



# U. S. History: From the Colonial Period to 1877

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## 12.2 EFFORTS TO REFORM SOCIETY

<p><b>EVANGELICALISM</b> <b>Religious &amp; Social Movement</b></p>	<p>EVANGELICALISM needs to be understood not only as a RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT, but also as a SOCIAL MOVEMENT. As such, it was an integral part of A BROADER ORGANIZATIONAL REVOLUTION that transformed 19<sup>th</sup> century American society.</p>
<p><b>ORGANIZATIONAL REVOLUTION</b></p> <p><b>18<sup>th</sup> Century:</b> <b><u>Hierarchical Order:</u></b> <b>Family, Work, Community</b></p> <p><b>19<sup>th</sup> Century:</b> <b><u>Institutional Order:</u></b> <b>Religious Sects, Voluntary Societies, Political Parties</b></p>	<p>For the most part, 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY Americans lived their lives within HIERARCHICALLY ORDERED INSTITUTIONS. They were oriented primarily to place, and they valued order and stability in their FAMILIES, WORK LIVES, and COMMUNITIES. Communities were composed of a recognizable set of "ranks and orders" in which the higher orders governed and the lower orders were expected to defer to the greater wisdom and virtue of their betters. Families were mini-hierarchies governed by male heads of household who sought suitable marriages for their daughters and tried to place their sons in appropriate occupations.</p> <p>By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, Americans increasingly had become MOBILE, constantly moving across social and geographical space. In this STATE OF FLUIDITY, families, towns, and occupational structures lost much of their traditional capacity to regulate individual and social life. Instead, Americans devised a different kind of INSTITUTIONAL ORDER based on RELIGIOUS SECTS AND DENOMINATIONS, VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES of various sorts, and POLITICAL PARTIES. These organizations gave needed structure and direction to their lives.</p>
<p><b><u>Evangelical Contribution:</u></b> <b>Discipline</b> <b>Fellowship</b> <b>Benevolence</b> <b>Order</b> <b>Security</b> <b>Activism</b></p>	<p>Historians have usually looked to political parties, reform societies like temperance organizations, or fraternal associations like the Masons for the origins of this new order. In fact, EVANGELICALS were its earliest and most energetic inventors. Conversion not only brought communicants into a new relationship to God, it also brought them into a new and powerful institution that provided them with PERSONAL DISCIPLINE, a sense of FELLOWSHIP, and channeled their BENEVOLENT OBLIGATIONS in appropriate directions. Just as had Puritanism, evangelicalism held out a VISION OF ORDER, direction, and discipline and provided its adherents with the sense of SECURITY that came with the promise of salvation. People came out of conversion not with a sense of the incapacity of the human will, but as CHRISTIAN ACTIVISTS imbued with a strong sense of the power of their own individual will.</p>
<p><b>THE REFORM IMPULSE</b> <b>Overview</b></p>	<p>EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTS sought to eradicate sin and convert people, while TEMPERANCE ADVOCATES fought against alcohol. Other groups sought perfection and personal fulfillment by rejecting established institutions, prescribing new modes of living, and founding UTOPIAN COMMUNITIES to put their ideas into practice. ABOLITIONISTS and WOMEN’S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS faced the most overwhelming obstacles to their efforts to eliminate slavery and gain rights for women.</p>
<p><b><u>Experiments in Regulating Personal Behavior:</u></b> <b>Temperance</b></p>	<p>One of the first specific reform impulses was TEMPERANCE, the movement to limit or prohibit consumption of alcohol. Drinking had been rising and was common among all classes. Reformers identified liquor as the cause of a number of social and family problems, including spouse and child abuse, poverty, and lack of productivity on the job. The first national organization, the AMERICAN TEMPERANCE SOCIETY, was founded in 1826 by the evangelical minister Lyman Beecher, and by the mid-1830s, over a million people, most of them from the middle class, had joined its affiliates throughout the nation. The campaign shifted from voluntary temperance to the legal banning of alcohol.</p>
<p><b>Moral Reform</b></p>	<p>More controversial than temperance was a movement called “MORAL REFORM,” which initially applied to public morals in general but quickly became restricted to a campaign to ERADICATE SEXUAL SIN, especially prostitution, which they saw as an outgrowth of</p>

