

# Chapter Thirteen:

# Antebellum Revival And Reform

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## Chapter Thirteen: Antebellum Revival and Reform

### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

The period between 1820 and 1860 was a time of great change in society, religion, and culture in the United States. The Second Great Awakening, a religious revival movement, saw evangelical Christianity supplant the established religious patterns of the colonial and Revolutionary eras: the Methodist and Baptist churches grew and spread. Others turned to “rational” religious denominations, such as Unitarianism. They based their religious beliefs and practices on rationalism, downplaying the miracles of scripture and concentrating instead on the morals it imparted and the historical events it recounted, arguing, “my rational nature is from God.” The mid-nineteenth century also witnessed the appearance of a number of millennial sects such as the Mormons, Shakers, and Millerites, advocating that the Second Coming of Jesus was at hand. Socially, society was in a period of great upheaval because of the changes spurred by the market revolution: increasing urbanization and industrialization, the growth of immigration, and growing inequality between classes. As a result, the reform impulse and its subsequent movements, such as abolitionism and the movement to reform prisons and asylums, were strongest in the northern United States, the area most affected by the social upheaval of the market revolution as reformers sought to impose order on a changing society. Socially and culturally, the period was also a time of experimentation. More than 100 Utopian communities sprang up all over the country. Some of these, such as the Shakers, were religious communities. Others, like Brook Farm, considered themselves to be social experiments.

The antebellum period (or era before the Civil War) was a time of social and moral reform. Moral reform groups promoted temperance, or abstinence from alcohol. Others worked to make basic education available to all or sought to improve conditions in prisons and asylums. Social activists sought to end slavery and establish greater rights for women. American intellectualism and literature flowered, in part under the transcendentalist movement. Each of these movements, religious, moral, and reform, stressed a belief in the basic goodness of human nature, and in its own way, each of the movements sought to perfect humankind and society.

#### 13.1.1 Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Evaluate the broad social implications of the Second Great Awakening.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ANTEBELLUM REVIVAL AND REFORM

- Analyze the “perfectionist” tendencies of the movements of the 1820-1860 period.
- Explain how the cultural movements of the nineteenth century (transcendentalism, Utopian communities, and the Cult of Domesticity) influenced American culture.
- Explain how The Second Great Awakening influenced the anti-slavery movement and the women’s rights movement.

## 13.2 RELIGIOUS REFORMS IN THE ANTEBELLUM UNITED STATES

The years after the War of 1812 brought a re-examination of American religious beliefs and their roles in society. Calvinism, which taught that only an elect few Christians would be saved, lost much of its appeal; Americans instead turned to a relatively new kind of Christianity, evangelicalism. Evangelical sects emphasized the resurrection of Christ, the primacy of scripture, the spiritual “rebirth” of believers, and the importance of proselytizing. The movement began in Europe in the 1700s with the growth of the Baptist movement and the foundation of the Methodist church. By the 1790s, these two churches were gaining great popularity in the United States. Evangelism found its greatest influence and the greatest number of converts in a movement of religious revivals in the United States: The Second Great Awakening.

### 13.2.1 The Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening began in the 1790s and, by the 1820s, had emerged as a major religious movement. Evangelical in nature, it stressed that salvation was available to all through free will. Religious reformers preached that individuals were responsible to seek out their own salvation and hoped to regenerate and perfect society through individual conversions. Because it was generally inclusive of everyone, the message was spread to men and women, to rich and poor, and among slaves and free blacks alike. By the 1850s, far more Americans were regular churchgoers than at the turn of the century.

The most successful denominations of the Second Great Awakening were the Methodist and Baptist churches. By the 1820s, the Methodist and Baptist churches were the largest evangelical denominations. Both were popularly-rooted movements that emphasized conversion and a spiritual rebirth through personal religious experiences. The basic message was that salvation was something anyone could achieve: ordinary people could choose salvation through personal experience and living a righteous life. Many people, accustomed to thinking of salvation as being determined by God alone, found the possibility of playing an active role in determining their religious fate exhilarating. Evangelical churches became tightly-knit communities that sought to transform society first as a force that determined and enforced values, morality, and conduct, and second, by outreach through moral reform societies that concentrated on reforming personal vices such as drinking, sexual misconduct, and gambling. Through these moral reform societies, churches hoped to change society by putting individuals on the “path to righteousness.” This reform impulse captured

one of the Second Great Awakening's basic messages: humanity could be improved, and indeed, perfected through religion and reform.

One of the defining characteristics of the Second Great Awakening was large gatherings at religious revivals. The meetings typically lasted three to five days and were meant to reawaken or "revive" one's religious faith through an intense, emotional experience. In part, this was achieved by a certain theatricality of preaching. Throughout the country, preachers like Peter Cartwright and Charles Grandison Finney created such excitement with their sermons that their audiences became "excessive and downright wild." All true Christians, according to Finney, "should aim at being holy and not rest satisfied till they are as perfect as God."<sup>1</sup> The religious music and hymns written during the era also helped draw crowds to the revivals; they appealed the common individual by using familiar melodies from popular music and featured folk instruments that many could play, such as the fiddle. Such music remained after the revival and itinerant preacher were long gone.

Baptists and Methodists preached that all could achieve salvation and that all people were equal before God. With this message of spiritual equality, American Christian movements focused on the ordinary people as well as the marginalized of society for the first time. The message held the greatest appeal for those without power in society. Far more women than men were converted during the revivals of the Second Great Awakening. For some women, church membership and the new Christian message offered more personal power and greater personal freedom, as becoming active in the church was considered to be acceptable feminine conduct. The early message also empowered African Americans, free and enslaved. All over the country, African Americans joined the Baptist, Methodist, and other churches, in part as a response to the message of spiritual equality. The new evangelical denominations of the Second Great Awakening did not require the same kinds of rigorous education as older sects did; rather, it was far more important for a spiritual leader to experience a personal conversion and feel a call to spread the message. Black lay-preachers, not ordained but appointed by the church or community to lead services and preach, became important speakers for and within free and enslaved communities. However, there were limits to spiritual equality; although all were spiritually equal in the eyes of God, for many believers, African Americans and women were still inferior to white men in all other ways. As a result, some African American congregants left the evangelical churches because of racial discrimination or because they were barred from leadership positions within the church and founded their own evangelical denominations, such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church. Generally, the evangelical movement

changed over time and became more limiting and conservative in their views of race and gender. The Second Great Awakening swept through most of the country, but it took differing forms in the North and the South.

### The Second Great Awakening in the South and in Appalachia

In Appalachia and the South, the Second Great Awakening brought a sense of community and provided entertainment in isolated rural and frontier areas. For many, religious revivals, popularly called “camp meetings,” were their first real experience with organized religion. Camp meetings were so called because, on the sparsely populated frontier, many attendees had to travel long distances to the meeting and camp out at the location. Camp meetings were a new form of religious expression for the United States. Their intense and emotional atmosphere inspired a tremendous number of conversions. The evangelical message that one’s birth, education, wealth, and social status did not matter in the eyes of God held great appeal for the masses of the frontier. Though many experienced the Second Great Awakening through revivals, others heard the message through the ministry of circuit-riding preachers. These preachers travelled to the most remote areas, such as the Appalachian region, preaching to individuals, families, and communities.

