

Reforming American Society

MAIN IDEA

In the mid-1800s, several reform movements worked to improve American education and society.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Several laws and institutions, such as public schools, date back to this period.

TERMS & NAMES

revival
Second Great Awakening
temperance movement

labor union
strike
Horace Mann
Dorothea Dix

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Anne Newport Royall wrote about America's growing interest in religion. She also described a preacher at a Tennessee **revival**, or meeting to reawaken religious faith.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

His text was, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The people must have been deaf indeed that could not have heard him. . . . He began low but soon bawled to deafening. He spit in his hands, rubbed them against each other, and then would smite them together, till he made the woods ring.

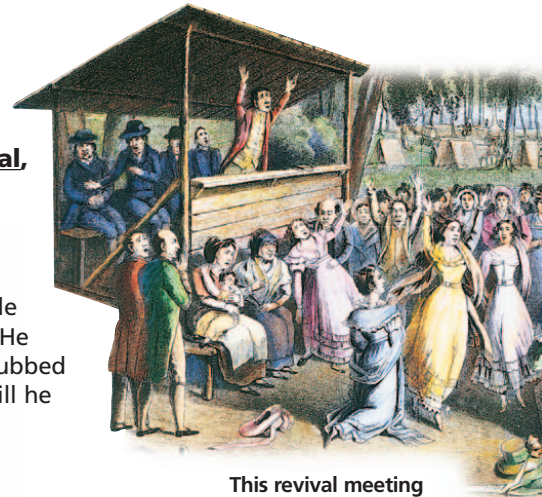
Anne Newport Royall, *Letters from Alabama*

Section 3 explains how, in the mid-1800s, many individuals called on Americans to reform, or to improve themselves and their society.

A Spirit of Revival

The renewal of religious faith in the 1790s and early 1800s is called the **Second Great Awakening**. Revivalist preachers said that anyone could choose salvation. This appealed to equality-loving Americans. Revivals spread quickly across the frontier. Settlers eagerly awaited the visits of preachers like Peter Cartwright. At the age of 16, Cartwright had given up a life of gambling and joined a Methodist Church. He became a minister and spent more than 60 years preaching on the frontier.

The revival also traveled to Eastern cities. There, former lawyer Charles Grandison Finney held large revival meetings. He preached that "all sin consists in selfishness" and that religious faith led people to help others. Such teaching helped awaken a spirit of reform. Americans began to believe that they could act to make things better.



This revival meeting took place during the Second Great Awakening.

Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about the influence of reformers.

	How People
Immigrants	
Writers	
Reformers	
Abolitionists	
Women	



Temperance pledges often displayed inspiring pictures and mottoes.

Temperance Societies

Led by churches, some Americans began the **temperance movement**, which is a campaign to stop the drinking of alcohol. Heavy drinking was common in the early 1800s. Some workers spent most of their wages on alcohol—leaving their families without enough money to live on. As a result, many women joined the temperance movement. “There is no reform in which women can act better or more appropriately than temperance,” said Mary C. Vaughan.

Some temperance workers handed out pamphlets urging people to stop drinking. Others produced plays, such as one entitled *The Drunkard*, to dramatize the evils of alcohol. In addition, temperance speakers

traveled widely, asking people to sign a pledge to give up alcohol. By 1838, a million people had signed.

Temperance also won the support of business owners. Industry needed workers who could keep schedules and run machines. Alcohol made it hard for workers to do either. New England businessman Neal Dow led the fight to make it illegal to sell alcohol. In 1851, Maine banned the sale of liquor. By 1855, 13 other states passed similar laws. But many people opposed these laws, and most were repealed. Still, the movement to ban alcohol remained strong, even into the 20th century.

Fighting for Workers’ Rights

As business owners tried to improve workers’ habits, workers called for improvements in working conditions. Factory work was noisy, boring, and unsafe. In the 1830s, American workers began to organize.

