

CHAPTER 13

Antebellum Idealism and Reform Impulses, 1820–1860

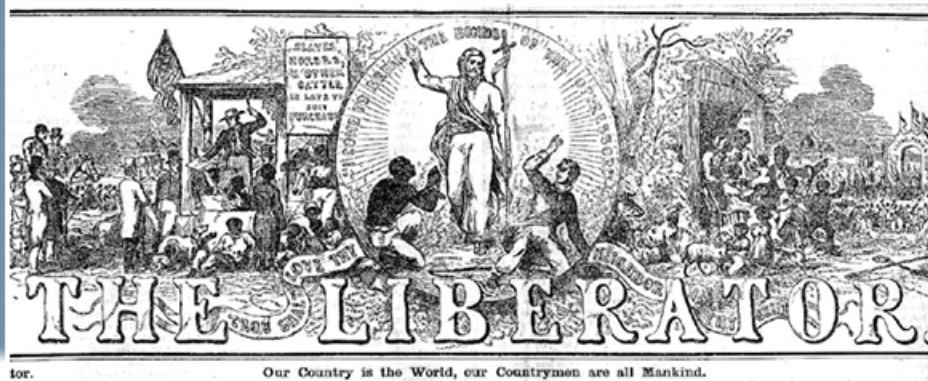


Figure 13.1 The masthead of *The Liberator*, by Hammatt Billings in 1850, highlights the religious aspect of antislavery crusades. *The Liberator* was an abolitionist newspaper published by William Lloyd Garrison, one of the leaders of the abolitionist movement in the United States.

Chapter Outline

- 13.1 An Awakening of Religion and Individualism
- 13.2 Antebellum Communal Experiments
- 13.3 Reforms to Human Health
- 13.4 Addressing Slavery
- 13.5 Women's Rights

Introduction

This masthead for the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* shows two Americas (**Figure 13.1**). On the left is the southern version where slaves are being sold; on the right, free blacks enjoy the blessing of liberty. Reflecting the role of evangelical Protestantism in reforms such as abolition, the image features Jesus as the central figure. The caption reads, “I come to break the bonds of the oppressor,” and below the masthead, “Our country is the World, our Countrymen are all Mankind.”

The reform efforts of the antebellum years, including abolitionism, aimed to perfect the national destiny and redeem the souls of individual Americans. A great deal of optimism, fueled by evangelical Protestantism revivalism, underwrote the moral crusades of the first half of the nineteenth century. Some reformers targeted what they perceived as the shallow, materialistic, and democratic market culture of the United States and advocated a stronger sense of individualism and self-reliance. Others dreamed of a more equal society and established their own idealistic communities. Still others, who viewed slavery as the most serious flaw in American life, labored to end the institution. Women’s rights, temperance, health reforms, and a host of other efforts also came to the forefront during the heyday of reform in the 1830s and 1840s.

13.1 An Awakening of Religion and Individualism

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the connection between evangelical Protestantism and the Second Great Awakening
- Describe the message of the transcendentalists

Protestantism shaped the views of the vast majority of Americans in the antebellum years. The influence of religion only intensified during the decades before the Civil War, as religious camp meetings spread the word that people could bring about their own salvation, a direct contradiction to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Alongside this religious fervor, transcendentalists advocated a more direct knowledge of the self and an emphasis on individualism. The writers and thinkers devoted to transcendentalism, as well as the reactions against it, created a trove of writings, an outpouring that has been termed the American Renaissance.

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

The reform efforts of the antebellum era sprang from the Protestant revival fervor that found expression in what historians refer to as the **Second Great Awakening**. (The First Great Awakening of evangelical Protestantism had taken place in the 1730s and 1740s.) The Second Great Awakening emphasized an emotional religious style in which sinners grappled with their unworthy nature before concluding that they were born again, that is, turning away from their sinful past and devoting themselves to living a righteous, Christ-centered life. This emphasis on personal salvation, with its rejection of predestination (the Calvinist concept that God selected only a chosen few for salvation), was the religious embodiment of the Jacksonian celebration of the individual. Itinerant ministers preached the message of the awakening to hundreds of listeners at outdoors revival meetings (**Figure 13.3**).

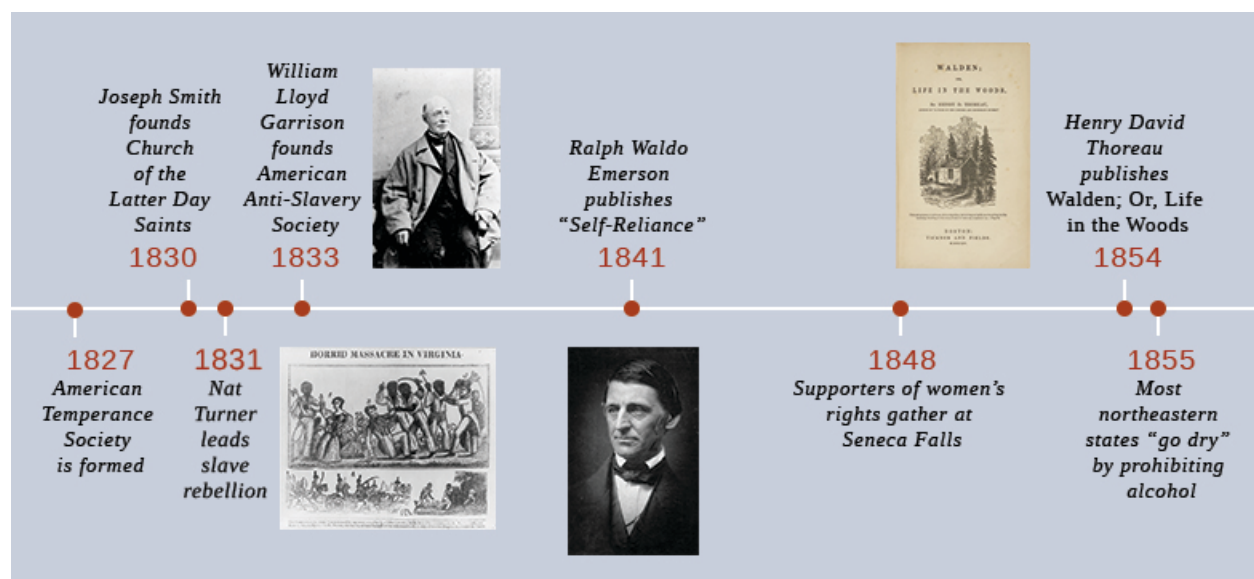


Figure 13.2



Figure 13.3 This 1819 engraving by Jacques Gerard shows a Methodist camp meeting. Revivalist camp meetings held by itinerant Protestant ministers became a feature of nineteenth-century American life.

The burst of religious enthusiasm that began in Kentucky and Tennessee in the 1790s and early 1800s among Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians owed much to the uniqueness of the early decades of the republic. These years saw swift population growth, broad western expansion, and the rise of participatory democracy. These political and social changes made many people anxious, and the more egalitarian, emotional, and individualistic religious practices of the Second Great Awakening provided relief and comfort for Americans experiencing rapid change. The awakening soon spread to the East, where it had a profound impact on Congregationalists and Presbyterians. The thousands swept up in the movement believed in the possibility of creating a much better world. Many adopted **millennialism**, the fervent belief that the Kingdom of God would be established on earth and that God would reign on earth for a thousand years, characterized by harmony and Christian morality. Those drawn to the message of the Second Great Awakening yearned for stability, decency, and goodness in the new and turbulent American republic.

The Second Great Awakening also brought significant changes to American culture. Church membership doubled in the years between 1800 and 1835. Several new groups formed to promote and strengthen the message of religious revival. The American Bible Society, founded in 1816, distributed Bibles in an effort to ensure that every family had access to the sacred text, while the American Sunday School Union, established in 1824, focused on the religious education of children and published religious materials specifically for young readers. In 1825, the American Tract Society formed with the goal of disseminating the Protestant revival message in a flurry of publications.

Missionaries and circuit riders (ministers without a fixed congregation) brought the message of the awakening across the United States, including into the lives of slaves. The revival spurred many slaveholders to begin encouraging their slaves to become Christians. Previously, many slaveholders feared allowing their slaves to convert, due to a belief that Christians could not be enslaved and because of the fear that slaves might use Christian principles to oppose their enslavement. However, by the 1800s, Americans established a legal foundation for the enslavement of Christians. Also, by this time, slaveholders had come to believe that if slaves learned the “right” (that is, white) form of Christianity, then slaves would be more obedient and hardworking. Allowing slaves access to Christianity also served to ease the consciences of Christian slaveholders, who argued that slavery was divinely ordained, yet it was a faith that also required slaveholders to bring slaves to the “truth.” Also important to this era was the creation of African American forms of worship as well as African American churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first independent black Protestant church in the United States. Formed in the 1790s by Richard Allen, the African Methodist Episcopal Church advanced the African American effort to express their faith apart from white Methodists (**Figure 13.4**).

