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CHAPTER

Religion and Reform 1800–1860

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The spirit of reform is in every place," declared the children of legal reformer David Dudley Field in their handwritten monthly *Gazette* in 1842:

The labourer with a family says "reform the common schools," the merchant and the planter say, "reform the tariff," the lawyer "reform the laws," the politician "reform the government," the abolitionist "reform the slave laws," the moralist "reform intemperance," . . . the ladies wish their legal privileges extended, and in short, the whole country is wanting reform.

Like many Americans, the Field children sensed that the political whirlwind of the 1830s had transformed the way people thought about themselves and about society. Suddenly, thousands of men and women took inspiration from the economic progress and democratic spirit of the age. Drawing on the religious optimism of the Second Great Awakening, they felt that they could improve their personal lives and society as a whole. Some activists dedicated themselves to the cause of reform. William Lloyd Garrison began as an antislavery advocate and foe of Indian removal and then went on to campaign for women's rights, pacifism, and the abolition of prisons. Susan B. Anthony embraced antislavery, temperance, and female suffrage. Such obsessively reform-minded individuals, warned Unitarian minister Henry W. Bellows, were pursuing "an object, which in its very nature is unattainable—the perpetual improvement of [people's] outward condition." In Bellows's view, human progress depended on inner character, the "regeneration of man" through Christian precepts.

Such debates reveal the multifaceted character of the reform impulse. Like Bellows, the first wave of American reformers, the benevolent religious improvers of the 1820s, hoped to promote morality and enforce social discipline. They championed regular church attendance, temperance, and a strict moral code. Their zeal offended many upright citizens: "A peaceable man can hardly venture to eat or drink, . . . to correct his child or kiss his wife, without obtaining the permission . . . of some moral or other reform society," said one.

A second wave of reformers—Garrison, Anthony, and other activists of the 1830s and 1840s—undertook to liberate people from archaic customs and traditional lifestyles. Mostly middle-class northerners and midwesterners, these activists promoted a bewildering assortment of radical ideals: extreme individualism, common ownership of property, the immediate emancipation of slaves, and sexual equality. Although their numbers were small, second-wave reformers challenged deeply rooted cultural practices and elicited horrified opposition among the majority of Americans. As one fearful southerner saw it, radical reformers favored a chaotic world with "No-Marriage, No-Religion, No-Private Property, No-Law and No-Government."

IDENTIFY THE BIG IDEA

To what extent did individualism, new religious sects, abolitionism, and women's rights (as the movement was called in the nineteenth century) change American culture between 1820 and 1860?



A Middle-Class Marriage During the 1830s, Joseph H. Davis used bright watercolors to paint scores of family portraits—150 still survive—that capture the comfortable lives of New England's middle classes. This double portrait commemorates the marriage of Hannah Roberts and Lewis Tebbets of Berwick, Maine. To emphasize their romantic love, Davis shows them gazing into each other's eyes, their hands linked by a prayer book, a symbol of their education and piety. Such respectable couples—Lewis Tebbets became a minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church—flocked to hear Ralph Waldo Emerson and other lecturers on the lyceum circuit. Terra Foundation for American Art, Chicago/Art Resource, NY.

Individualism: The Ethic of the Middle Class

Those fears were not exaggerated. Rapid economic growth and geographical expansion had weakened traditional institutions, forcing individuals to fend for themselves. In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville coined the word *individualism* to describe the result. Native-born white Americans were “no longer attached to each other by any tie of caste, class, association, or family,” the French aristocrat lamented, and so lived in social isolation. As Tocqueville mourned the loss of social ties, the New England essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) celebrated the liberation of the individual. Emerson’s vision influenced thousands of ordinary Americans and a generation of important artists, who, in the **American Renaissance**, a mid-nineteenth-century flourishing of literature and philosophy, wrote a remarkable number of first-class novels, poems, and essays.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and Transcendentalism

Emerson was the leading voice of **transcendentalism**, an intellectual movement rooted in the religious soil of New England. Its first advocates were Unitarian ministers from well-to-do New England families who questioned the constraints of their Puritan heritage (Chapter 8). For inspiration, they turned to European romanticism, a new conception of self and society. Romantic thinkers, such as German philosopher Immanuel Kant and English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, rejected the ordered, rational world of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. They embraced human passion and sought deeper insight into the mysteries of existence. By tapping their intuitive powers, the young Unitarians believed, people could come to know the infinite and the eternal.

As a Unitarian, Emerson stood outside the mainstream of American Protestantism. Unlike most Christians, Unitarians believed that God was a single being, not a trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In 1832, Emerson took a more radical step by resigning his Boston pulpit and rejecting all organized religion. He moved to Concord, Massachusetts, and wrote influential essays probing what he called “the infinitude of the private man,” the radically free person.

The young philosopher argued that people were trapped by inherited customs and institutions. They



The Founder of Transcendentalism

As this painting of Ralph Waldo Emerson by an unknown artist indicates, the young philosopher was an attractive man, his face brimming with confidence and optimism. With his radiant personality and incisive intellect, Emerson deeply influenced dozens of influential writers, artists, and scholars and enjoyed great success as a lecturer to the emerging middle class. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.

wore the ideas of earlier times — New England Calvinism, for example — as a kind of “faded masquerade,” and they needed to shed those values. “What is a man born for but to be a Reformer, a Remaker of what man has made?” Emerson asked. In his view, individuals could be remade only by discovering their “original relation with Nature” and entering into a mystical union with the “currents of Universal Being.” The ideal setting for this transcendent discovery was under an open sky, in solitary communion with nature. The revivalist Charles Grandison Finney described his religious conversion in Emersonian terms: an individual in the woods, alone, joining with God in a mystical union.

The transcendentalist message of individual self-realization reached hundreds of thousands of people through Emerson’s writings and lectures. Public lectures had become a spectacularly successful way of

spreading information and fostering discussion among the middle classes. Beginning in 1826, the lyceum movement—modeled on the public forum of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle—arranged lecture tours by hundreds of poets, preachers, scientists, and reformers. The lyceum became an important cultural institution in the North and Midwest, but not in the South, where the middle class was smaller and popular education had a lower priority. In 1839, nearly 150 lyceums in Massachusetts invited lecturers to address more than 33,000 subscribers. Emerson was the most popular speaker, eventually delivering fifteen hundred lectures in more than three hundred towns in twenty states.

Emerson celebrated those who rejected tradition and practiced self-discipline and civic responsibility. His individualistic ethos spoke directly to the experiences of many middle-class Americans, who had left family farms to make their way in the urban world. His pantheistic view of nature—that it was saturated with the presence of God—encouraged Unitarians in Boston to create the Mount Auburn Cemetery, a beautiful planned landscape of trees and bushes and burial markers for the dead of all faiths; soon there were similar rural cemeteries in many American cities. Emerson's optimism also inspired many religious preachers of the Second Great Awakening, such as Finney, who told believers to transcend old doctrines and constraints. "God has made man a moral free agent," Finney declared.

Emerson worried that the new market society—the focus on work, profits, and consumption—was debasing Americans' spiritual lives. "Things are in the saddle," he wrote, "and ride mankind." Seeking to revive intellectual life, transcendentalists created communal experiments. The most important was Brook Farm, just outside Boston, where Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller were residents or frequent visitors. Members recalled that they "inspired the young with a passion for study, and the middle-aged with deference and admiration." Whatever its intellectual excitement and spiritual rewards, Brook Farm was an economic failure. The residents planned to produce their own food and exchange their surplus milk, vegetables, and hay for manufactures. However, most members were ministers, teachers, writers, and students who had few farming skills; only the cash of affluent residents kept the enterprise afloat for five years. After a devastating fire in 1846, the organizers disbanded the community and sold the farm.

With the failure of Brook Farm, the Emersonians abandoned their quest for new social institutions. They

accepted the brute reality of the emergent commercial and industrial order and tried to reform it, especially through the education of workers and the movement to abolish slavery.

UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW

What were the main principles of transcendentalism, and how did they differ from the beliefs of most Protestant Christians?

Emerson's Literary Influence

Even as Emerson urged his fellow citizens to break free from tradition and expand their spiritual awareness, he issued a declaration of literary independence. In "The American Scholar" (1837), Emerson urged American authors to free themselves from the "courtly muse" of Old Europe and find inspiration in the experiences of ordinary Americans: "the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye; the form and gait of the body."

Thoreau, Fuller, and Whitman One young New England intellectual, Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), heeded Emerson's call and sought inspiration from the natural world. In 1845, depressed by his beloved brother's death, Thoreau built a cabin near Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, and lived alone there for two years. In 1854, he published *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, an account of his search for meaning beyond the artificiality of civilized society:

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 that I had not lived.

Walden's most famous metaphor provides an enduring justification for independent thinking: "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer." Beginning from this premise, Thoreau advocated a thoroughgoing individuality, urging readers to avoid unthinking conformity to social norms and peacefully to resist unjust laws.

As Thoreau was seeking self-realization for men, Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) was exploring the possibilities of freedom for women. Born into a wealthy Boston family, Fuller mastered six languages and read broadly in classic literature. Embracing Emerson's ideas, she started a transcendental "conversation," or discussion group, for educated Boston women in 1839. While editing *The Dial*, the leading transcendentalist journal, Fuller published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1844).



Margaret Fuller, 1848

At the age of thirty-eight, the American transcendentalist author Margaret Fuller moved to Italy, where she reported on the Revolution of 1848 for the *New York Tribune*. There she fell in love with Thomas Hicks (1823–1890), a much younger American artist. Hicks rebuffed Fuller’s romantic advances but painted this flattering portrait, softening her features and giving her a pensive look. Fuller took as a lover a petty noble and republican revolutionary, Giovanni Angelo, Marchese d’Ossoli, and gave birth to a son in September 1848. Two years later, the entire family died in a shipwreck while en route to the United States. Constance Fuller Threinen.

Fuller embraced the transcendental principle that all people could develop a life-affirming mystical relationship with God. Every woman therefore deserved psychological and social independence: the ability “to grow, as an intellect to discern, as a soul to live freely and unimpeded.” She wrote: “We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down [and] every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man.” Fuller became the

literary critic of the *New York Tribune* and traveled to Italy to report on the Revolution of 1848, only to drown in a shipwreck en route home to the United States. Fuller’s life and writings inspired a rising generation of women writers and reformers.

EXPLAIN CONSEQUENCES

How did authors of the American Renaissance incorporate transcendentalist ideas into their work?



To see a longer excerpt of *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, along with other primary sources from this period, see *Sources for America’s History*.

The poet Walt Whitman (1819–1892) also responded to Emerson’s call. He had been “simmering, simmering,” he recalled, and then Emerson “brought me to a boil.” Whitman worked as a printer, a teacher, a journalist, an editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, and an influential publicist for the Democratic Party. However, poetry was the “direction of his dreams.” In *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of wild, exuberant poems first published in 1855 and constantly revised and expanded, Whitman recorded in verse his efforts to transcend various “invisible boundaries”: between solitude and community, between prose and poetry, even between the living and the dead. At the center of *Leaves of Grass* is the individual — “I, Walt.” He begins alone: “I celebrate myself, and sing myself.” Because he has an Emersonian “original relation” with nature, Whitman claims perfect communion with others: “For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.” For Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller, the individual had a divine spark; for Whitman, the collective democracy assumed a sacred character.

The transcendentalists were optimistic but not naive. Whitman wrote about human suffering with passion, and Emerson laced his accounts of transcendence with twinges of anxiety. “I am glad,” he once said, “to the brink of fear.” Thoreau was gloomy about everyday life: “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” Nonetheless, dark murmurings remain muted in their work, overshadowed by assertions that nothing was impossible for the individual who could break free from tradition.

Darker Visions Emerson’s writings also influenced two great novelists, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville, who had more pessimistic worldviews. Both sounded powerful warnings that unfettered egoism could destroy individuals and those around them. Hawthorne brilliantly explored the theme of excessive individualism in his novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). The two main characters, Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, blatantly challenge their seventeenth-century New England community by committing adultery and producing a child. Their decision to ignore social restraints results not in liberation but in degradation: a profound sense of guilt and condemnation by the community.

Herman Melville explored the limits of individualism in even more extreme and tragic terms and emerged

as a scathing critic of transcendentalism. His most powerful statement was *Moby Dick* (1851), the story of Captain Ahab's obsessive hunt for a mysterious white whale that ends in death for Ahab and all but one member of his crew. Here, the quest for spiritual meaning in nature brings death, not transcendence, because Ahab, the liberated individual, lacks inner discipline and self-restraint.

Moby Dick was a commercial failure. The middle-class audience that devoured sentimental American fiction refused to follow Melville into the dark, dangerous realm of individualism gone mad. What middle-class readers emphatically preferred were the more modest examples of individualism offered by Emerson and Finney: personal improvement and religious piety through spiritual awareness and self-discipline.

