

Chapter 15

The Ferment of Reform and Culture

1790–1860

We [Americans] will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR," 1837

A third revolution accompanied the reformation of American politics and the transformation of the American economy in the mid-nineteenth century. It consisted of a diffuse yet deeply felt commitment to improve the character of ordinary Americans, to make them more upstanding, God-fearing, and literate. Some high-minded souls were disillusioned by the rough-and-tumble realities of democratic politics. Others, notably women, were excluded from the political game altogether. As the young Republic grew, increasing numbers of Americans poured their considerable energies into an astonishing variety of religious revivals and reform movements.

Reform campaigns of all types flourished in sometimes bewildering abundance. There was not "a reading man" who was without some scheme for a new utopia in his "waistcoat pocket," claimed Ralph Waldo Emerson. Reformers promoted better public schools and rights for women, as well as miracle medicines, polygamy, celibacy, rule by prophets, and guidance by spirits. Societies were formed against alcohol, tobacco, profanity, and the transit of mail on the Sabbath. Eventually overshadowing all other reforms was the great crusade against slavery (see pp. 348–349).

Many reformers drew their crusading zeal from religion. Beginning in the late 1790s and boiling over into the early nineteenth century, the Second Great Awakening swept through America's Protestant churches, transforming the place of religion in American life and sending a generation of believers out on their missions to perfect the world.

★ Reviving Religion

Church attendance was still a regular ritual for about three-fourths of the 23 million Americans in 1850. Alexis de Tocqueville declared that there was "no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America." Yet the religion of these years was not the old-time religion of colonial days. The austere Calvinist rigor had long been seeping out of the American churches. The rationalist ideas of the French Revolutionary era had done much to soften the older orthodoxy. Thomas Paine's widely circulated book *The Age of Reason* (1794) had shockingly declared that all churches were "set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit." American anticlericalism was seldom that virulent, but many of the Founding Fathers, including Jefferson and Franklin, embraced the liberal doctrines of **Deism** that Paine promoted. Deists relied on reason rather than revelation, on science rather than the Bible. They rejected the concept of original sin and denied Christ's divinity. Yet Deists believed in a Supreme Being who had created a knowable universe and endowed human beings with a capacity for moral behavior.

Deism helped to inspire an important spinoff from the severe Puritanism of the past—the Unitarian faith, which began to gather momentum in New England at the end of the eighteenth century. **Unitarians** held that God existed in only *one* person (hence *unitarian*), and not in the orthodox Trinity (God the Father, God

the Son, and God the Holy Spirit). Although denying the deity of Jesus, Unitarians stressed the essential goodness of human nature rather than its vileness; they proclaimed their belief in free will and the possibility of salvation through good works; they pictured God not as a stern Creator but as a loving Father. Embraced by many leading thinkers (including Ralph Waldo Emerson), the Unitarian movement appealed mostly to intellectuals whose rationalism and optimism contrasted sharply with the hellfire doctrines of Calvinism, especially predestination and human depravity.

A boiling reaction against the growing liberalism in religion set in about 1800. A fresh wave of roaring revivals, beginning on the southern frontier but soon rolling even into the cities of the Northeast, sent the **Second Great Awakening** surging across the land. Sweeping up even more people than the First Great Awakening (see p. 87) almost a century earlier, the Second Awakening was one of the most momentous episodes in the history of American religion. This tidal wave of spiritual fervor left in its wake countless converted souls, many shattered and reorganized churches, and numerous new sects. It also encouraged an effervescent evangelicalism that bubbled up into innumerable areas of American life—including prison reform, the temperance cause, the women’s movement, and the crusade to abolish slavery.

The Second Great Awakening was spread to the masses on the frontier by huge “camp meetings.” As many as twenty-five thousand people would gather for an encampment of several days to drink the hellfire

gospel as served up by an itinerant preacher. Thousands of spiritually starved souls “got religion” at these gatherings and in their ecstasy engaged in frenzies of rolling, dancing, barking, and jerking. Many of the “saved” soon backslid into their former sinful ways, but the revivals boosted church membership and stimulated a variety of humanitarian reforms. Responsive easterners were moved to do missionary work in the West with Indians, in Hawaii, and in Asia.

Methodists and Baptists reaped the most abundant harvest of souls from the fields fertilized by revivalism. Both sects stressed personal conversion (contrary to predestination), a relatively democratic control of church affairs, and a rousing emotionalism. As a frontier jingle ran,

*The devil hates the Methodists
Because they sing and shout the best.*

Powerful Peter Cartwright (1785–1872) was the best known of the Methodist “circuit riders,” or traveling frontier preachers. This ill-educated but sinewy servant of the Lord ranged for a half-century from Tennessee to Illinois, calling upon sinners to repent. With bellowing voice and flailing arms, he converted thousands of souls to the Lord. Not only did he lash the Devil with his tongue, but with his fists he knocked out rowdies who tried to break up his meetings. His Christianity was definitely muscular.

Bell-voiced Charles Grandison Finney was the greatest of the revival preachers. Trained as a lawyer, Finney abandoned the bar to become an evangelist

Religious Camp Meeting, by J. Maze Burbank, 1839

At huge, daylong encampments, repentant sinners dedicated themselves to lives of personal rectitude and social reform. Fire-and-brimstone preachers like the one depicted here inspired convulsions, speaking in tongues, and ecstatic singing and dancing among the converted. Out of this religious upheaval grew many of the movements for social improvement in the pre-Civil War decades, including the abolitionist crusade.



Old Dartmouth Historical Society/New Bedford Whaling Museum



Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio

Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875), 1834 The charismatic Finney appears here at age forty-two, at the height of his career as an evangelist. A mesmerizer of audiences, he was said to have converted over a half million people. In 1834, Finney had just led a series of enormously successful revivals in cities along the Erie Canal. The next year he would establish a theology department at the newly founded Oberlin College in Ohio, where he helped train a generation of ministers and served as president from 1851 to 1866.

after a deeply moving conversion experience as a young man. Tall and athletically built, Finney held huge crowds spellbound with the power of his oratory and the pungency of his message. He led massive revivals in Rochester and New York City in 1830 and 1831. Finney preached a version of the old-time religion, but he was also an innovator. He devised the “anxious bench,” where repentant sinners could sit in full view of the congregation, and he encouraged women to pray aloud in public. Holding out the promise of a perfect Christian kingdom on earth, Finney denounced both alcohol and slavery. He eventually served as president of Oberlin College in Ohio, which he helped to make a hotbed of revivalist activity and abolitionism.

A key feature of the Second Great Awakening was the feminization of religion, in terms of both church membership and theology. Middle-class women, the wives and daughters of businessmen, were the first and

In his lecture “Hindrances to Revivals,” delivered in the 1830s, Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875) proposed the excommunication of drinkers and slaveholders:

“Let the churches of all denominations speak out on the subject of temperance, let them close their doors against all who have anything to do with the death-dealing abomination, and the cause of temperance is triumphant. A few years would annihilate the traffic. Just so with slavery. . . . It is a great national sin. It is a sin of the church. The churches by their silence, and by permitting slaveholders to belong to their communion, have been consenting to it. . . . The church cannot turn away from this question. It is a question for the church and for the nation to decide, and God will push it to a decision.”

most fervent enthusiasts of religious revivalism. They made up the majority of new church members, and they were most likely to stay within the fold when the tents were packed up and the traveling evangelists left town. Perhaps women’s greater ambivalence than men about the changes wrought by the expanding market economy made them such eager converts to piety. It helped as well that evangelicals preached a gospel of female spiritual worth and offered women an active role in bringing their husbands and families back to God. That accomplished, many women turned to saving the rest of society. They formed a host of benevolent and charitable organizations and spearheaded crusades for most, if not all, of the era’s ambitious reforms.

✦ Denominational Diversity

Revivals also furthered the fragmentation of religious faiths. Western New York, where many descendants of New England Puritans had settled, was so blistered by sermonizers preaching “hellfire and damnation” that it came to be known as the **Burned-Over District**.

Millerites, or Adventists, who mustered several hundred thousand adherents, rose from the superheated soil of the Burned-Over District in the 1830s. Named after the eloquent and commanding William Miller, they interpreted the Bible to mean that Christ would return to earth on October 22, 1844. Donning their go-to-meeting clothes, they gathered in prayerful assemblies to greet their Redeemer. The failure of Jesus to descend on schedule dampened but did not destroy the movement.

Like the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening tended to widen the lines between classes



Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice by Grant Romney Clawson
© by Intellectual Reserve Inc.

Mormon Trekkers Crossing the Mississippi on the Ice Driven out of Illinois after the murder of founder Joseph Smith in 1844, the Mormons wintered near Council Bluffs, Iowa Territory, before beginning the long overland trek to Utah.

and regions. The more prosperous and conservative denominations in the East were little touched by revivalism, and Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Unitarians continued to rise mostly from the wealthier, better-educated levels of society. Methodists, Baptists, and the members of the other new sects spawned by the swelling evangelistic fervor tended to come from less prosperous, less “learned” communities in the rural South and West.

Religious diversity further reflected social cleavages when the churches faced up to the slavery issue. By 1844–1845 both the southern Baptists and the southern Methodists had split with their northern brethren over human bondage. The Methodists came to grief over the case of a slaveowning bishop in Georgia, whose second wife added several household slaves to his estate. In 1857 the Presbyterians, North and South, parted company. The secession of the southern churches foreshadowed the secession of the southern states. First the churches split, then the political parties split, and then the Union split.

✦ A Desert Zion in Utah

The smoldering spiritual embers of the Burned-Over District kindled one especially ardent flame in 1830. In that year Joseph Smith—a rugged visionary, proud of his prowess at wrestling—reported that he had received some golden plates from an angel. When deciphered,

they constituted the Book of Mormon, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (the **Mormons**) was launched. It was a native American product, a new religion, destined to spread its influence worldwide.

After establishing a religious oligarchy, Smith ran into serious opposition from his non-Mormon neighbors, first in Ohio and then in Missouri and Illinois. His cooperative sect antagonized rank-and-file Americans, who were individualistic and dedicated to free enterprise. The Mormons aroused further anger by voting as a unit and by openly but understandably drilling their militia for defensive purposes. Accusations of polygamy likewise arose and increased in intensity, for Joseph Smith was reputed to have several wives.

Continuing hostility finally drove the Mormons to desperate measures. In 1844 Joseph Smith and his brother were murdered and mangled by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, and the movement seemed near collapse. The falling torch was seized by a remarkable Mormon Moses named Brigham Young. Stern and austere in contrast to Smith’s charm and affability, the barrel-chested Brigham Young had received only eleven days of formal schooling. But he quickly proved to be an aggressive leader, an eloquent preacher, and a gifted administrator. Determined to escape further persecution, Young in 1846–1847 led his oppressed and despoiled Latter-Day Saints over vast rolling plains to Utah as they sang “Come, Come, Ye Saints.”