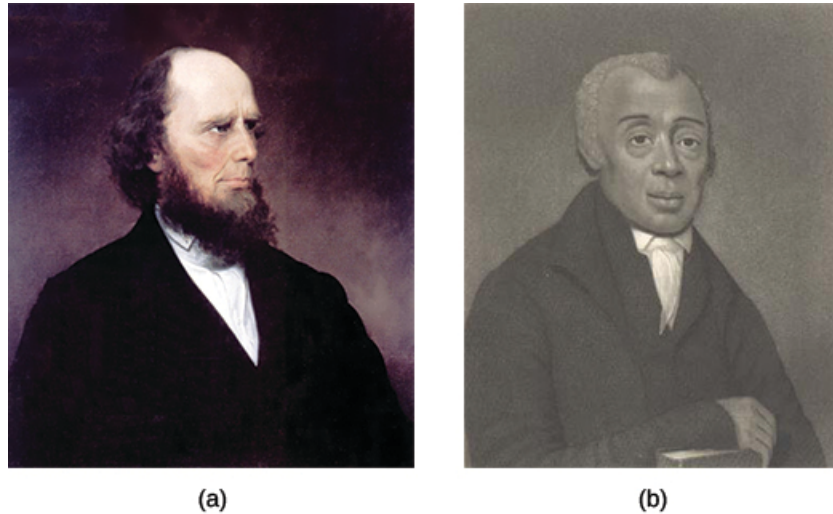


Figure 13.4 Charles Grandison Finney (a) was one of the best-known ministers of the Second Great Awakening. Richard Allen (b) created the first separate African American church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, in the 1790s.

In the Northeast, Presbyterian minister Charles Grandison Finney rose to prominence as one of the most important evangelicals in the movement (**Figure 13.4**). Born in 1792 in western New York, Finney studied to be a lawyer until 1821, when he experienced a religious conversion and thereafter devoted himself to revivals. He led revival meetings in New York and Pennsylvania, but his greatest success occurred after he accepted a ministry in Rochester, New York, in 1830. At the time, Rochester was a boomtown because the Erie Canal had brought a lively shipping business.

The new middle class—an outgrowth of the Industrial Revolution—embraced Finney’s message. It fit perfectly with their understanding of themselves as people shaping their own destiny. Workers also latched onto the message that they too could control their salvation, spiritually and perhaps financially as well. Western New York gained a reputation as the “burned over district,” a reference to the intense flames of religious fervor that swept the area during the Second Great Awakening.

TRANSCENDENTALISM

Beginning in the 1820s, a new intellectual movement known as **transcendentalism** began to grow in the Northeast. In this context, to transcend means to go beyond the ordinary sensory world to grasp personal insights and gain appreciation of a deeper reality, and transcendentalists believed that all people could attain an understanding of the world that surpassed rational, sensory experience. Transcendentalists were critical of mainstream American culture. They reacted against the age of mass democracy in Jacksonian America—what Tocqueville called the “tyranny of majority”—by arguing for greater individualism against conformity. European romanticism, a movement in literature and art that stressed emotion over cold, calculating reason, also influenced transcendentalists in the United States, especially the transcendentalists’ celebration of the uniqueness of individual feelings.

Ralph Waldo Emerson emerged as the leading figure of this movement (**Figure 13.5**). Born in Boston in 1803, Emerson came from a religious family. His father served as a Unitarian minister and, after graduating from Harvard Divinity School in the 1820s, Emerson followed in his father’s footsteps. However, after his wife died in 1831, he left the clergy. On a trip to Europe in 1832, he met leading figures of romanticism who rejected the hyper-rationalism of the Enlightenment, emphasizing instead emotion and the sublime.

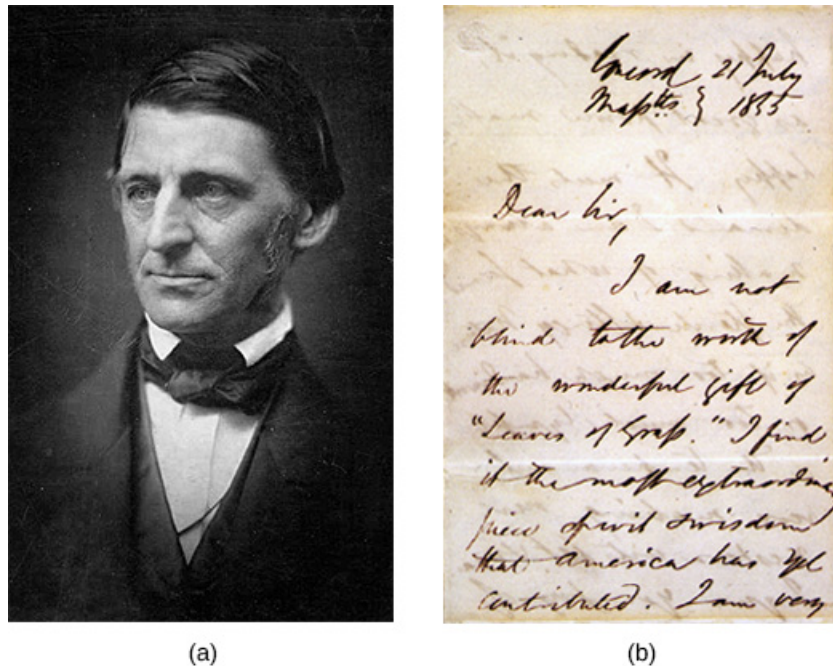


Figure 13.5 Ralph Waldo Emerson (a), shown here circa 1857, is considered the father of transcendentalism. This letter (b) from Emerson to Walt Whitman, another brilliant writer of the transcendentalist movement, demonstrates the closeness of a number of these writers.

When Emerson returned home the following year, he began giving lectures on his romanticism-influenced ideas. In 1836, he published “Nature,” an essay arguing that humans can find their true spirituality in nature, not in the everyday bustling working world of Jacksonian democracy and industrial transformation. In 1841, Emerson published his essay “Self-Reliance,” which urged readers to think for themselves and reject the mass conformity and mediocrity he believed had taken root in American life. In this essay, he wrote, “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist,” demanding that his readers be true to themselves and not blindly follow a herd mentality. Emerson’s ideas dovetailed with those of the French aristocrat, Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote about the “tyranny of the majority” in his *Democracy in America*. Tocqueville, like Emerson, expressed concern that a powerful majority could overpower the will of individuals.

Click and Explore



Visit **Emerson Central** (<http://openstaxcollege.org//15SelfReliance>) to read the full text of “Self Reliance” by Ralph Waldo Emerson. How have Emerson’s ideas influenced American society?

Emerson’s ideas struck a chord with a class of literate adults who also were dissatisfied with mainstream American life and searching for greater spiritual meaning. Many writers were drawn to transcendentalism, and they started to express its ideas through new stories, poems, essays, and articles. The ideas of transcendentalism were able to permeate American thought and culture through a prolific print culture,

which allowed magazines and journals to be widely disseminated.

Among those attracted to Emerson’s ideas was his friend Henry David Thoreau, whom he encouraged to write about his own ideas. Thoreau placed a special emphasis on the role of nature as a gateway to the transcendentalist goal of greater individualism. In 1848, Thoreau gave a lecture in which he argued that individuals must stand up to governmental injustice, a topic he chose because of his disgust over the Mexican-American War and slavery. In 1849, he published his lecture “Civil Disobedience” and urged readers to refuse to support a government that was immoral. In 1854, he published *Walden; Or, Life in the Woods*, a book about the two years he spent in a small cabin on Walden Pond near Concord, Massachusetts (**Figure 13.6**). Thoreau had lived there as an experiment in living apart, but not too far apart, from his conformist neighbors.