Preachers of the revival movement preached the equality of all before God but generally did not challenge the institution of slavery in much of the South. For some, the issue initially boiled down to access to the slave population and the ability to bring the message to a wider audience. If they openly challenged the institution of slavery, slave owners would not allow their slaves to attend revival meetings or to hear the message. Indeed, many slave owners feared the message of spiritual equality, so they kept the evangelists out. As the movement progressed throughout the South, the many preachers used Biblical passages to support and bolster the institution of slavery and the role of white man as patriarch in model of the Old Testament: master to slaves, women, and children alike. Simultaneously, the slaves, women, and children were told that obedience to their master was their Christian duty. Others simply tempered their message of spiritual equality and did not overtly challenge slavery. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as the message changed to reflect the prevailing ideas of the elite, the movement became more popular in the South as slave owners not only attended meetings themselves, but allowed and even encouraged the attendance of the slave population.

Throughout the South, slaves attended camp meetings. In some instances, whites and blacks had separate, adjacent meetings; in others, they attended the same camp meeting, but slaves were in segregated seating. In either case, they often heard the same sermons, sang the same songs, and received the

same message. Revivals also created a widely known group of respected black leaders, many among them preachers associated with the movement. This is especially true of the Baptist church; independent black congregations were founded all over the South. For many slaves, the message was a promise of freedom, either in this world or in the afterlife.

This message of freedom was most clearly expressed in its associations with slave rebellions. Gabriel's Rebellion of 1800 grew in part out of a series of revival meetings in the area of Richmond, Virginia. Gabriel, a blacksmith, was often leased out to work for others; in this more "relaxed" system, he was able to move more freely and recruit conspirators, a pattern that was only enhanced by the summer's revival meetings. Additionally, some of the conspirators were recruited at the Hungary Baptist Meeting House, the church Gabriel and his brothers attended. Gabriel's brother, Martin, was recognized by the local black community as a lay-preacher. When one of the conspirators proved hesitant to rebellion, Gabriel called on his brother to speak at a meeting of the conspirators to encourage them to action: outright rebellion. Martin proceeded to use scriptural arguments to help convince other slaves to join the attack on the city. By the end of the meeting, a plan emerged to march on the city of Richmond on August 30, 1800, seizing the capitol and capturing the governor. Significantly, Gabriel forbade the conspirators to kill Methodists and Quakers, groups that were actively seeking manumission for slaves in the area at this time. As a characteristic of the black community (free and slave) of Richmond during the period, evangelical Christianity was one part of Gabriel's message of freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Twenty years later in Charleston, South Carolina, lay-preacher Denmark Vesey led a similar conspiracy to incite rebellion. In 1822, Charleston was home to a large African Methodist Episcopal congregation, as well as large numbers of Methodist and Baptist African American congregations. Many of the congregants were literate, including Vesey himself. Historian James Sidbury has argued that Vesey and his conspirators "sought to build their liberation movement through their access to books and their skill in interpreting them."<sup>3</sup> The most important of these texts by far was the Bible; Vesey and church leaders argued that the Bible did not sanction slavery or command obedience from slaves. Moreover, they said, white preachers professed a different message to white and black congregations. Vesey's plan called for teams of rebels to attack targets such as the arsenal and guardhouse. Afterward, the rebels would flee to the newly-freed nation of Haiti. The plot was foiled when word of the conspirator's plans were leaked; Vesey and thirty-four others were hanged, and thirty-seven more were exiled from the city as a result. After the conspiracy was quelled, white Charlestonians accused black congregations of the same offense: falsifying and misinterpreting the Bible. The African Methodist Episcopal Church where Vesey preached was destroyed.<sup>4</sup>

Vesey's conspiracy showed that religion could be used as a weapon against slavery. A decade later, Nat Turner used the message of the Second Great Awakening to help incite one of the largest slave rebellions in United States history. Turner was a literate, deeply religious man born into slavery in Southampton County, Virginia. Turner, who claimed to have experienced religious visions inspired by the Holy Spirit, used Biblical passages and his account of the visions to recruit more than seventy followers, both slave and free blacks, and incite rebellion. In late August of 1831, Turner and his followers launched the rebellion. Over the next two days, the insurrectionists killed some sixty white men, women, and children. The rebellion was quelled by a local militia, who killed or captured many of the insurrectionists. Fifty-five slaves were tried for insurrection, murder, and treason. They were subsequently executed. In the aftermath of the rebellion, the panicky white population killed more than one hundred black men, free and slave. Rumors spread across the South that the rebellion was not limited to Virginia; more African Americans were killed or arrested in Alabama, Virginia, and in other slaveholding states. Turner himself evaded capture for months. Eventually, however, he was captured, tried, and executed. After Turner's execution, lawyer Thomas Grey published *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, an account of his conversations with Turner before he was tried. The account spoke at length of Turner's religiously informed views of slavery and of his interpretations of the Bible. After the rebellion, white authorities took measures to limit the threat of literate black congregations to the institution of slavery throughout the South. For example, Virginia passed legislation making it illegal to teach slaves, free blacks, or mulattoes to read or write. Moreover, black congregations could not hold religious meetings without a licensed white minister present, presumably to assure that the "right" messages on slavery and freedom were the only ones presented from the pulpit.<sup>5</sup>

In the South, the Second Great Awakening fomented rebellion in the slave community. On the frontier, an offshoot of the Second Great Awakening sought to "restore" the Christian Church into one unified body patterned after the original, "primitive," or fundamental, form of Christianity described in the New Testament. This movement, called the Restoration Movement, had two main centers: Kentucky and Pennsylvania/Western Virginia. Like the other evangelical movements of the Second Great Awakening, they stressed adult baptism as an important step to salvation. Today, the influence of the Restoration Movement is seen in the Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ churches.



## The Second Great Awakening in the North

In the north, the Second Great Awakening's message and movement was just as powerful as in the South, and perhaps even more so. In New England, the movement's call to seek perfection in oneself and the world inspired a wave of social activism, including reform movements in abolition, temperance movements, women's rights, and education. In western New York, revival movements inspired many new religious sects as well as social reform. Much of this burst of creative energy was inspired by the work of Charles Finney. In 1821, Finney set out to preach in western New York. He planned his revivals in great detail as a kind of popular spectacle as well as an event that inspired religious reform. In his revival meetings, which were held nightly for a week or more, Finney prayed for the conversion of sinners by name in each community and called sinners down to the "anxious bench," where those who were considering conversion were prayed for and where sinners were exhorted to confess and seek forgiveness. Finney also encouraged women to speak publicly in "witness" or "testimony" in these mixed-sex gatherings. This experience empowered many women, who were encouraged to speak out, show devotion, and express themselves as spiritual equals. Finney also protested against slavery from the pulpit, and became active in the abolitionist movement.