Overcoming pioneer hardships, the Mormons soon made the desert bloom like a new Eden by means of



MAP 15.1 The Mormon World After Joseph Smith’s murder at Carthage in 1844, the Mormons abandoned their thriving settlement at Nauvoo, Illinois (which had about twenty thousand inhabitants in 1845), and set out for the valley of the Great Salt Lake, then still part of Mexico. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (see p. 371) in 1848 brought the vast Utah Territory into the United States, the Mormons rapidly expanded their desert colony, which they called Deseret, especially along the “Mormon Corridor” that stretched from Salt Lake to southern California. © Cengage Learning

ingenious and cooperative methods of irrigation. The crops of 1848, threatened by hordes of crickets, were saved when flocks of gulls appeared, as if by a miracle, to gulp down the invaders. (A monument to the seagulls stands in Salt Lake City today.)

Semiarid Utah grew remarkably. By the end of 1848, some five thousand settlers had arrived, and other large bands were to follow them (see Map 15.1). Many dedicated Mormons in the 1850s actually made the thirteen-hundred-mile trek across the plains pulling two-wheeled carts.

Under the rigidly disciplined management of Brigham Young, the community became a prosperous frontier theocracy and a cooperative commonwealth. Young married as many as twenty-seven women—some of them wives in name only—and begot fifty-six children. The population was further swelled by thousands of immigrants from Europe, where the Mormons had established a flourishing missionary movement.

A crisis developed when the Washington government was unable to control the hierarchy of Brigham Young, who had been made territorial governor in 1850. A federal army marched in 1857 against the Mormons, who harassed its lines of supply and rallied to die in their last dusty ditch. Fortunately the quarrel was finally adjusted without serious bloodshed. The Mormons later ran afoul of the antipolygamy laws passed by Congress in 1862 and 1882, and their unique marital customs delayed statehood for Utah until 1896.

Polygamy was an issue of such consequence that it was bracketed with slavery in the Republican national platform of 1856:

“It is both the right and the imperative duty of Congress to prohibit in the Territories those twin relics of barbarism—Polygamy and Slavery.”

★ Free Schools for a Free People

Tax-supported primary schools were scarce in the early years of the Republic. They had the odor of pauperism about them, since they existed chiefly to educate the children of the poor—the so-called ragged schools. Advocates of “free” public education met stiff opposition. A midwestern legislator cried that he wanted only this simple epitaph when he died: “Here lies an enemy of public education.”

Well-to-do, conservative Americans gradually saw the light. If they did not pay to educate “other folks brats,” the “brats” might grow up into a dangerous, ignorant rabble—armed with the vote. Taxation for education was an insurance premium that the wealthy paid for stability and democracy.

Tax-supported public education, though miserably lagging in the slavery-cursed South, triumphed between 1825 and 1850. Hard-toiling laborers wielded increased influence and demanded instruction for their children. Most important was the gaining of manhood suffrage for whites in Jackson’s day. A free vote cried aloud for free education. A civilized nation that was both ignorant and free, declared Thomas Jefferson, “never was and never will be.”

The famed little red schoolhouse—with one room, one stove, one teacher, and often eight grades—became the shrine of American democracy. Regrettably, it was an imperfect shrine. Early free schools stayed open only a few months of the year. Schoolteachers, most of them men in this era, were too often ill-trained, ill-tempered, and ill-paid. They frequently put more stress on “lickin’” (with a hickory stick) than on “larnin’.” These knights of the blackboard often “boarded around” in the community, and some knew scarcely more than their older pupils. They usually taught only the “three Rs”—“readin’, ‘ritin’, and ‘rithmetic.” To many rugged Americans, suspicious of “book larnin’,” this was enough.

Reform was urgently needed. Into the breach stepped Horace Mann (1796–1859), a brilliant and idealistic graduate of Brown University. As secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, he campaigned effectively for more and better schoolhouses, longer school terms, higher pay for teachers, and an expanded curriculum. His influence radiated out to other states, and impressive improvements were chalked up. Yet education remained an expensive luxury for many communities. As late as 1860, the nation counted only about a hundred public secondary schools—and nearly a million white adult illiterates. Black slaves in the South



Saint Louis Art Museum, Museum Purchase

The Country School, by Winslow Homer, 1871 Stark and simple by latter-day standards, the one-room schoolhouse nevertheless contributed richly to the development of the young Republic.

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) wrote of his education (1859),

“There were some schools so-called [in Indiana], but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond ‘readin’, writin’ and cipherin’ to the rule of three. . . . There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity. I was raised to work, which I continued till I was twenty-two.”

were legally forbidden to receive instruction in reading or writing, and even free blacks, in the North as well as the South, were usually excluded from the schools.

Educational advances were aided by improved textbooks, notably those of Noah Webster (1758–1843), a Yale-educated Connecticut Yankee who was known as the “Schoolmaster of the Republic.” His “reading lessons,” used by millions of children in the nineteenth century, were partly designed to promote patriotism. Webster devoted twenty years to his famous dictionary, published in 1828, which helped to standardize the American language.

Equally influential was Ohioan William H. McGuffey (1800–1873), a teacher-preacher of rare power. His grade-school readers, first published in the 1830s, sold 122 million copies in the following decades. *McGuffey’s Readers* hammered home lasting lessons in morality, patriotism, and idealism.

Higher Goals for Higher Learning

Higher education was likewise stirring. The religious zeal of the Second Great Awakening led to the planting of many small, denominational, liberal arts colleges, chiefly in the South and West. Too often they were academically anemic, established more to satisfy local pride than genuinely to advance the cause of learning. Like their more venerable, ivy-draped brethren, the new colleges offered a narrow, tradition-bound curriculum of Latin, Greek, mathematics, and moral philosophy. On new and old campuses alike, there was little intellectual vitality and much boredom.

The first state-supported universities sprang up in the South, beginning with North Carolina in 1795.

Federal land grants nourished the growth of state institutions of higher learning. Conspicuous among the early group was the University of Virginia, founded in 1819. It was largely the brainchild of Thomas Jefferson, who designed its beautiful architecture and who at times watched its construction through a telescope from his hilltop home. He dedicated the university to freedom from religious or political shackles, and modern languages and the sciences received unusual emphasis.

Women’s higher education was frowned upon in the early decades of the nineteenth century. A woman’s place was believed to be in the home, and training in needlecraft seemed more important than training in algebra. In an era when the clinging-vine bride was the ideal, coeducation was regarded as frivolous. Prejudices also prevailed that too much learning injured the feminine brain, undermined health, and rendered a young lady unfit for marriage. The teachers of Susan B. Anthony, the future feminist, refused to instruct her in long division.

Women’s schools at the secondary level began to attain some respectability in the 1820s, thanks in part to the dedicated work of Emma Willard (1787–1870). In 1821 she established the Troy (New York) Female Seminary. Oberlin College, in Ohio, jolted traditionalists in 1837 when it opened its doors to women as well as men. (Oberlin had already created shock waves by admitting black students.) In the same year, Mary Lyon established an outstanding women’s school, Mount Holyoke Seminary (later College), in South Hadley, Massachusetts. Mossback critics scoffed that “they’ll be educatin’ cows next.”

Adults who craved more learning satisfied their thirst for knowledge at private subscription libraries or,

An editorial in the popular women’s magazine Godey’s Lady’s Book in 1845, probably written by editor Sarah Josepha Hale (1788–1879), argued for better education for women as a benefit to all of society:

“The mass of mankind are very ignorant and wicked. Wherefore is this? Because the mother, whom God constituted the first teacher of every human being, has been degraded by men from her high office; or, what is the same thing, been denied those privileges of education which only can enable her to discharge her duty to her children with discretion and effect. . . . If half the effort and expense had been directed to enlighten and improve the minds of females which have been lavished on the other sex, we should now have a very different state of society.”



Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio

The Women Graduates of the Oberlin College Class of 1855 Oberlin was the first coeducational institution of higher education in the United States, accepting women in 1837, two years after it had welcomed African Americans. Feminists continued to press for coeducation, and by 1872 ninety-seven American universities accepted women. At some of these institutions, however, such as Radcliffe College of Harvard University and Barnard College of Columbia University, women were educated in associated schools, not alongside male students.

increasingly, at tax-supported libraries. House-to-house peddlers also did a lush business in feeding the public appetite for culture. Traveling lecturers helped to carry learning to the masses through the **lyceum** lecture associations, which numbered about three thousand by 1835. The lyceums provided platforms for speakers in such areas as science, literature, and moral philosophy. Talented talkers like Ralph Waldo Emerson journeyed thousands of miles on the lyceum circuits, casting their pearls of civilization before appreciative audiences.

Magazines flourished in the pre-Civil War years, but most of them withered after a short life. The *North American Review*, founded in 1815, was the long-lived leader of the intellectuals. *Godey's Lady's Book*, founded in 1830, survived until 1898 and attained the enormous circulation (for those days) of 150,000. It was devoured devotedly by millions of women, many of whom read the dog-eared copies of their relatives and friends.

★ An Age of Reform

As the young Republic grew, reform campaigns of all types flourished in sometimes bewildering abundance. Some reformers were simply crackbrained cranks. But

most were intelligent, inspired idealists, usually touched by the fire of evangelical religion then licking through the pews and pulpits of American churches. The optimistic promises of the Second Great Awakening inspired countless souls to do battle against earthly evils. These modern idealists dreamed anew the old Puritan vision of a perfected society: free from cruelty, war, intoxicating drink, discrimination, and—ultimately—slavery. Women were particularly prominent in these reform crusades, especially in their own struggle for suffrage. For many middle-class women, the reform campaigns provided a unique opportunity to escape the confines of the home and enter the arena of public affairs.

In part the practical, activist Christianity of these reformers resulted from their desire to reaffirm traditional values as they plunged ever further into a world disrupted and transformed by the turbulent forces of a market economy. Mainly middle-class descendants of pioneer farmers, they were often blissfully unaware that they were witnessing the dawn of the industrial era, which posed unprecedented problems and called for novel ideas. They either ignored the factory workers, for example, or blamed their problems on bad habits. With naive single-mindedness, reformers sometimes applied conventional virtue to refurbishing an

In presenting her case to the Massachusetts legislature for more humane treatment for the mentally ill, Dorothea Dix (1802–1887) quoted from the notebook she carried with her as she traveled around the state:

“Lincoln. A woman in a cage. Medford. One idiotic subject chained, and one in a close stall for seventeen years. Pepperell. One often doubly chained, hand and foot; another violent; several peaceable now. . . . Dedham. The insane disadvantageously placed in the jail. In the almshouse, two females in stalls . . . ; lie in wooden bunks filled with straw; always shut up. One of these subjects is supposed curable. The overseers of the poor have declined giving her a trial at the hospital, as I was informed, on account of expense.”

older order—while events hurtled them headlong into the new.

