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Democratic Politics, Religious Revival, and Reform, 1824–1840





DOROTHEA DIX (*National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution/Art Resource, NY*)

DOROTHEA DIX WAS the perfect picture of the nineteenth-century New England reformer. Tall and thin, with a large nose and firm jaw, she dressed plainly and wore her hair pulled straight back from her face. Emotionally, she was lonely and prone to depression. As the child of a drunken Methodist preacher and a shiftless mother, she suffered through years of poverty and neglect on the Maine frontier, where she was put to work stitching together religious tracts for her father to sell. “I never knew childhood,” she later recalled. But as a teenager, Dorothea Dix went to live with her well-to-do Boston grandmother and educated herself through books and public lectures. She embraced Unitarian religion, taught school, and wrote devotional manuals and children’s stories. Then, at the age of thirty-nine, this quiet schoolteacher discovered the moral purpose that would transform her into an impassioned reformer.

One cold Sunday in March 1841, Dorothea Dix was teaching a religious class for women prisoners in the House of Corrections at East Cambridge, Massachusetts. After class, she was shocked to discover a number of insane inmates shivering in unheated cells. When she confronted the jailer, he explained that providing stoves for “lunatics” was not only dangerous but unnecessary, because they did not suffer from cold. The outraged Dix went to court and successfully petitioned to have stoves provided for the jail’s insane inmates. With this action, she launched her career as an advocate for humanitarian treatment of the mentally ill.

Dix hatched a bold plan. She would personally visit jails and almshouses throughout Massachusetts to study first-hand the living conditions of the insane, then present evidence of their abuse to the state legislature. For two years, Dix traveled the state documenting the conditions of the mentally ill, which were far worse than she had anticipated. When jailers and almshouse keepers tried to deny her access, she replied, “I cannot adopt description of the condition of the insane secondarily; what I assert for fact, I must see for myself.” In 1843, she presented to the legislature a report or “memorial” describing the insane confined “in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience.” The Massachusetts legislature responded by funding an expansion of the state’s mental hospital. Encouraged by her success, Dix spent the next 15 years traveling throughout the nation, documenting

FIRST STATE ELECTION IN MICHIGAN Michigan’s early elections were rowdy. Here, Detroit voters cast ballots in the state’s first gubernatorial election in 1837. Democrat Stevens Mason, shown on the left backed by a “no monopoly” banner, defeated the Whig candidate. (*Gift of Mrs. Samuel T. Carson photograph @ 1991 The Detroit Institute of Arts (detail)*)

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abuses and presenting her memorials, filled with statistics and moral outrage, to state legislatures, which then allocated funds for twenty new insane “asylums” or havens. By the time of the Civil War, twenty-eight states, four cities, and the federal government had constructed public mental institutions.

What was it that drove this sickly woman to endure dangerous travel conditions, confront the terrible living conditions of the mentally ill, and endure the ridicule of those who found her crusade “unladylike”? Like many other women and men of the period, Dorothea Dix’s reform impulse drew from a deep well of religious conviction. The two religions that shaped her Christian beliefs were seemingly at odds. The Methodist revivalism of her early childhood was emotional and demanded a conversion experience. But the Unitarianism of her young adulthood was rationalistic and emphasized gradual spiritual improvement. What the two religions shared, however, was theological perfectionism: the belief in the innate moral capacities of all men and women and their ability to strive toward spiritual perfection. “Raise up the fallen,” she wrote, “console the afflicted, defend the helpless, minister to the poor, reclaim the transgressor, be benefactors of mankind!” Even the raving lunatic, in Dix’s eyes, carried a spark of inner divinity that should be nurtured in a properly controlled moral environment.

Dorothea Dix’s perfectionist faith in the powers of moral institutions was shared by other reformers who regarded asylums—such as penitentiaries, almshouses, and orphan homes—as the solution for many of society’s ills. If humankind was fundamentally good, they reasoned, then poor environments

must be at fault when people went wrong. The solution was to place deviants in specially designed environments that imposed order on their disorderly lives and minds. Asylums subjected inmates to regimented schedules, controlling social interaction, and sometimes—especially in the new penitentiaries—imposing forced isolation and physical punishment. Though reformers such as Dix certainly aimed at genuinely humanitarian reform, their strategies actually generated new forms of social control over the criminal, the poor, and the mentally ill.