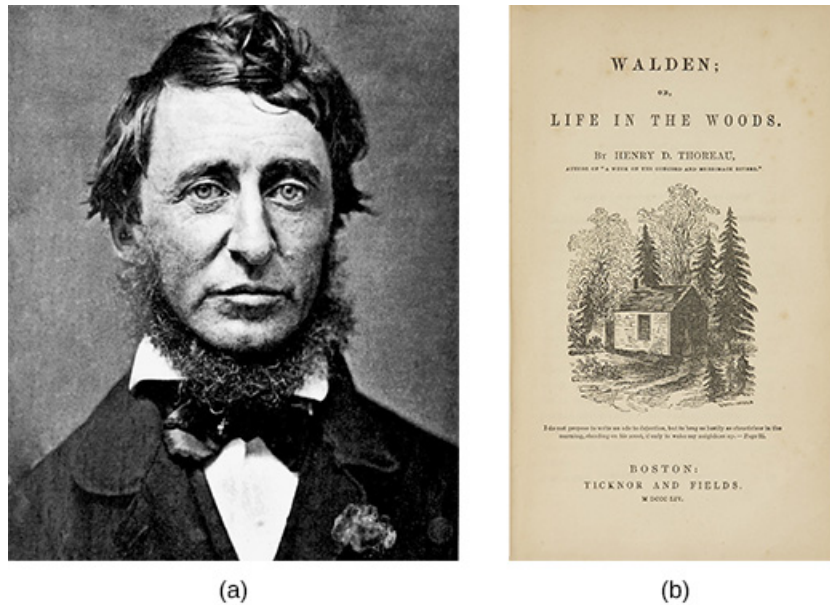


Figure 13.6 Henry David Thoreau (a) argued that men had the right to resist authority if they deemed it unjust. “All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable.” Thoreau’s *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (b) articulated his emphasis on the importance of nature as a gateway to greater individuality.

Margaret Fuller also came to prominence as a leading transcendentalist and advocate for women’s equality. Fuller was a friend of Emerson and Thoreau, and other intellectuals of her day. Because she was a woman, she could not attend Harvard, as it was a male-only institution for undergraduate students until 1973. However, she was later granted the use of the library there because of her towering intellect. In 1840, she became the editor of *The Dial*, a transcendentalist journal, and she later found employment as a book reviewer for the *New York Tribune* newspaper. Tragically, in 1850, she died at the age of forty in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York.

Walt Whitman also added to the transcendentalist movement, most notably with his 1855 publication of twelve poems, entitled *Leaves of Grass*, which celebrated the subjective experience of the individual. One of the poems, “Song of Myself,” amplified the message of individualism, but by uniting the individual with all other people through a transcendent bond.

AMERICANA

Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself"

Walt Whitman (**Figure 13.7**) was a poet associated with the transcendentalists. His 1855 poem, “Song of Myself,” shocked many when it was first published, but it has been called one of the most influential poems in American literature.



Figure 13.7 This steel engraving of Walt Whitman by Samuel Hollyer is from a lost daguerreotype by Gabriel Harrison, taken in 1854.

I CELEBRATE myself, and sing myself,
 And what I assume you shall assume,
 For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.
 I loafe and invite my soul,
 I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.
 My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,
 Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,
 I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,
 Hoping to cease not till death. . . .
 And I say to mankind, Be not curious about God,
 For I who am curious about each am not curious about God,
 (No array of terms can say how much I am at peace about God and about death.)
 I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least,
 Nor do I understand who there can be more wonderful than myself. . . .
 I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
 I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world. . . .
 You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
 But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
 And filter and fibre your blood.
 Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
 Missing me one place search another,
 I stop somewhere waiting for you.

What images does Whitman use to describe himself and the world around him? What might have been shocking about this poem in 1855? Why do you think it has endured?

Some critics took issue with transcendentalism's emphasis on rampant individualism by pointing out the

destructive consequences of compulsive human behavior. Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* emphasized the perils of individual obsession by telling the tale of Captain Ahab's single-minded quest to kill a white whale, Moby Dick, which had destroyed Ahab's original ship and caused him to lose one of his legs. Edgar Allan Poe, a popular author, critic, and poet, decried "the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists." These American writers who questioned transcendentalism illustrate the underlying tension between individualism and conformity in American life.

13.2 Antebellum Communal Experiments

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify similarities and differences among utopian groups of the antebellum era
- Explain how religious utopian communities differed from nonreligious ones

Prior to 1815, in the years before the market and Industrial Revolution, most Americans lived on farms where they produced much of the foods and goods they used. This largely pre-capitalist culture centered on large family units whose members all lived in the same towns, counties, and parishes.

Economic forces unleashed after 1815, however, forever altered that world. More and more people now bought their food and goods in the thriving market economy, a shift that opened the door to a new way of life. These economic transformations generated various reactions; some people were nostalgic for what they viewed as simpler, earlier times, whereas others were willing to try new ways of living and working. In the early nineteenth century, experimental communities sprang up, created by men and women who hoped not just to create a better way of life but to recast American civilization, so that greater equality and harmony would prevail. Indeed, some of these reformers envisioned the creation of alternative ways of living, where people could attain perfection in human relations. The exact number of these societies is unknown because many of them were so short-lived, but the movement reached its apex in the 1840s.

RELIGIOUS UTOPIAN SOCIETIES

Most of those attracted to utopian communities had been profoundly influenced by evangelical Protestantism, especially the Second Great Awakening. However, their experience of revivalism had left them wanting to further reform society. The communities they formed and joined adhered to various socialist ideas and were considered radical, because members wanted to create a new social order, not reform the old.

German Protestant migrants formed several **pietistic** societies: communities that stressed transformative individual religious experience or piety over religious rituals and formality. One of the earliest of these, the Ephrata Cloister in Pennsylvania, was founded by a charismatic leader named Conrad Beissel in the 1730s. By the antebellum era, it was the oldest communal experiment in the United States. Its members devoted themselves to spiritual contemplation and a disciplined work regime while they awaited the millennium. They wore homespun rather than buying cloth or premade clothing, and encouraged celibacy. Although the Ephrata Cloister remained small, it served as an early example of the type of community that antebellum reformers hoped to create.

In 1805, a second German religious society, led by George Rapp, took root in Pennsylvania with several hundred members called Rappites who encouraged celibacy and adhered to the socialist principle of holding all goods in common (as opposed to allowing individual ownership). They not only built the town of Harmony but also produced surplus goods to sell to the outside world. In 1815, the group sold its Pennsylvanian holdings and moved to Indiana, establishing New Harmony on a twenty-thousand-acre plot along the Wabash River. In 1825, members returned to Pennsylvania, and established themselves in the town called Economy.

The **Shakers** provide another example of a community established with a religious mission. The Shakers started in England as an outgrowth of the Quaker religion in the middle of the eighteenth century. Ann Lee, a leader of the group in England, emigrated to New York in the 1770s, having experienced a profound religious awakening that convinced her that she was “mother in Christ.” She taught that God was both male and female; Jesus embodied the male side, while Mother Ann (as she came to be known by her followers) represented the female side. To Shakers in both England and the United States, Mother Ann represented the completion of divine revelation and the beginning of the millennium of heaven on earth.

In practice, men and women in Shaker communities were held as equals—a radical departure at the time—and women often outnumbered men. Equality extended to the possession of material goods as well; no one could hold private property. Shaker communities aimed for self-sufficiency, raising food and making all that was necessary, including furniture that emphasized excellent workmanship as a substitute for worldly pleasure.

The defining features of the Shakers were their spiritual mysticism and their prohibition of sexual intercourse, which they held as an example of a lesser spiritual life and a source of conflict between women and men. Rapturous Shaker dances, for which the group gained notoriety, allowed for emotional release (**Figure 13.8**). The high point of the Shaker movement came in the 1830s, when about six thousand members populated communities in New England, New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky.



Figure 13.8 In this image of a Shaker dance from 1840, note the raised arms, indicating emotional expression.

Click and Explore



Learn more about the **musical heritage** (<http://openstaxcollege.org//15ShakerMusic>) of the Shakers, including the well-known song “Simple Gifts,” which has become part of American culture.

Another religious utopian experiment, the Oneida Community, began with the teachings of John Humphrey Noyes, a Vermonter who had graduated from Dartmouth, Andover Theological Seminary, and Yale. The Second Great Awakening exerted a powerful effect on him, and he came to believe in perfectionism, the idea that it is possible to be perfect and free of sin. Noyes claimed to have achieved this

state of perfection in 1834.

Noyes applied his idea of perfection to relationships between men and women, earning notoriety for his unorthodox views on marriage and sexuality. Beginning in his home town of Putney, Vermont, he began to advocate what he called “complex marriage:” a form of communal marriage in which women and men who had achieved perfection could engage in sexual intercourse without sin. Noyes also promoted “male continence,” whereby men would not ejaculate, thereby freeing women from pregnancy and the difficulty of determining paternity when they had many partners. Intercourse became fused with spiritual power among Noyes and his followers.

The concept of complex marriage scandalized the townspeople in Putney, so Noyes and his followers removed to Oneida, New York. Individuals who wanted to join the Oneida Community underwent a tough screening process to weed out those who had not reached a state of perfection, which Noyes believed promoted self-control, not out-of-control behavior. The goal was a balance between individuals in a community of love and respect. The perfectionist community Noyes envisioned ultimately dissolved in 1881, although the Oneida Community itself continues to this day (**Figure 13.9**).