Rural Communalism and Urban Popular Culture

Between 1820 and 1860, thousands of Americans grew dissatisfied with life in America's emerging market society and retreated into rural areas of the Northeast and Midwest (Map 11.1). There they sought to create ideal communities, or **utopias**, that would allow people to live differently and realize their spiritual potential.

Simultaneously, tens of thousands of rural Americans and European immigrants poured into the larger

cities of the United States. There, they created a popular culture that challenged some sexual norms, reinforced traditional racist feelings, and encouraged new styles of dress and behavior.

The Utopian Impulse

Many rural communalists were farmers and artisans seeking refuge from the economic depression of 1837–1843. Others were religious idealists. Whatever their origins, these rural utopias were symbols of social protest and experimentation. By advocating the common ownership of property (socialism) and unconventional forms of marriage and family life, the communalists challenged traditional property rights and gender roles.

Mother Ann and the Shakers The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, known as the Shakers because of the ecstatic dances that were part of their worship, was the first successful American communal movement. In 1770, Ann Lee (Mother Ann), a young cook in Manchester, England, had a vision that she was an incarnation of Christ. Four years later, she led a few followers to America and established a church near Albany, New York.

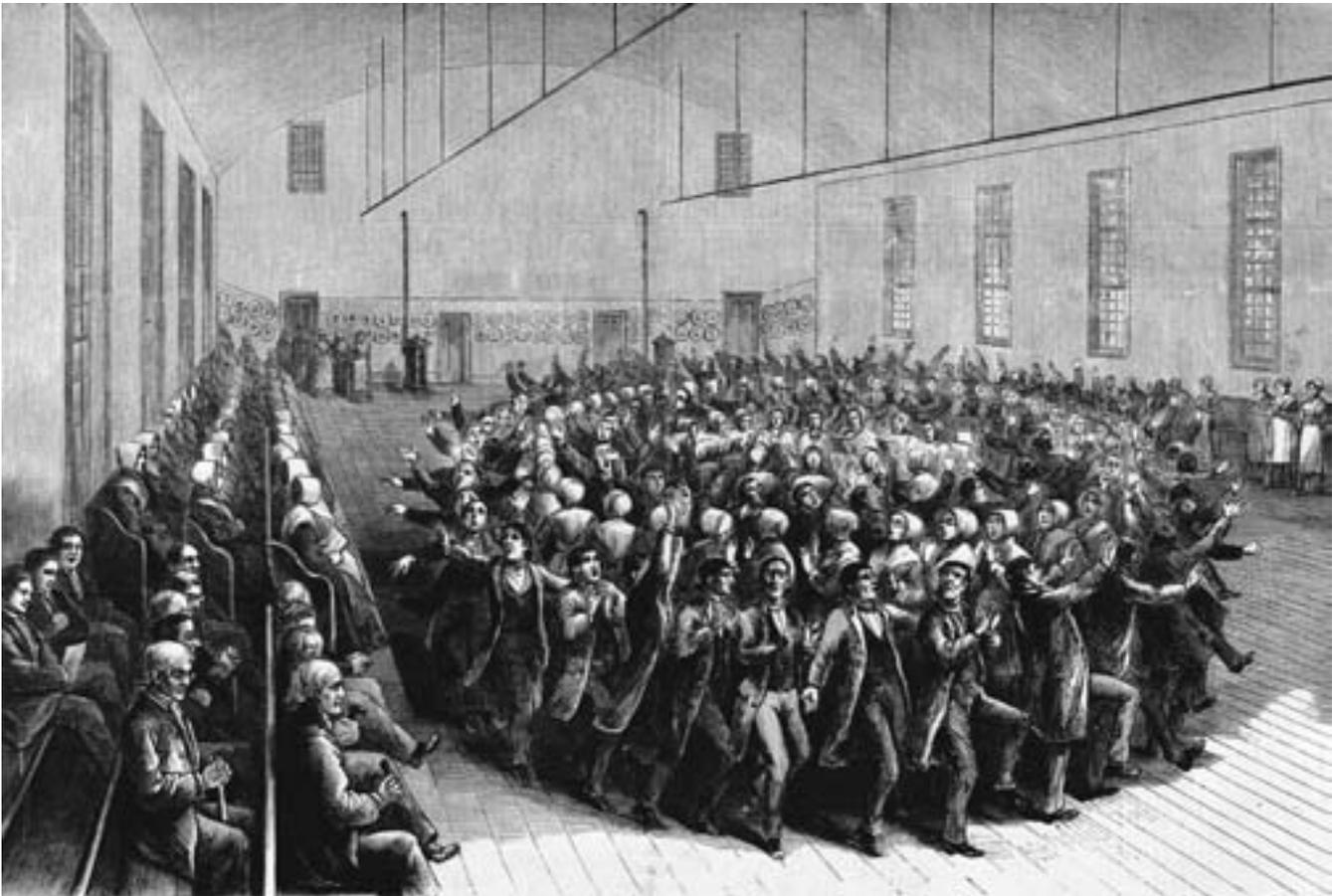
After Mother Ann's death in 1784, the Shakers honored her as the Second Coming of Christ, withdrew from the profane world, and formed disciplined

MAP 11.1

Major Communal Experiments Before 1860

Some experimental communities settled along the frontier, but the vast majority chose rural areas in settled regions of the North and Midwest. Because they opposed slavery, communalists usually avoided the South. Most secular experiments failed within a few decades, as the founders lost their reformist enthusiasm or died off; tightly knit religious communities, such as the Shakers and the Mormons, were longer-lived.





Shakers at Prayer

Most Americans viewed the Shakers with a mixture of fascination and suspicion. They feared the sect's radical aspects, such as a commitment to celibacy and communal property, and considered the Shakers' dancing more an invitation to debauchery than a form of prayer. Those apprehensions surfaced in this engraving, *The Shakers of New Lebanon* (New York), which expresses both the powerful intensity and the menacing character of this Shaker spiritual ritual. The work of the journalist-engraver Joseph Becker, the picture appeared in Frank Leslie's *Illustrated Newspaper* in 1873. © Bettmann.

religious communities. Members embraced the common ownership of property; accepted strict oversight by church leaders; and pledged to abstain from alcohol, tobacco, politics, and war. Shakers also repudiated sexual pleasure and marriage. Their commitment to celibacy followed Mother Ann's testimony against "the lustful gratifications of the flesh as the source and foundation of human corruption." The Shakers' theology was as radical as their social thought. They held that

God was "a dual person, male and female." This doctrine prompted Shakers to repudiate male leadership and to place community governance in the hands of both women and men—the Eldresses and the Elders.

IDENTIFY CAUSES

What factors led to the proliferation of rural utopian communities in nineteenth-century America?

Shakers founded twenty communities, mostly in New England, New York, and Ohio. Their agriculture and crafts, especially furniture making, acquired a reputation for quality that made most Shaker communities self-sustaining and even comfortable. Because the Shakers disdained sexual intercourse, they relied on conversions and the adoption of thousands of young orphans to increase their numbers. During the 1830s, three thousand adults, mostly women, joined the Shakers, attracted by their communal intimacy and sexual equality. To Rebecca Cox Jackson, an African American seamstress from Philadelphia, the Shakers seemed to be "loving to live forever." However, with the proliferation of public and private orphanages during the 1840s and 1850s, Shaker communities began to decline and, by 1900, had virtually disappeared. They

left as a material legacy a plain but elegant style of wood furniture.

Albert Brisbane and Fourierism As the Shakers' growth slowed during the 1840s, the American Fourierist movement mushroomed. Charles Fourier (1777–1837) was a French reformer who devised an eight-stage theory of social evolution that predicted the imminent decline of individual property rights and capitalist values. Fourier's leading disciple in America was Albert Brisbane. Just as republicanism had freed Americans from slavish monarchical government, Brisbane argued, so Fourierist **socialism** would liberate workers from capitalist employers and the "menial and slavish system of Hired Labor or Labor for Wages." Members would work for the community, in cooperative groups called phalanxes; they would own its property in common, including stores and a bank, a school, and a library.

Fourier and Brisbane saw the phalanx as a humane system that would liberate women as well as men. "In society as it is now constituted," Brisbane wrote, individual freedom was possible only for men, while "woman is subjected to unremitting and slavish domestic duties." In the "new Social Order . . . based upon

Associated households," men would share women's domestic labor and thereby increase sexual equality.

Brisbane skillfully promoted Fourier's ideas in his influential book *The Social Destiny of Man* (1840), a regular column in Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, and hundreds of lectures. Fourierist ideas found a receptive audience among educated farmers and craftsmen, who yearned for economic stability and communal solidarity following the Panic of 1837. During the 1840s, Fourierists started nearly one hundred cooperative communities, mostly in western New York and the Midwest. Most communities quickly collapsed as members fought over work responsibilities and social policies. Fourierism's rapid decline revealed the difficulty of maintaining a utopian community in the absence of a charismatic leader or a compelling religious vision.

John Humphrey Noyes and Oneida John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886) was both charismatic and religious. He ascribed the Fourierists' failure to their secular outlook and embraced the pious Shakers as the true "pioneers of modern Socialism." The Shakers' marriageless society also inspired Noyes to create a community that defined sexuality and gender roles in radically new ways.

Attacking the Women's Rights Movement

Amelia Jenks Bloomer (1818–1894) wrote for her husband's newspaper, the *County Courier* of Seneca Falls, New York. In 1848 she attended the women's convention there and began her own biweekly newspaper, *The Lily*, focusing on temperance and women's rights. In 1851, Bloomer enthusiastically promoted—and serendipitously gave her name to—the comfortable women's costume devised by another temperance activist: loose trousers gathered at the ankles topped by a short skirt. Fearing women's quest for equal dress and equal rights, humorists such as John Leech ridiculed the new female attire. Here, bloomer-attired women smoke away and belittle the male proprietor as "one of the 'inferior animals,'" a thinly veiled effort by Leech to reassert men's "natural" claim as the dominant sex. From *Punch* 1851, John Leech Archive.



No. VI.—SOMETHING MORE OF BLOOMERISM.
(BEHIND THE COUNTER THERE IS ONE OF THE "INFERIOR ANIMALS.")

Noyes was a well-to-do graduate of Dartmouth College who joined the ministry after hearing a sermon by Charles Grandison Finney. Dismissed as the pastor of a Congregational church for holding unorthodox beliefs, Noyes turned to **perfectionism**, an evangelical Protestant movement of the 1830s that attracted thousands of New Englanders who had migrated to New York and Ohio. Perfectionists believed that Christ had already returned to earth (the Second Coming) and therefore people could aspire to sinless perfection in their earthly lives. Unlike most perfectionists, who lived conventional personal lives, Noyes rejected marriage, calling it a major barrier to perfection. “Exclusiveness, jealousy, quarreling have no place at the marriage supper of the Lamb,” Noyes wrote. Instead of the Shakers’ celibacy, Noyes embraced “complex marriage,” in which all members of the community were married to one another. He rejected monogamy partly to free women from their status as the property of their husbands, as they were by custom and by common law. Symbolizing the quest for equality, Noyes’s women followers cut their hair short and wore pantaloons under calf-length skirts.

In 1839, Noyes set up a perfectionist community near his hometown of Putney, Vermont. However, local outrage over the practice of complex marriage forced Noyes to relocate the community in 1848 to an isolated area near Oneida, New York, where the members could follow his precepts. To give women the time and energy to participate fully in community affairs, Noyes urged them to avoid multiple pregnancies. He asked men to help by avoiding orgasm during intercourse. Less positively, he encouraged sexual relations at a very early age and used his position of power to manipulate the sexual lives of his followers.

By the mid-1850s, the Oneida settlement had two hundred residents and became self-sustaining when the inventor of a highly successful steel animal trap joined the community. With the profits from trap making, the Oneidians diversified into the production of silverware. When Noyes fled to Canada in 1879 to avoid prosecution for adultery, the community abandoned complex marriage but retained its cooperative spirit. The Oneida Community, Ltd., a jointly owned silverware-manufacturing company, remained a successful communal venture until the middle of the twentieth century.

The historical significance of the Oneidians, Shakers, and Fourierists does not lie in their numbers, which were small, or in their fine crafts. Rather, it stems from their radical questioning of traditional sexual norms and of the capitalist values and class divisions of the emerging market society. Their utopian communities stood as countercultural blueprints of a more egalitarian social and economic order.

Joseph Smith and the Mormon Experience

The Mormons, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, were religious utopians with a conservative social agenda: to perpetuate close-knit communities and patriarchal power. Because of their cohesiveness, authoritarian leadership, and size, the Mormons provoked more animosity than the radical utopians did.

Joseph Smith Like many social movements of the era, **Mormonism** emerged from religious ferment among families of Puritan descent who lived along the



A Mormon Man and His Wives

The practice of polygamy split the Mormon community and, because it deviated from Christian religious principles, enraged Protestant denominations. This Mormon household, pictured in the late 1840s, was unusually prosperous, partly because of the labor of the husband’s multiple wives. Although the cabin provides cramped quarters for a large polygamous family, it boasts a brick chimney and—a luxury for any pioneer home—a glass window. Library of Congress.