Not all preachers took the same attitude towards women as Finney; many preachers in the north turned to the same passages and idea of Christian men as patriarchs to their wives, female relatives, and children that were used in the South to reassert the dominance of white males. Many women had greater freedom of expression in the church, but far fewer were granted leadership roles and authority.

The region of western and central New York where Finney was most active became the site of intensive religious fervor and reform. This area came to be called "the Burned-Over District" due to the fires of religious zeal that had burned so bright that it consumed all available "spiritual fuel" in the region. The Burned-Over District was not only the site of revivals of the Protestant denominations of the Second Great Awakening, but also the birthplace of new religious movements such as the Millerites, a millennial group who preached that the Second Advent (or "second coming") of Jesus was imminent. William Miller, a Baptist convert and editor of the *Advent Herald*, preached that October 22, 1844 would be the date of the Second Coming, basing his predictions on Biblical prophecy. Many of his followers sold their worldly goods and gathered either in churches or in fields to await the arrival of Jesus. The movement experienced what became to be known as "the Great Disappointment" when the morning of October 23 arrived rather than Jesus. Soon after, the movement disintegrated. However, the modern-day Seventh Day Adventist Church later grew out of the Millerite

movement. The Latter Day Saint Movement (of which the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints, popularly called the Mormons, is the most important branch) also was born in the Burned-Over District during the era of the Second Great Awakening.

### The Mormons

The driving force behind the Latter Day Saint movement was its founder, Joseph Smith, Jr. In 1823, Smith recounted that an angel named Moroni had visited him. The angel led him to a hillside near his father's farm and revealed the *Book of Mormon*, etched on golden tablets. Smith described Moroni as a son of the prophet Mormon and the last of the Nephites, descendants of Hebrews who had travelled to the Americas sometime around 500 BCE. The book reports that there, Jesus visited the Nephites after his crucifixion and resurrection. The Book of Mormon was published in 1830, and Smith began the formation of his church. Like many religious movements of the day, Mormons believed in the imminent Second Coming of Jesus. Unlike the prevailing message of the Second Great Awakening in the Burned-Over district, the Mormon church was extremely patriarchal; women could achieve salvation only through obedience and submission to their husbands. Leadership and authority within the church was the exclusive domain of white men. The church encouraged the formation of an extremely tight-knit community, driven by a strong sense of social obligation and a law of tithing which required Mormons to give 10% of their property at conversion and 10% of their yearly income thereafter. Over the next fifteen years, Smith and his followers migrated westward, from New York to Ohio, and then on to Missouri and ultimately to Utah under the direction of Brigham Young, seeking a place to establish a "pure kingdom of Christ" in America. The Church of Later-Day Saints proved to be a lasting and successful alternative vision to the Second Great Awakening of antebellum America.

### The Unitarian Movement

Evangelical Christianity was certainly the most powerful religious movement in the antebellum United States, but it was not the only one. Throughout New England, many Christians began to espouse Unitarianism, a sect based on the importance of human reason. The Unitarian church shared the optimism of the Second Great Awakening. Unitarians stressed the inherent goodness of humankind. Everyone was eligible for salvation, and a loving God embraced all. Dr. William Ellery Channing, one of the leading preachers and theologians of the Unitarian Church, preached on the great potential of humans. In 1828, his "Likeness to God" sermon argued that true religion is marked by the believer becoming more and more like God. In the spirit of the Enlightenment, Unitarians held that theological ideology

should be subject to rational thought and reason; Channing preached that “my rational nature is from God.” Unitarians attested to the “oneness of God.” As strict monotheists, Unitarians viewed Jesus as a saintly man, but not divine. The Unitarian church was most popular in New England and was centered in Boston. For the most part, it appealed to the elite of society. The Unitarian movement spread through many of the Congregationalist churches of the area. Channing’s 1819 “Unitarian Christianity” sermon, which outlined many of the core beliefs of the new American sect, such as a belief in human goodness and rejection of the Trinity, inspired many churches to adopt Unitarianism.

### 13.2.2 Before You Move On...

#### Key Concepts

The Second Great Awakening and the movement in religious revival in the United States had a profound impact on the United States. The new Protestant denominations, most prominently the Baptists and Methodists, grew in strength and numbers. The Second Great Awakening encouraged this impulse to reform by emphasizing individual responsibility and the desire to seek perfection. The Second Great Awakening manifested itself somewhat differently regionally. In the South, the movement became more conservative over time, and generally supported the system of slavery. Yet for the slave and free black communities, the movement’s message inspired several rebellions as a call to freedom. In the north, the movement reached its zenith in the “Burned-Over District” of Charles Finney. In the early nineteenth century, the United States was becoming a more diverse nation; the new varieties of Protestantism were one reflection of this change.

#### Test Yourself

1. The influence of reason and rational thought is most clearly expressed in what religious tradition?
  - a. Unitarians
  - b. Mormons
  - c. Methodists
  - d. Puritans

2. The \_\_\_\_\_ refers to an area of New York that was so affected by the Second Great Awakening that there “was no more fuel to burn” for the fire of religion.
- Burned-Over District
  - “anxious bench”
  - Moroni
  - Millerites

[Click here to see answers](#)

### 13.3 CULTURAL MOVEMENTS: TRANSCENDENTALISM, UTOPIAN COMMUNITIES, AND THE CULT OF DOMESTICITY

Like the Second Great Awakening, other American movements professed a deep-held belief in the goodness of mankind. Transcendentalists and members of Utopian communities emphasized the perfectibility of humanity and took steps to live their lives and create communities so as to achieve some measure of human perfection. These movements transformed American culture in distinct ways. The transcendentalists had a lasting effect as part of a greater, global movement in Romanticism, which emphasized elevation of the spirit over reason. Transcendentalists also had a powerful effect on the development of a distinctly American field of literature.

More than a hundred Utopian communities were established throughout the United States during the nineteenth century; each of these communities sought to perfect the human experience, though they took differing views on how this could be achieved.

#### 13.3.1 Transcendentalism

The transcendentalists were an intellectual community mostly centered in New England. They emphasized the dignity of the individual and exalted American ideals of freedom, optimism, and self-reliance. They sought to “transcend” the limits of reason and intellect and allow the soul to attain a relationship, a mystical oneness, with the universe. Many important American transcendentalists were writers who set about establishing an “American literary independence,” producing a flowering of literature. Much of their literature reflected transcendental beliefs, praising Nature, a simple life, and self-reliance. In *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, Henry David Thoreau wrote of his experiences supporting himself living on Walden Pond, Massachusetts; he begins his narrative by declaring, “I went to the

woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover I had not lived.”<sup>6</sup> In his address “The American Scholar,” fellow Massachusetts resident Ralph Waldo Emerson similarly wrote that “We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds...A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.”<sup>7</sup> Many transcendentalists, including Emerson and Thoreau, were also reformers who worked in the abolitionist and women’s rights causes.