Figure 13.9 The Oneida Community was a utopian experiment located in Oneida, New York, from 1848 to 1881.

The most successful religious utopian community to arise in the antebellum years was begun by Joseph Smith. Smith came from a large Vermont family that had not prospered in the new market economy and moved to the town of Palmyra, in the “burned over district” of western New York. In 1823, Smith claimed to have been visited by the angel Moroni, who told him the location of a trove of golden plates or tablets. During the late 1820s, Smith translated the writing on the golden plates, and in 1830, he published his findings as *The Book of Mormon*. That same year, he organized the Church of Christ, the progenitor of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints popularly known as **Mormons**. He presented himself as a prophet and aimed to recapture what he viewed as the purity of the primitive Christian church, purity that had been lost over the centuries.

Smith emphasized the importance of families being led by fathers. His vision of a reinvigorated patriarchy resonated with men and women who had not thrived during the market revolution, and his claims attracted those who hoped for a better future. Smith’s new church placed great stress on work and discipline. He aimed to create a New Jerusalem where the church exercised oversight of its members.

Smith’s claims of translating the golden plates antagonized his neighbors in New York. Difficulties with anti-Mormons led him and his followers to move to Kirtland, Ohio, in 1831. By 1838, as the United States experienced continued economic turbulence following the Panic of 1837, Smith and his followers were facing financial collapse after a series of efforts in banking and money-making ended in disaster. They

moved to Missouri, but trouble soon developed there as well, as citizens reacted against the Mormons' beliefs. Actual fighting broke out in 1838, and the ten thousand or so Mormons removed to Nauvoo, Illinois, where they founded a new center of Mormonism.

By the 1840s, Nauvoo boasted a population of thirty thousand, making it the largest utopian community in the United States. Thanks to some important conversions to Mormonism among powerful citizens in Illinois, the Mormons had virtual autonomy in Nauvoo, which they used to create the largest armed force in the state. Smith also received further revelations there, including one that allowed male church leaders to practice polygamy. He also declared that all of North and South America would be the new Zion and announced that he would run for president in the 1844 election.

Smith and the Mormons' convictions and practices generated a great deal of opposition from neighbors in surrounding towns. Smith was arrested for treason (for his role in the destruction of the printing press of a newspaper that criticized Mormonism), and while he was in prison, an anti-Mormon mob stormed into his cell and killed him. Brigham Young (**Figure 13.10**) then assumed leadership of the group, which he led to a permanent home in what is now Salt Lake City, Utah.

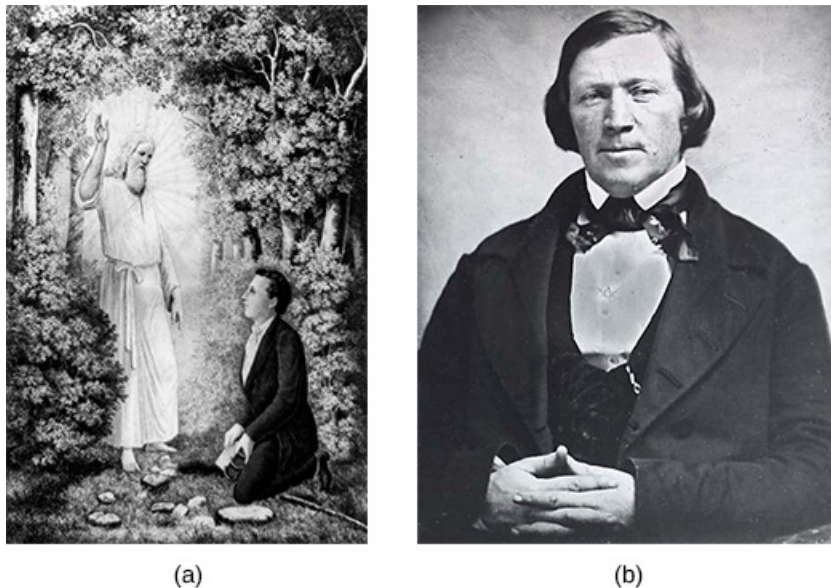


Figure 13.10 Carl Christian Anton Christensen depicts *The angel Moroni delivering the plates of the Book of Mormon to Joseph Smith*, circa 1886 (a). On the basis of these plates, Joseph Smith (b) founded the Church of Latter-Day Saints. Following Smith's death at the hands of a mob in Illinois, Brigham Young took control of the church and led them west to the Salt Lake Valley, which at that time was still part of Mexico.

SECULAR UTOPIAN SOCIETIES

Not all utopian communities were prompted by the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening; some were outgrowths of the intellectual ideas of the time, such as romanticism with its emphasis on the importance of individualism over conformity. One of these, Brook Farm, took shape in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, in the 1840s. It was founded by George Ripley, a transcendentalist from Massachusetts. In the summer of 1841, this utopian community gained support from Boston-area thinkers and writers, an intellectual group that included many important transcendentalists. Brook Farm is best characterized as a community of intensely individualistic personalities who combined manual labor, such as the growing and harvesting food, with intellectual pursuits. They opened a school that specialized in the liberal arts rather than rote memorization and published a weekly journal called *The Harbinger*, which was “Devoted to Social and Political Progress” (**Figure 13.11**). Members of Brook Farm never totaled more than one hundred, but it won renown largely because of the luminaries, such as Emerson and Thoreau, whose names were attached to it. Nathaniel Hawthorne, a Massachusetts writer who took issue with some of

the transcendentalists' claims, was a founding member of Brook Farm, and he fictionalized some of his experiences in his novel *The Blithedale Romance*. In 1846, a fire destroyed the main building of Brook Farm, and already hampered by financial problems, the Brook Farm experiment came to an end in 1847.

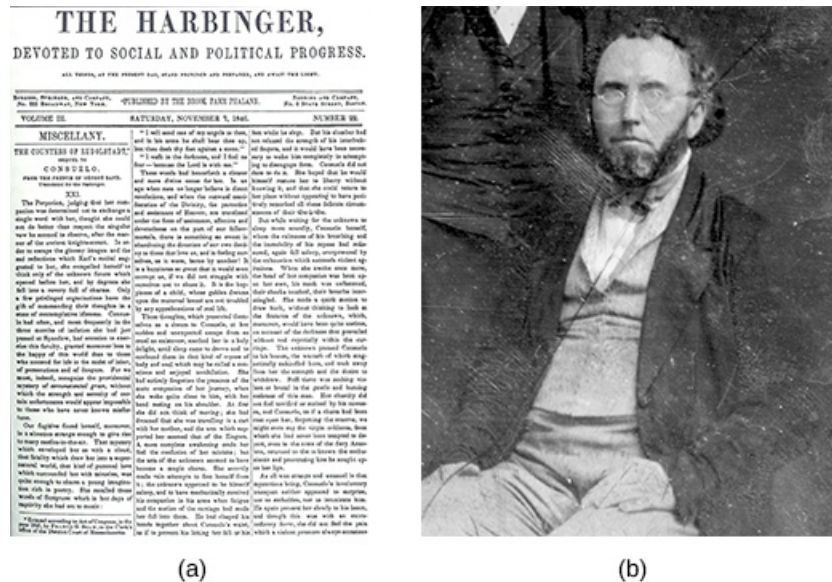


Figure 13.11 Brook Farm printed *The Harbinger* (a) to share its ideals more widely. George Ripley (b), who founded the farm, was burdened with a huge debt several years later when the community collapsed.

Robert Owen, a British industrialist, helped inspire those who dreamed of a more equitable world in the face of the changes brought about by industrialization. Owen had risen to prominence before he turned thirty by running cotton mills in New Lanark, Scotland; these were considered the most successful cotton mills in Great Britain. Owen was very uneasy about the conditions of workers, and he devoted both his life and his fortune to trying to create cooperative societies where workers would lead meaningful, fulfilled lives. Unlike the founders of many utopian communities, he did not gain inspiration from religion; his vision derived instead from his faith in human reason to make the world better.

When the Rappite community in Harmony, Indiana, decided to sell its holdings and relocate to Pennsylvania, Owen seized the opportunity to put his ideas into action. In 1825, he bought the twenty-thousand-acre parcel in Indiana and renamed it New Harmony (**Figure 13.12**). After only a few years, however, a series of bad decisions by Owen and infighting over issues like the elimination of private property led to the dissolution of the community. But Owen's ideas of cooperation and support inspired other "Owenite" communities in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain.



Figure 13.12 This 1838 engraving of New Harmony shows the ideal collective community that Robert Owen hoped to build.

