

# Reform Movements in 19th Century America



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## I. Religious Sources of Reform

### A. Second Great Awakening--religious revivals among Protestants.

1. Unlike Puritans, who emphasized election, Arminian theology stated that salvation was a matter of individual choice. Individuals needed to repent, confess sins, and accept God's gift of salvation.
2. Focus on the Second Coming of Christ. Need for reform of society to hasten the new Kingdom of God.
3. Biggest impact among women. Evangelical mission to save others gave women more status, purpose.
4. Frontier revivals featured emotional appeals while providing social meetings for settlers

### B. New religious groups formed as instruments of reform

1. Utopian societies created in reaction to urban growth and industrialization. Emphasis on community and withdrawal from society
2. Shakers--socially radical. Abolished families, practiced celibacy and full equality between sexes.
3. Mormons--Organized by Joseph Smith in 1830 as a cooperative theocracy with himself as the Prophet. Because of persecution, Smith and his followers moved

from New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois, where he was murdered by opponents. Succeeded by Brigham Young, who led migration to Utah.

## II. Non-Religious Utopian Communities

A. New Harmony, Illinois. 1825. Socialist center founded by Robert Owen to be self-sufficient and existing without currency. Failed after several years.

B. Brook Farm Experiment. Transcendentalist in orientation, rejecting society's standards and Enlightenment thought, emphasizing individualism and the mysteries of nature. Famous contributors: Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville.

## III. Other Areas of Early Social Reform

A. Temperance--religious basis in violation of the Sabbath. Movement moved from moderation to abstinence to prohibition in its goals. Led by women but supported by factory owners who had massive absenteeism on Mondays.

B. Education--compulsory education in every state by 1860. Led by Horace Mann, who secularized the curriculum and made it more practical to train citizens.

C. Women's Rights--women were considered so inferior to men that they were not allowed to obtain higher education, vote, or control their own property

1. Grimké sisters (1838) began with abolitionism, and then turned to attacking the subordinate position of women. Similarities to position of slaves noted.

2. Seneca Falls Statement (1848)--statement of women's mistreatment by men.

3. Improvement made possible by:

- a) Democratic spirit of Jacksonian period, which caused reformers to call for women's suffrage

- b) Industrial revolution demonstrated to women that they could enter occupations

- c) Reform movements, where women could crusade equally with men.

### D. Abolitionism

1. American Colonization Society formed (1816) to gradually emancipate blacks and settle them in Africa.

2. Abolitionism rose in the 1830s with an emphasis on racial equality. Intent on freeing, then educating blacks.

- a) William Lloyd Garrison The Liberator demanded immediate abolition.
- b) Theodore Weld worked for gradual emancipation through religious conversion. Used Oberlin College as training ground for abolitionists
- c) Organized abolitionists smuggled 2,000 slaves a year out of the South to Canada and deluged Congress with petitions despite the gag rule (1836) which forbid the discussion of slavery in Congress.

#### E. Humane Treatment of Individuals

- 1) Dorothea Dix investigated and reported treatment of insane and led to creation of humane institutions
- 2) Legal code reforms
  - a) Reduction in crimes punishable by death
  - b) Abolishing of public hangings in many states
  - c) Abandoning flogging and other cruel punishments
- 3) Prison reform--rehabilitation of criminals attempted to counter the tendency of prisons to create more hardened criminals. Work seen as way to reform criminals.