<p><b><u>Experiments in Philosophy and Religion: Transcendentalism</u></b></p>	<p>uncontrolled male sexuality. The reformers published a national newspaper, THE ADVOCATE OF MORAL REFORM, which was the first completely woman-operated publication in the nation. Moral reform drew on evangelical themes of SELF-CONTROL and SUPPRESSION OF SIN, but its advocates' belief that women had a responsibility to speak out about unspeakable things meant that male evangelicals often did not support the movement.</p> <p>The fundamental tenet of the New England-based literary and philosophical movement known as TRANSCENDENTALISM was that individuals should reject the materialistic world and abstract religion and instead look to themselves for truth and guidance. Led by RALPH WALDO EMERSON, who preached a doctrine of individual SELF-RELIANCE, the transcendentalists believe that each man must find within himself the truths and the values that could sustain an effective and happy life.</p>
<p><b>Unitarians</b></p>	<p>UNITARIANS regarded the idea of the Trinity as a philosophic absurdity. There is only ONE GOD, they said. He is the MAKER OF THE UNIVERSE, a TRANSCENDENT Being who designed the ETERNAL NATURAL LAWS that move the heavenly bodies and all things on earth. He gave us the POWER OF REASON to puzzle out the mysteries of life, each individual pursuing this quest on his own. How do we know what is right? God placed the VOICE OF CONSCIENCE in men's hearts and he speaks to each person singly. Ultimately, then, each man walks individually with God.</p>
<p><b>The New Puritans of the Burned-Over District</b></p>	<p>After completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, the rush of people into and through WESTERN NEW YORK made that region the site of extraordinary religious excitement. All sorts of sects swarmed into the area. So intense, continuous, and often hysterical were the evangelical and revivalist campaigns that swept over western new York that it was called the BURNED-OVER DISTRICT. Men came to believe that the Holy Spirit was speaking again on earth and began a search for personal purity. The NEW PURITANS launched TEMPERANCE campaigns, ATTACKED SUNDAY DANCING, SUNDAY MAILS, PLEASURE EXCURSIONS, STYLES OF DRESS, IMMORALITY IN PRINT, and every other possible transgression. Their goal, in short, was to TRANSFORM THE WORLD.</p>
<p><b>The Mormons</b></p>	<p>JOSEPH SMITH, bewildered by the conflicting claims of the many sects that competed for his support in the Burned-Over District, went into the woods to pray for divine assistance and had a VISION. The spiritual beings he saw told him that he was confused because Christianity in its current form had become wholly corrupted. The time had come for a NEW REVELATION from God to lead men once more on the true path. The new revelation, which Smith issued to the world in 1830 as the BOOK OF MORMON, told the story of how Jesus had visited the new World after his death and taught an ancient white people his true faith. They had later been exterminated by a dark people, but before their disappearance a scribe named Mormon had buried their history and sacred beliefs in a hill in western New York. According to Smith, divine inspiration led him to uncover, translate, and publish the book as the basis of the new faith. Deeply critical of society's growing emphasis on individualism, Smith created a community based on PATRIARCHAL AUTHORITY and POLYGAMY with STRICT CHURCH CONTROL OF SOCIETY. Persecuted for their beliefs, the Mormons eventually fled to Utah and established a community there. Headquartered in Salt Lake City, their church, known as the church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, is now a worldwide movement which claims 11 million members throughout the world and over 5 million in the United States.</p>
<p><b>The Adventists</b></p>	<p>The fervent MILLENNIAL ATMOSPHERE of the Second Great Awakening reached its climax when WILLIAM MILLER, a self-educated farmer in upstate New York, became CONVINCED THAT THE WORLD WOULD COME TO AN END about the year 1843. He began lecturing and preaching and the movement caught on. It spread into western New York in 1843. A huge tent was erected in the center of Rochester, new York, to which the faithful came by the thousands. When the year 1843 passed, Miller changed his forecast. He now sated that the Advent would occur on October 22, 1844. the day came and went and the</p>