A French philosopher who advocated the creation of a new type of utopian community, Charles Fourier also inspired American readers, notably Arthur Brisbane, who popularized Fourier's ideas in the United States. Fourier emphasized collective effort by groups of people or "associations." Members of the association would be housed in large buildings or "phalanxes," a type of communal living arrangement. Converts to Fourier's ideas about a new science of living published and lectured vigorously. They believed labor was a type of capital, and the more unpleasant the job, the higher the wages should be. Fourierists in the United States created some twenty-eight communities between 1841 and 1858, but by the late 1850s, the movement had run its course in the United States.

13.3 Reforms to Human Health

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the different reforms aimed at improving the health of the human body
- Describe the various factions and concerns within the temperance movement

Antebellum reform efforts aimed at perfecting the spiritual and social worlds of individuals, and as an outgrowth of those concerns, some reformers moved in the direction of ensuring the health of American citizens. Many Americans viewed drunkenness as a major national problem, and the battle against alcohol and the many problems associated with it led many to join the temperance movement. Other reformers offered plans to increase physical well-being, instituting plans designed to restore vigor. Still others celebrated new sciences that would unlock the mysteries of human behavior and, by doing so, advance American civilization.

TEMPERANCE

According to many antebellum reformers, intemperance (drunkenness) stood as the most troubling problem in the United States, one that eroded morality, Christianity, and played a starring role in corrupting American democracy. Americans consumed huge quantities of liquor in the early 1800s, including gin, whiskey, rum, and brandy. Indeed, scholars agree that the rate of consumption of these drinks during the first three decades of the 1800s reached levels that have never been equaled in American history.

A variety of reformers created organizations devoted to **temperance**, that is, moderation or self-restraint. Each of these organizations had its own distinct orientation and target audience. The earliest ones were formed in the 1810s in New England. The Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance and the Connecticut Society for the Reformation of Morals were both formed in 1813. Protestant ministers led both organizations, which enjoyed support from New Englanders who clung to the ideals of the Federalist Party and later the Whigs. These early temperance societies called on individuals to lead pious lives and avoid sin, including the sin of overindulging in alcohol. They called not for the eradication of drinking but for a more restrained and genteel style of imbibing.

AMERICANA

The Drunkard's Progress

This 1840 temperance illustration (**Figure 13.13**) charts the path of destruction for those who drink. The step-by-step progression reads:

- Step 1. A glass with a friend.
- Step 2. A glass to keep the cold out.
- Step 3. A glass too much.
- Step 4. Drunk and riotous.
- Step 5. The summit attained. Jolly companions. A confirmed drunkard.
- Step 6. Poverty and disease.
- Step 7. Forsaken by Friends.
- Step 8. Desperation and crime.
- Step 9. Death by suicide.



Figure 13.13 This 1846 image, *The Drunkards Progress. From the First Glass to the Grave*, by Nathaniel Currier, shows the destruction that prohibitionists thought could result from drinking alcoholic beverages.

Who do you think was the intended audience for this engraving? How do you think different audiences (children, drinkers, nondrinkers) would react to the story it tells? Do you think it is an effective piece of propaganda? Why or why not?

In the 1820s, temperance gained ground largely through the work of Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher. In 1825, Beecher delivered six sermons on temperance that were published the following year as *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance*. He urged total abstinence from hard liquor and called for the formation of voluntary associations to bring forth a new day without spirits (whiskey, rum, gin, brandy). Lyman's work enjoyed a wide readership and support from leading Protestant ministers as well as the emerging middle class; temperance fit well with the middle-class ethic of encouraging hard work and a sober workforce.

In 1826, the American Temperance Society was formed, and by the early 1830s, thousands of similar societies had sprouted across the country. Members originally pledged to shun only hard liquor. By 1836, however, leaders of the temperance movement, including Beecher, called for a more comprehensive approach. Thereafter, most temperance societies advocated total abstinence; no longer would beer and wine be tolerated. Such total abstinence from alcohol is known as **teetotalism**.

Teetotalism led to disagreement within the movement and a loss of momentum for reform after 1836. However, temperance enjoyed a revival in the 1840s, as a new type of reformer took up the cause

against alcohol. The engine driving the new burst of enthusiastic temperance reform was the Washington Temperance Society (named in deference to George Washington), which organized in 1840. The leaders of the Washingtonians came not from the ranks of Protestant ministers but from the working class. They aimed their efforts at confirmed alcoholics, unlike the early temperance advocates who mostly targeted the middle class.

Washingtonians welcomed the participation of women and children, as they cast alcohol as the destroyer of families, and those who joined the group took a public pledge of teetotalism. Americans flocked to the Washingtonians; as many as 600,000 had taken the pledge by 1844. The huge surge in membership had much to do with the style of this reform effort. The Washingtonians turned temperance into theater by dramatizing the plight of those who fell into the habit of drunkenness. Perhaps the most famous fictional drama put forward by the temperance movement was *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* (1853), a novel that became the basis for popular theatrical productions. The Washingtonians also sponsored picnics and parades that drew whole families into the movement. The group's popularity quickly waned in the late 1840s and early 1850s, when questions arose about the effectiveness of merely taking a pledge. Many who had done so soon relapsed into alcoholism.

Still, by that time, temperance had risen to a major political issue. Reformers lobbied for laws limiting or prohibiting alcohol, and states began to pass the first temperance laws. The earliest, an 1838 law in Massachusetts, prohibited the sale of liquor in quantities less than fifteen gallons, a move designed to make it difficult for ordinary workmen of modest means to buy spirits. The law was repealed in 1840, but Massachusetts towns then took the initiative by passing local laws banning alcohol. In 1845, close to one hundred towns in the state went “dry.”

An 1839 Mississippi law, similar to Massachusetts' original law, outlawed the sale of less than a gallon of liquor. Mississippi's law illustrates the national popularity of temperance; regional differences notwithstanding, citizens in northern and southern states agreed on the issue of alcohol. Nonetheless, northern states pushed hardest for outlawing alcohol. Maine enacted the first statewide prohibition law in 1851. New England, New York, and states in the Midwest passed local laws in the 1850s, prohibiting the sale and manufacture of intoxicating beverages.

REFORMS FOR THE BODY AND THE MIND

Beyond temperance, other reformers looked to ways to maintain and improve health in a rapidly changing world. Without professional medical organizations or standards, health reform went in many different directions; although the American Medical Association was formed in 1847, it did not have much power to oversee medical practices. Too often, quack doctors prescribed regimens and medicines that did far more harm than good.

Sylvester Graham stands out as a leading light among the health reformers in the antebellum years. A Presbyterian minister, Graham began his career as a reformer, lecturing against the evils of strong drink. He combined an interest in temperance with vegetarianism and sexuality into what he called a “Science of Human Life,” calling for a regimented diet of more vegetables, fruits, and grain, and no alcohol, meat, or spices.

Graham advocated baths and cleanliness in general to preserve health; hydropathy, or water cures for various ailments, became popular in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s. He also viewed masturbation and excessive sex as a cause of disease and debility. His ideas led him to create what he believed to be a perfect food that would maintain health: the Graham cracker, which he invented in 1829. Followers of Graham, known as Grahamites, established boardinghouses where lodgers followed the recommended strict diet and sexual regimen.

During the early nineteenth century, reformers also interested themselves in the workings of the mind in an effort to better understand the effects of a rapidly changing world awash with religious revivals and democratic movements. **Phrenology**—the mapping of the cranium to specific human attributes—stands

as an early type of science, related to what would become psychology and devoted to understanding how the mind worked. Phrenologists believed that the mind contained thirty-seven “faculties,” the strengths or weaknesses of which could be determined by a close examination of the size and shape of the cranium (**Figure 13.14**).

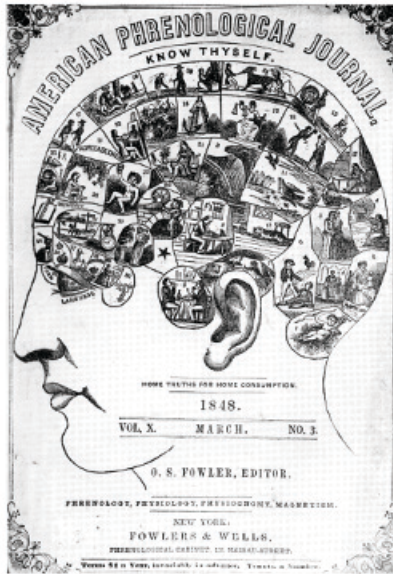


Figure 13.14 This March 1848 cover of the *American Phrenological Journal* illustrates the different faculties of the mind as envisioned by phrenologists.

Initially developed in Europe by Franz Joseph Gall, a German doctor, phrenology first came to the United States in the 1820s. In the 1830s and 1840s, it grew in popularity as lecturers crisscrossed the republic. It was sometimes used as an educational test, and like temperance, it also became a form of popular entertainment.