### 13.3.2 Utopian Communities

Other groups held similar beliefs to the transcendentalists and focused their efforts on establishing ideal communities that would work to perfect the human experience in a social Utopia. Over the course of the century, some 100 Utopian communities were founded. Many focused on religion as the center of its community and activities; others were secular in nature. Utopian movements withdrew from the larger society and focused their efforts on the creation of a perfected new social order, not a reformed older one. Most of the communities stressed hard work and commitment to community ideals as a means of achieving this perfected new society. Many collapsed after years or even months; however, taken together, Utopianism was a significant movement that introduced new ideas to American society. In some cases, the transcendental and Utopian movements overlapped.

In 1840, leading transcendentalist George Ripley of Boston announced his intention of creating a place based on communal living and transcendental values. He and his followers established Brook Farm, where intellectuals pursued both hard physical and mental work as a way of life. Each member of the community was encouraged to work at the farming tasks that they liked best; every member was paid the same wage, including women. The community supported itself not only through farming, but also selling handmade goods and charging admission to the farm to curious visitors; they also earned money through the tuition raised by the excellent school run on the farm by Ripley. Brook Farm was to serve as an example in the perfection of living for the rest of the world. By 1844, community members had formally adopted a socialist societal model. They wrote and published a journal to promote and promulgate their views. However, the general public paid little attention to both the journal and the farm itself. Like many other Utopian communities, the experiment at Brook Farm came to an end in part because it had little to no real effect on the outside world. The final factor in its ending was when part of the farm caught fire; the community was unable to rebuild because the buildings were uninsured. By 1847, the experiment in communal living was over, and the farm closed down.

One of the longest-lasting Utopian traditions was the Shaker community. The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing established multiple communities devoted to living a simple life and developing one's talents through hard work. They were popularly called Shakers because of their practice of worship through music and dance, sometimes in twitching, "shaking" movements. Shakers worked to perfect themselves and their communities in anticipation of Christ's return.

Shakers, who lived a celibate life, added to their community through adoption and conversion, by taking in orphans, the homeless, and poor. The sexes lived and worked separately but held property in common. They practiced equality of the sexes, and at each level of the church hierarchy, both men and women held leadership positions. Since men and women were equal in the eyes of God, they argued, men and women should be treated equally on Earth. In fact, the founder of the American Shaker church was a woman: "Mother" Ann Lee. Shakers believed that God had both male and female aspects, and that Mother Lee was the female counterpart to Christ. For these reasons, more women joined the Shakers than men. At their height, the movement had about 6,000 members; however, the movement's rule of celibacy brought about its decline as few people joined the Shakers after mid-century.

Ultimately, the Shaker community's most lasting influence on the American public was not religious, but through design aesthetics. The Shaker emphasis on simplicity, functionality, and craftsmanship held broad appeal for many Americans. Shaker-designed and produced products and furniture, such as chairs, boxes, and cabinetry, remain a staple of the design world to this day.

Utopian socialist communities formed as a reaction to growing industrialization and its effects on the working class. The most prominent example of this is the community at New Harmony, Indiana. Established in 1825 by Scottish business owner and social reformer Robert Owen, the community's goal was to create a new social order where cooperation and the needs of the community superseded the interests of individuals. To this end, the community adopted a constitution which required that members of the community work for the community in exchange for credit at the town store. Those who did not wish to work could purchase credit instead. The town was to be governed by a committee of seven: four chosen by Owen, three elected by the community. Within the year, complaints of discrepancies between workers and non-workers arose. Additionally, the community had been unable to become self-sufficient and was overcrowded. Nevertheless, many members remained hopeful that the experiment would work and the community adopted a new constitution that espoused equal rights and equal duties for all. Although the constitution aspired to lofty goals, it proved too

short on detailed specifics on how the community was to function on a day-to-day basis. The community limped along for several more months, but by 1827, it was subdivided and socialism gave way to individualism.

### 13.3.3 The Cult of Domesticity and Separate Spheres

Though many of the Utopian communities such as the Shakers called for relative equality of the sexes and women were viewed as spiritual equals in the Second Great Awakening, the American elite and middle class held a very different idea of the nature of women and their role in society. The “Cult of Domesticity” declared that the sphere of a “true woman” was her household. Publications such as *Godey’s Lady Book* and *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* instructed women on how to create a refuge for their husbands and children, sheltering them from the cruel world outside. Moreover, women were to be the moral compass for their families. The Cult of Domesticity provided a powerful ideology of gender roles for many Americans. While not all regions and classes were adherents to this ideology, it was a movement that profoundly influenced American culture.

The ideology of the Cult of Domesticity took shape in the early 1800s. It viewed women and men as complete and total opposites, with almost no characteristics in common. Sex was the ultimate divisor, and gender roles and American society and culture were shaped with this division at its heart. Men and women inhabited two completely different “spheres”: the public world of work and politics, belonging exclusively to men, and the private world of home and family, the domain of women. Although the spheres were completely separate, they were complimentary. The Cult of Domesticity built upon this notion of separate spheres and asserted that true women were centered exclusively in the domestic world of home and family; childrearing and caretaking was not work for women, but a natural expression of their feminine nature. True womanhood was found in selfless service to others. True women were to be pure and pious as well as skilled practitioners of the domestic arts, such as needlecraft. The Cult of Domesticity was upheld as the ideal among the mainstream American culture; however, many women were effectively excluded from “true womanhood” by virtue of their social status, race, or religion. True women, the underlying message proclaimed, were white, Protestant, and did not work outside of the home; it was a middle-class social ideology resting on the assumption that a woman was married to a man who was able and willing to support her. Living the ideals of the Cult of Domesticity and true womanhood allowed the middle class to distinguish themselves from the working class as increasing industrialization, urbanization, and immigration in the 1820-1850 period resulted in the first emergence of female wage laborers.

The Cult of Domesticity served a religious as well as social and cultural role. Through their devotion and sacrifice as wife, and more importantly, as mother, women were serving as a Christian ideal for their family. She served as a representative of Christ in daily life and made her sphere of domesticity a kind of sacred territory, creating a home which was a “haven from the heartless world” for her husband and children. Historians Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil argue that “true womanhood was a fervently Protestant notion, which gave to female devotion and selfless sacrifice a redemptive power.”<sup>8</sup> It is no coincidence that this ideology came to prominence in the same era as the Second Great Awakening.

Both the influence of the Cult of Domesticity and the role that women played in the Second Great Awakening ultimately allowed and even encouraged women to participate in the moral reform efforts that came to characterize the antebellum period in the United States. Beginning in the 1820s, women participate in female benevolent associations that sponsored international Christian missionary efforts. Other organizations worked closer to home to uplift the poor, spiritually and morally. Middle class women were involved in these organizations because adherents of the Cult of Domesticity viewed the absence of separate spheres and family values as the cause of poverty. Since the mother and wife worked outside of the home in the corrupt public world, they reasoned, how could it be a place of refuge and purity? Middle class women worked to “educate” the poor in how they should live. Belief in the moral superiority of the Cult of Domesticity allowed for women of the middle class to engage in good works outside of the home, in the public world. In essence, the moral outreach and female benevolent societies expanded the private, domestic sphere and allowed the middle class to view itself as superior to the working class not only economically, but also socially. By the early 1830s, middle class women played an important role in the many reform movements of the age, including the temperance movement as well as the reform of education and prisons.