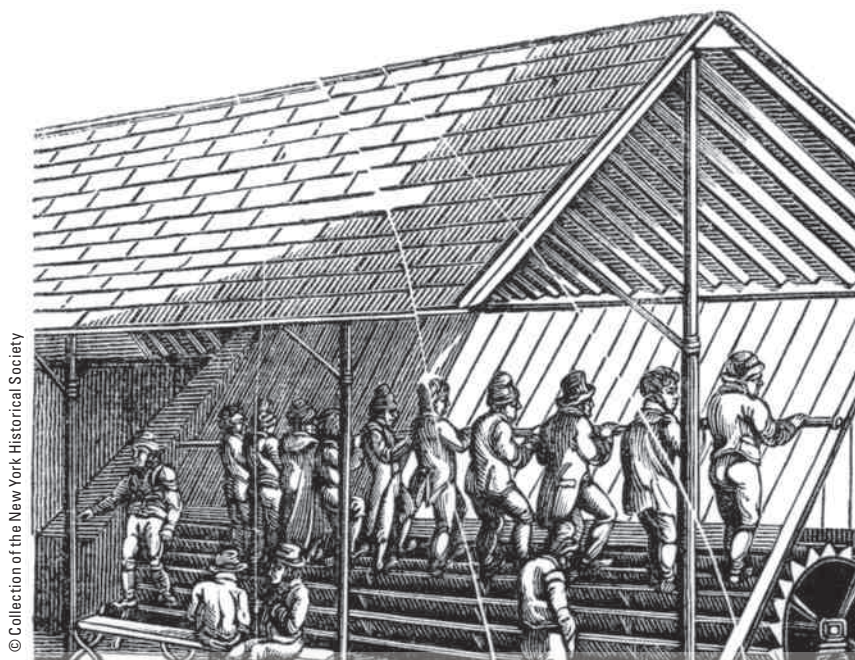
Imprisonment for debt continued to be a nightmare, though its extent has been exaggerated. As late as 1830, hundreds of penniless people were languishing in filthy holes, sometimes for owing less than one

dollar. The poorer working classes were especially hard hit by this merciless practice. But as the embattled laborer won the ballot and asserted himself, state legislatures gradually abolished debtors' prisons.

Criminal codes in the states were likewise being softened, in accord with more enlightened European practices. The number of capital offenses was being reduced, and brutal punishments, such as whipping and branding, were being slowly eliminated. A refreshing idea was taking hold that prisons should reform as well as punish—hence “reformatories,” “houses of correction,” and “penitentiaries” (for penance).

Sufferers of so-called insanity were still being treated with incredible cruelty. The medieval concept had been that the mentally deranged were cursed with unclean spirits; the nineteenth-century idea was that they were willfully perverse and depraved—to be treated only as beasts. Many crazed persons were chained in jails or poor-houses with sane people.

Into this dismal picture stepped a formidable New England teacher-author, Dorothea Dix (1802–1887). A physically frail woman afflicted with persistent lung trouble, she possessed infinite compassion and will-power. She traveled some sixty thousand miles in eight years and assembled her damning reports on insanity and asylums from firsthand observations. Though she never raised her voice, Dix's message was loud and clear.



© Collection of the New York Historical Society



National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution/Art Resource, NY

(left) The Stepping Mill, Auburn Prison, New York, 1823; (right) Portrait of Dorothea Dix by Samuel Bell Waugh, 1868 Reformers like Dorothea Dix believed that idleness was a scourge and prescribed rigorous exercise regimens for prisoners. At the experimental prison in Auburn, chained prisoners were obliged to turn this wheel for long periods of time.

Her classic petition of 1843 to the Massachusetts legislature, describing cells so foul that visitors were driven back by the stench, turned legislative stomachs and hearts. Her persistent prodding resulted in improved conditions and in a gain for the concept that the demented were not willfully perverse but mentally ill.

Agitation for peace also gained momentum in the pre-Civil War years. In 1828 the American Peace Society was formed, with a ringing declaration of war on war. A leading spirit was William Ladd, who orated when his legs were so badly ulcerated that he had to sit on a stool. His ideas were finally to bear some fruit in the international organizations for collective security of the twentieth century. The American peace crusade, linked with a European counterpart, was making promising progress by midcentury, but it was set back by the bloodshed of the Crimean War in Europe and the Civil War in America.

★ Demon Rum—The “Old Deluder”

The ever-present drink problem attracted dedicated reformers. Custom, combined with a hard and monotonous life, led to the excessive drinking of hard liquor, even among women, clergymen, and members of Congress. Weddings and funerals all too often became disgraceful brawls, and occasionally a drunken mourner

would fall into the open grave with the corpse. Heavy drinking decreased the efficiency of labor, and poorly safeguarded machinery operated under the influence of alcohol increased the danger of accidents occurring at work. Drunkenness also fouled the sanctity of the family, threatening the spiritual welfare—and physical safety—of women and children.

After earlier and feeble efforts, the **American Temperance Society** was formed in Boston in 1826. Within a few years, about a thousand local groups sprang into existence. They implored drinkers to sign the temperance pledge and organized children’s clubs, known as the “Cold Water Army.” Temperance crusaders also made effective use of pictures, pamphlets, and lurid lecturers, some of whom were reformed drunkards. A popular temperance song ran,

*We’ve done with our days of carousing,
Our nights, too, of frolicsome glee;
For now with our sober minds choosing,
We’ve pledged ourselves never to spree.*

The most popular anti-alcohol tract of the era was T. S. Arthur’s melodramatic novel, *Ten Nights in a Barroom and What I Saw There* (1854). It described in shocking detail how a once-happy village was ruined by Sam Slade’s tavern. The book was second only to Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a best seller in the 1850s, and it enjoyed a highly successful run on the stage. Its

Signing the Pledge, Lithograph, 1846

Temperance reformers decried many evils of alcohol, but they fulminated especially against its corrupting influence on family life. Here a former drinker pledges to abstain hereafter, while his hopeful wife and children look on.



Granger Collection, New York

touching theme song began with the words of a little girl:

*Father, dear father, come home with me now,
The clock in the belfry strikes one.*

Early foes of Demon Drink adopted two major lines of attack. One was to stiffen the individual's will to resist the wiles of the little brown jug. The moderate reformers thus stressed "temperance" rather than "teetotalism," or the total elimination of intoxicants. But less patient zealots came to believe that temptation should be removed by legislation. Prominent among this group was Neal S. Dow of Maine, a blue-nosed reformer who, as a mayor of Portland and an employer of labor, had often witnessed the debauching effect of alcohol—to say nothing of the cost to his pocketbook of work time lost because of drunken employees.

Dow—the "Father of Prohibition"—sponsored the so-called **Maine Law of 1851**. This drastic new statute, hailed as "the law of Heaven Americanized," prohibited the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquor. Other states in the North followed Maine's example, and by 1857 about a dozen had passed various prohibitory laws. But these figures are deceptive, for within a decade some of the statutes were repealed or declared unconstitutional, if not openly flouted.

It was clearly impossible to legislate thirst for alcohol out of existence, especially in localities where public sentiment was hostile. Yet on the eve of the Civil War, the prohibitionists had registered inspiring gains. There was much less drinking among women than earlier in the century and probably much less per capita consumption of hard liquor.

✦ Women in Revolt

When the nineteenth century opened, it was still a man's world, both in America and in Europe. A wife was supposed to immerse herself in her home and subordinate herself to her lord and master (her husband). Like black slaves, she could not vote; like black slaves, she could be legally beaten by her overlord "with a reasonable instrument." When she married, she could not retain title to her property; it passed to her husband.

Yet American women, though legally regarded as perpetual minors, fared better than their European cousins. French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville noted that in his native France, rape was punished only lightly, whereas in America it was one of the few crimes punishable by death.

Despite these relative advantages, women were still "the submerged sex" in America in the early part of the century. But as the decades unfolded, women increasingly surfaced to breathe the air of freedom



Stellar Suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton (left) and Susan B. Anthony (right) were two of the most persistent battlers for rights. Their National Woman Suffrage Association fought for women's equality in courts and workplaces as well as at the polls. © Bettmann/Corbis

and self-determination. In contrast to women in colonial times, many women now avoided marriage altogether—about 10 percent of adult women remained "spinsters" at the time of the Civil War.

Gender differences were strongly emphasized in nineteenth-century America—largely because the burgeoning market economy was increasingly separating women and men into sharply distinct economic roles. Women were thought to be physically and emotionally weak, but also artistic and refined. Endowed with finely tuned moral sensibilities, they were the keepers of society's conscience, with special responsibility to teach the young how to be good and productive citizens of the Republic. Men were considered strong but crude, always in danger of slipping into some savage or beastly way of life if not guided by the gentle hands of their loving ladies.

The home was a woman's special sphere, the centerpiece of the "cult of domesticity." Even reformers like Catharine Beecher, who urged her sisters to seek employment as teachers, endlessly celebrated the role

What It Would Be If Some Ladies Had Their Own Way

The men in this antifeminist cartoon are sewing, tending the baby, and washing clothes. The scene seemed absurd then, but not a century later.



Stock Montage

of the good homemaker. But some women increasingly felt that the glorified sanctuary of the home was in fact a gilded cage. They yearned to tear down the bars that separated the private world of women from the public world of men.

Clamorous female reformers—most of them white and well-to-do—began to gather strength as the century neared its halfway point. Most were broad-gauge battlers; while demanding rights for women, they joined in the general reform movement of the age, fighting for temperance and the abolition of slavery. Like men, they had been touched by the evangelical spirit that offered the promise of earthly reward for human endeavor. Neither foul eggs nor foul words, when hurled by disapproving men, could halt women heartened by these doctrines.

The women's rights movement was mothered by some arresting characters. Prominent among them was Lucretia Mott, a sprightly Quaker whose ire had been aroused when she and her fellow female delegates to the London antislavery convention of 1840 were not recognized. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a mother of seven who had insisted on leaving "obey" out of her marriage ceremony, shocked fellow feminists by going so far as to advocate suffrage for women. Quaker-reared Susan B. Anthony, a militant lecturer for women's rights, fearlessly exposed herself to rotten garbage and vulgar epithets. She became such a conspicuous advocate of female rights that progressive women everywhere were called "Suzy Bs."

Other feminists challenged the man's world. Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, a pioneer in a previously forbidden profession for women, was the first female graduate of a medical college. The talented Grimké sisters, Sarah and

Angelina, championed antislavery. Lucy Stone retained her maiden name after marriage—hence the latter-day "Lucy Stoners," who follow her example. Amelia Bloomer revolted against the current "street sweeping" female attire by donning a short skirt with Turkish trousers—"bloomers," they were called—amid much bawdy ridicule about "Bloomerism" and "loose habits." A jeering male rhyme of the times jabbed,

*Gibbey, gibbey gab
The women had a confab
And demanded the rights
To wear the tights
Gibbey, gibbey gab.*

Unflinching feminists met in 1848 in a memorable **Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls,**

When early feminist Lucy Stone (1818–1893) married fellow abolitionist Henry B. Blackwell (1825–1909) in West Brookfield, Massachusetts, in 1855, they added the following vow to their nuptial ceremony:

“While acknowledging our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relation of husband and wife, yet in justice to ourselves and a great principle, we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no . . . promise of voluntary obedience to such of the present laws of marriage, as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority.”