Click and Explore



Map the brain! Check out all thirty-seven of **phrenology's purported faculties** (<http://openstaxcollege.org//15Phrenology>) of the mind.

The popularity of phrenology offers us some insight into the emotional world of the antebellum United States. Its popularity speaks to the desire of those living in a rapidly changing society, where older ties to community and family were being challenged, to understand one another. It appeared to offer a way to quickly recognize an otherwise-unknown individual as a readily understood set of human faculties.

13.4 Addressing Slavery

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Identify the different approaches to reforming the institution of slavery
- Describe the abolitionist movement in the early to mid-nineteenth century

The issue of slavery proved especially combustible in the reform-minded antebellum United States. Those who hoped to end slavery had different ideas about how to do it. Some could not envision a biracial society and advocated sending blacks to Africa or the Caribbean. Others promoted the use of violence as the best method to bring American slavery to an end. Abolitionists, by contrast, worked to end slavery and to create a multiracial society of equals using moral arguments—moral suasion—to highlight the immorality of slavery. In keeping with the religious fervor of the era, abolitionists hoped to bring about a mass conversion in public opinion to end slavery.

“REFORMS” TO SLAVERY

An early and popular “reform” to slavery was **colonization**, or a movement advocating the displacement of African Americans out of the country, usually to Africa. In 1816, the Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color of America (also called the American Colonization Society or ACS) was founded with this goal. Leading statesmen including Thomas Jefferson endorsed the idea of colonization.

Members of the ACS did not believe that blacks and whites could live as equals, so they targeted the roughly 200,000 free blacks in the United States for relocation to Africa. For several years after the ACS’s founding, they raised money and pushed Congress for funds. In 1819, they succeeded in getting \$100,000 from the federal government to further the colonization project. The ACS played a major role in the creation of the colony of Liberia, on the west coast of Africa. The country’s capital, Monrovia, was named in honor of President James Monroe. The ACS stands as an example of how white reformers, especially men of property and standing, addressed the issue of slavery. Their efforts stand in stark contrast with other reformers’ efforts to deal with slavery in the United States.

Although rebellion stretches the definition of reform, another potential solution to slavery was its violent overthrow. Nat Turner’s Rebellion, one of the largest slave uprisings in American history, took place in 1831, in Southampton County, Virginia. Like many slaves, Nat Turner was inspired by the evangelical Protestant fervor sweeping the republic. He preached to fellow slaves in Southampton County, gaining a reputation among them as a prophet. He organized them for rebellion, awaiting a sign to begin, until an eclipse in August signaled that the appointed time had come.

Turner and as many as seventy other slaves killed their masters and their masters’ families, murdering a total of around sixty-five people (**Figure 13.15**). Turner eluded capture until late October, when he was tried, hanged, and then beheaded and quartered. Virginia put to death fifty-six other slaves whom they believed to have taken part in the rebellion. White vigilantes killed two hundred more as panic swept through Virginia and the rest of the South.

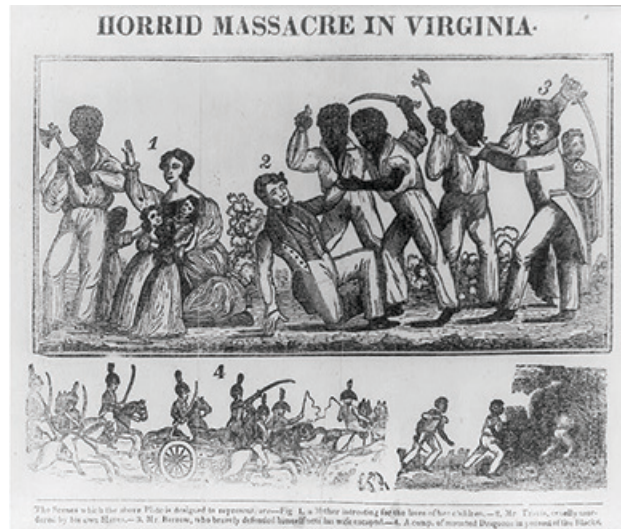


Figure 13.15 In *Horrid Massacre in Virginia*, circa 1831, the text on the bottom reads, “The Scenes which the above Plate is designed to represent are Fig 1. a mother intreating for the lives of her children. -2. Mr. Travis, cruelly murdered by his own Slaves. -3. Mr. Barrow, who bravely defended himself until his wife escaped. -4. A comp. of mounted Dragoons in pursuit of the Blacks.” From whose side do you think the illustrator is telling this story?

MY STORY

Nat Turner on His Battle against Slavery

Thomas R. Gray was a lawyer in Southampton, Virginia, where he visited Nat Turner in jail. He published *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the leader of the late insurrection in Southampton, Va., as fully and voluntarily made to Thomas R. Gray* in November 1831, after Turner had been executed.

For as the blood of Christ had been shed on this earth, and had ascended to heaven for the salvation of sinners, and was now returning to earth again in the form of dew . . . it was plain to me that the Saviour was about to lay down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and the great day of judgment was at hand. . . . And on the 12th of May, 1828, I heard a loud noise in the heavens, and the Spirit instantly appeared to me and said the Serpent was loosened, and Christ had laid down the yoke he had borne for the sins of men, and that I should take it on and fight against the Serpent, . . . *Ques.* Do you not find yourself mistaken now? *Ans.* Was not Christ crucified. And by signs in the heavens that it would make known to me when I should commence the great work—and on the appearance of the sign, (the eclipse of the sun last February) I should arise and prepare myself, and slay my enemies with their own weapons.

How did Turner interpret his fight against slavery? What did he mean by the “serpent?”

Nat Turner’s Rebellion provoked a heated discussion in Virginia over slavery. The Virginia legislature was already in the process of revising the state constitution, and some delegates advocated for an easier manumission process. The rebellion, however, rendered that reform impossible. Virginia and other slave states recommitted themselves to the institution of slavery, and defenders of slavery in the South increasingly blamed northerners for provoking their slaves to rebel.

Literate, educated blacks, including David Walker, also favored rebellion. Walker was born a free black man in North Carolina in 1796. He moved to Boston in the 1820s, lectured on slavery, and promoted the first African American newspaper, *Freedom’s Journal*. He called for blacks to actively resist slavery and to use violence if needed. He published *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* in 1829, denouncing the scheme of colonization and urging blacks to fight for equality in the United States, to take action against

racism. Walker died months after the publication of his *Appeal*, and debate continues to this day over the cause of his death. Many believe he was murdered. Walker became a symbol of hope to free people in the North and a symbol of the terrors of literate, educated blacks to the slaveholders of the South.

ABOLITIONISM

Abolitionists took a far more radical approach to the issue of the slavery by using moral arguments to advocate its immediate elimination. They publicized the atrocities committed under slavery and aimed to create a society characterized by equality of blacks and whites. In a world of intense religious fervor, they hoped to bring about a mass awakening in the United States of the sin of slavery, confident that they could transform the national conscience against the South's peculiar institution.

William Lloyd Garrison and Antislavery Societies

William Lloyd Garrison of Massachusetts distinguished himself as the leader of the **abolitionist** movement. Although he had once been in favor of colonization, he came to believe that such a scheme only deepened racism and perpetuated the sinful practices of his fellow Americans. In 1831, he founded the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, whose first edition declared:

I am aware that many object to the severity of my language; but is there not cause for severity? I will be as harsh as truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to give a moderate alarm; tell him to moderately rescue his wife from the hands of the ravisher; tell the mother to gradually extricate her babe from the fire into which it has fallen;—but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.

White Virginians blamed Garrison for stirring up slaves and instigating slave rebellions like Nat Turner's.

Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1831, and the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) in 1833. By 1838, the AASS had 250,000 members, sometimes called Garrisonians. They rejected colonization as a racist scheme and opposed the use of violence to end slavery. Influenced by evangelical Protestantism, Garrison and other abolitionists believed in **moral suasion**, a technique of appealing to the conscience of the public, especially slaveholders. Moral suasion relied on dramatic narratives, often from former slaves, about the horrors of slavery, arguing that slavery destroyed families, as children were sold and taken away from their mothers and fathers (**Figure 13.16**). Moral suasion resonated with many women, who condemned the sexual violence against slave women and the victimization of southern white women by adulterous husbands.



Figure 13.16 These woodcuts of a chained and pleading slave, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* (a) and *Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?*, accompanied abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier's antislavery poem, "Our Countrymen in Chains." Such images exemplified moral suasion: showing with pathos and humanity the moral wrongness of slavery.

Click and Explore



Read the full text of **John Greenleaf Whittier's antislavery poem** (<http://openstaxcollege.org//15AmericasLost>) "Our Countrymen in Chains."