Erie Canal and who were heirs to a religious tradition that believed in a world of wonders, supernatural powers, and visions of the divine.

The founder of the Latter-day Church, Joseph Smith Jr. (1805–1844), was born in Vermont to a poor farming and shop-keeping family that migrated to Palmyra in central New York. In 1820, Smith began to have religious experiences similar to those described in conversion narratives: “[A] pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noonday came down from above and rested upon me and I was filled with the spirit of God.” Smith came to believe that God had singled him out to receive a special revelation of divine truth. In 1830, he published *The Book of Mormon*, which he claimed to have translated from ancient hieroglyphics on gold plates shown to him by an angel named Moroni. *The Book of Mormon* told the story of an ancient Jewish civilization from the Middle East that had migrated to the Western Hemisphere and of the visit of Jesus Christ, soon after his Resurrection, to those descendants of Israel. Smith’s account explained the presence of native peoples in the Americas and integrated them into the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Smith proceeded to organize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Seeing himself as a prophet in a sinful, excessively individualistic society, Smith revived traditional social doctrines, including patriarchal authority. Like many Protestant ministers, he encouraged practices that led to individual success in the age of capitalist markets and factories: frugality, hard work, and enterprise. Smith also stressed communal discipline to safeguard the Mormon “New Jerusalem.” His goal was a church-directed society that would restore primitive Christianity and encourage moral perfection.

Constantly harassed by anti-Mormons, Smith struggled to find a secure home for his new religion. At

one point, he identified Jackson County in Missouri as the site of the sacred “City of Zion,” and his followers began to settle there. Agitation led by Protestant ministers quickly forced them out: “Mormons were the common enemies of mankind and ought to

be destroyed,” said one cleric. Smith and his growing congregation eventually settled in Nauvoo, Illinois, a town they founded on the Mississippi River (Map 11.2). By the early 1840s, Nauvoo had 30,000 residents. The Mormons’ rigid discipline and secret rituals—along with their prosperity, hostility toward other sects, and bloc voting in Illinois elections—fueled resentment among their neighbors. That resentment increased when Smith refused to accept Illinois laws of which he disapproved, asked Congress to make Nauvoo a separate federal territory, and declared himself a candidate for president of the United States.

Moreover, Smith claimed to have received a new revelation justifying polygamy, the practice of a man having multiple wives. When leading Mormon men took several wives—“plural celestial marriage”—they threw the Mormon community into turmoil and enraged nearby Christians. In 1844, Illinois officials arrested Smith and charged him with treason for allegedly conspiring to create a Mormon colony in Mexican territory. An anti-Mormon mob stormed the jail in Carthage, Illinois, where Smith and his brother were being held and murdered them.

Brigham Young and Utah Led by Brigham Young, Smith’s leading disciple and now the sect’s “prophet, seer and revelator,” about 6,500 Mormons fled the United States. Beginning in 1846, they crossed the

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

In what ways were Mormons similar to, and different from, other communal movements of the era?

MAP 11.2

The Mormon Trek, 1830–1848

Because of their unorthodox religious views and communal solidarity, Mormons faced hostility first in New York and then in Missouri and Illinois. After founder Joseph Smith Jr. was murdered, Brigham Young led the polygamist faction of Mormons into lands claimed by Mexico and thinly populated by Native Americans. From Omaha, the migrants followed the path of the Oregon Trail to Fort Bridger and then struck off to the southwest. They settled along the Wasatch Range in the basin of the Great Salt Lake in present-day Utah.



Great Plains into Mexican territory and settled in the Great Salt Lake Valley in present-day Utah. Using cooperative labor and an irrigation system based on communal water rights, the Mormon pioneers quickly spread agricultural communities along the base of the Wasatch Range. Many Mormons who rejected polygamy remained in the United States. Led by Smith's son, Joseph Smith III, they formed the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and settled throughout the Midwest.

When the United States acquired Mexico's northern territories in 1848, the Salt Lake Mormons petitioned Congress to create a vast new state, Deseret, stretching from Utah to the Pacific coast. Instead, Congress set up the much smaller Utah Territory in 1850 and named Brigham Young its governor. Young and his associates ruled in an authoritarian fashion, determined to ensure the ascendancy of the Mormon Church and its practices. By 1856, Young and the Utah territorial legislature were openly vowing to resist federal laws. Pressed by Protestant church leaders to end polygamy and considering the Mormons' threat of nullification "a declaration of war," President James Buchanan dispatched a small army to Utah. As the "Nauvoo Legion" resisted the army's advance, aggressive Mormon militia massacred a party of 120 California-bound emigrants and murdered suspicious travelers and Mormons seeking to flee Young's regime. Despite this bloodshed, the "Mormon War" ended quietly in June 1858. President Buchanan, a longtime supporter of the white South, feared that the forced abolition of polygamy would serve as a precedent for ending slavery and offered a pardon to Utah citizens who would acknowledge federal authority. (To enable Utah to win admission to the Union in 1896, its citizens ratified a constitution that "forever" banned the practice of polygamy. However, the state government has never strictly enforced that ban.)

The Salt Lake Mormons had succeeded even as other social experiments had failed. Reaffirming traditional values, their leaders resolutely used strict religious controls to perpetuate patriarchy and communal

discipline. However, by endorsing private property and individual enterprise, Mormons became prosperous contributors to the new market society. This blend of economic innovation, social conservatism, and hierarchical leadership, in combination with a strong missionary impulse, created a wealthy and expansive

church that now claims a worldwide membership of about 12 million people.

Urban Popular Culture

As utopians organized communities in the countryside, rural migrants and foreign immigrants created a new urban culture. In 1800, American cities were overgrown towns with rising death rates: New York had only 60,000 residents, Philadelphia had 41,000, and life expectancy at birth was a mere twenty-five years. Then urban growth accelerated as a huge in-migration outweighed the high death rates. By 1840, New York's population had ballooned to 312,000; Philadelphia and its suburbs had 150,000 residents; and three other cities—New Orleans, Boston, and Baltimore—each had about 100,000. By 1860, New York had become a metropolis with more than 1 million residents: 813,000 in Manhattan and another 266,000 in the adjacent community of Brooklyn.

Sex in the City These newly populous cities, particularly New York, generated a new urban culture. Thousands of young men and women flocked to the city searching for adventure and fortune, but many found only a hard life. Young men labored for meager wages building thousands of tenements, warehouses, and workshops. Others worked as low-paid clerks or operatives in hundreds of mercantile and manufacturing firms. The young women had an even harder time. Thousands toiled as live-in domestic servants, ordered about by the mistress of the household and often sexually exploited by the master. Thousands more scraped out a bare living as needlewomen in New York City's booming ready-made clothes industry. Unwilling to endure domestic service or subsistence wages, many young girls turned to prostitution. Dr. William Sanger's careful survey, commissioned in 1855 by worried city officials, found six thousand women engaged in commercial sex. Three-fifths were native-born whites, and the rest were foreign immigrants; most were between fifteen and twenty years old. Half were or had been domestic servants, half had children, and half were infected with syphilis.

Commercialized sex—and sex in general—formed one facet of the new urban culture. "Sporting men" engaged freely in sexual conquests; otherwise respectable married men kept mistresses in handy apartments; and working men frequented bawdy houses. New York City had two hundred brothels in the 1820s and five hundred by the 1850s. Prostitutes—so-called "public" women—openly advertised their wares on Broadway,

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

How were the cultures of utopian communalists and urban residents similar to and different from the mainstream culture described in Chapters 8 and 9?

Night Life in Philadelphia

This watercolor by Russian painter Pavel Svinin (1787–1839) captures the social diversity and allure of urban America. A respectable gentleman relishes the delicacies sold by a black oysterman. Meanwhile, a young woman—probably a prostitute but perhaps an adventurous working girl—engages the attention of two well-dressed young “swells” outside the Chestnut Street Theatre. Such scenes were new to Americans and marked the beginning of a profound split between the nation’s rural and urban cultures. © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image source: Art Resource, NY.



the city’s most fashionable thoroughfare, and welcomed clients on the infamous “Third Tier” of the theaters. Many men considered illicit sex as a right. “Man is endowed by nature with passions that must be gratified,” declared the *Sporting Whip*, a working-class magazine. Even the Reverend William Berrian, pastor of the ultra-respectable Trinity Episcopal Church, remarked from the pulpit that he had resorted ten times to “a house of ill-fame.”

Prostitution formed only the tip of the urban sexual volcano. Freed from family oversight, men formed homoerotic friendships and relationships; as early as 1800, the homosexual “Fop” was an acknowledged character in Philadelphia. Young people moved from partner to partner until they chanced on an ideal mate. Middle-class youth strolled along Broadway in the latest fashions: elaborate bonnets and silk dresses for young women; flowing capes, leather boots, and

silver-plated walking sticks for young men. Rivaling the elegance on Broadway was the colorful dress on the Bowery, the broad avenue that ran along the east side of lower Manhattan. By day, the “Bowery Boy” worked as an apprentice or journeyman. By night, he prowled the streets as a “consummate dandy,” his hair cropped at the back of his head “as close as scissors could cut,” with long front locks “matted by a lavish application of *bear’s grease*, the ends tucked under so as to form a roll and brushed until they shone like glass bottles.” The “B’hoy,” as he was called, cut a dashing figure as he walked along with a “Bowery Gal” in a striking dress and shawl: “a light pink contrasting with a deep blue” or “a bright yellow with a brighter red.”

Minstrelsy Popular entertainment was a central facet of the new urban culture. In New York, workingmen could partake of traditional rural blood

sports—rat and terrier fights as well as boxing matches—at Sportsmen Hall, or they could seek drink and fun in billiard and bowling saloons. Other workers crowded into the pit of the Bowery Theatre to see the “Mad Tragedian,” Junius Brutus Booth, deliver a stirring (abridged) performance of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*. Reform-minded couples enjoyed evenings at the huge Broadway Tabernacle, where they could hear an abolitionist lecture, see the renowned Hutchinson Family Singers lead a roof-raising rendition of their antislavery anthem, “Get Off the Track,” and sentimentally lament the separation of a slave couple in Stephen Foster’s “Oh Susanna,” a popular song of the late 1840s. Families could visit the museum of oddities (and hoaxes) created by P. T. Barnum, the great cultural entrepreneur and founder of the Barnum & Bailey Circus.

However, the most popular theatrical entertainments were the minstrel shows, in which white actors in blackface presented comic routines that combined racist caricature and social criticism. **Minstrelsy** began around 1830, when a few actors put on blackface and performed song-and-dance routines (Thinking Like a Historian, p. 358). The most famous was John Dartmouth Rice, whose “Jim Crow” blended a weird shuffle-dance-and-jump with unintelligible lyrics delivered in “Negro dialect.” By the 1840s, there were hundreds of minstrel troupes, including a group of black entertainers, Gavitt’s Original Ethiopian Serenaders. The actor-singers’ rambling lyrics poked racist fun at African Americans, portraying them as lazy, sensual, and irresponsible while simultaneously using them to criticize white society. Minstrels ridiculed the

drunkenness of Irish immigrants, parodied the halting English of German immigrants, denounced women’s demands for political rights, and mocked the arrogance of upper-class men. Still, by caricaturing blacks, the minstrels declared the importance of being white and spread racist sentiments among Irish and German immigrants.

Immigrant Masses and Nativist Reaction By 1850, immigrants were a major presence throughout the Northeast. Irish men and women in New York City numbered 200,000, and Germans 110,000 (Figure 11.1). German-language shop signs filled entire neighborhoods, and German foods (sausages, hamburgers, sauerkraut) and food customs (such as drinking beer in family *biergärten*) became part of the city’s culture. The mass of impoverished Irish migrants found allies in the American Catholic Church, which soon became an Irish-dominated institution, and the Democratic Party, which gave them a foothold in the political process.

