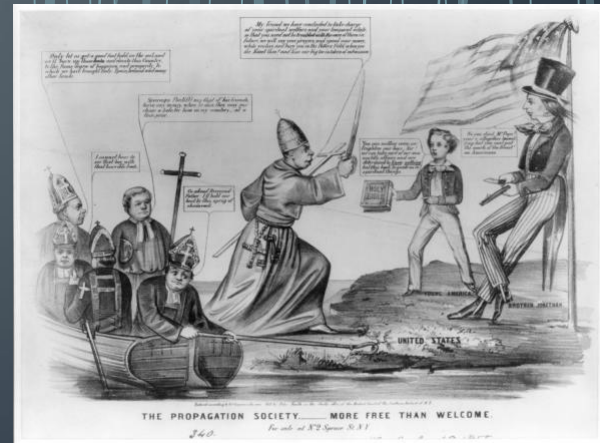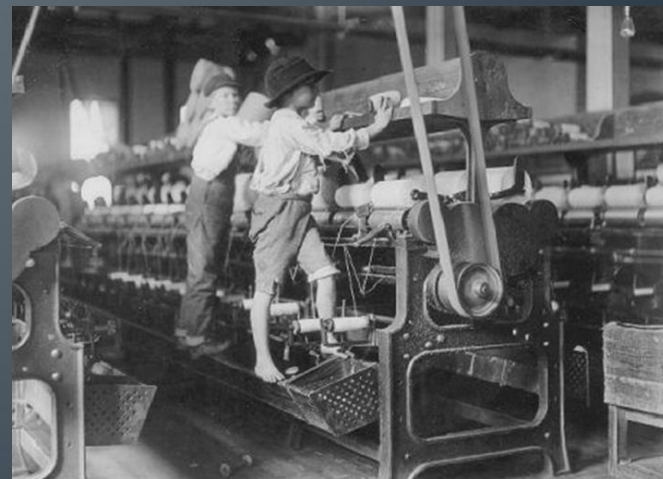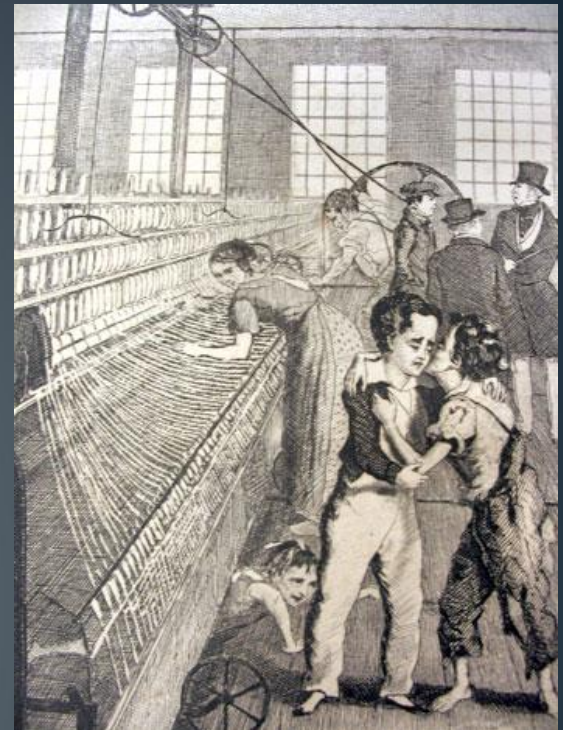# Factories, Immigration and Nativists

CA 8th Grade US History Standard 8.6.3, 8.6.7, 8.12.6

Conditions in Factories

- By the 1840s and 50s factories had become the dominant work environment in America.

- Working conditions in factories were difficult.
  - People worked long hours
  - Pay was low
  - Living conditions were poor
  - Factories had limited ventilation
  - Few factories had heating systems
  - Machines were unsafe

Unions Form

- To try and improve working conditions.
  - Skilled workers began to form trade unions
    - A trade union is an association of workers formed to get better wages and working conditions for employees.
  - The trade union petitioned employers for
    - Higher wages
    - Better working conditions
    - Shorter hours
  - One strategy unions used to pressure employers to agreeing to their requests was a strike.
    - A strike is when union workers refuse to do their jobs until their demands are met.

Photograph of New York City Garment Workers, 1913

Source: *Historical Atlas of the United States*, National Geographic Society, 1988

Unions

- The trade unions won several victories
  - President Van Buren ordered that all government employees work no more than 10 hours a day.
  - In 1842, Massachusetts workers won the legal right to strike.
    - Unfortunately, unskilled workers were easily replaced so found it difficult to bargain for better wages and conditions.
  - Women had a difficult time organizing unions because most men didn't want the women in their unions.
    - But they were able to organize many successful protests.

Immigrants

- Things changed in the 1840s and 50s with the influx of approximately 4 million immigrants to the United States.
  - An immigrant is a person who moves to a new country.
  - Most of the immigrants were from Ireland or Germany
  - Irish
    - Between 1840 and 1860 about 1.5 million Irish fled Ireland and the Irish Potato famine.
    - Most settled in cities and took factory jobs.
  - German
    - Most Germans came to America fleeing an unsuccessful revolution.
    - They had money and bought farms in the midwest.
    - Others offered skilled labor like coal miners and iron workers.

Nativists

- Some Americans were against immigration and formed a group called the Nativists.
  - These people wanted to preserve the U.S. for
    - Native born
    - White
    - Protestants
  - The nativists called for a cap on immigration.
  - They also wanted immigrants to be 21 years old before becoming citizens.
  - Nativists argued that immigrants
    - Stole jobs from native born Americans
    - Raised the crime rate in cities
    - Were untrustworthy
    - Were Catholic

Know-Nothings

- The Nativists eventually formed their own political party.
  - They were officially the American Party but were nicknamed the "Know-Nothing" Party.
  - Many believed the American party would replace the crumbled Whig party.
- In 1856 the American party selected former President Millard Fillmore as their presidential candidate.
- Although he did not win, he did take 21% of the vote.
- Nativism eventually took a backseat to the slavery issue.