What imagery and rhetoric does Whittier use to advance the cause of abolitionism?

Garrison also preached **immediatism**: the moral demand to take immediate action to end slavery. He wrote of equal rights and demanded that blacks be treated as equal to whites. He appealed to women and men, black and white, to join the fight. The abolition press, which produced hundreds of tracts, helped to circulate moral suasion. Garrison and other abolitionists also used the power of petitions, sending hundreds of petitions to Congress in the early 1830s, demanding an end to slavery. Since most newspapers published congressional proceedings, the debate over abolition petitions reached readers throughout the nation.

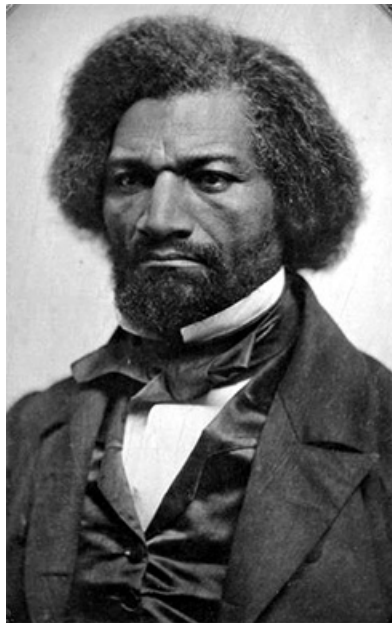
Although Garrison rejected the U.S. political system as a tool of slaveholders, other abolitionists believed mainstream politics could bring about their goal, and they helped create the Liberty Party in 1840. Its first candidate was James G. Birney, who ran for president that year. Birney epitomized the ideal and goals of the abolitionist movement. Born in Kentucky in 1792, Birney owned slaves and, searching for a solution to what he eventually condemned as the immorality of slavery, initially endorsed colonization. In the 1830s, however, he rejected colonization, freed his slaves, and began to advocate the immediate end of slavery. The Liberty Party did not generate much support and remained a fringe third party. Many of its supporters turned to the Free-Soil Party in the aftermath of the Mexican Cession.

The vast majority of northerners rejected abolition entirely. Indeed, abolition generated a fierce backlash in the United States, especially during the Age of Jackson, when racism saturated American culture. Anti-abolitionists in the North saw Garrison and other abolitionists as the worst of the worst, a threat to the republic that might destroy all decency and order by upending time-honored distinctions between blacks and whites, and between women and men. Northern anti-abolitionists feared that if slavery ended, the North would be flooded with blacks who would take jobs from whites.

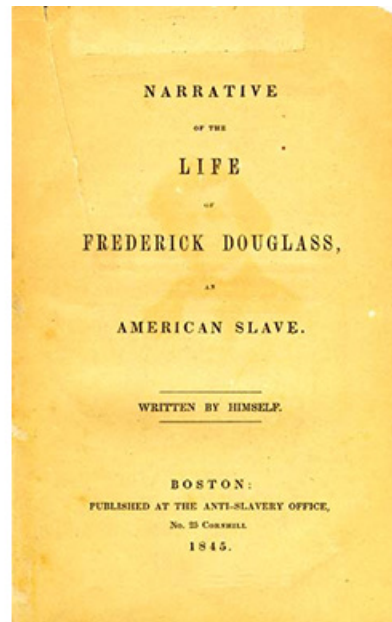
Opponents made clear their resistance to Garrison and others of his ilk; Garrison nearly lost his life in 1835, when a Boston anti-abolitionist mob dragged him through the city streets. Anti-abolitionists tried to pass federal laws that made the distribution of abolitionist literature a criminal offense, fearing that such literature, with its engravings and simple language, could spark rebellious blacks to action. Their sympathizers in Congress passed a “gag rule” that forbade the consideration of the many hundreds of petitions sent to Washington by abolitionists. A mob in Illinois killed an abolitionist named Elijah Lovejoy in 1837, and the following year, ten thousand protestors destroyed the abolitionists’ newly built Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia, burning it to the ground.

Frederick Douglass

Many escaped slaves joined the abolitionist movement, including Frederick Douglass. Douglass was born in Maryland in 1818, escaping to New York in 1838. He later moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, with his wife. Douglass’s commanding presence and powerful speaking skills electrified his listeners when he began to provide public lectures on slavery. He came to the attention of Garrison and others, who encouraged him to publish his story. In 1845, Douglass published *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself*, in which he told about his life of slavery in Maryland (**Figure 13.17**). He identified by name the whites who had brutalized him, and for that reason, along with the mere act of publishing his story, Douglass had to flee the United States to avoid being murdered.



(a)



(b)

Figure 13.17 This 1856 ambrotype of Frederick Douglass (a) demonstrates an early type of photography developed on glass. Douglass was an escaped slave who was instrumental in the abolitionism movement. His slave narrative, told in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself* (b), followed a long line of similar narratives that demonstrated the brutality of slavery for northerners unfamiliar with the institution.

British abolitionist friends bought his freedom from his Maryland owner, and Douglass returned to the United States. He began to publish his own abolitionist newspaper, *North Star*, in Rochester, New York. During the 1840s and 1850s, Douglass labored to bring about the end of slavery by telling the story of his life and highlighting how slavery destroyed families, both black and white.

MY STORY

Frederick Douglass on Slavery

Most white slaveholders frequently raped female slaves. In this excerpt, Douglass explains the consequences for the children fathered by white masters and slave women.

Slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers . . . this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable . . . the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father. . . .

Such slaves [born of white masters] invariably suffer greater hardships . . . They are . . . a constant offence to their mistress . . . she is never better pleased than when she sees them under the lash, . . . The master is frequently compelled to sell this class of his slaves, out of deference to the feelings of his white wife; and, cruel as the deed may strike any one to be, for a man to sell his own children to human flesh-mongers, . . . for, unless he does this, he must not only whip them himself, but must stand by and see one white son tie up his brother, of but few shades darker . . . and ply the gory lash to his naked back.

—Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave Written by Himself* (1845)

What moral complications did slavery unleash upon white slaveholders in the South, according to Douglass? What imagery does he use?

13.5 Women's Rights

By the end of this section, you will be able to:

- Explain the connections between abolition, reform, and antebellum feminism
- Describe the ways antebellum women's movements were both traditional and revolutionary

Women took part in all the antebellum reforms, from transcendentalism to temperance to abolition. In many ways, traditional views of women as nurturers played a role in encouraging their participation. Women who joined the cause of temperance, for example, amplified their accepted role as moral guardians of the home. Some women advocated a much more expansive role for themselves and their peers by educating children and men in solid republican principles. But it was their work in antislavery efforts that served as a springboard for women to take action against gender inequality. Many, especially northern women, came to the conclusion that they, like slaves, were held in shackles in a society dominated by men.

Despite the radical nature of their effort to end slavery and create a biracial society, most abolitionist men clung to traditional notions of proper gender roles. White and black women, as well as free black men, were forbidden from occupying leadership positions in the AASS. Because women were not allowed to join the men in playing leading roles in the organization, they formed separate societies, such as the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, and similar groups.

THE GRIMKÉ SISTERS

Two leading abolitionist women, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, played major roles in combining the fight to end slavery with the struggle to achieve female equality. The sisters had been born into a prosperous slaveholding family in South Carolina. Both were caught up in the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening, and they moved to the North and converted to Quakerism.

In the mid-1830s, the sisters joined the abolitionist movement, and in 1837, they embarked on a public lecture tour, speaking about immediate abolition to “promiscuous assemblies,” that is, to audiences of women and men. This public action thoroughly scandalized respectable society, where it was unheard of for women to lecture to men. William Lloyd Garrison endorsed the Grimké sisters’ public lectures, but other abolitionists did not. Their lecture tour served as a turning point; the reaction against them propelled the question of women’s proper sphere in society to the forefront of public debate.

THE DECLARATION OF RIGHTS AND SENTIMENTS

Participation in the abolitionist movement led some women to embrace feminism, the advocacy of women’s rights. Lydia Maria Child, an abolitionist and feminist, observed, “The comparison between women and the colored race is striking . . . both have been kept in subjection by physical force.” Other women, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, and Susan B. Anthony, agreed (**Figure 13.18**).