### 13.3.4 Before You Move On...

#### Key Concepts

The nineteenth century saw cultural movements that, like the Second Great Awakening, perceived humanity as basically good and imminently perfectible. The transcendentalists, the United States’ first organized intellectual community, expressed this notion in their writings. American literature flourished in part because of the activities of the transcendentalists. Secular and religious utopian communities sought to live their lives and create communities that achieved some measure of human perfection. Utopian movements focused their efforts



on the creation of a perfected new social order, not a reformed older one. Most of the communities withdrew from society, stressing the value of hard work and commitment to community ideals as a means of achieving this perfected new society. The Brook Farm community was an intellectual experiment that overlapped with the transcendental movement. The Shakers sought perfection of humanity in religion, stressing the equality of the sexes and celibacy. Finally, the utopian socialist community of New Harmony tried to create a more perfect society through communal work and property.

Finally, the Cult of Domesticity sought to perfect family life through the maintenance of a home run by a moral, domestically-skilled wife and mother. The home (and, by extension, the woman of the house) came to represent a place of morality, in sharp contrast to the corrupt public world. The Cult of Domesticity provided a powerful ideology of gender roles for many Americans. While not all regions and classes were adherents to this ideology, it was a movement that profoundly influenced American culture.

### Test Yourself

1. Transcendentalists viewed \_\_\_\_\_ as the key to the human experience.
  - a. transcending nature to attain reason
  - b. equality of nations
  - c. self-reliance
  - d. dystopian communities
2. Shakers and Millerites were \_\_\_\_\_ movements, because they thought that the second coming of Jesus was approaching.
  - a. millennial
  - b. diurnal
  - c. reform
  - d. utopian
3. The notion of separate spheres and the Cult of Domesticity allowed the American middle class to distinguish themselves as separate from and superior to the working class.
  - a. True
  - b. False

[Click here to see answers](#)

## 13.4 AMERICAN ANTEBELLUM REFORM

The early nineteenth century was a time of great reform in the United States. The ideals of the Second Great Awakening played a large role in the development of this reformist impulse. Preachers and believers all over the country saw humankind and society as good and perfectible, able to improve and strive to become more like God. At the same time, the Second Great Awakening stressed the notion of personal responsibility and the responsibility of a person to the sins of neighbors. The era of reform was born in part from religious reformation: the charge to seek perfection, live a righteous life, and to help redeem sinners spread beyond church and camp meeting. The antebellum reform movements were based in a network of voluntary, church-affiliated reform organizations. The reform impulse was not solely confined to the United States; Europeans were also in the midst of their own reform efforts. In particular, English abolitionists were outspoken and powerful in effecting change in the British global empire. Many types of reform movements existed during this period in the United States, and groups and causes only grew more splintered over time. Many different kinds of Americans worked in the reform movement. In particular, women played a large role in various aspects of reform. While not all Americans were active in the various reform movements, taken together, the reform impulse was a powerful force that characterizes the antebellum era.

### 13.4.1 The Temperance Movement

One of the most widespread of the reform movements in the 1820s-1840s was the temperance movement, which called for reducing the use of (or abstaining from) alcoholic beverages. Its roots lay in the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, where religious reformers called for individuals to lead “clean” lives and to redeem their sinning neighbors. The reformist impulse also stemmed from new social conditions. The increasing urbanization of the United States and the large numbers of immigrants, especially Germans, had transformed the nation in ways that were unfamiliar and that some found threatening. Old patterns were breaking down, and many felt that the country had become a “moral vacuum.” Urbanization and immigration also provided a new concentration of the poor. The emerging American middle class participated in reform not only for religious reasons, but also to confirm their new social status. By helping others, they asserted their worth while at the same time alleviating social ills.

Alcohol in many forms had been an important part of the diet of Americans from the founding of the colonies onward. The Mayflower carried barrels upon barrels of beer for its passengers. Whiskey was a frontier staple for generations because it preserved the harvest; in 1791, a Hamiltonian

attempt to tax whiskey to alleviate the national debt resulted in the Whiskey Rebellion.<sup>9</sup> By the 1830s, Americans were drinking more than ever; in the 1830s, the average American consumed more than 1.5 bottles of liquor a week. Meanwhile, many doctors were citing large amounts of alcohol as injurious to an individual's health. Chief among these physicians was Dr. Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania. Ministers such as Connecticut Presbyterian Lyman Beecher also spoke out against alcohol as a societal evil.

The response to these conditions was the 1826 creation of the American Temperance Society in Boston, Massachusetts. The Society grew quickly and soon had spread across the country. Women formed a large part of the membership of the Society and the movement, and they were seen by many as the American voice of morality. Much of this perception stems from the "Cult of Domesticity." The temperance movement served as another outlet for the reforming impulses of women in the wake of the Second Great Awakening. Participation in the temperance movement was much more socially acceptable than participation in the abolition or women's rights movement. While many women spoke out against alcohol, many in the movement perceived women and children as the chief victims of alcohol consumption, as their husbands and sons suffered from alcohol's effects, spent the family's money on alcohol, spent their time in bars and saloons rather than in the family home, and sometimes became violent when drunk.

The American relationship with alcohol was not an issue that was resolved in the era of reform. The temperance movement and organizations had more than a million supporters who enthusiastically held rallies and distributed pamphlets on the evils of "demon rum." By the 1860s, their efforts had indeed slowed, but certainly did not stop, the average American's consumption of alcohol. Over the course of the nineteenth century, many towns and counties became "dry." Perhaps the greatest legislative victory for the temperance movement during the era of reform was Maine's short-lived total ban on alcohol from 1851-1856.

### **13.4.2 Reform of Prisons, Asylums, and Schools**

Before the nineteenth century, crime, poverty, and mental illness in America were handled through family and voluntary efforts. Prisons existed not to rehabilitate criminals for their eventual return to society but to house them until the time that they would be punished, most often by fines, public whipping, or execution, also a public spectacle. Debtors were punished by imprisonment. Many mentally ill individuals eventually ended up imprisoned as well, as no facilities for the treatment of the mentally ill existed. Reformers worked to create public institutions to deal with the social problems. They believed that social deviants, including criminals

and debtors, could be reformed and morally redeemed. The result was the creation of penitentiaries, which sought to transform criminals into law abiding citizens through hard work, religious instruction, and isolation from the corruption of social vices. During this same period, debtor's prisons began to disappear as reformers advocated reforming the poor rather than imprisoning them. Workhouses were established to keep the poor from drunkenness, idleness, and gambling. Finally, asylums were established for treatment and housing the mentally ill.