Native-born New Yorkers took alarm as hordes of ethnically diverse migrants altered the city’s culture. They organized a nativist movement—a final aspect of the new urban world. Beginning in the mid-1830s, nativists called for a halt to immigration and mounted a cultural and political assault on foreign-born residents (Chapter 9). Gangs of B’hoys assaulted Irish youths in the streets, employers restricted Irish workers to the most menial jobs, and temperance reformers denounced the German fondness for beer. In 1844, the American Republican Party, with the endorsement of the Whigs, swept the city elections by focusing on

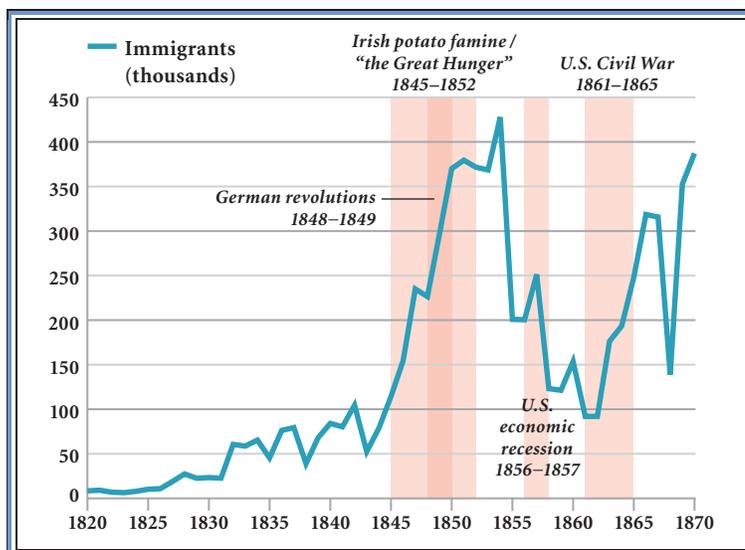


FIGURE 11.1
The Surge in Immigration, 1854–1855

In 1845, the failure of the potato crop in Ireland prompted the wholesale migration to the United States of peasants from the overcrowded farms of its western counties. Population growth and limited economic prospects likewise spurred the migration of tens of thousands of German peasants, while the failure of the liberal republican political revolution of 1848 prompted hundreds of prominent German politicians and intellectuals to follow them. An American economic recession cut the flow of immigrants, but the booming northern economy during the Civil War again persuaded Europeans to set sail for the United States.

the culturally emotional issues of temperance, anti-Catholicism, and nativism.

In the city, as in the countryside, new values were challenging old beliefs. The sexual freedom celebrated by Noyes at Oneida had its counterpart in commercialized sex and male promiscuity in New York City, where it came under attack from the Female Moral Reform Society. Similarly, the disciplined rejection of tobacco and alcohol by the Shakers and the Mormons found a parallel in the Washington Temperance Society and other urban reform organizations. American society was in ferment, and the outcome was far from clear.

Rampant Racism

Minstrel shows and their music were just two facets of the racist culture of mid-nineteenth-century America. Exploiting the market for almanacs among farmers and city-folk alike, the publishing firm of Fisher and Brother produced the *Black Joke Al-Ma-Nig* for 1852. Like other almanacs, it provided astrological charts, weather predictions, and a detailed calendar of events. To boost sales, the almanac included “new an’ original nigga’ stories, black jokes, puns, parodies” that would “magnetize bofe white an’ black.” Such racist caricatures of black faces and language influenced white views of African Americans well into the twentieth century. Courtesy: The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Abolitionism

Like other reform movements, the **abolitionist** crusade of the 1830s drew on the religious enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening. Around 1800, antislavery activists had assailed human bondage as contrary to republicanism and liberty. Three decades later, white abolitionists condemned slavery as a sin and demanded immediate, uncompensated emancipation. Their uncompromising stance led to fierce political debates, urban riots, and sectional conflict.





Dance and Social Identity in Antebellum America

Styles of dance and attitudes toward them tell us a great deal about cultural and social norms. When nineteenth-century Americans took to partying, their dances—regardless of the class or ethnic identity of the dancers—focused more on individual couples and allowed more room for improvisation and intimacy than the dance forms of the previous century.

1. **William Sidney Mount, *Rustic Dance After a Sleigh Ride*, 1830.** In the eighteenth century, wealthy, fashionable Americans danced the French minuet, a ceremonious and graceful dance in which couples executed prescribed steps while barely touching. Ordinary white folks preferred the country dances brought by their ancestors from Europe, which also involved intricate steps, line formations, and limited physical contact. Mount (1807–1868) was self-taught, lived in rural Long Island, and depicted scenes of everyday life. This painting, replete with amorous pursuits, depicts a traditional contra dance in which the lead couple advances a few steps and then sashays to the back of the line, as another couple takes its place.



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, USA/Bequest of Martha C. Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik/Collection of American Paintings, 1815–65/The Bridgeman Art Library.

2. **“The Polka Fashions,” from *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, 1845.** “A magazine of elegant literature,” according to its publisher, Louis A. Godey, the *Lady’s Book*

was the most widely circulated American periodical prior to the Civil War and an arbiter of good taste among the aspiring middle classes. Each issue contained a sheet of music for the latest dance craze. The *Lady’s Book* cautiously endorsed the waltz, a sensuous dance that required a close embrace, but enthusiastically welcomed its cousin, the polka, whose lively tempo and rapid spinning had a wholesome and joyful quality. Introduced from Bohemia, the polka dominated the ballrooms of America’s upper and middle classes in the 1840s and 1850s.



Private Collection/The Bridgeman Art Library.

3. **George Templeton Strong, diary entry, December 23, 1845.**

Well, last night I spent at Mrs. Mary Jones’s great ball. Very splendid affair — “the Ball of the Season.” . . . Two houses open, standing supper table, “dazzling array of beauty and fashion.” “Polka” for the first time brought under my inspection. It’s a kind of insane Tartar jig performed to disagreeable music of an uncivilized character.

4. Description of juba dancing from Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 1842.

In New York's Five Points slum in 1842, Charles Dickens described a challenge dance featuring William Henry Lane, or Master Juba, a young African American who created juba dancing, a blend of Irish jig and African dance moves.

The corpulent black fiddler, and his friend who plays the tambourine, stamp upon the boarding of the small raised orchestra in which they sit, and play a lively measure. Five or six couples come upon the floor, marshalled by a lively young negro, who is the wit of the assembly, and the greatest dancer known. . . . Instantly the fiddler grins, and goes at it tooth and nail; there is new energy in the tambourine. . . . Single shuffle, double shuffle, cut and cross-cut; snapping his fingers, rolling his eyes, turning in his knees, presenting the backs of his legs in front, spinning about on his toes and heels like nothing but the man's fingers on the tambourine; dancing with two left legs, two right legs, two wooden legs, two wire legs, two spring legs — all sorts of legs and no legs — . . . having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink.

5. Poster advertising Barlow, Wilson, Primrose, and West's "Mammoth Minstrels' Colored Masquerade." *Unlike slavery, minstrelsy survived the Civil War and remained popular until the early twentieth century, when it evolved into vaudeville. Barlow, Wilson, Primrose, and West's Mammoth*

Minstrels toured the United States, Europe, and Australia between 1877 and 1882, thrilling audiences with the clog dances that had devolved out of juba.

Sources: (3) Luther S. Harris, *Around Washington Square: An Illustrated History of Greenwich Village* (Baltimore, 2003), 41; (4) Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Pictures from Italy* (C. Scribner: New York, 1868), 107.

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

1. What do sources 1 and 2 suggest about sexual manners among rural folk and genteel urbanites?
2. What does the polka (sources 3 and 4) reveal about changing cultural practices among the social elite?
3. Compare the juba and minstrelsy dances described above (sources 4 and 5) with the polka and contra dance forms (sources 1 and 2). How were dance forms and popular entertainment evolving? How did those changes relate to broader social developments?
4. The waltz, polka, and juba dances were popular during the Second Great Awakening, when (and long afterward) preachers often complained that "dance is destructive to Christian life." Why might ministers (and priests) take such a view? Would any form of dance be acceptable to them?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Using the material on class, religion, and culture in Chapters 9 and 11, the description of the Quarterons Ball in Chapter 12 (p. 387), and the insights you have gathered by a careful inspection of these sources, write an essay showing how dance and other entertainments reflect or reveal differences among American social groups.



Private Collection/Photo © Barbara Singer/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Black Social Thought: Uplift, Race Equality, and Rebellion

Beginning in the 1790s, leading African Americans in the North advocated a strategy of social uplift, encouraging free blacks to “elevate” themselves through education, temperance, and hard work. By securing “respectability,” they argued, blacks could become the social equals of whites. To promote that goal, black leaders—men such as James Forten, a Philadelphia sailmaker; Prince Hall, a Boston barber; and ministers Hosea Easton and Richard Allen (Chapter 8)—founded an array of churches, schools, and self-help associations. Capping this effort, John Russwurm and Samuel D. Cornish of New York published the first African American newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*, in 1827.

The black quest for respectability elicited a violent response in Boston, Pittsburgh, and other northern cities among whites who refused to accept African Americans as their social equals. “I am Mr. _____’s help,” a white maid informed a British visitor. “I am no sarvant; none but negers are sarvants.” Motivated by racial contempt, white mobs terrorized black communities. The attacks in Cincinnati were so violent and destructive that several hundred African Americans fled to Canada for safety.

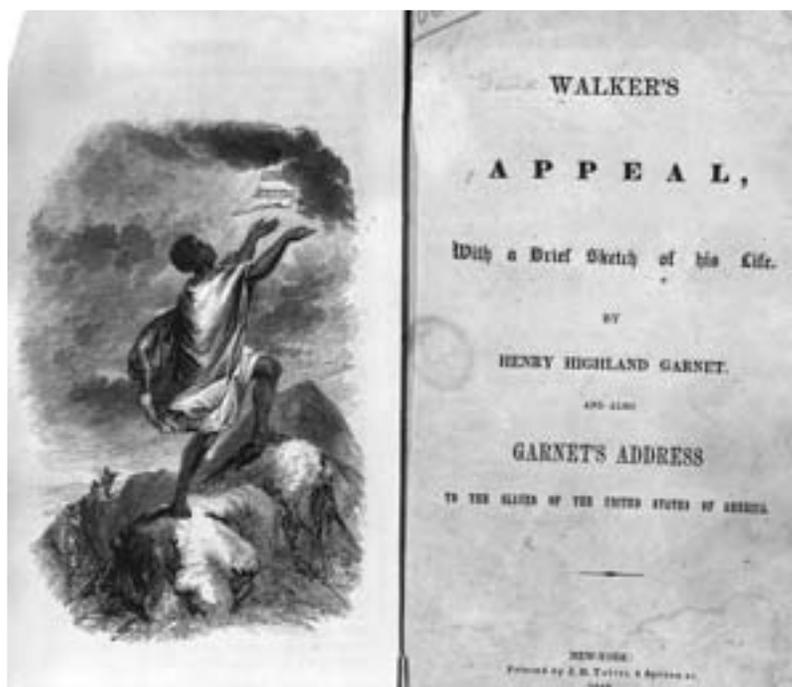
CHANGE OVER TIME

How and why did African American efforts to achieve social equality change between 1800 and 1840?

David Walker’s Appeal Responding to the attacks, David Walker published a stirring pamphlet, *An Appeal . . . to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), protesting black “wretchedness in this Republican Land of Liberty!!!!” Walker was a free black from North Carolina who had moved to Boston, where he sold secondhand clothes and copies of *Freedom’s Journal*. A self-educated author, Walker ridiculed the religious pretensions of slaveholders, justified slave rebellion, and in biblical language warned of a slave revolt if justice were delayed. “We must and shall be free,” he told white Americans. “And woe, woe, will be it to you if we have to obtain our freedom by fighting. . . . Your destruction is at hand, and will be speedily consummated unless you repent.” Walker’s pamphlet quickly went through three printings and, carried by black merchant seamen, reached free African Americans in the South.

In 1830, Walker and other African American activists called a national convention in Philadelphia. The delegates refused to endorse either Walker’s radical call for a slave revolt or the traditional program of uplift for free blacks. Instead, this new generation of activists demanded freedom and “race equality” for those of African descent. They urged free blacks to use every legal means, including petitions and other forms of political protest, to break “the shackles of slavery.”

Nat Turner’s Revolt As Walker threatened violence in Boston, Nat Turner, a slave in Southampton County,



A Call for Revolution

David Walker (1785–1830), who ran a used clothing shop in Boston, spent his hard-earned savings to publish *An Appeal . . . to the Colored Citizens of the World* (1829), a learned and passionate attack on racial slavery. Walker depicted Christ as an avenging “God of justice and of armies” and raised the banner of slave rebellion. A year later, a passerby found Walker in the doorway of his shop, dead from unknown causes. Library of Congress.