Examining the Evidence

Dress as Reform

Among the many social movements that swept nineteenth-century America, dress reform emerged in the 1840s as a critique of materialism and the constraints that fashion imposed on women. Medical professionals, social reformers, and transcendentalist intellectuals all argued that corsets constricting vital organs and voluminous skirts dragging along garbage-strewn streets unfairly restricted women's mobility, prevented women from bearing healthy children, and even induced serious sickness and death. The "Bloomer costume" depicted in this illustration from *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* in 1851 included Turkish-style trou-

sers, a jacket, and a short overskirt that came to the knees. Named after reformer Amelia Bloomer (1818–1894), who publicized the new style in her magazine, *The Lily*, the bloomer dress was first adopted by utopian communities such as the Owenites in New Harmony, Indiana, and the Oneidans in New York. Radical social critic Henry David Thoreau also advocated rational dress as a way of rejecting the artificial desires created by industrialization. But while applauded by reformers, new-style dress was viciously ridiculed by mainstream society, as this print demonstrates. Critics claimed that women blurred gender distinctions by adopting

"male" attire, endangering the family and even American civilization. After only a decade, practitioners gave up wearing bloomers in public, adopting plain and simplified clothing instead. But Owenites, some Mormons, women's rights advocates, farmers, and travelers on the overland trail continued to wear bloomers in private. How did dress reform intersect with other religious and social movements of the era? Why did bloomers upset so many antebellum Americans? Have there been other historical eras when new styles of dress came to symbolize broader social change?



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New York. The defiant Stanton read a "Declaration of Sentiments," which in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence declared that "all men and women are created equal." One resolution formally demanded the ballot for females. Amid scorn and denunciation from

press and pulpit, the Seneca Falls meeting launched the modern women's rights movement.

The crusade for women's rights was eclipsed by the campaign against slavery in the decade before the Civil War. Still, any white male, even an idiot, over the age

of twenty-one could vote, while no woman could. Yet women were gradually being admitted to colleges, and some states, beginning with Mississippi in 1839, were even permitting wives to own property after marriage.

★ Wilderness Utopias

Bolstered by the utopian spirit of the age, various reformers, ranging from the high-minded to the “lunatic fringe,” set up more than forty communities of a cooperative, communistic, or “communitarian” nature. Seeking human betterment, a wealthy and idealistic Scottish textile manufacturer, Robert Owen, founded in 1825 a communal society of about a thousand people at **New Harmony**, Indiana. Little harmony prevailed in the colony, which, in addition to hard-working visionaries, attracted a sprinkling of radicals, work-shy theorists, and outright scoundrels. The colony sank in a morass of contradiction and confusion.

Brook Farm in Massachusetts, comprising two hundred acres of grudging soil, was started in 1841 with the brotherly and sisterly cooperation of about twenty intellectuals committed to the philosophy of transcendentalism (see p. 327). They prospered reasonably well until 1846, when they lost by fire a large new communal building shortly before its completion. The whole

venture in “plain living and high thinking” then collapsed in debt. The Brook Farm experiment inspired Nathaniel Hawthorne’s classic novel *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).

A more radical experiment was the **Oneida Community**, founded in New York in 1848. It practiced free love (“complex marriage”), birth control (through “male continence,” or *coitus reservatus*), and the eugenic selection of parents to produce superior offspring. This curious enterprise flourished for more than thirty years, largely because its artisans made superior steel traps and Oneida Community (silver) Plate (see “Makers of America: The Oneida Community,” pp. 322–323).

Various communistic experiments, mostly small in scale, have been attempted since Jamestown. But in competition with democratic free enterprise and free land, virtually all of them sooner or later failed or changed their methods. Among the longest-lived sects were the **Shakers**, founded in England in 1747 and brought to America in 1774 by Mother Ann Lee. She moved her tiny band of followers to upstate New York—the first of a score or so of American Shaker communities. The Shakers attained a membership of about six thousand in 1840, but since their monastic customs prohibited both marriage and sexual relations, they were virtually extinct by 1940.



Harvesting, by Olof Krans, ca. 1896 The Shakers’ emphasis on communal work and separation of the sexes was captured in this painting of the Bishop Hill Colony in Illinois. Krans, born in Sweden, arrived at Bishop Hill with his family in 1850 when he was twelve. Trained as a housepainter, he turned later in life to recording on canvas the simplicity of daily life that he remembered from his youth.

Bishop Hill State Historic Site, Illinois Historic Preservation Agency



Collection of the New York Historical Society



American Museum of Natural History

(left) Passenger Pigeons, by John Audubon; (right) John J. Audubon (1785–1851)

An astute naturalist and a gifted artist, Audubon drew the birds of America in loving detail. Ironically, he had to go to Britain in the 1820s to find a publisher for his pioneering depictions of the unique beauty of American wildlife. Born in Haiti and educated in France, he achieved fame as America's greatest ornithologist. The passenger pigeons shown here once numbered in the billions in North America but were extinct by 1900, thanks to aggressive hunting and trapping. This was perhaps the greatest mass slaughter of wildlife in history.

★ The Dawn of Scientific Achievement

Early Americans, confronted with pioneering problems, were more interested in practical gadgets than in pure science. Jefferson, for example, was a gifted amateur inventor who won a gold medal for a new type of plow. Noteworthy also were the writings of the mathematician Nathaniel Bowditch (1733–1838) on practical navigation and of the oceanographer Matthew F. Maury (1806–1873) on ocean winds and currents. These writers promoted safety, speed, and economy. But as far as basic science was concerned, Americans were best known for borrowing and adapting the findings of Europeans.

Yet the Republic was not without scientific talent. The most influential American scientist of the first half of the nineteenth century was Professor Benjamin Silliman (1779–1864), a pioneer chemist and geologist who taught and wrote brilliantly at Yale College for more than fifty years. Professor Louis Agassiz (1807–1873), a distinguished French Swiss immigrant, served for a quarter of a century at Harvard College. A path-

breaking student of biology who sometimes carried snakes in his pockets, he insisted on original research and deplored the reigning overemphasis on memory work. Professor Asa Gray (1810–1888) of Harvard College, the Columbus of American botany, published over 350 books, monographs, and papers. His textbooks set new standards for clarity and interest.

Lovers of American bird lore owed much to the French-descended naturalist John J. Audubon (1785–1851), who painted wildfowl in their natural habitat. His magnificently illustrated *Birds of America* attained considerable popularity. The Audubon Society for the protection of birds was named after him, although as a young man he shot much feathered game for sport.

Medicine in America, despite a steady growth of medical schools, was still primitive by modern standards. Bleeding remained a common cure and a curse as well. Smallpox plagues were still dreaded, and the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia took several thousand lives. "Bring out your dead!" was the daily cry of the corpse-wagon drivers.

John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886), the founder of the Oneida Community, repudiated the old Puritan doctrines that God was vengeful and that sinful mankind was doomed to dwell in a vale of tears. Noyes believed in a benign deity, in the sweetness of human nature, and in the possibility of a perfect Christian community on earth. “The more we get acquainted with God,” he declared, “the more we shall find it our special duty to be happy.”

That sunny thought was shared by many early-nineteenth-century American utopians (a word derived from Greek that slyly combines the meanings of “a good place” and “no such place”). But Noyes added some wrinkles of his own. The key to happiness, he taught, was the suppression of selfishness. True Christians should possess no private property—nor should they indulge in exclusive emotional relationships, which bred jealousy, quarreling, and covetousness. Material things and sexual partners alike, Noyes preached, should be shared. Marriage should not be monogamous. Instead all members of the community should be free to love one another in “complex marriage.” Noyes called his system “Bible Communism.”

Tall and slender, with piercing blue eyes and reddish hair, the charismatic Noyes began voicing these ideas in his hometown of Putney, Vermont, in the 1830s. He soon attracted a group of followers who called themselves the Putney Association, a kind of extended family whose members farmed five hundred acres by day and sang and prayed together in the evenings. They sustained their spiritual intensity by submitting to “Mutual Criticism,” in which the person being criticized would sit in silence while other members frankly discussed his or her faults and merits. “I was, metaphorically, stood upon my head and allowed to drain till all the self-righteousness had dripped out of me,” one man wrote of his experience with Mutual Criticism.

The Putney Association also indulged in sexual practices that outraged the surrounding community’s sense of moral propriety. Indicted for adultery in 1847, Noyes led his followers to Oneida, in the supposedly more tolerant region of New York’s Burned-Over District, the following year. Several affiliated communities were also established, the most important of which was at Wallingford, Connecticut.

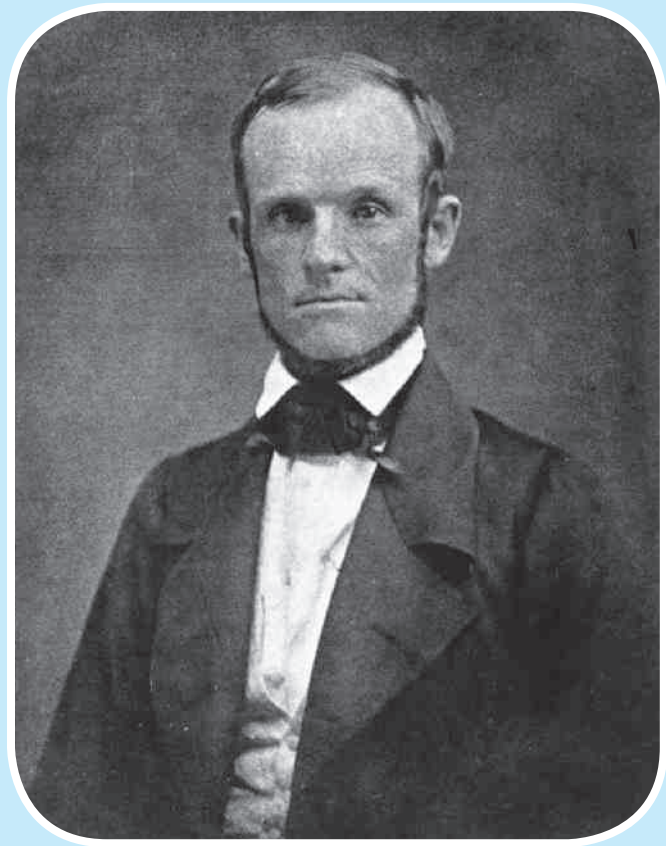
The Oneidans struggled in New York until they were joined in the 1850s by Sewell Newhouse, a clever inventor of steel animal traps. The manufacture of Newhouse’s traps, and other products such as sewing silk and various types of bags, put the Oneida Community on a sound financial footing. By the 1860s Oneida was a flourishing commonwealth of some three hundred people. Men and women shared equally in all the community’s tasks, from field to factory to kitchen.