Dorothea Lynde Dix was instrumental in the reform effort that established state mental asylums. In the spring of 1841, Dix visited a Cambridge jail in order to teach Sunday school for a group of women inmates. There she found the inmates, some of them mentally ill (whom Dix refers to as lunatics), housed in filthy conditions in unheated cells. Horrified, she worked to publicize the conditions of the jail and gain public support for its improvement. She conducted an eighteen month study of the jails and almshouses of Massachusetts and, in 1843, made a presentation to the Massachusetts legislature, reporting that the mentally ill were housed in "cages, closets, cellars and pens...Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience."<sup>10</sup> A movement for change was already underway when Dix began her campaign for reform; for instance, Quakers had already founded several asylums for treatment. Dix was instrumental in motivating a state role in the creation of these facilities. Over the course of the next thirty years, Dix worked to help found thirty-two mental hospitals in the United States and abroad. Moreover, her reports on jails also aided in the efforts to reform prisons.

American reformers also sought to implement school reform. Before the early 1800s, education for most Americans was very basic. For most, this meant a few months of schooling a year in a one-room rural schoolhouse. The wealthy engaged private tutors and academies. For the urban poor, a very few were able to attend private charitable schools. Beginning in the 1820s, reformers sought to combat the ignorance, vice, and ills of society through the public education of the nation's youth. Moreover, the rising numbers of immigrants in the northeast combined with near-universal white male suffrage convinced cities and states that education was essential to maintain a democracy. Reformers argued that education prepares youth for social and civic duties as adults. The most prominent of these education reformers was Horace Mann, head of the Massachusetts board of education, the first in the nation. Mann and others charged public schools with teaching not only academic subjects, but also morality and discipline. One means of teaching these values was through the series *McGuffey's Readers*, a series of texts that taught not only spelling and vocabulary, but also punctuality, frugality, and temperance. Public education proved to be most accessible in

the more urbanized northeast; in the rural, more agricultural regions of the south and west, school reform was not as effectively implemented.

Women played a large role in education reform. Young female teachers staffed many of the schools. It is also during this time that higher education began to open to women. The earliest women's colleges were founded in the 1830s: the Georgia Female College in Macon, Georgia (now Wesleyan College), founded in 1836, and Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts (Now Mount Holyoke College), founded in 1837. Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio became the first co-educational institution when it admitted four women in 1837.

### **13.4.3 Abolitionism and the Women's Rights Movements**

Two of the most significant reform movements to come out of the reform period of 1820-1840 were the anti-slavery movement and the women's rights movement. Each of these movements worked for freedom and emancipation and to grant a greater body of rights to two of the groups on the periphery of American society. The movements shared a common support base: many abolitionists supported or were active in the women's rights movement, or vice versa. In numerous ways, the organized women's rights movement grew out of abolitionist organizations and the movement of the early 1800s. Although neither group saw their cause's ultimate goals achieved during the era of reform, each movement saw great advances. Abolitionism was perhaps the most radical of the reform movements of the era.

The struggle to end slavery has a long history both globally and in the United States; indeed, the struggle to end slavery emerged at roughly the same time as slavery itself. However, abolitionism developed significantly over the 1800s. In the early decades of the century, several groups emerged as "colonizationists." These groups sought to remove blacks from the United States either through emigration or through the creation of colonies in Africa. The end of slavery would come about gradually under this ideal. For the most part, colonizationists accepted the idea of black inferiority. For some members of the movement, the idea meant the end of slavery; for others, it was an answer for racial tensions in the United States. Kentucky Congressional representative Henry Clay argued for colonization because of the "unconquerable prejudice" against blacks in the United States. Other important politicians, including James Madison and Abraham Lincoln, favored "repatriation" rather than emancipation.

For the most part, the African American community did not see colonization or repatriation as a viable alternative to emancipation and abolition. David Walker, an African American abolitionist, called for a unified global black

voice against slavery in his *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Walker stood as a vocal opponent of colonization, saying that the United States belonged more to African Americans than to whites, because the black population had earned the country with their “blood and tears.”

Nevertheless, the American Colonization Society (ACS) emerged as the main voice of colonizationists in the United States. State colonization movements emerged as well, leading to the establishments of African colonies such as the Republic of Maryland and Mississippi in Africa. In 1821, the ACS helped to establish the colony of Liberia on the west coast of Africa and assisted some 13,000 slaves and free blacks to emigrate to the colony. The experiment in Liberia proved to be, in many ways, a failure; hundreds died from disease soon after emigrating. Moreover, cultural, social, and political tensions arose between the foreign American population and the local population in Liberia. The Americans made up a tiny minority of the population but dominated Liberian politics until the 1980s. Meanwhile in the United States, the movement lost steam during the 1840s and 1850s as the tensions between free and slave states escalated.

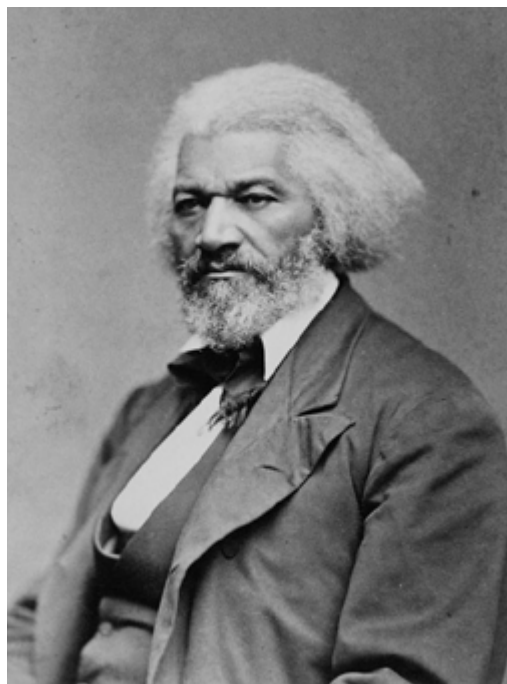
One of the most prominent abolitionists of the era was William Lloyd Garrison, publisher of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*. Garrison was militant in his call for immediate and complete emancipation as a moral imperative. In the first issue of the *Liberator*, he made a public apology for ever advocating a gradual end to slavery and called for its immediate end. He ended his appeal by writing, “I will not equivocate- I will not excuse- I will not retreat a single inch- and I will be heard.”<sup>11</sup> Along with an immediate end to slavery, Garrison also espoused racial equality as an absolute necessity to ending the institution without massive bloodshed. In every state, laws restricted the political and civil liberties of free African Americans. Many Americans found this radical notion of racial equality and the call to end these restrictive laws intimidating or even frightening. Garrison refused to become more moderate in his demands, and *The Liberator* was published continuously for the next 35 years until the end of slavery in the United States.

In 1833, Garrison was among the group that founded the American Anti-Slavery Society. They were inspired in part by the success of British abolitionists. Abolitionists differed in their ideas about how to effectively bring about the end of slavery. Some, like Garrison, favored fiery calls and “no moderation”; at a rally in 1854, Garrison asserted that there could be “no union with slaveholders” and called the U.S. Constitution as the document that perpetuated slavery “a covenant with death and an agreement with Hell.”<sup>12</sup> Others were convinced that their best strategy was to convince the public that slavery was a sin. By the end of the 1830s, the Society had grown by leaps and bounds, with more than 1,300 chapters and almost 250,000

members. It provided a leading voice for abolition, in part through the publication of its newspaper, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*. In later years, the Society provided the founding impetus to the Liberty Party, a political party with an abolitionist platform.