<p><b><u>Experiments in Social Systems:</u></b> <b>New Harmony</b></p>	<p>SECOND COMING did not take place. Many became disillusioned and left the faith, but the Adventist movement survived.</p> <p>An experiment in communal living in NEW HARMONY, Indiana, started in 1825, under the leadership of Robert Owen. It was based on COOPERATION instead of competition, BROTHERHOOD instead of individualism, and COOPERATIVE ENTERPRISE instead of competitive capitalism. All labored in common, under the guidance of an administrative committee, and in return received credit to their accounts in a common store. There were music and dancing, endless meetings and discussion, and no recognized religion. All things were owned in common. Before 1830, however, it had all collapsed. Human nature seemed too individualistic to fit into the mold.</p>
<p><b>Brook Farm</b></p>	<p>BROOK FARM was established in Massachusetts by George Ripley, a Unitarian minister. Supported by Emerson and other Boston intellectuals, the farm never had more than 80 or 90 members. The farm work was never very efficiently done, but the PICNICS, BOATING PARTIES, DEBATES, and LECTURES made it a place of real INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION. In 1844, after Ripley tried to impose a stricter form of communalism, the experiment lost much of its appeal. Its buildings were destroyed in fire in 1846.</p>
<p><b>Oneida Community</b></p>	<p>John Humphrey Noyes, a leading “perfectionist,” believed that the Second Coming of Christ had already occurred and that people could aspire to freedom from sin. He argued that the major obstacle to perfection was marriage, which promoted exclusiveness and jealousy. Noyes created a community in Oneida, New York, whose members PRACTICED “COMPLEX MARRIAGE” in which every person was married to every other person. The Oneidans’ sexual practices SCANDALIZED SOCIETY, forcing Noyes to flee prosecution. Although few in numbers, the Oneidans were important for the alternative they offered to the prevailing social, economic, and gender divisions of America’s new capitalist industrial society.</p>
<p><b><u>Experiments in Social Change:</u></b> <b>Education</b></p>	<p>After 1830, the clamor for EDUCATIONAL REFORM grew insistent. A good education should be provided not only FOR CHILDREN, but also FOR WORKING-CLASS ADULTS. Led by HORACE MANN, the first state superintendent of education in Massachusetts, the campaign for FREE COMMON SCHOOLS was largely won in the North by 1860. Through many devices – a series of powerfully written annual reports, his <i>Common School Journal</i>, and in meetings, orations, and special training programs – he spread his message widely. At the same time, ADULT EDUCATION was eagerly pushed forward, and every step possible was taken to make books and CHEAP PERIODICALS available to the masses to popularize knowledge.</p>
<p><b>Treatment of the Insane</b></p>	<p>One of the cruelest abuses of human beings in the United States was the treatment of inane people as criminals. The individual most responsible for improving this state of affairs was DOROTHEA DIX, a Massachusetts school teacher. Shocked at conditions she saw when she visited a jail in 1841, Dix gathered information on other jails in Massachusetts and wrote a report describing the conditions she found:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>I proceed gentlemen, briefly to call your attention to the present state of insane persons confined within this commonwealth in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience...</i></p> <p>Shocked by her report, the Massachusetts legislature passed a law establishing that the insane were to be treated as sick rather than criminals. After her success at home, Dix traveled throughout the United States and Europe successfully promoting BETTER TREATMENT FOR THE INSANE.</p>
<p><b>The Abolition Movement</b></p>	<p>The most glaring VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS in the United States was AFRICAN SLAVERY. The issue was particularly disturbing because by 1840, most Latin American</p>

<p><b>Discussion Questions</b></p>	<p>countries had abolished slavery and Great Britain had banned it in her colonies. The organized ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT had begun among various RELIGIOUS GROUPS. As early as 1776, QUAKERS had agreed to hold no more slaves. Even in the slave state of Virginia, the BAPTISTS in 1789 recommended legal measures to eradicate the evil. Many southerners supported the AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY designed to free slaves and return them to Africa. As late as 1831, the state of Virginia came near to voting to abolish slavery by BUYING OUT THE OWNERS.</p> <p>Generally, however, the INCREASE IN COTTON GROWING tended to influence southerners toward DEFENDING SLAVERY as necessary to the prosperity of their section. The attacks of ABOLITIONISTS like WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON, who published <i>The Liberator</i>, and FREDERICK DOUGLAS, who published <i>The North Star</i>, helped to drive southerners toward an AGGRESSIVE DEFENSE of the institution. southern CLERGYMEN even began to find support for it in the Bible. In 1836, under pressure from the South, the House of Representatives passed a “GAG RULE” providing that all abolitionist petitions should be shelved without debate.</p> <p>Despite the excitement aroused the anti-slavery movement at first affected politics very little. The MISSOURI COMPROMISE had supposedly averted civil war by fixing for all time the boundary between slave and free territory. No prominent politician and neither major party proposed to endanger the union by touching SLAVERY where it was ALREADY PROTECTED BY LAW.</p> <p><b>Describe the organizational movement that transformed 19<sup>th</sup> century American life. What contribution did Evangelicals make to the movement? How did this stimulate a reform movement?</b></p> <p><b>The reform impulse took many forms (experiments in regulating personal behavior, in philosophy and religion, in social systems, and in social change)? How do you account for the comprehensive nature of the reform movement?</b></p> <p><b>Which reforms were most significant?</b></p>
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