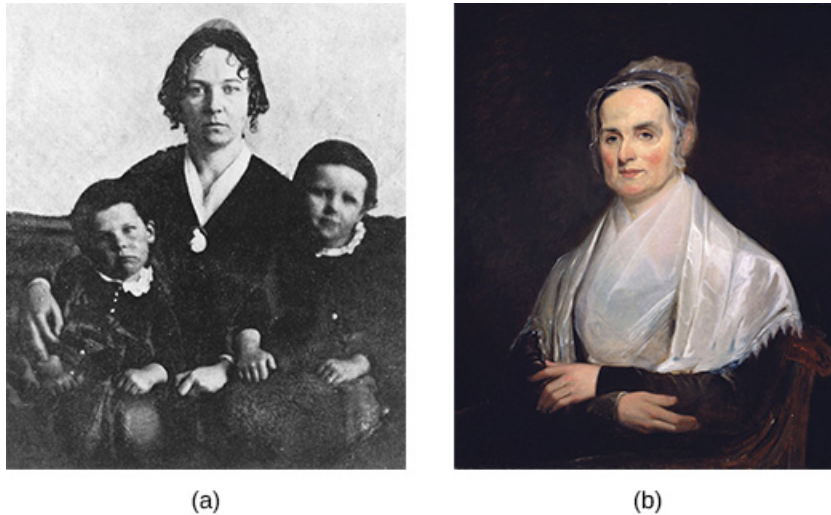


Figure 13.18 Elizabeth Cady Stanton (a) and Lucretia Mott (b) both emerged from the abolitionist movement as strong advocates of women’s rights.

In 1848, about three hundred male and female feminists, many of them veterans of the abolition campaign, gathered at the **Seneca Falls** Convention in New York for a conference on women’s rights that was organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. It was the first of what became annual meetings that have continued to the present day. Attendees agreed to a “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments” based on the Declaration of Independence; it declared, “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” “The history of mankind,” the document continued, “is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.”

Click and Explore



Read the entire text of the **Declaration of Rights and Sentiments** (<http://openstaxcollege.org//15SenecaFalls>) in the Internet Modern History Sourcebook at Fordham University.

REPUBLICAN MOTHERHOOD IN THE ANTEBELLUM YEARS

Some northern female reformers saw new and vital roles for their sex in the realm of education. They believed in traditional gender roles, viewing women as inherently more moral and nurturing than men. Because of these attributes, the feminists argued, women were uniquely qualified to take up the roles of educators of children.

Catharine Beecher, the daughter of Lyman Beecher, pushed for women's roles as educators. In her 1845 book, *The Duty of American Women to Their Country*, she argued that the United States had lost its moral compass due to democratic excess. Both "intelligence and virtue" were imperiled in an age of riots and disorder. Women, she argued, could restore the moral center by instilling in children a sense of right and wrong. Beecher represented a northern, middle-class female sensibility. The home, especially the parlor, became the site of northern female authority.

Key Terms

abolitionist a believer in the complete elimination of slavery

colonization the strategy of moving African Americans out of the United States, usually to Africa

immediatism the moral demand to take immediate action against slavery to bring about its end

millennialism the belief that the Kingdom of God would be established on earth and that God would reign on earth for a thousand years characterized by harmony and Christian morality

moral suasion an abolitionist technique of appealing to the consciences of the public, especially slaveholders

Mormons an American denomination, also known as the Latter-Day Saints, that emphasized patriarchal leadership

phrenology the mapping of the mind to specific human attributes

pietistic the stressing of stressed transformative individual religious experience or piety over religious rituals and formality

Second Great Awakening a revival of evangelical Protestantism in the early nineteenth century

Seneca Falls the location of the first American conference on women’s rights and the signing of the “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments” in 1848

Shakers a religious sect that emphasized communal living and celibacy

teetotalism complete abstinence from all alcohol

temperance a social movement encouraging moderation or self-restraint in the consumption of alcoholic beverages

transcendentalism the belief that all people can attain an understanding of the world that transcends rational, sensory experience

Summary

13.1 An Awakening of Religion and Individualism

Evangelical Protestantism pervaded American culture in the antebellum era and fueled a belief in the possibility of changing society for the better. Leaders of the Second Great Awakening like Charles G. Finney urged listeners to take charge of their own salvation. This religious message dovetailed with the new economic possibilities created by the market and Industrial Revolution, making the Protestantism of the Second Great Awakening, with its emphasis on individual spiritual success, a reflection of the individualistic, capitalist spirit of the age. Transcendentalists took a different approach, but like their religiously oriented brethren, they too looked to create a better existence. These authors, most notably Emerson, identified a major tension in American life between the effort to be part of the democratic majority and the need to remain true to oneself as an individual.

13.2 Antebellum Communal Experiments

Reformers who engaged in communal experiments aimed to recast economic and social relationships by introducing innovations designed to create a more stable and equitable society. Their ideas found many

expressions, from early socialist experiments (such as by the Fourierists and the Owenites) to the dreams of the New England intellectual elite (such as Brook Farm). The Second Great Awakening also prompted many religious utopias, like those of the Rappites and Shakers. By any measure, the Mormons emerged as the most successful of these.

13.3 Reforms to Human Health

Reformers targeted vices that corrupted the human body and society: the individual and the national soul. For many, alcohol appeared to be the most destructive and widespread. Indeed, in the years before the Civil War, the United States appeared to be a republic of drunkenness to many. To combat this national substance abuse problem, reformers created a host of temperance organizations that first targeted the middle and upper classes, and then the working classes. Thanks to Sylvester Graham and other health reformers, exercise and fresh air, combined with a good diet, became fashionable. Phrenologists focused on revealing the secrets of the mind and personality. In a fast-paced world, phrenology offered the possibility of knowing different human characteristics.

13.4 Addressing Slavery

Contrasting proposals were put forth to deal with slavery. Reformers in the antebellum United States addressed the thorny issue of slavery through contrasting proposals that offered profoundly different solutions to the dilemma of the institution. Many leading American statesmen, including slaveholders, favored colonization, relocating American blacks to Africa, which abolitionists scorned. Slave rebellions sought the end of the institution through its violent overthrow, a tactic that horrified many in the North and the South. Abolitionists, especially those who followed William Lloyd Garrison, provoked equally strong reactions by envisioning a new United States without slavery, where blacks and whites stood on equal footing. Opponents saw abolition as the worst possible reform, a threat to all order and decency. Slaveholders, in particular, saw slavery as a positive aspect of American society, one that reformed the lives of slaves by exposing them to civilization and religion.

13.5 Women's Rights

The spirit of religious awakening and reform in the antebellum era impacted women lives by allowing them to think about their lives and their society in new and empowering ways. Of all the various antebellum reforms, however, abolition played a significant role in generating the early feminist movement in the United States. Although this early phase of American feminism did not lead to political rights for women, it began the long process of overcoming gender inequalities in the republic.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following is *not* a characteristic of the Second Great Awakening?
 - A. greater emphasis on nature
 - B. greater emphasis on religious education of children
 - C. greater church attendance
 - D. belief in the possibility of a better world
2. Transcendentalists were most concerned with _____.
 - A. the afterlife
 - B. predestination
 - C. the individual
 - D. democracy
3. What do the Second Great Awakening and transcendentalism have in common?

4. Which religious community focused on the power of patriarchy?
- Shakers
 - Mormons
 - Owenites
 - Rappites
5. Which community or movement is associated with transcendentalism?
- the Oneida Community
 - the Ephrata Cloister
 - Brook Farm
 - Fourierism
6. How were the reform communities of the antebellum era treated by the general population?
7. The first temperance laws were enacted by _____.
- state governments
 - local governments
 - the federal government
 - temperance organizations
8. Sylvester Graham's reformers targeted _____.
- the human body
 - nutrition
 - sexuality
 - all of the above
9. Whom did temperance reformers target?
10. In the context of the antebellum era, what does colonization refer to?
- Great Britain's colonization of North America
 - the relocation of African Americans to Africa
 - American colonization of the Caribbean
 - American colonization of Africa
11. Which of the following did William Lloyd Garrison *not* employ in his abolitionist efforts?
- moral suasion
 - immediatism
 - political involvement
 - pamphleteering
12. Why did William Lloyd Garrison's endorsement of the Grimké sisters divide the abolitionist movement?
- They advocated equal rights for women.
 - They supported colonization.
 - They attended the Seneca Falls Convention.
 - They lectured to co-ed audiences.
13. Which female reformer focused on women's roles as the educators of children?
- Lydia Maria Child
 - Sarah Grimké
 - Catherine Beecher
 - Susan B. Anthony
14. How did the abolitionist movement impact the women's movement?

Critical Thinking Questions

15. In what ways did the Second Great Awakening and transcendentalism reflect and react to the changes in antebellum American thought and culture?
16. What did the antebellum communal projects have in common? How did the ones most influenced by religion differ from those that had other influences?
17. In what ways do temperance, health reforms, and phrenology offer reflections on the changes in the United States before the Civil War? What needs did these reforms fill in the lives of antebellum Americans?
18. Of the various approaches to the problem of slavery, which one do you find to be the most effective and why?
19. In what ways were antebellum feminists radical? In what ways were they traditional?