The Anti-Slavery Society was home to white and black abolitionists. Many prominent African American abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass were members of the Society. Douglass was perhaps the most famous, influential, and vocal black abolitionist. Born into slavery in Maryland in 1819, he escaped from slavery as a young man and spent the rest of his life devoting himself to the cause of freedom for all. Douglass was a skilled orator and a prolific writer. His many autobiographies, including *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, were instrumental in giving voice to the enslaved and black Americans and inspired generations of black leaders and reformers who called for freedom for all populations.

Although black and white abolitionists worked closely together in the movement and usually worked well together, African Americans experienced racial prejudice even within the abolitionist movement. Some of this came from a lack of understanding; in other cases, it was overt prejudice. White abolitionists tended to see free and slave as two polar opposites; black abolitionists knew that there were varying degrees of freedom and slavery. Often, white abolitionists knowingly or unknowingly exploited stereotypes in their abolitionist efforts. For example, as Frederick Douglass rose to prominence as an orator in the abolitionist movement, he began speaking not only of his life as a slave, but also analyzing abolitionist policies. White abolitionists warned him that people would cease to believe that he had ever been enslaved if he sounded too educated and advised him to leave the complex analysis to the whites. Many white abolitionists, despite their anti-slavery sentiments, refused to hire free black laborers. Even anti-slavery and abolitionist groups refused to grant full rights to black members. Eventually, the American Anti-Slavery Society itself split into factions over social issues.



**Figure 13.1 Frederick Douglass (1879)** | Frederick Douglass, author, orator, and abolitionist, was a leading voice in the abolitionist movement of the early nineteenth century.

**Author:** Frank W. Legg  
**Source:** National Archives

The abolitionist sentiment was also present in the South. An important example of the abolitionist voice in the South came from sisters from Charleston, South Carolina who had migrated north and become Quakers because of their abolitionism. The Grimké sisters, Sarah and Angelina, spoke out against the system of slavery in many forums. In 1837, Angelina wrote to William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*. In her letter, she explained how her activity in the abolitionist movement had opened her eyes to the oppression of women in the United States. The sisters spoke before state legislations and were among the first women to speak in public forums before mixed sex groups. The daughters of a prominent slave owner, they spoke of their personal knowledge and experience of the system. Angelina later married Theodore Dwight Weld, a prominent abolitionist preacher. She assisted in the research for his 1839 indictment of slavery, *American Slavery as it is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*. The Grimké sisters were one example of the overlap in the reformist impulse between abolitionism and women's rights.

### The Women's Rights Movement

To the eyes of many reformers, the movements in abolition and women's rights had much in common; many who worked to end slavery also called for the "emancipation of women." Indeed, the women's rights movement had largely grown out of the anti-slavery movement. Women joined and actively participated in abolitionist organizations such as the Anti-Slavery Society; they sponsored events such as the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. A key moment came in 1840, when the Anti-Slavery Society split after a woman, Abigail Kelley, was nominated to serve on one of the Society's committees. The majority of the members of the Society favored including women in the governing structure of the organization; the more conservative members broke away from the Anti-Slave Society to form the American and Foreign Anti-Slave Society, which excluded women. Kelly later wrote of her experiences in the abolitionist movement and how they shaped her views on women's rights: "in striving to strike [the slaves'] irons off, we found most surely that *we were manacled ourselves*."<sup>13</sup>

Two of the leading figures of the women's rights movement met at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. There, the convention refused to seat the American female delegates. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, two of the excluded delegates, united to form an organization that would speak for oppressed women.

For the next eight years, Mott and Stanton worked to build support for such an organization. In July 1848 they were finally able to call together a group together for the first national convention devoted to the issue of





**Figure 13.2 Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton** | These two women were instrumental in organizing the Seneca Falls Convention and writing the Declaration of Sentiments, which would articulate the goals of the women's rights movement.

**Author:** Unknown (Mott), Carol M. Highsmith (Stanton)  
**Source:** Library of Congress

women's rights, the Seneca Falls Convention. Three hundred delegates, both men and women, attended the meeting. Over the course of two days, the delegates discussed the role of women in society and debated the issue of women's right to vote. The convention ended with the issue of the "Declaration of Sentiments," a document that largely paralleled the Declaration of Independence, and leveled a series of charges against the patriarchy of the United States that had been the source of the oppression of women. It declared that "all men and women are created equal," and went on to list the "repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward women," including that "He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice," and "He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns."<sup>14</sup> The Declaration of Sentiments formed the basis of the goals of the women's rights movement that lasted throughout the rest of the century. The first and foremost of these goals was achieving the right to vote as an inalienable right of full, republican citizenship. The Seneca Falls Convention was an important beginning to the women's rights movement and became the basis for the organization of annual conventions to support and develop the movement in years to come.

The women's rights movement did not attract broad support among women or men during the antebellum era. Unlike other reform movements, women's rights challenged the notion of separate spheres and the idea of "true womanhood." Historians Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil argue

that women's rights challenged the most basic idea of true womanhood—the selfless nature of women—because “women's rights advocacy led women to insist that they had the same claim on individual rights to life, liberty, property, and happiness as men.”<sup>15</sup> The work to achieve the vote made no substantive progress in the antebellum period. The most significant success was that by 1860, more than a dozen states had granted women greater control over the wages they earned, and some even allowed women to sue husbands and fathers who tried to deprive them of their wages.

### 13.4.4 Before You Move On...

#### Key Concepts

Early nineteenth-century America was a time of reform. Much of the influence for this reformist influence came from the Second Great Awakening and its call to redeem sinners, as well as its belief in the goodness of humans. Like the preachers of the revivals, the temperance movement reformers called for individuals to lead “clean” lives and to redeem their sinning neighbors. Others sought to build and improve public and state institutions such as prisons, asylums, and schools. Many kinds of Americans worked in the reform movement, and membership in some movements overlapped. Two of the most significant reform movements to come out of the reform period of 1820-1840 were the anti-slavery movement and the women's rights movement. Each of these movements worked for freedom and emancipation and to grant a greater body of rights to two of the groups on the periphery of American society. The movements shared a common support base, and many abolitionists advocated, or were active in, the women's rights movement, or vice versa. In many ways, the organized women's rights movement grew out of abolitionist organizations and the movement of the early 1800s. Although neither group saw their cause's ultimate goals achieved during the era of reform, each movement saw great advances. Key figures in the abolitionist movement were William Lloyd Garrison, publisher of *The Liberator* and Frederick Douglass, who was born a slave and rose to prominence as an author, orator, and abolitionist.

#### Test Yourself

1. The colonizationist scheme of the early 1800s proved to be popular among black abolitionists.
  - a. True
  - b. False

2. The Seneca Falls Convention worked to establish\_\_\_\_\_
  - a. women's rights.
  - b. a utopian community.
  - c. the end of slavery.
  - d. a national temperance society.
  