Spread primarily by the wave of religious revivals known as the Second Great Awakening, theological perfectionism shaped a host of reforms that swept the United States after 1820, including temperance, antislavery, education, women’s rights, and utopian communitarianism. Most of these movements, like Dix’s crusade for the mentally ill, raised fundamental questions about the proper balance of order and freedom in the new American democracy. Were temperance reformers justified in passing legislation that prohibited liquor sales? Did solitary confinement promote self-government among criminal offenders, or did it represent a tyrannical abuse of governmental authority? These questions of order versus freedom also lay at the heart of the new two-party system that would reshape American political life during the presidential terms of Andrew Jackson. Jacksonian Democrats rallied to the cause of freedom, so long as freedom was largely restricted to adult white men. By contrast, Whigs—the party more likely to support the work of Dorothea Dix—were quick to take up the cause of moral order and to fill the ranks of the era’s many reform movements.

FOCUS Questions

- How did the democratization of American politics contribute to the rise of Andrew Jackson?
- How did Jackson’s policies and the Panic of 1837 help launch and solidify the Whig Party?
- What new assumptions about human nature lay behind the religious movements of the period?
- Did the reform movements aim primarily at making Americans more free or more orderly?

The Rise of Democratic Politics, 1824–1832

In 1824, Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, who would guide the Democratic Party in the 1830s, and Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams, who would become that decade’s leading Whigs, all belonged to the Republican Party of Thomas Jefferson. But the Republican Party was coming apart under pressures generated by industrialization in New England, the spread of cotton cultivation in the South, and westward expansion. These forces would split Jefferson’s Party into two new parties. In general, Republicans who retained Jefferson’s preference for states’ rights became Democrats; Republicans who believed that the national government should actively encourage economic development, the so-called National Republicans, became Whigs.

Whatever their differences, all politicians in the 1820s and 1830s had to adapt to the increasingly democratic view of politics as a forum for expressing the will of the common people. Gentlemen could still be elected to office, but their political success now depended less on their education and wealth than on their ability to win the battle over public opinion.

Democratic Ferment

Political democratization took several forms. Beginning in the West, one state after another abolished the requirement that voters own property. Written ballots replaced the custom of voting aloud, which had enabled elites to influence their subordinates at the polls. Formerly appointive offices became elective. Though the Electoral College survived, the choice of presidential electors by state legislatures gave way to direct election by the voters. In 1800, a supporter of Thomas Jefferson could only vote for the men who would vote for the men who would vote for Jefferson. By 1824, however, only six state legislatures continued to choose presidential electors, and by 1832, only one.

The fierce battles between the Republicans and the Federalists beginning in the 1790s had taught both parties how to court voters. At grand party-run barbecues from Maine to Maryland, potential voters happily washed down free clams and oysters with free beer and whiskey. Republicans sought to expand suffrage in the North, and Federalists did the same in the South, each in the hope of becoming the majority party in that section. Democratization was also advanced by the transportation and communications revolutions that enabled the creation of a politically informed public.

Political democratization had its limitations. In 1820, both Federalists and Republicans were still organized from the top down. To nominate candidates, both parties relied on the caucus (a conference of party members in the legislature) rather than on popularly elected nominating conventions. Women and free blacks remained disfranchised. Nevertheless, open opposition to the “common people” (meaning adult white males) was becoming a formula for political suicide. The people, one Federalist complained, “have become too saucy and are really beginning to fancy themselves equal to their betters.”

The Election of 1824 and the Adams Presidency

In 1824, sectional tensions ended the Era of Good Feelings when five Republican candidates vied for the presidency. John Quincy Adams emerged as

New England’s favorite. South Carolina’s brilliant John C. Calhoun competed with Georgia’s William Crawford for southern support. Out of the West marched the ambitious **Henry Clay** of Kentucky, confident that his American System of protective tariffs and federally supported internal improvements would win votes from both eastern manufacturing interests and western agriculturalists.

The fifth candidate was Andrew Jackson of Tennessee. Already popular on the frontier and in the South, he quickly won support from opponents of the American System in Pennsylvania and northern states. As the only presidential candidate in the election of 1824 not linked to the Monroe administration, Jackson had gained popularity after the Panic of 1819, which, as Calhoun commented, had left people with “a general mass of disaffection to the Government” and “looking out anywhere for a leader.” To Thomas Jefferson, however, Jackson was “one of the most unfit men I know of for such a place” as the presidency.

When the Republican caucus met, three-fourths of Congressional Republicans refused to attend, and Crawford was selected as presidential candidate. But his weak prospects evaporated when he suffered a paralyzing stroke. Calhoun assessed Jackson’s support and prudently decided to run unopposed for the vice presidency.