The members lived under one roof in Mansion House, a sprawling building that boasted central heating, a well-stocked library, and a common dining hall, as well as the “Big Hall,” where members gathered nightly for prayer and entertainment. Children at the age of three were removed from direct parental care and raised communally in the Children’s House until the age of thirteen or fourteen, when they took up jobs in the community’s industries. They imbibed their religious doctrines with their school lessons:

*I-spirit
With me never shall stay,
We-spirit
Makes us happy and gay.*

Oneida’s apparent success fed the utopian dreams of others, and for a time it became a great tourist attraction. Visitors from as far away as Europe came to picnic on the shady lawns, speculating on the sexual secrets that Mansion House guarded, while their hosts fed them strawberries and cream and entertained them with music.

But eventually the same problems that had driven Noyes and his band from Vermont began to shadow their lives at Oneida. Their New York neighbors grew increasingly horrified at the Oneidans’ licentious sexual



Granger Collection

The Founding Father John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886)



Mansion House A sprawling, resplendent building, it formed the center of the Oneida Community's life and was a stunning specimen of mid-nineteenth-century architectural and engineering achievement.

practices, including the selective breeding program by which the community matched mates and gave permission—or orders—to procreate, without regard to the niceties of matrimony. “It was somewhat startling to me,” one straight-laced visitor commented, “to hear Miss _____ speak about her baby.”

Yielding to their neighbors' criticisms, the Oneidans gave up complex marriage in 1879. Soon other “communistic” practices withered away as well. The communal dining hall became a restaurant, where meals were bought with money, something many Oneidans had never used before. In 1880 the Oneidans

abandoned communism altogether and became a joint-stock company specializing in the manufacture of silver tableware. Led by Noyes's son Pierrepont, Oneida Community, Ltd., grew into the world's leading manufacturer of stainless steel knives, forks, and spoons, until foreign competition forced it into bankruptcy in 2006. As for Mansion House, it still stands in central New York, but it now serves as a museum and private residence. Ironically, what grew from Noyes's religious vision was not utopia but a mighty capitalist corporation that finally succumbed to the “creative destruction” that is capitalism's essence.



A Bag Bee on the Lawn of Mansion House The fledgling community supported itself in part by manufacturing bags. Men and women shared equally in the bag-making process.

An outbreak of cholera occurred in New York City in 1832, and a wealthy businessman, Philip Hone (1780–1851), wrote in his diary for the Fourth of July,

“The alarm about the cholera has prevented all the usual jollification under the public authority. . . . The Board of Health reports today twenty new cases and eleven deaths since noon yesterday. The disease is here in all its violence and will increase. God grant that its ravages may be confined, and its visit short.”

People everywhere complained of ill health—malaria, the “rheumatics,” the “miserics,” and the chills. Illness often resulted from improper diet, hurried eating, perspiring and cooling off too rapidly, and ignorance of germs and sanitation. “We was sick every fall, regular,” wrote the mother of future president James Garfield. Life expectancy was still dismayingly short—about forty years for a white person born in 1850, and less for blacks. The suffering from decayed or ulcerated teeth was enormous; tooth extraction was often practiced by the muscular village blacksmith.

Self-prescribed patent medicines were common (one dose for people, two for horses) and included Robertson’s Infallible Worm Destroying Lozenges. Fad diets proved popular, including the whole-wheat bread and crackers regimen of Sylvester Graham. Among home remedies was the rubbing of tumors with dead toads. The use of medicine by regular doctors was often harmful, and Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes declared in 1860 that if the medicines, as then employed, were thrown into the sea, humans would be better off and the fish worse off.

Victims of surgical operations were ordinarily tied down, often after a stiff drink of whiskey. The surgeon then sawed or cut with breakneck speed, undeterred by the piercing shrieks of the patient. A priceless boon for medical progress came in the early 1840s, when several American doctors and dentists, working independently, successfully employed laughing gas and ether as anesthetics.

Artistic Achievements

As early as the 1770s, Revolutionary Americans anticipated that a great cultural flourishing would accompany America’s political awakening. Optimistic commentators spoke of the “rising glory” of America, sharing the British philosopher George Berkeley’s prediction in 1752 that “westward the course of empire takes its way . . . time’s noblest offspring is its last.” But while American

political thought sparked with originality, the nation’s earliest cultural forays proved less than spectacular. Flush with political independence, Americans strained to achieve cultural autonomy and create a national art worthy of their aspirations.

Architecturally, America chose to imitate Old World styles rather than create indigenous ones. Early national builders articulated a plain **Federal Style** of architecture that borrowed from classical Greek and Roman examples and emphasized symmetry, balance, and restraint. Public buildings incorporated a neoclassical vocabulary of columns, domes, and pediments to suggest venerable ancient models for America’s novel republican experiment. Charles Bulfinch’s design of the Massachusetts State House (1798) and Benjamin Latrobe’s early-nineteenth-century additions to the U.S. Capitol and President’s House (now White House) showcased this neoclassical obsession.

A remarkable **Greek Revival** came between 1820 and 1850, partly stimulated by the heroic efforts of the Greeks in the 1820s to wrest independence from the “terrible Turk.” Popularized in pattern books for carpenters, plain and porticoed Greek Revival houses proliferated across America, especially in New York’s Burned-Over District and the Old Northwest. About midcentury strong interest developed in a revival of medieval Gothic forms, with their emphasis on pointed arches, sloped roofs, and large, stained-glass windows.

Talented Thomas Jefferson, architect of revolution, was one of the ablest American architects of his generation. Inspired by the sixteenth-century Venetian architect Andrea Palladio, Jefferson’s Virginia hilltop home, Monticello, arose as perhaps the most stately mansion in the nation and an iconic example of the Palladian style. Jefferson also modeled Richmond’s new state capitol on an ancient Roman temple, the Maison Carrée, which he had visited while minister to France. The quadrangle of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, another of Jefferson’s creations, remains one of the finest examples of neoclassical architecture in America.

Early American painting also struggled to find a distinctive national style. Imitative portraiture and history painting predominated in the late eighteenth century, as American artists attempted to cover their provincial culture with a civilizing veneer. Painting suffered from the dollar-grabbing of a raw civilization; from the hustle, bustle, and absence of leisure; from the lack of a wealthy class to sit for portraits—and then pay for them. Some of the earliest painters, including Benjamin West, were enticed to go to England, where they found both training and patrons. America exported artists and imported art.

Painting, like the theater, also suffered from the Puritan prejudice that art was a sinful waste of time—and

often obscene. John Adams boasted that “he would not give a sixpence for a bust of Phidias or a painting by Raphael.” When Edward Everett, the eminent Boston scholar and orator, placed a statue of Apollo in his home, he had its naked limbs draped.

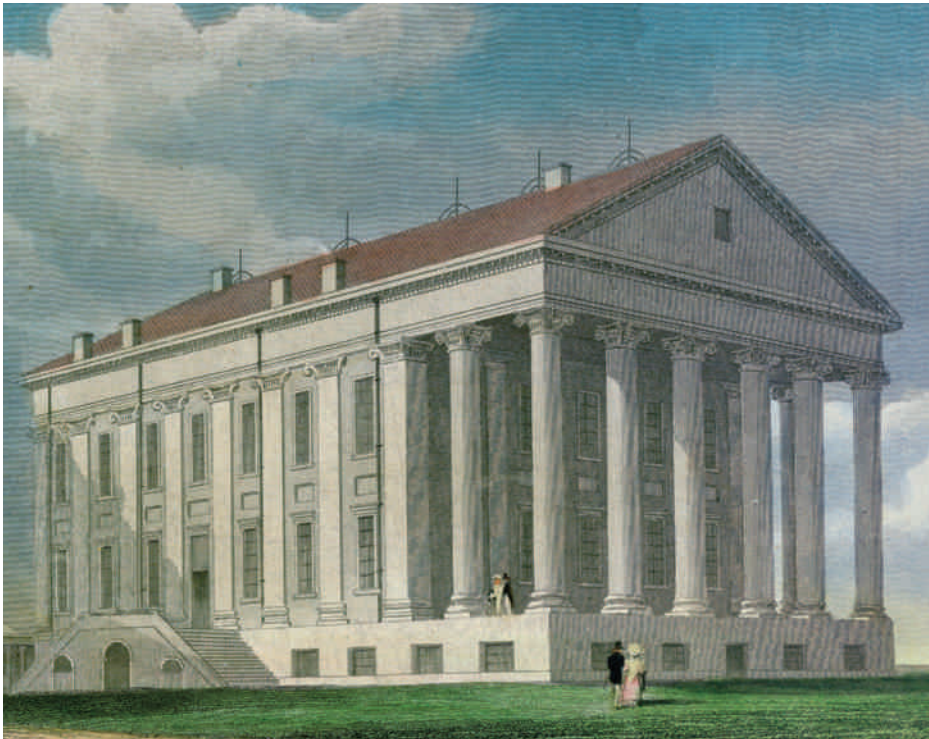
Competent painters nevertheless emerged. Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828), a restless Rhode Islander and one of the most gifted of the early group, wielded his brush in Britain in competition with the best artists. Returning to America in 1793, he produced several portraits of Washington, all of them somewhat idealized and dehumanized. (One of them appears on the familiar one-dollar bill.) Truth to tell, by the time he posed for Stuart, the famous general had lost his natural teeth and some of the original shape of his face. Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827), a Marylander, painted some sixty portraits of Washington, who patiently sat for about fourteen of them. John Trumbull (1756–1843), who had fought in the Revolutionary War, recaptured its heroic scenes and spirit on scores of striking canvases.

After the War of 1812, American painters turned increasingly from human portraits and history paintings to pastoral mirrorings of local landscapes. In America’s vast wilderness the new nation’s painters finally found their distinctive muse. The **Hudson River school** of the 1820s and 1830s excelled in this type of romantic art. Its leading lights, British-born Thomas Cole and New Jerseyan Asher Durand, celebrated the raw sublimity and grand divinity of nature.

Cole’s canvases, including *The Oxbow* (1836), portrayed the ecological threat of human encroachment on once-pristine environments. His masterpiece five-part series *The Course of Empire* (1833–1836) depicted the cyclical rise and fall of human civilization—a powerful analogy for nineteenth-century Americans anxious about industrialization and expansion. Around midcentury a group of “luminist” painters, including German-born Albert Bierstadt, dramatically and sometimes fancifully rendered majestic natural landscapes in the same romantic tradition.

At the same time, new technologies reframed the artistic landscape. Portrait painters gradually encountered some unwelcome competition from the invention of a crude photograph known as the daguerreotype, perfected about 1839 by a Frenchman, Louis Daguerre. Cheap and easily reproducible lithographs, most notably from the New York City firm of Currier and Ives, offered picturesque scenes and city views to millions of consumers.