3. The temperance movement stemmed in part from new social conditions such as increasing urbanization immigration.
  - a. True
  - b. False

[Click here to see answers](#)

## 13.5 Conclusion

The period between 1820 and 1860 reflected a national mood of experimentation and rebellion. Americans experimented in new ways of thinking and believing, and rebelled against injustices to women and the enslaved. The mid-nineteenth century was also a time of change in religion. Older religious denominations were supplanted in many areas by new religious sects such as the Methodists and Baptists. Others were deeply influenced by the Enlightenment and rational thinking. Convinced of the perfection of nature defined and popularized by scientists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these new theologians believed that this very perfection argued for the existence of a rational creator. They based their religious beliefs and practices on this rationalism, downplaying the miracles of scripture and concentrating instead on the morals it imparted and the historical events it recounted, arguing, “my rational nature is from God.” However, these rational religions had limited appeal for the vast majority of Americans, who, in the mid-nineteenth century, were attracted to the preaching of the Second Great Awakening, a religious revival movement. Preachers like Peter Cartwright and Charles Grandison Finney created such excitement with their sermons that their audiences became “excessive and downright wild.”

The mid-nineteenth century also witnessed the appearance of a number of millennial sects advocating that the Second Coming of Jesus was at hand. The Mormons called themselves the “latter day” saints and spoke continually of an approaching new dispensation; the official name of the Shakers was “the United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing.” The followers of William Miller, a Baptist convert and editor of the *Advent Herald*, established 1844 as the year of the Second Coming, sold their worldly goods, and gathered either in churches or in fields to watch the descent of Jesus. When he failed to appear, the movement disintegrated.

Just as the millennial sects looked forward to a new and better life introduced by the Second Coming of Jesus, so also did a group of men and women who participated in one of the many utopian experiments of the mid-century. The Shakers created a religious community that bound their residents to each other and to God. Brook Farm was one of the best-known communities and included among its participants literary figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson. Closely linked to the emotional outpouring behind revivalism and the creation of new, often millennial, sects was the appearance of a movement known as Romanticism. Manifested in transcendentalism and in the literature of mid-eighteenth century, American Romanticism embodied a revolt against the rationalism of the Enlightenment, of Deism

and Unitarianism, and emphasized the victory of heart over head. Utopian movements focused their efforts on the creation of a perfected new social order, not a reformed older one. Most of the communities withdrew from society, stressed the value of hard work and commitment to community ideals as a means of achieving this perfected new society. The Brook Farm community was an intellectual experiment that overlapped with the transcendental movement. The Shakers sought perfection of humanity in religion, stressing the equality of the sexes and celibacy. Finally, the utopian socialist community of New Harmony tried to create a more perfect society through communal work and property.

The Cult of Domesticity provided a powerful ideology of gender roles for many Americans. While not all regions and classes were adherents to this ideology, it was a movement that profoundly influenced American culture. In the ideology of separate spheres, the home (and, by extension, the woman of the house) came to represent a place of morality, in sharp contrast to the corrupt public world.

Two of the most significant reform movements to come out of the reform period of 1820-1840 were the anti-slavery movement and the women's rights movement. Each of these movements worked for freedom and emancipation and to grant a greater body of rights to two of the groups on the periphery of American society. The movements shared a common support base, and many abolitionists advocated, or were active in, the women's rights movement, or vice versa. In many ways, the organized women's rights movement grew out of abolitionist organizations and the movement of the early 1800s. Although neither group saw their cause's ultimate goals achieved during the era of reform, each movement saw great advances.

## 13.6 CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

- Which reformist impulse changed the United States more deeply: religious or political reform?

## 13.7 KEY TERMS

- Abolitionism
- Anti-Slavery Society
- Brooke farm
- Burned-Over District
- William Ellery Channing
- Cult of Domesticity
- Dorothea Dix
- Frederick Douglass
- Charles Grandison Finney
- The Liberator
- Mormons
- Lucretia Mott
- Second Great Awakening
- Separate Spheres
- Seneca Falls Convention
- Shakers
- Joseph Smith
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- Temperance movement
- Transcendentalism
- Unitarianism
- Utopianism
- Brigham Young

## 13.8 CHRONOLOGY

The following chronology is a list of important dates and events associated with this chapter.

Date	Event
1800	Gabriel's Rebellion
1820s	Height of Second Great Awakening
1821	Foundation of the colony of Liberia
1826	Foundation of the American Temperance Society
1830	Publication of the Book of Mormon
1833	American Anti-Slavery Society established
1840	Brook Farm established
1840	Seneca Falls Convention
1847	Mormon trek to Utah

## 13.9 END NOTES

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- 3 James Sidbury, "Reading, Revelation, and Rebellion: The Textual Communities of Gabriel, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner," in *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 124
- 4 Sidbury, "Reading, Revelation, and Rebellion," 123-127.
- 5 Sidbury, "Reading, Revelation, and Rebellion," 127-133.
- 6 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*\_(USA: Dover Thrift Edition, 1995 edition), 59.
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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ANTEBELLUM REVIVAL AND REFORM

11 Bryan Paul Frost and Jeffery Sickkenga, *History of American Political Thought* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003), 398.

12 Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 3.

13 Teresa Zackodnick, *Press, Platform, Pulpit: Black Feminist Publics in the Era of Reform* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 2011) , 104.

14 Sue Davis, *The Political Thought of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

15 DuBois and Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes*, 222-223.



## ANSWER KEY FOR CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ANTEBELLUM REVIVAL AND REFORM

Check your answers to the questions in the Before You Move On Sections for this chapter. You can click on the questions to take you back to the chapter section.

Correct answers are **BOLDED**

### Section 13.2.2 - p. 593

1. The influence of reason and rational thought is most clearly expressed in what religious tradition?

- A. UNITARIANS**
- b. Mormons
- c. Methodists
- d. Puritans

2. The \_\_\_\_\_ refers to an area of New York that was so affected by the Second Great Awakening that there "was no more fuel to burn" for the fire of religion.

- A. BURNED-OVER DISTRICT**
- b. "anxious bench"
- c. Moroni
- d. Millerites

### Section 13.3.4 - p. 599

1. Transcendentalists viewed \_\_\_\_\_ as the key to the human experience.

- a. transcending nature to attain reason
- b. equality of nations
- C. SELF-RELIANCE**
- d. dystopian communities

2. Shakers and Millerites were \_\_\_\_\_ movements, because they thought that the second coming of Jesus was approaching.

- A. MILLENNIAL**
- b. diurnal
- c. reform
- d. utopian

3. The notion of separate spheres and the Cult of Domesticity allowed the American Middle class to distinguish themselves as separate from and superior to the working class.

- A. TRUE**
- b. False

### Section 13.4.4 - p. 608

1. The colonizationist scheme of the early 1800s proved to be popular among black abolitionists.

- a. True
- B. FALSE**

2. The Seneca Falls Convention worked to establish\_\_\_\_\_

- A. WOMEN'S RIGHTS.**
- b. a utopian community.
- c. the end of slavery.
- d. a national temperance society.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ANTEBELLUM REVIVAL AND REFORM

3. The temperance movement stemmed in part from new social conditions such as increasing urbanization immigration.

**A. TRUE**

b. False