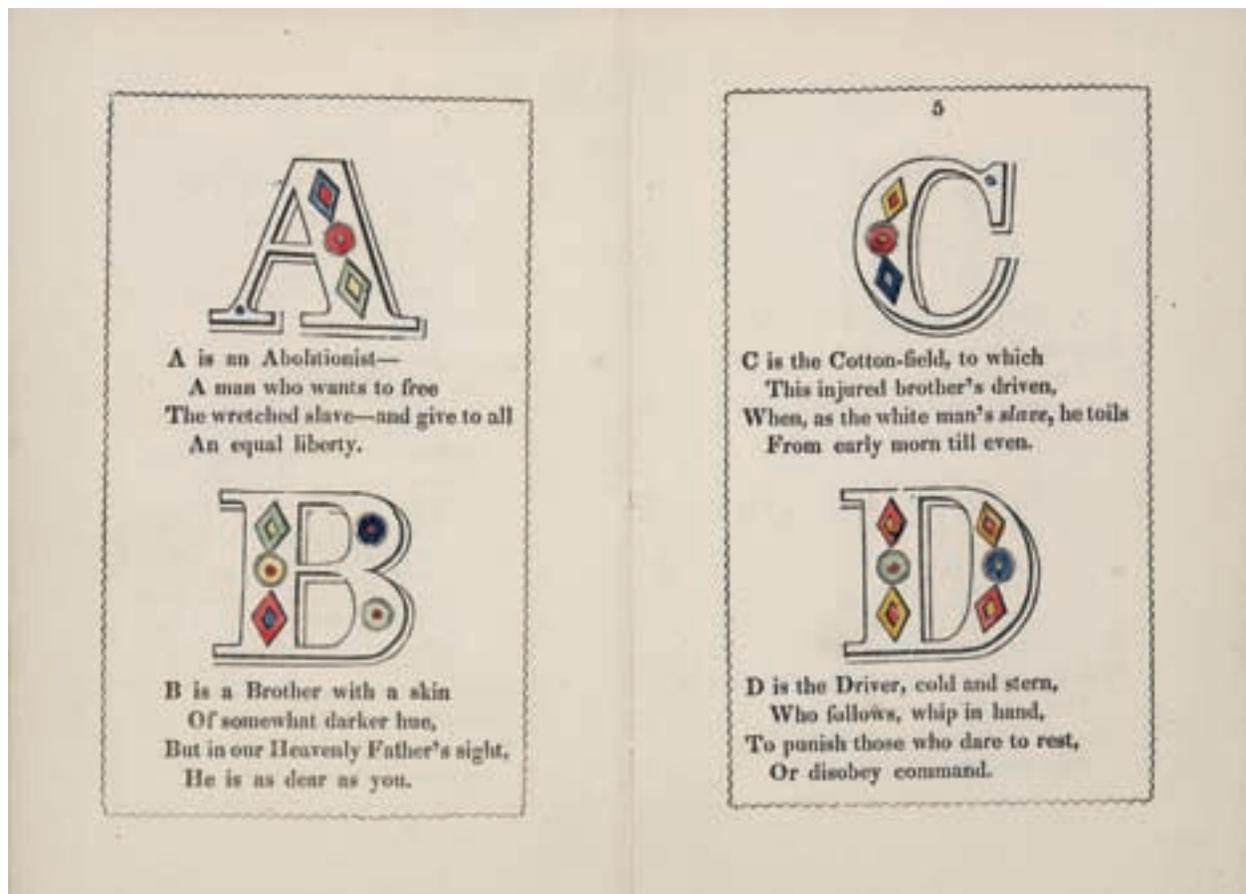
Virginia, staged a bloody revolt—a chronological coincidence that had far-reaching consequences. As a child, Turner had taught himself to read and had hoped for emancipation, but one new master forced him into the fields, and another separated him from his wife. Becoming deeply spiritual, Turner had a religious vision in which “the Spirit” explained that “Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first.” Taking an eclipse of the sun in August 1831 as an omen, Turner and a handful of relatives and friends rose in rebellion and killed at least 55 white men, women, and children. Turner hoped that hundreds of slaves would rally to his cause, but he mustered only 60 men. The white militia quickly dispersed his poorly armed force and took their revenge. One company of cavalry killed 40 blacks in two days and put 15 of their heads on poles to warn

“all those who should undertake a similar plot.” Turner died by hanging, still identifying his mission with that of his Savior. “Was not Christ crucified?” he asked.

Deeply shaken by Turner’s Rebellion, the Virginia assembly debated a law providing for gradual emancipation and colonization abroad. When the bill failed by a vote of 73 to 58, the possibility that southern planters would voluntarily end slavery was gone forever. Instead, the southern states toughened their slave codes, limited black movement, and prohibited anyone from teaching slaves to read. They would meet Walker’s radical *Appeal* with radical measures of their own.

Evangelical Abolitionism

Rejecting Walker’s and Turner’s resort to violence, a cadre of northern evangelical Christians launched a moral crusade to abolish the slave regime. If planters did not allow blacks their God-given status as free



The Anti-Slavery Alphabet

Girding themselves for a long fight, abolitionists conveyed their beliefs to the next generation. This primer, written by Quakers Hannah and Mary Townsend and published in Philadelphia in 1846, taught young children the alphabet by spreading the antislavery message. “A” was for “Abolitionist,” and “B” was for a “Brother,” an enslaved black who, though of a “darker hue,” was considered by God “as dear as you.” The Huntington Library & Art Collections, San Marino, CA.

moral agents, these radical Christians warned, they faced eternal damnation at the hands of a just God.

William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Weld, and Angelina and Sarah Grimké The most determined abolitionist was William Lloyd Garrison (1805–1879). A Massachusetts-born printer, Garrison had worked during the 1820s in Baltimore on an antislavery newspaper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. In 1830, Garrison went to jail, convicted of libeling a New England merchant engaged in the domestic slave trade. In 1831, Garrison moved to Boston, where he immediately started his own weekly, *The Liberator* (1831–1865), and founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society.

Influenced by a bold pamphlet, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition* (1824), by an English Quaker, Elizabeth Coltman Heyrick, Garrison demanded immediate abolition without compensation to slaveholders. “I will not retreat a single inch,” he declared, “AND I WILL BE HEARD.” Garrison accused the American Colonization Society (Chapter 8) of perpetuating slavery and assailed the U.S. Constitution as “a covenant with death and an agreement with Hell” because it implicitly accepted racial bondage.

In 1833, Garrison, Theodore Weld, and sixty other religious abolitionists, black and white, established the American Anti-Slavery Society. The society won financial

support from Arthur and Lewis Tappan, wealthy silk merchants in New York City. Women abolitionists established separate groups, including the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, founded by Lucretia Mott in 1833, and the Anti-Slavery Conventions of American Women, a network of local societies. The women

raised money for *The Liberator* and carried the movement to the farm villages and small towns of the Midwest, where they distributed abolitionist literature and collected thousands of signatures on antislavery petitions.

Abolitionist leaders launched a three-pronged plan of attack. To win the support of religious Americans, Weld published *The Bible Against Slavery* (1837), which used passages from Christianity’s holiest book to discredit slavery. Two years later, Weld teamed up with the Grimké sisters—Angelina, whom he married, and Sarah. The Grimkés had left their father’s plantation in South Carolina, converted to Quakerism, and taken up the abolitionist cause in Philadelphia. In *American*

Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses (1839), Weld and the Grimkés addressed a simple question: “What is the actual condition of the slaves in the United States?” Using reports from southern newspapers and firsthand testimony, they presented incriminating evidence of the inherent violence of slavery. Angelina Grimké told of a treadmill that South Carolina slave owners used for punishment: “One poor girl, [who was] sent there to be flogged, and who was accordingly stripped naked and whipped, showed me the deep gashes on her back—I might have laid my whole finger in them—large pieces of flesh had actually been cut out by the torturing lash.” Filled with such images of pain and suffering, the book sold more than 100,000 copies in a single year.

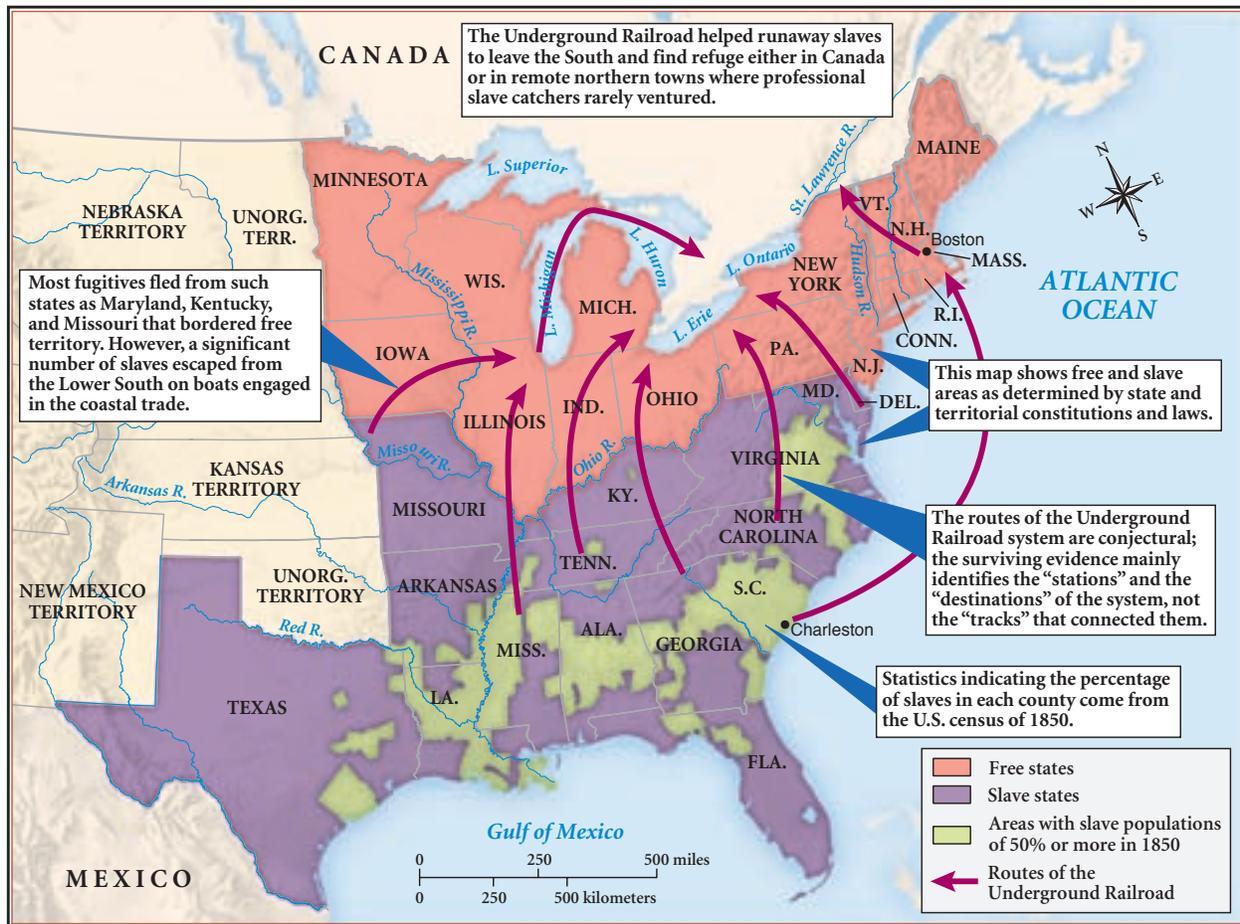
The American Anti-Slavery Society To spread their message, the abolitionists turned to mass communication. Using new steam-powered presses to print a million pamphlets, the American Anti-Slavery Society carried out a “great postal campaign” in 1835, flooding the nation, including the South, with its literature.

The abolitionists’ second tactic was to aid fugitive slaves. They provided lodging and jobs for escaped blacks in free states and created the **Underground Railroad**, an informal network of whites and free blacks in Richmond, Charleston, and other southern towns that assisted fugitives (Map 11.3). In Baltimore, a free African American sailor loaned his identification papers to future abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who used them to escape to New York. Harriet Tubman and other runaways risked re-enslavement or death by returning repeatedly to the South to help others escape. “I should fight for . . . liberty as long as my strength lasted,” Tubman explained, “and when the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me.” Thanks to the Railroad, about one thousand African Americans reached freedom in the North each year.

There, they faced an uncertain future because most whites continued to reject civic or social equality for African Americans. Voters in six northern and midwestern states adopted constitutional amendments that denied or limited the franchise for free blacks. “We want no masters,” declared a New York artisan, “and least of all no negro masters.” Moreover, the Fugitive Slave Law (1793) allowed owners and their hired slave catchers to seize suspected runaways and return them to bondage. To thwart these efforts, white abolitionists and free blacks formed mobs that attacked slave catchers, released their captives, and often spirited them off to British-ruled Canada, which refused to extradite fugitive slaves.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

How did the ideology and tactics of the Garrisonian abolitionists differ from those of the antislavery movements discussed in Chapters 6 and 8?

**MAP 11.3****The Underground Railroad in the 1850s**

Before 1840, most African Americans who fled slavery did so on their own or with the help of family and friends. Thereafter, they could count on support from members of the Underground Railroad. Provided with food and directions by free blacks in the South, fugitive slaves crossed into free states. There, they received protection and shelter from abolitionists who arranged for their transportation to Canada or to “safe” American cities and towns.

A political campaign was the final element of the abolitionists’ program. Between 1835 and 1838, the American Anti-Slavery Society bombarded Congress with petitions containing nearly 500,000 signatures. They demanded the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, an end to the interstate slave trade, and a ban on admission of new slave states.

Thousands of deeply religious farmers and small-town proprietors supported these efforts. The number of local abolitionist societies grew from two hundred in 1835 to two thousand by 1840, with nearly 200,000 members, including many transcendentalists. Emerson condemned Americans for supporting slavery, and Thoreau, viewing the Mexican War as a naked scheme to extend slavery, refused to pay taxes and submitted to arrest. In 1848, he published “Resistance to Civil

Government,” an essay urging individuals to follow a higher moral law. The black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet went further; his *Address to the Slaves of the United States of America* (1841) called for “Liberty or Death” and urged slave “Resistance! Resistance! Resistance!”