Music was slowly shaking off the restraints of colonial days, when the prim Puritans had frowned upon nonreligious singing. Rhythmic and nostalgic “darky” tunes, popularized by whites, were becoming immense hits by midcentury. Special favorites were the uniquely American **minstrel shows**, featuring white actors with blackened faces playing stock plantation characters. (For the survival of blackface performance into the twentieth century, see “Examining the



The Library of Virginia

Virginia State Capitol, 1785–1788 With the coming of the American Revolution, Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson urged that the state capital move from Williamsburg to Richmond. There he designed a new, neoclassical capitol building inspired by the Maison Carrée, an exceedingly well-preserved Roman temple in Nîmes, France. The Virginia State Capitol became the Capitol of the Confederacy during the Civil War.



The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Russell Sage, 1908 (08.228)
Photograph © 1995 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Oxbow, by Thomas Cole, 1836 This rendering of the oxbow of the Connecticut River near Northampton, Massachusetts, after a thunderstorm is considered one of Cole's (1801–1848) masterpieces. A leader of the so-called Hudson River school, Cole wandered on foot over the mountains and rivers of New York State and New England, making pencil studies from which he painted in his studio during the winter. He and other members of this group transformed their realistic sketches into lyrical, romantic celebrations of the beauty of the American wilderness.

Evidence: *The Jazz Singer*, 1927," p. 717.) "Dixie," later adopted by the Confederates as their battle hymn, was written in 1859, ironically in New York City by an Ohioan. The most famous southern songs, also ironically, came from a white Pennsylvanian, Stephen C. Foster (1826–1864). His one excursion into the South occurred in 1852, after he had published "Camp-town Races" (1850), "Old Folks at Home" (1851), and "Oh! Susanna" (1848), the anthem of California gold-rushers. Foster made a valuable contribution to American folk music by capturing the plaintive spirit of the slaves. An odd and pathetic figure, he finally lost both his art and his popularity and died in a charity ward after drowning his sorrows in drink. Lacking adequate copyright protections, songwriters in this era earned pennies, not profits.

✦ The Blossoming of a National Literature

"In the four quarters of the globe," sneered a British critic of 1820, "who reads an American book, or goes

to an American play, or looks at an American picture or statue?" Like their sisterly artistic pursuits, early American literary efforts also fell short of initial expectations. Despite an unusually literate population, post-Revolutionary America imported or plagiarized much of its "polite" reading matter from Britain.

Busy conquering a continent, Americans poured most of their creative efforts into practical outlets. Praiseworthy were political essays, like *The Federalist* (1787–1788) of Hamilton, Jay, and Madison; pamphlets, like Tom Paine's *Common Sense* (1776); and political orations, like the masterpieces of Daniel Webster. In the category of nonreligious books published before 1820, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1818) is one of the few that achieved genuine distinction. His narrative is a classic in its simplicity, clarity, and inspirational quality. Even so, it records only a fragment of "Old Ben's" long, fruitful, and amorous life.

After 1820 a confident cohort of young American authors finally began to answer the call for an authentic national literature. Their rise corresponded with the wave of nationalism following the War of 1812 and the arrival of **romanticism** on American shores.

Conceived as a reaction against the hyper-rational Enlightenment, romanticism originated in the revolutionary salons of continental Europe and England. In direct contrast to neoclassicism, romanticism emphasized imagination over reason, nature over civilization, intuition over calculation, and the self over society. Emotion, expression, and experimentation were core values. Upsetting the restrained, clocklike universe of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, nineteenth-century romantics elevated primal nature in all its sublime and picturesque glory. They celebrated human potential and prized the heroic genius of the individual artist. Infused with romantic energy, American literature flowered in the mid-nineteenth century as never before.

Washington Irving (1783–1859), born in New York City, was the first American to win international recognition as a literary figure. Steeped in the traditions of New Netherland, he published in 1809 his amusing *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, with its “local color” caricatures of the Dutch. When the family business failed, Irving was forced to turn to the goose-feather pen. In 1819–1820 he published *The Sketch Book*, which brought him immediate fame at home and abroad. Combining a pleasing style with delicate charm and quiet humor, he used English as well as American themes and included such immortal Gothic tales as “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” Europe was amazed to find at last an American with a feather in his hand, not in his hair. Later turning to Spanish locales and biography, Irving did much to interpret America to Europe and Europe to America. He was, said the Englishman William Thackeray, “the first ambassador whom the New World of letters sent to the Old.”

James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) followed on Irving's coattails and gained world fame making New World themes respectable. Expelled from Yale, he eventually married into a wealthy family and settled down

on the New York frontier. Reading one day to his wife from an insipid English novel, Cooper remarked in disgust that he could write a better book himself. His wife challenged him to do so—and he did.

After an initial failure, Cooper launched an illustrious career in 1821 with his second novel, *The Spy*—an absorbing tale of the American Revolution. His stories of the sea were meritorious and popular, but his fame rests most enduringly on his five *Leatherstocking Tales*, featuring a dead-eye rifleman named Natty Bumppo, a solitary and self-reliant hero who mingles easily with nature's “noble savages” in stirring adventures like *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). Cooper's novels sold well to Europeans, some of whom came to think of all American people as born with tomahawk in hand. Actually Cooper's deepest theme was an exploration of the viability and destiny of America's republican experiment; he contrasted the undefiled purity of “natural men,” children of the untrammelled wilderness, with the artificiality and corruption of modern civilization. Cooper's emblematic tales of the vanishing frontier offered literary analogues of the Hudson River school's visual landscapes.

Along with Irving and Cooper, the third member of New York's trailblazing Knickerbocker Group was the belated Puritan William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), transplanted from Massachusetts. At age sixteen he wrote the meditative and melancholy “Thanatopsis” (published in 1817), which was one of the first high-quality poems produced in the United States. Critics could hardly believe that it had been written on “this side of the water.” Although Bryant continued with poetry, he made his living by editing the influential *New York Evening Post*. For over fifty years, he set a model for journalism that was dignified, liberal, and conscientious.

★ Trumpeters of Transcendentalism

A golden age in American literature dawned in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, when an amazing outburst shook New England. One of the mainsprings of this literary flowering was **transcendentalism**, especially around Boston, which preened itself as “the Athens of America.”

The transcendentalist movement of the 1830s resulted in part from a liberalizing of the straight-jacket Puritan theology. It also owed much to foreign influences, including the German romantic philosophers and the religions of Asia. The transcendentalists rejected the prevailing empiricist theory, derived from John Locke, that all knowledge comes to the mind through the senses. Truth, rather, “transcends” the senses: it cannot be found by observation alone. Every person possesses an inner light that can illuminate the

Washington Irving's (1783–1859) popular folktale “Rip Van Winkle” (1819) offered a shrewd allegory for the dramatic changes sweeping the early Republic. In this short story, the fictional Rip sleeps through the American Revolution. Upon awakening after twenty years, he finds his fellow village people

“haranguing vehemently about rights of citizens—election—members of congress—liberty—Bunker's hill—heroes of seventy-six—and other words, that were a perfect Babylonish jargon to the bewildered Van Winkle.”

highest truth and put him or her in direct touch with God, or the “Oversoul.”

These mystical doctrines of transcendentalism defied precise definition, but they underlay concrete beliefs. Foremost was a stiff-backed individualism in matters religious as well as social. Closely associated was a commitment to self-reliance, self-culture, and self-discipline. These traits naturally bred hostility to authority and to formal institutions of any kind, as well as to all conventional wisdom. Finally came a romantic exaltation of the dignity of the individual, whether black or white—the mainspring of a whole array of humanitarian reforms.

Best known of the transcendentalists was Boston-born Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). Tall, slender, and intensely blue-eyed, he mirrored serenity in his noble features. Trained as a Unitarian minister, he

early forsook his pulpit and ultimately reached a wider audience by pen and platform. He was a never-failing favorite as a lyceum lecturer and for twenty years took a western tour every winter. Perhaps his most thrilling public effort was a Phi Beta Kappa address, “**The American Scholar**,” delivered at Harvard College in 1837. This brilliant appeal was an intellectual declaration of independence, for it urged American writers to throw off European traditions and delve into the riches of their own backyards.

Hailed as both a poet and a philosopher, Emerson was not of the highest rank as either. He was more influential as a practical philosopher and public intellectual. Through his fresh and vibrant essays he enriched countless thousands of humdrum lives. Catching the individualistic mood of the Republic, he stressed self-reliance, self-improvement, self-confidence, optimism,



National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution/Art Resource, NY

Portrait of Washington Irving and His Literary Friends at Sunnyside, 1864 This apocryphal gathering of America’s founding generation of writers, many of them now sadly unread, was imagined to take place in the library of Washington Irving’s Hudson River home. Surrounding Irving, seated in the armchair at center, are fourteen accomplished creators of history, philosophy, fiction, and poetry: (seated, left to right) William Gilmore Simms, Fitz-Greene Halleck, William Hickling Prescott, Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Fennimore Cooper, George Bancroft; (standing, left to right) Henry Theodore Tuckerman, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Nathaniel Parker Willis, James Kirke Paulding, William Cullen Bryant, John Pendleton Kennedy. The portrait itself represented a collaborative effort of artists. Felix Octavius Carr Darley did the original drawing, with the help of photographs taken by Matthew Brady. Christian Schussele made a four-by-six-foot oil painting of the scene and Thomas Oldham Barlow rendered it as a steel-plate engraving for distribution to a wide public.

In 1849 Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) published “Resistance to Civil Government” (later renamed “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience”), asserting,

“All men recognize the right of revolution; the right to refuse allegiance to and to resist the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable. But almost all say that such is not the case now. . . . I say, when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty more urgent is the fact, that the country so overrun is not our own, but ours is the invading army.”

and freedom, though he also criticized American triumphalism of the Jacksonian brand. By the 1850s he was an outspoken critic of slavery, and he ardently supported the Union cause in the Civil War.

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was Emerson’s close associate—a poet, a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a nonconformist. Condemning a government that supported slavery, he refused to pay his Massachusetts poll tax and was jailed for a night.* A gifted prose writer, he is well known for *Walden: Or Life in the Woods* (1854). The book is a record of Thoreau’s two years of simple existence in a hut that he built on the edge of Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts. *Walden* epitomized the romantic quest for isolation from society’s corruptions. A stiff-necked individualist, Thoreau believed that he should reduce his bodily wants so as to gain time to pursue truth through study and meditation. Thoreau’s *Walden* and his essay “On the Duty of Civil Disobedience” (1849) exercised a strong influence in furthering idealistic thought, both in America and abroad. His writings later encouraged Mahatma Gandhi to resist British rule in India and, still later, inspired the development of American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.’s thinking about nonviolence.

Precocious Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) befriended Emerson around the time of his Phi Beta Kappa address in 1837 and soon joined the Boston circle of transcendentalists. She edited the movement’s journal, *The Dial*,

*The story (probably apocryphal) is that Emerson visited Thoreau at the jail and asked, “Why are you here?” The reply came, “Why are you not here?”