The young women mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, started a labor union. A **labor union** is a group of workers who band together to seek better working conditions. In 1836, the mill owners raised the rent of the company-owned boarding houses where the women lived. About 1,500 women went on **strike**, stopping work to demand better conditions. Eleven-year-old Harriet Hanson helped lead the strikers.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I . . . started on ahead, saying, . . . “I don’t care what you do, I am going to turn out, whether anyone else does or not,” and I marched out, and was followed by the others. As I looked back at the long line that followed me, I was more proud than I have ever been since.

Harriet Hanson, quoted in *A People’s History of the United States*

Other workers called for shorter hours and higher wages. In 1835 and 1836, 140 strikes took place in the eastern United States. Then the Panic

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A. Evaluating

How did the temperance movement encourage people to take responsibility for their families?

Vocabulary

repeal: to cancel

Background

President Van Buren's order reduced the workweek from 70 to 60 hours.

of 1837 brought hard times. Jobs were scarce, and workers were afraid to cause trouble. The young labor movement fell apart. Even so, workers achieved a few goals. For example, in 1840 President Martin Van Buren ordered a ten-hour workday for government workers.

Improving Education

In the 1830s, Americans also began to demand better schools. In 1837, Massachusetts set up the first state board of education in the United States. Its head was **Horace Mann**. Mann called public education “the great equalizer.” He also argued that “education creates or develops new treasures—treasures never before possessed or dreamed of by any one.” By 1850, many Northern states had opened public elementary schools.

Boston opened the first public high school in 1821. A few other Northern cities followed suit. In addition, churches and other groups founded hundreds of private colleges in the following decades. Many were located in states carved from the Northwest Territory. These included Antioch and Oberlin Colleges in Ohio, the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, and Northwestern University in Illinois.

Women could not attend most colleges. One exception was Oberlin. It was the first college to accept women as well as men. In 1849, English immigrant Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to earn a medical degree in the United States. Despite such individual efforts, it was rare for a woman to attend college until the late 1800s.

African Americans also faced obstacles to getting an education. This was especially true in the South. There, teaching an enslaved person to read had been illegal since the Nat Turner Rebellion in 1831. Enslaved African Americans who tried to learn were brutally punished. Even in the North, most public schools barred African-American children.

Few colleges accepted African Americans. Those that did often took only one or two blacks at a time. The first African American to receive a college degree was Alexander Twilight in 1823. John Russwurm received one in 1826 and later began the first African-American newspaper.

Caring for the Needy

As some people promoted education, others tried to improve society's care for its weakest members. In 1841, **Dorothea Dix**, a reformer from Boston, was teaching Sunday school at a women's jail. She discovered some women who were locked in cold, filthy cells

Mary Jane Patterson was the first African-American woman to earn a college degree. She graduated from Oberlin in 1862 and went on to work as a teacher.

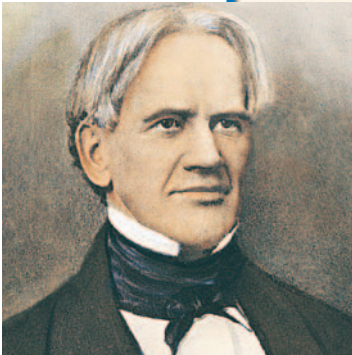


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B. Making Inferences

Why do you think women and African Americans had a hard time getting an education?

AMERICA'S HISTORY MAKERS



HORACE MANN

1796–1859

Horace Mann once said in a speech to students, “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.” Mann had no reason to be ashamed. As a child, he knew poverty and hardship. He educated himself and later fought for public education for other people.

Toward the end of his life, Mann became president of Antioch College. It committed itself to education for both men and women and equal rights for African Americans.



DOROTHEA DIX

1802–1887

At the age of 12, Dorothea Dix left an unhappy home to go live with her grandparents in Boston. Just two years later, she began teaching little children.

In 1841, Dix saw the harsh treatment of mentally ill women. Society frowned upon women traveling alone, but Dix defied custom. She went by train to several places where the mentally ill were housed.