Opposition and Internal Conflict

Still, abolitionists remained a minority, even among churchgoers. Perhaps 10 percent of northerners and midwesterners strongly supported the movement, and only another 20 percent were sympathetic to its goals.

Attacks on Abolitionism Slavery’s proponents were more numerous and equally aggressive. The



“The Negro in His Own Country” Versus “The Negro in America”

Slave owners and their intellectual and religious allies responded to abolitionists’ attacks by defending slavery as a “positive good.” These two images, from Josiah Priest’s *Bible Defence of Slavery* (1852), support the argument that enslavement saved Africans from a savage, war-ridden life (note the skeleton in the top image) and exposed them to the civilized world. Such publications achieved wide circulation and popularity among the planter classes. Chicago History Museum.



abolitionists’ agitation, ministers warned, risked “embroiling neighborhoods and families—setting friend against friend, overthrowing churches and institutions of learning, embittering one portion of the land against the other.” Wealthy men feared that the attack on slave property might become an assault on all prop-

UNDERSTAND POINTS OF VIEW

Which groups of Americans opposed the abolitionists, and why did they do so?

erty rights, conservative clergymen condemned the public roles assumed by abolitionist women, and northern wage earners feared that freed blacks would work for lower wages and take their jobs. Underlining the national “reach” of slavery, northern merchants and textile manufacturers supported the southern planters who supplied them with cotton, as did hog farmers in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois and pork packers in Cincinnati and

Chicago who profited from lucrative sales to slave plantations. Finally, whites almost universally opposed “**amalgamation**,” the racial mixing and intermarriage that Garrison seemed to support by holding meetings of blacks and whites of both sexes.

Racial fears and hatreds led to violent mob actions. White workers in northern towns laid waste to taverns and brothels where blacks and whites mixed, and they vandalized “respectable” African American churches, temperance halls, and orphanages. In 1833, a mob of 1,500 New Yorkers stormed a church in search of Garrison and Arthur Tappan. Another white mob swept through Philadelphia’s African American neighborhoods, clubbing and stoning residents and destroying homes and churches. In 1835, “gentlemen of property and standing”—lawyers, merchants, and bankers—broke up an abolitionist convention in Utica, New

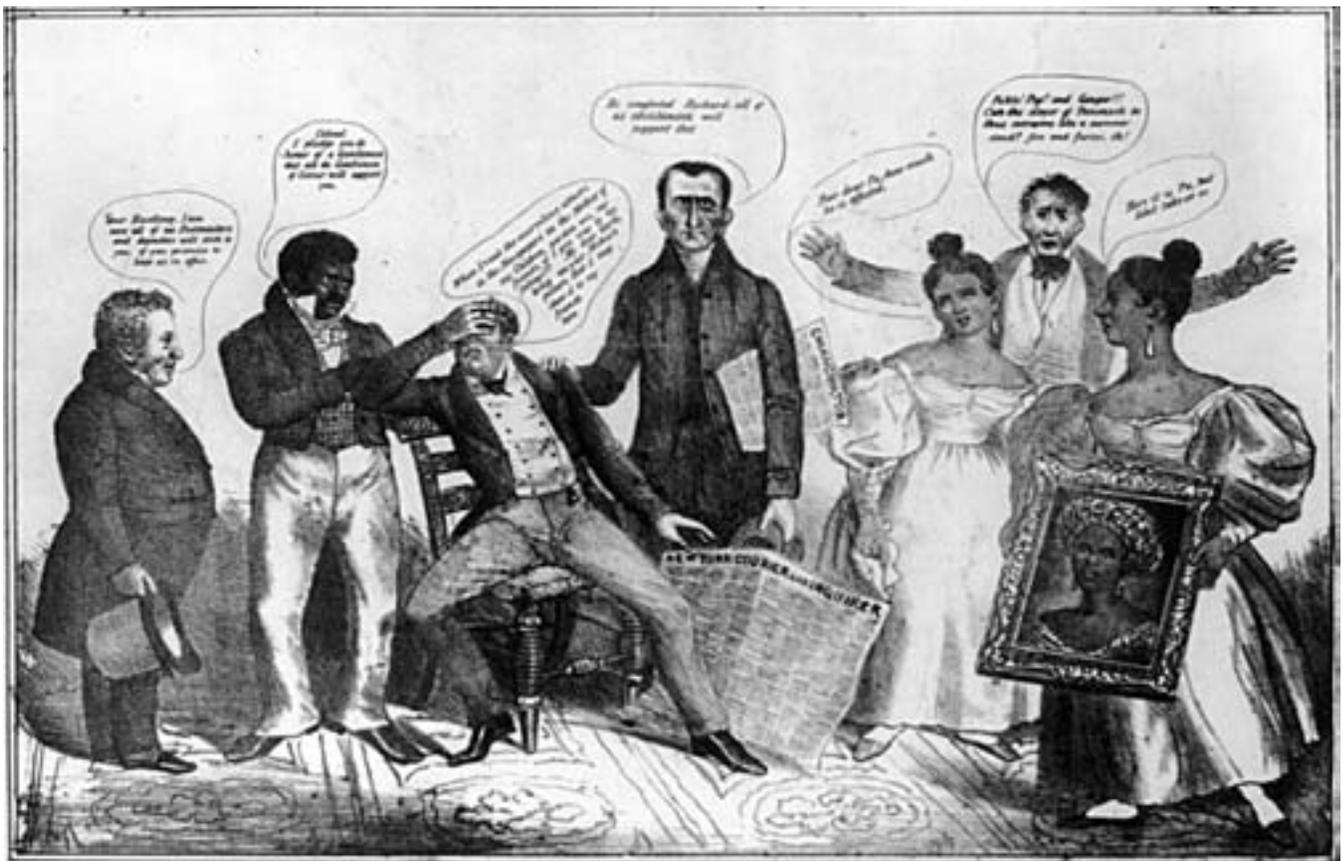
York. Two years later, a mob in Alton, Illinois, shot and killed Elijah P. Lovejoy, editor of the abolitionist *Alton Observer*. By pressing for emancipation and equality, the abolitionists had revealed the extent of racial prejudice and had heightened race consciousness, as both whites and blacks identified across class lines with members of their own race.

Racial solidarity was especially strong in the South, where whites banned abolitionists. The Georgia legislature offered a \$5,000 reward for kidnapping Garrison and bringing him to the South to be tried (or lynched) for inciting rebellion. In Nashville, vigilantes whipped a northern college student for distributing abolitionist pamphlets; in Charleston, a mob attacked the post office and destroyed sacks of abolitionist mail. After

1835, southern postmasters simply refused to deliver mail suspected to be of abolitionist origin.

Politicians joined the fray. President Andrew Jackson, a longtime slave owner, asked Congress in 1835 to restrict the use of the mails by abolitionist groups. Congress refused, but in 1836, the House of Representatives adopted the so-called **gag rule**. Under this informal agreement, which remained in force until 1844, the House automatically tabled antislavery petitions, keeping the explosive issue of slavery off the congressional stage.

Internal Divisions Assailed by racists from the outside, evangelical abolitionists fought among themselves over gender issues. Many antislavery clergymen



AN AFFECTING SCENE IN KENTUCKY.

The Complexities of Race

This cartoon takes aim at Richard Mentor Johnson of Kentucky, the distraught man being comforted by abolitionists Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. A longtime congressman and senator, Johnson was the Democrats' vice-presidential candidate in 1836. Although the party stood for the South and slavery—and condemned mixed-race unions—Johnson lived openly with an African American woman, Julia Chinn, whose daughters hold her portrait. Future Supreme Court justice John Catron noted with disgust that Johnson tried “to force his daughters into society” and that they and their mother “claimed equality.” Racial prejudice cost Johnson some votes, but he won a plurality in the electoral college, and, on a party-line vote, Democrats in the Senate elected him Martin Van Buren’s vice president. Library of Congress.

opposed an activist role for women, but Garrison had broadened his reform agenda to include pacifism, the abolition of prisons, and women's rights: "Our object is universal emancipation, to redeem women as well as men from a servile to an equal condition." In 1840, Garrison's demand that the American Anti-Slavery Society support women's rights split the abolitionist movement. Abby Kelley, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, among others, remained with Garrison in the American Anti-Slavery Society and assailed both the institutions that bound blacks and the customs that constrained free women.

Garrison's opponents founded a new organization, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, which turned to politics. Its members mobilized their churches to oppose racial bondage and organized the Liberty Party, the first antislavery political party. In 1840, the new party nominated James G. Birney, a former Alabama slave owner, for president. Birney and the Liberty Party argued that the Constitution did not recognize slavery and, consequently, that slaves became free when they entered areas of federal authority, such as the District of Columbia and the national territories. However, Birney won few votes, and the future of political abolitionism appeared dim.

Popular violence in the North, government-aided suppression in the South, and internal schisms stunned the abolitionist movement. By melding the energies and ideas of evangelical Protestants, moral reformers, and transcendentalists, it had raised the banner of anti-slavery to new heights, only to face a hostile backlash. "When we first unfurled the banner of *The Liberator*,"

Garrison admitted, "it did not occur to us that nearly every religious sect, and every political party would side with the oppressor."

The Women's Rights Movement

The prominence of women among the abolitionists reflected a broad shift in American culture. By joining religious revivals and reform movements, women entered public life. Their activism caused many gender issues — sexual behavior, marriage, family authority — to become subjects of debate. The debate entered a new phase in 1848, when some reformers focused on women's rights and demanded complete equality with men.

Origins of the Women's Movement

"Don't be afraid, not afraid, fight Satan; stand up for Christ; don't be afraid." So spoke Mary Walker Ostram on her deathbed in 1859. Her religious convictions were as firm at the age of fifty-eight as they had been in 1816, when she joined the first Sunday school in Utica, New York. Married to a lawyer-politician and childless, Ostram had devoted her life to evangelical Presbyterianism and its program of benevolent social reform. At her funeral, minister Philemon Fowler celebrated Ostram as a "living fountain" of faith, an exemplar of "Women's Sphere of Influence" in the world.



A Nineteenth-Century Middle-Class Family

Whereas colonial-era families were large, often with six to eight children, nineteenth-century middle-class couples, such as Azariah and Eliza Caverly, pictured here in 1836 by Joseph H. Davis (1811–1865), consciously limited their fertility, treated their spouses with affection, and carefully supervised the education of their children. The Caverlys' daughter fingers a Bible, suggesting her future moral responsibilities as a mother, while their son holds a square ruler, either indicating Azariah's profession or foreshadowing the son's career as a prosperous architect or engineer. Fenimore Art Museum, Cooperstown, New York.

Although Reverend Fowler heaped praise on Ostram, he rejected a public presence for women. Like men of the Revolutionary era, Fowler thought women should limit their political role to that of “republican mother,” instructing “their sons in the principles of liberty and government.” Women inhabited a “**separate sphere**” of domestic life, he said, and had no place in “the markets of trade, the scenes of politics and popular agitation, the courts of justice and the halls of legislation. Home is her peculiar sphere.”

However, Ostram and many other middle-class women were redefining the notion of the domestic sphere by becoming active in their churches. Their spiritual activism bolstered their authority within the household and gave them new influence over many areas of family life, including the timing of pregnancies. Publications such as *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, a popular monthly periodical, and Catharine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841) taught women how to make their homes examples of middle-class efficiency and domesticity. Women in propertied farm families were equally vigilant and carried domestic issues into the public sphere. To protect their homes and husbands from alcoholic excess, they joined the Independent Order of Good Templars, a temperance group which made women full members (American Voices, p. 368).

Moral Reform Some religious women developed a sharp consciousness of gender and became public actors. In 1834, middle-class women in New York City founded the Female Moral Reform Society and elected Lydia Finney, the wife of revivalist Charles Grandison Finney, as its president. The society tried to curb prostitution and to protect single women from moral corruption. Rejecting the sexual double standard, its members demanded chaste behavior by men. By 1840, the Female Moral Reform Society had blossomed into a national association, with 555 chapters and 40,000 members throughout the North and Midwest. Employing only women as agents, the society provided moral guidance for young women who were working as factory operatives, seamstresses, or servants. Society members visited brothels, where they sang hymns, offered prayers, searched for runaway girls, and noted the names of clients. They also founded homes of refuge for prostitutes and won the passage of laws in Massachusetts and New York that made seduction a crime.

Improving Prisons, Creating Asylums, Expanding Education Other women set out to improve public institutions, and Dorothea Dix (1801–1887) was their model. Dix’s paternal grandparents were prominent Bostonians, but her father, a Methodist minister, ended

up an impoverished alcoholic. Emotionally abused as a child, Dix grew into a compassionate young woman with a strong sense of moral purpose. She used money from her grandparents to set up charity schools to “rescue some of America’s miserable children from vice” and became a successful author. By 1832, she had published seven books, including *Conversations on Common Things* (1824), an enormously successful treatise on natural science and moral improvement.