In 1958 civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968) connected his theory of nonviolent resistance to Henry David Thoreau’s pedigree:

“At this point [in the planning of the 1955 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott] I began to think about Thoreau’s *Essay on Civil Disobedience*. I remembered how, as a college student, I had been moved when I first read this work. I became convinced that what we were preparing to do in Montgomery was related to what Thoreau had expressed. We were simply saying to the white community, ‘We can no longer lend our cooperation to an evil system.’”

for two years after its founding in 1840. In the same year, she launched her series of “Conversations,” or paid seminars designed to promote scholarly dialogue among local elite women (and some invited men). Known for her sparkling conversational wit, Fuller also wrote prolifically. In 1845, she published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, a powerful critique of gender roles and an iconic statement of the budding feminist movement. After an influential stint as literary editor of Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune*, Fuller sailed for Europe and eventually took part in the struggle to bring unity and republican government to Italy. She died tragically in a shipwreck off New York’s Fire Island while returning to the United States in 1850.

Bold, brassy, and swaggering was the open-collared figure of Brooklyn’s Walt Whitman (1819–1892). In his famous collection of poems *Leaves of Grass* (1855), he gave free rein to his gushing genius with what he called a “barbaric yawp.” His landmark “Song of Myself,” with its unabashed first-person speaker, celebrated the romantic artist-hero in free verse. Highly emotional and unconventional, Whitman dispensed with titles, stanzas, rhymes, and at times even regular meter. He located divinity in commonplace natural objects (e.g., leaves of grass) as well as the human body. Whitman even handled sex with shocking frankness, although he lauded his verses in later editions, and his book was banned in Boston.

Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* was at first a financial failure. The only three enthusiastic reviews that it received were written by the author himself—anonously. But in time the once-withered *Leaves of Grass*, revived and honored, won for Whitman an enormous following in both America and Europe and gained him the informal title “Poet Laureate of Democracy.” Singing with transcendental abandon of his love for the masses, he caught the exuberant enthusiasm of an

Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888)

This color lithograph printed by Louis Prang in 1888 made Alcott's image accessible to her many loyal readers. In search of independence for herself and financial security for her family, Alcott worked as a seamstress, governess, teacher, and housemaid until her writing finally brought her success. Her much-loved, largely autobiographical novel *Little Women* has remained in print continuously from 1868 until our own day.



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expanding America that had turned its back on the Old World:

*All the Past we leave behind;
We debouch upon a newer, mightier world, varied world;
Fresh and strong the world we seize—world of labor and
the march—
Pioneers! O Pioneers!*

Here at last was the native art for which critics had been crying.

★ Glowing Literary Lights

Certain other literary giants were not actively associated with the transcendentalist movement, though not completely immune to its influences. Professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882), who for many years taught modern languages at Harvard College, was one of the most popular poets ever produced in America. Handsome and urbane, he lived a generally serene life, except for the tragic deaths of two wives, the second of whom perished before his eyes when her dress caught fire. Writing for the genteel classes, he was adopted by the less cultured masses. His wide knowledge of European literature supplied him with many themes, but some of his most admired narrative poems—*Evangeline* (1847), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855),

and *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858)—were based on American traditions. Immensely popular in Europe, Longfellow was the first American ever to be enshrined in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

A fighting Quaker with piercing dark eyes, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892) was the uncrowned poet laureate of the antislavery crusade. Less talented as a writer than Longfellow, he was vastly more important in influencing social action. His abolitionist poems cried aloud against inhumanity, injustice, and intolerance, against

*The outworn rite, the old abuse,
The pious fraud transparent grown*

Undeterred by insults and the stoning of mobs, Whittier helped arouse a callous America on the slavery issue. He also left behind a legacy of “local color” sketches and verse dedicated to his native New England.

Many-sided professor James Russell Lowell (1819–1891), who succeeded Professor Longfellow at Harvard, ranks as one of America's better poets. He was also a distinguished essayist, literary critic, and diplomat, as well as editor of Boston's *Atlantic Monthly* and *North American Review*—a diffusion of talents that hampered his poetical output. Lowell is remembered as a political satirist in his *Biglow Papers*, especially those of 1846–1848 opposing the Mexican War. Written partly as poetry in the Yankee dialect, the *Papers* condemned in

blistering terms the alleged slavery-expansion designs of the Polk administration.

Two women writers whose work remains enormously popular today also sprouted from this New England literary soil. Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888) grew up in Concord, Massachusetts, in the bosom of transcendentalism, alongside neighbors Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller. Her philosopher father Bronson Alcott occupied himself more with ideas than with earning a living, leaving his daughter to write *Little Women* (1868) and other books to support her mother and sisters. Not far away in Amherst, Massachusetts, poet Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) lived as a recluse but created her own original world through precious gems of poetry. Her seclusion was but an extreme example of the romantic artist's desire for social remove. In deceptively spare language and simple rhyme schemes, Dickinson explored universal themes of nature, love, death, and immortality. Although she hesitated during her lifetime to publish more than a dozen of her poems, when she died, nearly two thousand of them were found among her papers and eventually made their way into print.

The most noteworthy literary figure produced by the South before the Civil War was novelist William Gilmore Simms (1806–1870). Quantitatively, at least, he was great: eighty-two books flowed from his ever-moist pen, winning for him the title “the Cooper of the South.” His favorite themes, captured in titles like *The Yemasee* (1835) and *The Cassique of Kiawah* (1859), dealt with the southern frontier in colonial days and with the South during the Revolutionary War. Enormously popular in his own day, Simms ardently promoted southern literature and won the esteem of many northern writers, including Irving, Bryant, and Herman Melville, among others. Yet his national and international reputation suffered after the Civil War, no doubt due to his overt proslavery and secessionist sentiments.

Literary Individualists and Dissenters

Not all writers in these years believed so keenly in human goodness and social progress. A clique of contrary-minded authors plumbed the darker realms of human experience, exploring pain, fear, and grief, along with the supernatural and the subconscious. Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), who spent much of his youth in Virginia, was an eccentric genius. Orphaned at an early age, cursed with ill health, and married to a child-wife of thirteen who fell fatally ill of tuberculosis, he suffered hunger, cold, poverty, and debt. Failing at suicide, he took refuge in the bottle and dissipated his talent early.

Poe was a gifted lyric poet, as the mesmerizing rhythms of “The Raven” (1845) attest. A master stylist, he also excelled in the short story, especially of the Gothic horror type, in which he shared his alcoholic nightmares with fascinated readers. If he did not invent the modern detective story, he at least set new high standards in tales like “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841).

Poe was fascinated by the ghostly and ghastly, as in “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) and other stories. Obsessed with romantic antiheroes on the verge of mental disintegration, he reflected a morbid sensibility distinctly at odds with the usually optimistic tone of American culture. Partly for this reason, Poe has perhaps been even more prized by Europeans than by Americans. His brilliant career was cut short when he was found drunk in a Baltimore gutter and shortly thereafter died.

Two other writers reflected the continuing Calvinist obsession with original sin and with the never-ending struggle between good and evil. In somber Salem, Massachusetts, writer Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) grew up in an atmosphere heavy with the memories of his Puritan forebears and the tragedy of his father's premature death on an ocean voyage. His masterpiece was *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), which describes the Puritan practice of forcing an adulteress to wear a scarlet “A” on her clothing. The tragic tale chronicles the psychological effects of sin on the guilty heroine Hester Prynne, a classic romantic outcast, and her secret lover Arthur Dimmesdale, the father of her baby and a minister of the gospel in Puritan Boston. In *The Marble Faun* (1860), Hawthorne dealt with a group of young American artists who witness a mysterious murder in Rome. The book explores the concepts of the omnipresence of evil and the dead hand of the past weighing upon the present.

Herman Melville (1819–1891), an orphaned and ill-educated New Yorker, went to sea as a youth and served eighteen adventuresome months on a whaler. “A whale ship was my Yale College and my Harvard,” he wrote. Jumping ship in the South Seas, he lived among cannibals, from whom he providently escaped unscathed. His exotic tales of the South Seas were immediately popular, but his masterpiece, *Moby Dick* (1851), was not. This epic novel is a complex allegory of good and evil, told by its narrator Ishmael in terms of the conflict between a whaling captain, Ahab, and a giant white whale, Moby Dick. The monomaniacal Captain Ahab, having lost a leg to the marine monster, lives only for revenge. His deterministic pursuit finally ends when Moby Dick rams and sinks Ahab's ship, leaving only one survivor. The whale's exact identity and Ahab's motives remain obscure. In the end the untamed sea, like the terrifyingly impersonal and unknowable universe of Melville's imagination, simply rolls on.



Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA

Capturing a Sperm Whale, painted by William Page from a sketch by C. B. Hulsart, 1835 This painting and Melville's *Moby-Dick* vividly portray the hazards of whaling. Despite the dangers, it proved to be an important industry from colonial times to the end of the nineteenth century.

Moby-Dick was widely ignored at the time of its publication; people were accustomed to more straightforward and upbeat prose. A disheartened Melville continued to write unprofitably for some years, part of the time eking out a living as a customs inspector in New York City, and then died in relative obscurity. Ironically, his brooding masterpiece about the mysterious white whale had to wait until the more jaded twentieth century for readers and for proper recognition.

✦ Portrayers of the Past

A distinguished group of American historians was emerging at the same time that other writers were winning distinction. Energetic George Bancroft (1800–1891), who as secretary of the navy helped found the Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1845, has deservedly received the title “Father of American History.” He published a spirited, superpatriotic history of the United States to 1789 in six (originally ten) volumes (1834–1876), a work that grew out of his vast researches in dusty archives in Europe and America.

Two other historians are read with greater pleasure and profit today. William H. Prescott (1796–1859), who accidentally lost the sight of an eye while in college, conserved his remaining weak vision and published classic accounts of the conquest of Mexico (1843) and Peru (1847). Francis Parkman (1823–1893), whose eyes were so defective that he wrote in darkness with the aid of a guiding machine, penned a brilliant series of volumes beginning in 1851. In epic style he chronicled the struggle between France and Britain in colonial times for the mastery of North America.

Early American historians of prominence were almost without exception New Englanders, largely because the Boston area provided well-stocked libraries and a stimulating literary tradition. These writers numbered abolitionists among their relatives and friends and hence were disposed to view unsympathetically the slavery-cursed South. This “made in New England” interpretation dominated the writing of American history until the close of the nineteenth century, when pressure for national reconciliation overcame regional bias. “The history of the United States has been written by Boston,” one pro-southern historian bitterly complained, “and largely written wrong.”

Varying Viewpoints

Reform: Who? What? How? and Why?

Early chronicles of the antebellum period universally lauded the era's reformers, portraying them as idealistic, altruistic crusaders intent on improving American society.

After World War II, however, some historians began to detect selfish and even conservative motives underlying the apparent benevolence of the reformers. This view described the advocates of reform as anxious, upper-class men and women threatened by the ferment of life in antebellum America. The pursuit of reforms like temperance, asylums, prisons, and mandatory public education represented a means of asserting "social control." In this vein, one historian described a reform movement as "the anguished protest of an aggrieved class against a world they never made." In Michael Katz's treatment of early educational reform, proponents were community leaders who sought a school system that would ease the traumas of America's industrialization by inculcating business-oriented values and discipline in the working classes.