In the election, Jackson won more popular and electoral votes than any other candidate but failed to gain the majority required by the Constitution. So the election was thrown into the House of Representatives, whose members had to choose a president from the top three candidates—Jackson, Adams, and Crawford. Hoping to forge an alliance between the West and Northeast for a future presidential bid, Clay threw his support to New Englander John Quincy Adams, who won the election. “The Judah of the West,” commented Jackson bitterly, “has closed the contract and will receive the thirty pieces of silver.” When the new president appointed Clay his secretary of state, Jackson’s supporters accused Adams of stealing victory by entering a “corrupt bargain” with Clay, an allegation that formed a dark cloud over Adams’s presidency.

The guiding principle of the Adams presidency was improvement, both social and personal. “The spirit of improvement is abroad upon the earth,” he wrote. In his eyes, the American republic was the culmination of human progress, and he intended to further that progress through a broad-gauged program for

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American development. In his First Annual Message to Congress, he laid out his plans to improve public education, expand communications and commerce, and launch an ambitious program of federal internal improvements. In foreign policy, he proposed that the U.S. participate in the first pan-American conference as a way to promote commerce

with Latin America. Condemning what he called “the baneful weed of party strife,” Adams sought to remain aloof from partisan politics, leaving most of Monroe’s officeholders in place, and even appointing his own opponents to high office.

But Adams’s ambitions met with growing political opposition. Strict constructionists opposed internal improvements on constitutional grounds. Southerners protested U.S. participation in the pan-American conference because it required association with regimes that had abolished slavery, including the black republic of Haiti, created by slave revolutionaries. And “the baneful weed of party strife” swirled around his presidency. At the midterm congressional elections of 1826 and 1827, Adams’s opponents took control of both houses of Congress. While Adams continued to practice a time-honored politics of courting regional leaders so they would deliver the votes of their followings, his opponents—most important, Martin Van Buren of New York—were inventing a new grass-roots politics based on organization and partisan loyalty. John Quincy Adams’s outdated notion of the president as a custodian of the public good, as well as his distaste for partisan politics, helped guarantee him a single-term presidency.

The Rise of Andrew Jackson and the Election of 1828

As President Adams’s popularity declined, Andrew Jackson’s rose. While seasoned politicians distrusted his notoriously hot temper and his penchant for duels, Jackson was still a popular hero for his victory over the British in the Battle of New Orleans. And because he had fought in the American Revolution as a boy, Jackson seemed to many Americans a living link to a more virtuous past.

The presidential campaign of 1828 began almost as soon as Adams was inaugurated. Jackson’s supporters began to put together a modern political machine based on local committees and state conventions, partisan newspapers and public rallies. Two years before the election of 1828, towns and

villages across the United States were buzzing with political activity and debate between “Adams men,” or National Republicans, and “Jackson men,” or Democratic Republicans. But few Americans realized that a new political system was being born. The man most alert to the transformation was Martin Van Buren, whose political savvy would make him vice president during Jackson’s second term, and then president.

Van Buren exemplified a new breed of politician. A tavern keeper’s son, he began his political career at the county level. As governor, he built a powerful political machine, the Albany Regency, composed mainly of men like himself from the lower and middling ranks. His archrival, DeWitt Clinton, was everything Van Buren was not—tall, handsome, and aristocratic. But Van Buren’s geniality put ordinary people at ease. More important, he had an uncanny ability to anticipate which way the political winds would blow, an ability that would earn him the nickname “Little Magician.”

The election of 1824 convinced Van Buren of the need for two-party competition. Without the discipline imposed by an opposition party, the Republicans had splintered into sectional pieces, and the final selection was decided by self-interested leaders in Congress. It would be better, Van Buren decided, to organize the spectrum of political opinions into two opposing groups. Then the parties would compete, and a clear winner would emerge. Jackson’s strong showing in the election persuaded Van Buren that “Old Hickory” could lead a new political party. In the election of 1828, this party, soon to be called the **Democratic Party**, ran Jackson for president and Calhoun for vice president. Its opponents, the National Republicans, rallied behind Adams and his running mate, treasury secretary Richard Rush. The second American party system was beginning to take shape.

The 1828 campaign was a vicious, mudslinging affair. The National Republicans called Jackson a murderer for killing several men in duels and military executions. They charged him with adultery for living with Rachel Robards when she was still married to another man. “Ought a convicted adulteress and her paramour husband,” the Adams men taunted, “be placed in the highest office of this free and Christian land?” Jackson’s supporters responded by accusing Adams of wearing silk underwear, spending public funds on a billiard table for the White House, and offering a beautiful American prostitute to the Russian tsar.