In 1841, Dix took up a new cause. Discovering that insane women were jailed alongside male criminals, she persuaded Massachusetts lawmakers to enlarge the state hospital to house indigent mental patients. Exhilarated by that success, Dix began a national movement to establish state asylums for the mentally ill. By 1854, she had traveled more than 30,000 miles and had visited eighteen state penitentiaries, three hundred county jails, and more than five hundred almshouses and hospitals. Dix’s reports and agitation prompted many states to improve their prisons and public hospitals.

Both as reformers and teachers, other northern women transformed public education. From Maine to Wisconsin, women vigorously supported the movement led by Horace Mann to increase elementary schooling and improve the quality of instruction. As secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education from 1837 to 1848, Mann lengthened the school year; established teaching standards in reading, writing, and arithmetic; and recruited well-educated women as teachers. The intellectual leader of the new women educators was Catharine Beecher, who founded academies for young women in Hartford, Connecticut, and Cincinnati, Ohio. In widely read publications, Beecher argued that “energetic and benevolent women” were better qualified than men were to impart moral and intellectual instruction to the young. By the 1850s, most teachers were women, both because local school boards heeded Beecher’s arguments and because they could hire women at lower salaries than men. As secular educators as well as moral reformers, women were now part of American public life.

From Black Rights to Women’s Rights

As women addressed controversial issues such as moral reform and emancipation, they faced censure over their public presence. Offended by this criticism, which revealed their own social and legal inferiority, some women sought full freedom for their sex.

TRACE CHANGE OVER TIME

Using the material on women’s lives in Chapters 4, 8, and 11, analyze and explain the changing nature of their “private” and “public” lives.



Saving the Nation from Drink

The temperance crusade was the most successful antebellum reform movement. It mobilized more than a million supporters in all sections of the nation and significantly lowered the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Nonetheless, like other reform efforts, the antidrinking crusade divided over questions of strategy and tactics. The following passages, taken from the writings of leading temperance advocates, show that some reformers favored legal regulation while others preferred persuasion and voluntary abstinence.

Lyman Beecher

“Intemperance Is the Sin of Our Land”

A leading Protestant minister and spokesman for the Benevolent Empire, Lyman Beecher regarded drunkenness as a sin. His *Six Sermons on . . . Intemperance* (1829) condemned the recklessness of working-class drunkards and called on responsible members of the middle class to lead the way to a temperate society.

Intemperance is the sin of our land, and, with our boundless prosperity, is coming in upon us like a flood; and if anything shall defeat the hopes of the world, which hang upon our experiment of civil liberty, it is that river of fire. . . .

In every city and town the poor-tax, created chiefly by intemperance, is [increasing the burden on taxpaying citizens]. . . . The frequency of going upon the town [relying on public welfare] has taken away the reluctance of pride, and destroyed the motives to providence which the fear of poverty and suffering once supplied. The prospect of a destitute old age, or of a suffering family, no longer troubles the vicious portion of our community. They drink up their daily earnings, and bless God for the poor-house, and begin to look upon it as, of right, the drunkard’s home. . . . Every intemperate and idle man, whom you behold tottering about the streets and steeping himself at the stores, regards your houses and lands as pledged to take care of him, puts his hands deep, annually, into your pockets. . . .

What then is this universal, natural, and national remedy for intemperance? IT IS THE BANISHMENT OF ARDENT SPIRITS FROM THE LIST OF LAWFUL ARTICLES OF COMMERCE, BY A CORRECT AND EFFICIENT PUBLIC SENTIMENT; SUCH AS HAS TURNED SLAVERY OUT OF HALF OUR LAND, AND WILL YET EXPEL IT FROM THE WORLD.

We are not therefore to come down in wrath upon the distillers, and importers, and venders of ardent spirits. None of us are enough without sin to cast the first stone. . . . It is the buyers who have created the

demand for ardent spirits, and made distillation and importation a gainful traffic. . . . Let the temperate cease to buy—and the demand for ardent spirits will fall in the market three fourths, and ultimately will fail wholly. . . .

This however cannot be done effectually so long as the traffic in ardent spirits is regarded as lawful, and is patronized by men of reputation and moral worth in every part of the land. Like slavery, it must be regarded as sinful, impolitic, and dishonorable. That no measures will avail short of rendering ardent spirits a contraband of trade, is nearly self-evident.

Abraham Lincoln

“A New Class of Champions”

In Baltimore in 1840, a group of reformed alcoholics formed the Washington Temperance Society, which turned the antidrinking movement in a new direction. By talking publicly about their personal experiences of alcoholic decline and spiritual recovery, they inspired thousands to “sign the pledge” of total abstinence. (Its philosophy exists today in the organization Alcoholics Anonymous.) In 1842, Lincoln, an ambitious lawyer and Illinois legislator who did not drink, praised such “moral suasion” in an address to the Washingtonians of Springfield, Illinois.

Although the temperance cause has been in progress for near twenty years, it is apparent to all that it is just now being crowned with a degree of success hitherto unparalleled. The list of its friends is daily swelled by the additions of fifties, of hundreds, and of thousands.

The warfare heretofore waged against the demon intemperance has somehow or other been erroneous. . . . [Its] champions for the most part have been preachers [such as Beecher], lawyers, and hired agents. Between these and the mass of mankind there is a want of approachability. . . .

But when one who has long been known as a victim of intemperance bursts the fetters that have bound him,

and appears before his neighbors “clothed and in his right mind,” . . . to tell of the miseries once endured, now to be endured no more . . . there is a logic and an eloquence in it that few with human feelings can resist. . . .

In my judgment, it is to the battles of this new class of champions that our late success is greatly, perhaps chiefly, owing. . . . [Previously,] too much denunciation against dram-sellers and dram-drinkers was indulged in. This I think was both impolitic and unjust. . . . When the dram-seller and drinker were incessantly [condemned] . . . as moral pestilences . . . they were slow [to] . . . join the ranks of their denouncers in a hue and cry against themselves.

By the Washingtonians this system of consigning the habitual drunkard to hopeless ruin is repudiated. . . . They teach hope to all — despair to none. As applying to their cause, they deny the doctrine of unpardonable sin. . . .

If the relative grandeur of revolutions shall be estimated by the great amount of human misery they alleviate, and the small amount they inflict, then indeed will this be the grandest the world shall ever have seen. Of our political revolution of '76 we are all justly proud. It has given us a degree of political freedom far exceeding that of any other nation of the earth. . . . But, with all these glorious results, past, present, and to come, [this freedom] had its evils too. It [was abused by drunken husbands and thereby] breathed forth famine, swam in blood, and rode in fire; and long, long after, the orphan's cry and the widow's wail continued to break the sad silence that ensued. These were the price, the inevitable price, paid for the blessings it brought. . . .

Turn now to the temperance revolution. In it we shall find a stronger bondage broken, a viler slavery manumitted, a greater tyrant deposed; in it, more of want supplied, more disease healed, more sorrow assuaged. By it no orphans starving, no widows weeping.

Glorious consummation! Hail, fall of fury! Reign of reason, all hail!

American Temperance Magazine

“You Shall Not Sell”

In 1851, the Maine legislature passed a statute prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages in the state. The Maine Supreme Court upheld the statute, arguing that the legislature had the “right to regulate by law the sale of any article, the use of which would be detrimental of

the morals of the people.” Subsequently, the *American Temperance Magazine* became a strong advocate of legal prohibition and by 1856 had won passage of “Maine Laws” in twelve other states (Chapter 9).

This is a utilitarian age. The speculative has in all things yielded to the practical. Words are mere noise unless they are things [and result in action].

In this sense, moral suasion is moral balderdash. “Words, my lord, words” . . . are a delusion. . . . The drunkard's mental and physical condition pronounces them an absurdity. He is ever in one or other extreme — under the excitement of drink, or in a state of morbid collapse. . . . Reason with a man when all reason has fled, and it is doubtful whether he or you is the greater fool. . . . Moral suasion! Bah!

Place this man we have been describing out of the reach of temptation. He will have time to ponder. His mind and frame recover their native vigor. The public-house does not beset his path. . . . Thus, and thus only, will reformation and temperance be secured. And how is this accomplished? Never except through the instrumentality of the law. If it were possible to reason the drunkard into sobriety, it would not be possible to make the rum-seller forego his filthy gains. Try your moral suasion on him. . . . The only logic he will comprehend, is some such ordinance as this, coming to him in the shape and with the voice of law — you shall not sell.

Source: David Brion Davis, *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 395–398, 403–409.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What does Lincoln's address suggest about his general political philosophy?
2. Compare Beecher's position to Lincoln's. In what ways are they similar? How are they different? Then compare Beecher's solution to that of the *American Temperance Magazine*. Are they the same? Whose view of personal responsibility versus institutional coercion is closest to the position of Orestes Brownson (Chapter 9, pp. 308–309)?
3. In which of these selections do you see the influence of the Second Great Awakening, especially the evangelical message of Charles Grandison Finney? Where do you see the influence of the Market Revolution and the cultural values of the rising middle class? What positions do these selections take with respect to the appropriate role of government in regulating morality and personal behavior?

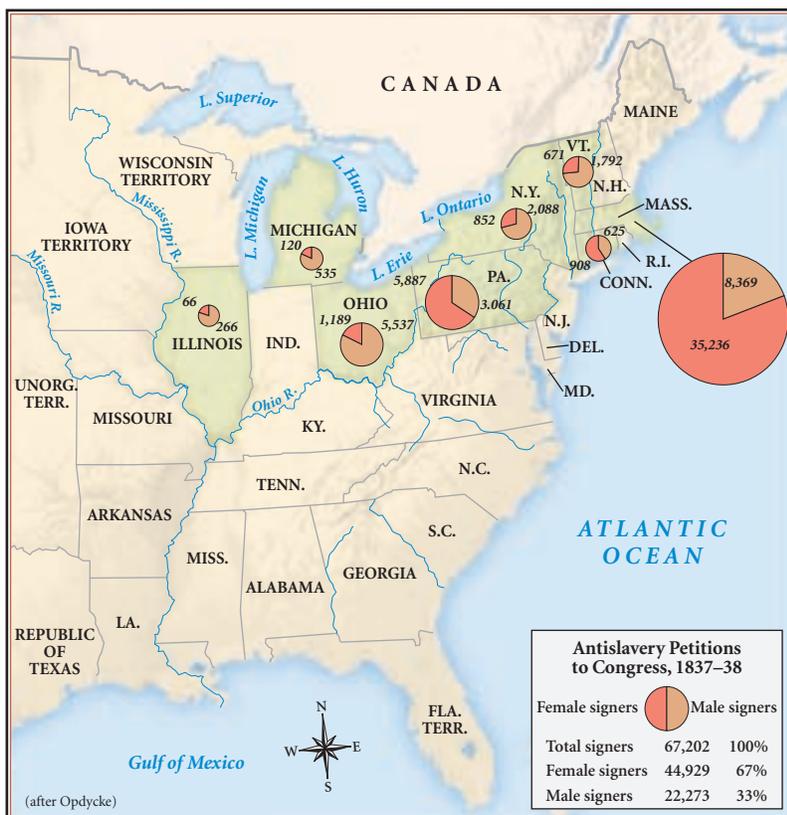
Abolitionist Women Women were central to the antislavery movement because they understood the special horrors of slavery for women. In her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, black abolitionist Harriet Jacobs described forced sexual intercourse with her white owner. “I cannot tell how much I suffered in the presence of these wrongs,” she wrote. According to Jacobs and other enslaved women, such sexual assaults incited additional cruelty by their owners’ wives, who were enraged by their husbands’ promiscuity. In her best-selling novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Harriet Beecher Stowe pinpointed the sexual abuse of women as a profound moral failing of the slave regime.

As Garrisonian women attacked slavery, they frequently violated social taboos by speaking to mixed audiences of men and women. Maria W. Stewart, an African American, spoke to mixed crowds in Boston in the early 1830s. As abolitionism blossomed, scores of white women delivered lectures condemning slavery, and thousands more made home “visitations” to win converts to their cause (Map 11.4). When Congregationalist clergymen in New England assailed Angelina and Sarah Grimké for such activism in a Pastoral Letter in 1837, Sarah Grimké turned to the Bible for justification: “The Lord Jesus defines the duties of his

followers in his Sermon on the Mount . . . without any reference to sex or condition,” she replied: “Men and women were CREATED EQUAL; both are moral and accountable beings and whatever is right for man to do, is right for woman.” In a pamphlet debate with Catharine Beecher (who believed that women should exercise authority primarily as wives, mothers, and schoolteachers), Angelina Grimké pushed the argument beyond religion by invoking Enlightenment principles to claim equal civic rights:

It is a woman’s right to have a voice in all the laws and regulations by which she is governed, whether in Church or State. . . . The present arrangements of society on these points are a violation of human rights, a rank usurpation of power, a violent seizure and confiscation of what is sacredly and inalienably hers.