The wave of reform activity in the 1960s prompted a reevaluation of the reputations of the antebellum reformers. These more recent interpretations found much to admire in the authentic religious commitments of reformers and especially in the participation of women, who sought various social improvements as an extension of their function as protectors of the home and family.

The scholarly treatment of abolitionism is a telling example of how reformers and their campaigns have risen and fallen in the estimation of historians. To northern historians writing in the late nineteenth century, abolitionists were courageous men and women so devoted to uprooting the evil of slavery that they were willing to dedicate their lives to a cause that often ostracized them from their communities. By the mid-twentieth century, an interpretation more favorable to the South prevailed, one that blamed the fanaticism of the abolitionists for the Civil War. But as the racial climate in the United States began to change during the 1960s, historians once again showed sympathy for the abolitionist struggle, and by the end of the twentieth century abolitionist men and women were revered as ideologically committed individuals dedicated not just to freeing the enslaved but to saving the moral soul of America.

Scholars animated by the modern feminist movement have inspired a reconsideration of women's reform activity. It

had long been known, of course, that women were active participants in charitable organizations. But not until Nancy Cott, Kathryn Sklar, Mary Ryan, and other historians began to look more closely at what Cott has called "the bonds of womanhood" did the links between women's domestic lives and their public benevolent behavior fully emerge. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg showed in her study of the New York Female Moral Reform Society, for example, that members who set out at first to convert prostitutes to evangelical Protestantism and to close down the city's many brothels soon developed an ideology of female autonomy that rejected male dominance. When men behaved in immoral or illegal ways, women reformers claimed that they had the right—even the duty—to leave the confines of their homes and actively work to purify society. More recently, historians Nancy Hewitt and Lori Ginzberg have challenged the assumption that all women reformers embraced a single definition of female identity. Instead they have emphasized the importance of class differences in shaping women's reform work, which led inevitably to tensions within female ranks. Giving more attention to the historical evolution of female reform ideology, Ginzberg has also detected a shift from an early focus on moral uplift to a more class-based appeal for social control.

Historians of the suffrage movement have emphasized another kind of exclusivity among women reformers—the boundaries of race. Ellen DuBois has shown that after a brief alliance with the abolitionist movement, many female suffrage reformers abandoned the cause of black liberation in an effort to achieve their own goal with less controversy. Whatever historians may conclude about the liberating or leashing character of early reform, it is clear by now that they have to contend with the ways in which class, gender, and race divided reformers, making the plural—*reform movements*—the more accurate depiction of the impulse to "improve" that pervaded American society in the early nineteenth century.

Most recently, historians of all kinds of reform have highlighted the transatlantic dimensions of these movements. American reformers corresponded with and adopted ideas from their European counterparts, participating in waves of reform that extended well beyond the shores of the United States.

Chapter Review

KEY TERMS

The Age of Reason (307)
 Deism (307)
 Unitarians (307)
 Second Great Awakening (308)
 Burned-Over District (309)
 Mormons (310)
 lyceum (314)
 American Temperance Society (316)
 Maine Law of 1851 (317)
 Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls (318)
 New Harmony (320)
 Brook Farm (320)
 Oneida Community (320)
 Shakers (320)
 Federal Style (324)
 Greek Revival (324)
 Hudson River school (325)
 minstrel shows (325)
 romanticism (326)
 transcendentalism (327)
 "The American Scholar" (328)

PEOPLE TO KNOW

Peter Cartwright
 Charles Grandison Finney
 Joseph Smith
 Brigham Young
 Horace Mann
 Dorothea Dix
 Neal S. Dow
 Lucretia Mott
 Elizabeth Cady Stanton
 Susan B. Anthony
 Lucy Stone
 Amelia Bloomer
 Robert Owen
 John J. Audubon
 Stephen C. Foster
 James Fenimore Cooper
 Ralph Waldo Emerson
 Henry David Thoreau
 Walt Whitman
 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
 Louisa May Alcott
 Emily Dickinson
 Edgar Allan Poe
 Nathaniel Hawthorne
 Herman Melville
 Francis Parkman

TO LEARN MORE

Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (1994)
 Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797–1840* (2002)
 Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989)
 Joseph Hawes, *Children in Urban Society* (1971)
 Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (2007)
 Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (1978)
 Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America* (1976)
 Spencer Klaw, *Without Sin: The Life and Death of the Oneida Community* (1993)

Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (2008)
 Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (1988)
 William Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic* (1979)
 Caroline Winterer, *The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910* (2002)

A complete, annotated bibliography for this chapter—along with brief descriptions of the People to Know—may be found on the American Pageant website. The Key Terms are defined in a Glossary at the end of the text.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1747** Shaker movement founded in Manchester, England
- 1770s** First Shaker communities established in New York
- 1794** Thomas Paine publishes *The Age of Reason*
- 1795** University of North Carolina founded
- 1800** Second Great Awakening begins
- 1819** Jefferson founds University of Virginia
- 1819–1820** Irving publishes *The Sketch Book*
- 1821** Emma Willard establishes Troy (New York) Female Seminary
- 1825** New Harmony commune established
- 1826** American Temperance Society founded
Cooper publishes *The Last of the Mohicans*
- 1828** Noah Webster publishes dictionary
American Peace Society founded
- 1830** Joseph Smith founds Mormon Church
Godey's Lady's Book first published
- 1830–1831** Finney conducts revivals in eastern cities
- 1835** Lyceum movement flourishes
- 1836** Cole's *The Oxbow* debuts
- 1837** Oberlin College admits female students
Mary Lyon establishes Mount Holyoke Seminary
Emerson delivers "The American Scholar" address
- 1840** London antislavery convention refuses to recognize female delegates
- 1841** Brook Farm commune established
- 1843** Dorothea Dix petitions Massachusetts legislature on behalf of the insane
- 1845** Poe publishes "The Raven"
- 1846–1847** Mormon migration to Utah
- 1848** Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention held
Oneida Community established
Foster's "Oh! Susanna" debuts
- 1850** Hawthorne publishes *The Scarlet Letter*
- 1851** Melville publishes *Moby Dick*
Maine passes first law prohibiting liquor
- 1854** Thoreau publishes *Walden*
- 1855** Whitman publishes *Leaves of Grass*



Go to the CourseMate website at www.cengagebrain.com for additional study tools and review materials—including audio and video clips—for this chapter.

AP* Review Questions for Chapter 15

- As embraced by many of the Founding Fathers, Deism
(A) emphasized that a person's fate was predestined and known only by God.
(B) was rooted in strict adherence to the Bible.
(C) celebrated God's hand in the daily workings of the world.
(D) stressed that God created the world but trusted the moral capacity of human beings to run it.
(E) embraced Original Sin and Christ's divinity.
- Which of the following is NOT a true statement about the Second Great Awakening?
(A) It was a religious movement that led to the reorganization of many existing churches and the founding of new sects.
(B) It drew new converts from massive camp or revival meetings.
(C) It had its greatest appeal to men, who constituted the majority of new religious adherents.
(D) It inspired several reform movements.
(E) It widened existing class and regional divisions.
- The term *Burned-Over District* refers to
(A) parts of western New York that were inundated with sermoners preaching hellfire and damnation.
(B) factory districts in New England that were ravaged by fires in the early 1800s.
(C) disillusionment in certain parts of the Northeast when Christ's second coming did not occur as predicted.
(D) sections of the frontier that were overwhelmed with multiple revivals.
(E) regions of New England that were overcrowded, overgrown, and increasingly run-down.
- Who founded the Mormon religion (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints)?
(A) Brigham Young
(B) Joseph Smith
(C) Charles Finney
(D) Peter Cartwright
(E) William Miller
- Despite early resistance to public education, once established it was advanced by all of the following reforms EXCEPT
(A) increasing manhood suffrage.
(B) campaigns for better schoolhouses and higher pay for teachers.
(C) efforts to keep children in school for longer terms.
(D) improvements in textbooks.
(E) the expanding number of public schools nationwide.
- Why was there a lag in founding women's colleges and other secondary institutions until after the 1820s?
(A) Lack of funding
(B) Fear that education would make women unfit for marriage
(C) Discomfort with women and men in similar institutions
(D) The fact that educating women was against many religious principles
(E) The fact that secondary education for women was against the law in many states
- The reformer Dorothea Dix is best known for
(A) championing the mentally ill.
(B) temperance.
(C) abolition.
(D) educational reform.
(E) labor reform.
- Reformers blamed alcohol consumption—Demon Drink—for all of the following EXCEPT
(A) corruption of women.
(B) degradation of the family.
(C) decrease in church participation.
(D) disruption of American society by immigrants.
(E) decline in worker productivity.
- What is the significance of Seneca Falls in 1848?
(A) The rise of the universal suffrage movement
(B) The beginning of the abolition movement
(C) The birth of the industrial revolution
(D) The advent of the women's rights movement
(E) The start of a dress reform crusade

10. Which of the following was NOT among the many Utopian communities that sprang up in the early to mid-nineteenth century?
- (A) Oneida
 - (B) Brook Farm
 - (C) Quakers
 - (D) Shakers
 - (E) New Harmony
11. The main spark in the flowering of a truly American form of literature was the
- (A) emerging consumer culture in the 1820s.
 - (B) upswing in nationalism after the War of 1812.
 - (C) intensifying rivalry with Britain.
 - (D) improvement in publishing techniques.
 - (E) rising literacy rates in America.
12. The transcendentalist movement of the 1830s
- (A) celebrated the power of the individual spirit.
 - (B) embraced the communal influences of the church and other institutions.
 - (C) believed that human beings attain knowledge through the five senses.
 - (D) argued that laws and government were the key to social order.
 - (E) put the greater good ahead of the individual's needs.
13. All of the following American authors celebrated the human potential for goodness and progress in their work EXCEPT
- (A) John Greenleaf Whittier.
 - (B) Louisa May Alcott.
 - (C) Henry David Thoreau.
 - (D) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
 - (E) Edgar Allan Poe.
14. Who is considered the “father of American history”?
- (A) Francis Parkman
 - (B) George Bancroft
 - (C) William Prescott
 - (D) Herman Melville
 - (E) Ralph Waldo Emerson
15. A major difference between the Great Awakening and Second Great Awakening was that
- (A) the Second Great Awakening encompassed a return to Catholic and Jewish ideals.
 - (B) the Second Great Awakening manifested in reform movements that attempted to dramatically change American society.
 - (C) the Great Awakening was unsuccessful at reviving religious fervor.
 - (D) the Great Awakening was much larger in scope than the Second Great Awakening.
 - (E) the population targeted by the Second Great Awakening was less diverse than during colonial times.
16. Advancements in American arts and culture resulted from all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) interest in the revival of Gothic forms.
 - (B) surging nationalism after the War of 1812.
 - (C) the idea that truth “transcends” the senses.
 - (D) greater emphasis on education in the South.
 - (E) foreign influences, including German romanticism.