Dix wrote a report about her research. (See page 438.) That report changed the care of the mentally ill.

How might their backgrounds have motivated Dorothea Dix and Horace Mann to become leaders in reform movements?

simply because they were mentally ill. Visiting other jails, Dix learned that the mentally ill often received no treatment. Instead, they were chained and beaten. Dix pleaded with the Massachusetts Legislature to improve the care of the mentally ill. Later, she traveled all over the United States on behalf of the mentally ill. Her efforts led to the building of 32 new hospitals.

Some reformers worked to improve life for people with other disabilities. Thomas H. Gallaudet started the first American school for deaf children in 1817. Samuel G. Howe founded the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston in the 1830s.

Reformers also tried to improve prisons. In the early 1800s, debtors, lifelong criminals, and child offenders were put in the same cells. Reformers demanded that children go to special jails. They also called for the rehabilitation of adult prisoners. Rehabilitation means preparing people to live useful lives after their release from prison.

Spreading Ideas Through Print

During this period of reform, Americans began to receive more information about how they should lead their lives. In the 1830s, cheaper newsprint and the invention of the steam-driven press lowered the price of a newspaper to a penny. Average Americans could afford to buy the “penny papers.” Penny papers were also popular because, in addition to serious news, they published gripping stories of fires and crimes.

Hundreds of new magazines also appeared. One was the *Ladies' Magazine*. Its editor was Sarah Hale, a widow who used writing to support her family. The magazine advocated education for women. It also

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C. Recognizing Effects How did reformers change the treatment of the mentally ill, the disabled, and prisoners?

suggested that men and women were responsible for different, but equally important, areas of life. The magazine taught that a woman's area was the home and the world of "human ties." A man's area was politics and the business of earning a living for his family. Later, Hale edited *Godey's Lady's Book*, which published poems and stories as well as articles.

Creating Ideal Communities

While magazines sought to tell people how to live and reform movements tried to change society, some individuals decided to start over. They aimed to build an ideal society, called a utopia.

Two attempts at utopias were New Harmony, Indiana, and Brook Farm, Massachusetts. In both, residents received food and other necessities of life in exchange for work. However, both utopias experienced conflicts and financial difficulties. They ended after only a few years.

Religious belief led to some utopias. For example, the Shakers followed the beliefs of Ann Lee. She preached that people should lead holy lives in communities that demonstrate God's love to the world. When a person became a Shaker, he or she vowed not to marry or have children. Shakers shared their goods with each other, believed that men and women are equal, and refused to fight for any reason. Shakers set up communities in New York, New England, and on the frontier.

People called them *Shakers* because they shook with emotion during church services. Otherwise, Shaker life was calm. Shakers farmed and built simple furniture in styles that remain popular today. The childless Shakers depended on converts and adopting children to keep their communities going. In the 1840s, the Shakers had 6,000 members—their highest number. In 1999, only seven Shakers remained.

In the 1840s and 1850s, reform found a new direction. Many individuals began to try to win rights for two oppressed groups—women and enslaved persons. Section 4 discusses these efforts.

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D. Forming and Supporting Opinions

Why do you think it was hard for utopias to succeed? Give reasons.

Section 3 Assessment

1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- revival
- Second Great Awakening
- temperance movement
- labor union
- strike
- Horace Mann
- Dorothea Dix

2. Using Graphics

Create a chart like the one below. Use it to list problems identified by reformers and their solutions to them.

Problem	Reformer's Solution

3. Main Ideas

- How did the Second Great Awakening influence the reform movement?
- How did labor unions try to force business owners to improve working conditions?
- What were women's contributions to the reform movement?

4. Critical Thinking

Recognizing Effects What was the long-term impact of the reform movement that took place in the mid-1800s?

THINK ABOUT

- the changes reformers made in education, temperance, prisons, and the care of the disabled
- which of those changes are still in effect today

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

SPEECH CIVICS

Think of a modern problem that is similar to an issue discussed in this section. Give a **speech** or write a **letter** to a government official suggesting a reform.