**Enrichment Essay - Daily Life in the New Nation**

Life in the early United States was very different from today. There were no airplanes, cars, or telephones. People rode horses or in horse-drawn conveyances. They hunted or grew their own food and made their own clothing. They hauled water from streams or wells. They used firelight or, sometimes, oil lamps to light their homes.

But to many of the roughly 5 million people living in the United States in 1800, life felt new and exciting. No longer was the country a collection of separate colonies. It was now a single nation, with a president, a capital city, a constitution, and a flag.

While the country was now one nation, daily life could be very different depending on who one was and where one lived. Let’s take a look at what daily life was like for various groups of people in the United States around the year 1800.

**Life on a Farm**

Most people in the new nation were farmers. Some farms were small; some were large. A family farm in New England might include 10 acres or so of ploughed fields, a house, a barn, and outbuildings such as a henhouse and an outhouse. For a New England farmer, corn was the main crop. Other crops included beans, squash, turnips, and potatoes. Farm families usually had a few domestic animals. Cows, hens, and pigs provided milk, eggs, and meat.

Farm children worked as hard as their parents. Both boys and girls worked in the fields, tended the vegetable garden, and fed the animals. Boys hunted and trapped animals with their fathers. Girls cooked and sewed with their mothers.

Farms in the South were called *plantations*. Large plantations were almost like towns. In addition to the plantation house, there were storehouses, kitchens and laundries, and slave houses.

Plantation owners grew crops such as tobacco and cotton. Owners of large plantations did not do their own farming. The backbreaking work of planting and picking was done by slaves.

**Life in the City**

In 1800, the largest cities in the new nation were on the eastern seaboard. Many, such as Boston, New York, and Charleston, had deep harbors where ships coming from Europe and Africa could unload their cargo.

Cities were busy places. Businesspeople hired workers to make products like wooden barrels and ships. Shops sold goods such as fabric, medicine, and stationery. Many people offered their labor as tailors and hat makers, blacksmiths and silversmiths, and ironmongers (people who made iron tools).

Cities were places of great contrast in 1800. They had elegant houses made of wood and brick, and slums of hastily built shacks. There was often a central green, or “common,” where people grazed their cows. All cities had taverns. Some had grand public buildings, colleges, churches, and theaters. Most were noisy and smelled bad from rotting fish and garbage.

**Life on the Frontier**

In 1800, most of the territory west of the Appalachian Mountains was “frontier land.” The frontier included forests, plains, and mountains. There were few roads and settlements. Some white settlers were starting to travel west to claim land for farming, but most whites on the frontier were traders and trappers.

Trappers and traders tended to be rugged individuals. They had to be. Trappers usually traveled by horse, often alone, deep into the wilderness.They spent weeks and months setting animal traps. They waited out the worst of the winter, when travel was impossible, in hand-built cabins or in Native American villages. In the spring, they collected the animals they had caught in their traps and returned to towns and trading posts, their packhorses piled high with skins and furs.

Traders did not catch animals themselves. Instead, they traded such goods as knives, glass beads, and rum with Native Americans for skins and furs.

Trappers and traders sold their goods for paper money or gold. The animal pelts they brought from the frontier were much in demand for hats and blankets.

**Women’s Lives**

Women worked hard in 1800. Some women owned businesses, but most worked in their homes. They cooked, cleaned, and did other household chores. And they raised large families.

In 1800, some chores took days to finish. Bread had to be baked; butter had to be churned. Women made all of their families’ clothes. They cleaned and combed wool, spun it into yarn, dyed the yarn and wove it into fabric, and sewed everything by hand. Women made soap and washed clothes. They tended animals and milked cows. And they did all this while training and supervising their children.

Women had many responsibilities, but they did not have legal rights either inside or outside their homes. Legally, husbands were in charge of their families. They owned all property inherited by their wives. Almost everywhere, women could not vote.

**The Lives of African American Slaves**

In 1800, the majority of slaves lived in the South. Most lived on medium-size plantations where there were 20 to 50 slaves.

Legally, slaves were property. Although slaves could not leave the plantations to which they belonged, they could be traded, bought, or sold by their white owners. Husbands could be taken from wives, and children could be taken from parents. Punishments were severe. Runaway slaves were whipped if they were caught. Often they were killed.

Slaves lived in separate communities on the plantation. They had only what their masters chose to give them in the way of food, shelter, and clothing. On some plantations, children might attend field school, but that was rare. Most slaves received little or no education.

Some slaves worked in the plantation house, cooking and cleaning. Some worked as skilled laborers, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and seamstresses. Most worked in the fields. They worked from sunrise to sunset, with only enough time to eat a quick midday meal. In summer, the workday could be 16 hours long.

**The Lives of Free African Americans**

A few slaves managed to gain their freedom. Some bought their freedom. Others ran from southern plantations to northern cities, where they could find work. Some African Americans were born free because their parents were free.

In the North, attitudes toward African Americans were mixed. Some people, like the Quakers, took a fierce stand against slavery. Other northerners owned slaves. Even free African Americans could not eat or sleep in inns with whites, vote, join the army, or sit near whites in churches.

**The Lives of Native Americans**

In 1800, more than a dozen Native American nations lived in the new nation’s states and territories. There was no one way of life for Native Americans. Each nation was made up of tribes with different customs and languages. Some tribes stayed in one place and grew crops. Others followed the herds they hunted.

Let’s look more closely at one Native American nation, the Sioux. As white settlers began to travel west, some claimed the land that had historically been used by the Sioux. The Sioux were a nation of Plains Indians. In 1800, they lived on the great plains of the Midwest in small bands of 10 to 50 extended-family groups. They followed the buffalo herds. During the winter, they lived in one camp for several months. In the spring, summer, and fall, they moved camp every few days, using horses to carry their food and tools.

Buffalo supplied the Sioux with almost everything they needed, including food, shelter, and clothing. The Sioux also ate deer, rabbit, bear, and wild turkey, as well as wild fruits and nuts.

Each family lived in a teepee, or tent. Sioux teepees were made of animal hides, supported by long wooden poles. They had an opening at the top for smoke from the cooking fire to escape. There was no furniture inside a teepee. Family members slept on piles of buffalo hides.

Although each tribe had a chief, all adult members of a tribe helped to make decisions.

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