By 1840, female abolitionists were asserting that traditional gender roles resulted in the **domestic slavery** of women. “How can we endure our present marriage relations,” asked Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “[which give a woman] no charter of rights, no individuality of her own?” As reformer Ernestine Rose put it: “The radical difficulty . . . is that women are considered as belonging to men.” Having acquired a public voice and



political skills in the crusade for African American freedom, thousands of northern women now advocated greater rights for themselves.

Seneca Falls and Beyond During the 1840s, women’s rights activists devised a pragmatic program of reform. Unlike radical utopians, they did not challenge the institution of marriage or the conventional division of labor within the family. Instead, they tried to strengthen the legal rights of married women by seeking legislation that permitted them to own property (America Compared, p. 372). This initiative won crucial support from affluent men, who feared bankruptcy in the volatile market economy and wanted to put



Crusading Reformers

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) and Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906) were a dynamic duo. Stanton, the well-educated daughter of a prominent New York judge, was an early abolitionist and the mother of seven children. Anthony came from a Quaker family and became a teacher and a temperance activist. Meeting in 1851, Stanton and Anthony became friends and co-organizers. From 1854 to 1860, they led a successful struggle to expand New York’s Married Women’s Property Law of 1848. During the Civil War, they formed the Women’s Loyal National League, which helped win passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, ending slavery. In 1866, they joined the American Equal Rights Association, which demanded the vote for women and African Americans. © Bettmann/Corbis.

some family assets in their wives’ names. Fathers also desired their married daughters to have property rights to protect them (and their paternal inheritances) from financially irresponsible husbands. Such motives prompted legislatures in three states—Mississippi, Maine, and Massachusetts—to enact **married women’s property laws** between 1839 and 1845. Then, women activists in New York won a comprehensive statute that became the model for fourteen other states. The New York statute of 1848 gave women full legal control over the property they brought to a marriage.

Also in 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized a gathering of women’s rights activists in the small New York town of Seneca Falls. Seventy women and thirty men attended the **Seneca Falls Convention**, which issued a rousing manifesto extending to women the egalitarian republican ideology of the Declaration of Independence. “All men and women are created equal,” the Declaration of Sentiments declared, “[yet] the history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman [and] the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” To persuade Americans to right this long-standing wrong, the activists resolved to “employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press on our behalf.” By staking out claims for equality for women in public life, the Seneca Falls reformers repudiated both the natural inferiority of women and the ideology of separate spheres.

Most men dismissed the Seneca Falls declaration as nonsense, and many women also rejected the activists and their message. In her diary, one small-town mother and housewife lashed out at the female reformer who “aping mannish manners . . . wears absurd and barbarous attire, who talks of her wrongs in harsh tone, who struts and strides, and thinks that she proves herself superior to the rest of her sex.”

Still, the women’s rights movement grew in strength and purpose. In 1850, delegates to the first national women’s rights convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, hammered out a program of action. The women called on churches to eliminate notions of female inferiority in their theology. Addressing state legislatures, they proposed laws to allow married women to institute lawsuits, testify in court, and assume custody of their children in the event of divorce or a husband’s death. Finally, they began a concerted campaign to win the vote for women. As delegates to the 1851 convention

PLACE EVENTS IN CONTEXT

What was the relationship between the abolitionist and women’s rights movements?



Women's Rights in France and the United States, 1848

During the political uprising in France in 1848, Pauline Roland and Jeanne Deroine unsuccessfully sought voting rights and an equal civil status for French women. However, the two women won election to the Central Committee of the Associative Unions, the umbrella organization of French trade unions. Imprisoned for their activism, they dispatched a letter to the Second Woman's Rights Convention, which met in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1851.

When their letter was read to the Convention, Ernestine Potowsky Rose (1810–1892) offered the following response, which indicated the different perspective and political strategy of the American women's movement.

Pauline Roland and Jeanne Deroine Letter to the Convention of the Women of America

Dear Sisters: Your courageous declaration of Woman's Rights has resounded even to our prison and has filled our souls with inexpressible joy. In France the [conservative] reaction [to the uprising of 1848] has suppressed the cry of liberty of the women of the future. . . . The Assembly kept silence in regard to the right of one half of humanity. . . . No mention was made of the right of woman in a Constitution framed in the name of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. . . .

[However,] the right of woman has been recognized by the laborers and they have consecrated that right by the election of those who had claimed it in vain for both sexes. . . . It is by labor; it is by entering resolutely into the ranks of the working people that women will conquer the civil and political equality on which depends the happiness of the world. . . . Sisters of America! your socialist sisters of France are united with you in the vindication of the right of woman to civil and political equality. . . . [Only] by the union of the working classes of both sexes [can we achieve] . . . the civil and political equality of woman.

Ernestine Rose Speech to the Second Woman's Rights Convention

After having heard the letter read from our poor incarcerated sisters of France, well might we exclaim, Alas poor France! Where is thy glory?

. . . But need we wonder that France, governed as she is by Russian and Austrian despotism, does not recognize . . . the Rights of Woman, when even here, in this far-famed land of freedom . . . woman, the mockingly so-called "better half" of man, has yet to plead for her rights. . . . In the laws of the land, she has no rights; in government she has no voice. . . . From the cradle to the grave she is subject to the power and control of man. Father, guardian, or husband, one conveys her like some piece of merchandise over to the other.

. . . Carry out the republican principle of universal suffrage, or strike it from your banners and substitute "Freedom and Power to one half of society, and Submission and Slavery to the other." Give women the elective franchise. Let married women have the same right to property that their husbands have. . . .

There is no reason against woman's elevation, but . . . prejudices. The main cause is a pernicious falsehood propagated against her being, namely that she is inferior by her nature. Inferior in what? What has man ever done that woman, under the same advantages could not do?

Source: *History of Woman Suffrage*, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1887), 1: 234–242.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What strategy to achieve women's rights do Roland and Deroine advocate? What strategy can be detected in Rose's remarks? How are their perspectives similar to, or different from, one another?
2. What does this French-American comparison (and your reading in Chapter 11) suggest about the nature and values of the American women's rights movement?

proclaimed, suffrage was "the corner-stone of this enterprise, since we do not seek to protect woman, but rather to place her in a position to protect herself."

The activists' legislative campaign required talented organizers and lobbyists. The most prominent political

operative was Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), a Quaker who had acquired political skills in the temperance and antislavery movements. Those experiences, Anthony reflected, taught her "the great evil of woman's utter dependence on man." Joining the

women's rights movement, she worked closely with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Anthony created an activist network of political "captains," all women, who relentlessly lobbied state legislatures. In 1860, her efforts secured a New York law granting women the right to control their own wages (which fathers or husbands had previously managed); to own property acquired by "trade, business, labors, or services"; and, if widowed, to assume sole guardianship of their children. Genuine individualism for women, the dream of transcendentalist Margaret Fuller, had advanced a tiny step closer to reality. In such small and much larger ways, the mid-century reform movements had altered the character of American culture.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we examined four major cultural movements of the mid-nineteenth century—transcendentalist reform, communalism, abolitionism, and women's rights—as well as the new popular culture in New York City. Our discussion of the transcendentalists highlighted the influence of Ralph Waldo Emerson

on the great literary figures of the era and linked transcendentalism to the rise of individualism and the character of middle-class American culture.

Our analysis of communal experiments probed their members' efforts to devise new rules for sexual behavior, gender relationships, and property ownership. We saw that successful communal experiments, such as Mormonism, required a charismatic leader or a religious foundation and endured if they developed strong, even authoritarian, institutions.

We also traced the personal and ideological factors that linked the abolitionist and women's rights movements. Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and the Grimké sisters began as antislavery advocates, but, denied access to lecture platforms by male abolitionists and conservative clergy, they became staunch advocates of women's rights. This transition was a logical one: both enslaved blacks and married women were "owned" by men, either as property or as their legal dependents. Consequently, the efforts to abolish the legal prerogatives of husbands were as controversial as those to end the legal property rights of slave owners. As reformers took aim at such deeply rooted institutions and customs, many Americans feared that their activism would not perfect society but destroy it.

CHAPTER REVIEW

MAKE IT STICK Go to **LearningCurve** to retain what you've read.



TERMS TO KNOW Identify and explain the significance of each term below.

Key Concepts and Events

individualism (p. 346)

American Renaissance (p. 346)

transcendentalism (p. 346)

utopias (p. 349)

socialism (p. 351)

perfectionism (p. 352)

Mormonism (p. 352)

minstrelsy (p. 356)

abolitionism (p. 357)

Underground Railroad (p. 362)

amalgamation (p. 364)

gag rule (p. 365)

separate sphere (p. 367)

domestic slavery (p. 370)

married women's property laws
(p. 371)

Seneca Falls Convention (p. 371)

Key People

Ralph Waldo Emerson (p. 346)

Henry David Thoreau (p. 347)

Margaret Fuller (p. 347)

Walt Whitman (p. 348)

Herman Melville (p. 349)

Nat Turner (p. 360)

William Lloyd Garrison (p. 362)

Dorothea Dix (p. 367)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (p. 371)

Susan B. Anthony (p. 371)

REVIEW QUESTIONS

Answer these questions to demonstrate your understanding of the chapter's main ideas.

1. Analyze the relationship between religion and reform in the decades from 1800 to 1860. Why did many religious people feel compelled to remake society? How successful were they? Do you see any parallels with social movements today?
2. The word *reform* has a positive connotation, as an effort to make things better. Yet many mid-nineteenth-century Americans viewed some “reforms,” such as abolitionism and women’s rights, as destructive to the social order, and other “reforms,” such as Sabbatarianism and temperance, as threats to individual freedom. What was the apparent conflict among reform, social order, and liberty?
3. **THEMATIC UNDERSTANDING** Review the events listed under “Ideas, Beliefs, and Culture” on the thematic timeline on page 283, paying particular attention to the entries related to individualism and rights on the one hand and to various communal and religious movements on the other. What was the relationship between these somewhat contradictory cultural impulses? How were these two movements related to the social and economic changes in America in the decades after 1800?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Recognize the larger developments and continuities within and across chapters by answering these questions.

1. **ACROSS TIME AND PLACE** Did the era of reform (1820–1860) increase or diminish the extent of social and cultural freedom that existed during the Revolutionary era (1770–1820)?
2. **VISUAL EVIDENCE** Compare the cheerful depiction of the young woman in the watercolor depicting “night life in Philadelphia” on page 355 with the thoughtful or intense expression on the faces of the social reformers depicted in this chapter (Emerson, p. 346; Fuller, p. 348; and Stanton and Anthony, p. 371). Given their beliefs, would those reformers have approved or disapproved of the conduct of the young Philadelphia woman? Explain your reasoning.

MORE TO EXPLORE

Start here to learn more about the events discussed in this chapter.

Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in New York City* (1998). A gripping murder mystery that probes the nature of the new plebeian culture.

Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (2007). A comprehensive history from a cultural perspective.

Paul E. Johnson and Sean Wilentz, *The Kingdom of Matthias* (1995). A compelling story of religious utopianism gone mad.

Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee* (1975). Explores the life and rebellion of Nat Turner.

Mark Perry, *Lift Up Thy Voice* (2001). Offers a study of the Grimké family.

David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (1995). Shows how racism shaped white working-class culture.

TIMELINE Ask yourself why this chapter begins and ends with these dates and then identify the links among related events.

1826	• Lyceum movement begins
1829	• David Walker's <i>Appeal . . . to the Colored Citizens of the World</i>
1830	• Joseph Smith publishes <i>The Book of Mormon</i>
1830s	• Emergence of minstrelsy shows
1831	• William Lloyd Garrison founds <i>The Liberator</i> • Nat Turner's uprising in Virginia
1832	• Ralph Waldo Emerson turns to transcendentalism
1833	• Garrison organizes American Anti-Slavery Society
1834	• New York activists create Female Moral Reform Society
1835	• Abolitionists launch great postal campaign, sparking series of antiabolitionist riots
1836	• House of Representatives adopts gag rule
1837	• Grimké sisters defend public roles for women
1840	• Liberty Party runs James G. Birney for president
1840s	• Fourierist communities arise in Midwest
1841	• Dorothea Dix promotes hospitals for mentally ill
1844	• Margaret Fuller publishes <i>Woman in the Nineteenth Century</i>
1845	• Henry David Thoreau goes to Walden Pond
1846	• Brigham Young leads Mormons to Salt Lake
1848	• Seneca Falls Convention proposes women's equality
1850	• Nathaniel Hawthorne's <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>
1851	• Herman Melville publishes <i>Moby Dick</i>
1852	• Harriet Beecher Stowe writes <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i>
1855	• Dr. Sanger surveys sex trade in New York City • Walt Whitman's <i>Leaves of Grass</i>
1858	• "Mormon War" over polygamy

KEY TURNING POINTS: Most of the entries here relate to events in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s. In your judgment, which is the most important event in each decade? Over all three decades? Write a coherent essay that justifies your choices and, if possible, relates those events to each other.