trade Associations, made up of skilled workers in different trades, formed in Philadelphia. The first city-wide labor council. Tailors in Philadelphia tried for conspiracy, verdict stressed the "injury to trade" aspect of their organization.

1828 Workingmen's Party formed in Philadelphia.

The first all-women factory strike in Dover, NH. See Lesson 2 below.

Philadelphia Mechanics Union of Trade Associations unsuccessfully strikes for a ten hour day.

1829 The Workingmen's Party of New York formed.

Important Concepts

blacklist, conspiracy, Cordwainers Conspiracy Cases, depression, Jefferson's Agrarian Democracy, panic (economic), strike, sweatshops or outwork