Although both sides slung mud, Jackson’s men had better aim. Charges by Adams’s supporters that Jackson was an illiterate backwoodsman backfired, increasing his popularity by casting him as a

common man. Jackson's supporters explained that the people's choice was between "the democracy of the country, on the one hand, and a lordly purse-proud aristocracy on the other." Jackson's mind, they boasted, was unclouded by learning, his morals were simple and true, and his will was fiercely resolute. Adams, they sneered, was an aristocrat, a scholar whose learning obscured the truth, a writer not a fighter. Though Jackson was actually a wealthy slaveholder, people wanted to see in him the idealized common man: uncorrupt, natural, and plain.

Jackson won the election with more than twice the electoral vote of Adams (see Map 10.1). Yet the popular vote was much closer, and reflected the sectional bases of the new parties. Adams's voter support in New England was twice that of Jackson's, while Jackson received double his opponent's vote in the South and nearly triple in the Southwest.

Jackson in Office

As a vocal opponent to corruption and privilege, President Jackson made the federal civil service his first target. Many officeholders, he believed, regarded their jobs as entitlements. Jackson, by contrast, supported "rotation in office" so that as many common people as possible would have a chance to work for the government. Jackson did not invent rotation, but he applied it more thoroughly than his predecessors by firing nearly half the higher civil service, especially postmasters and customs officers.

Although Jackson defended these dismissals on democratic grounds, he also had a partisan motive. The firings were concentrated in the Northeast, stronghold of his defeated presidential opponent—though President Adams had actually left most of his predecessor Monroe's officeholders in place. Among Jackson's new appointments was his supporter Samuel Swartwout. As the chief customs officer for the port of New York, Swartwout embarrassed Jackson by running off with millions of dollars of customs receipts. Critics dubbed the practice of basing appointments on party loyalty the "spoils system."

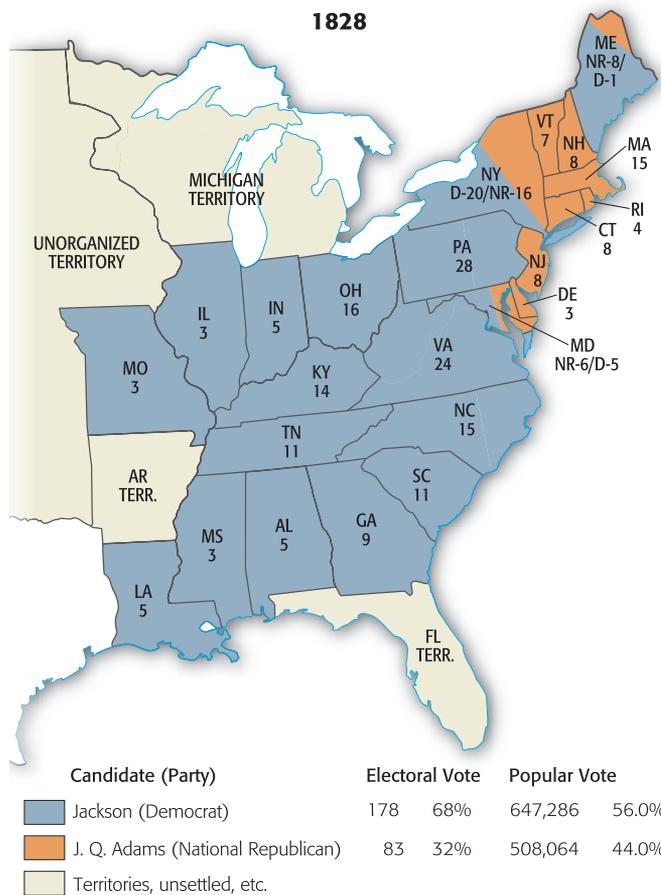
Jackson's positions on internal improvements and tariffs sparked even more intense controversy. He did not oppose all federal aid for internal improvements. But Jackson suspected that public officials used such aid to win political support by handing out favors. To end such corruption, he flatly rejected federal support for roads within states. In 1830, when a bill came before him that would have provided federal money for a road between Maysville and Lexington, Kentucky, Jackson vetoed it on the grounds of its "purely local character."



JOHN QUINCY ADAMS President Adams is pictured here in his study. A map of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal conveys his support for internal improvements, and his many books demonstrate the commitment to learning that Andrew Jackson's supporters successfully used against him in the election of 1828. (New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Clermont State Historic Site, Taconic Region)

The tariff issue tested Jackson's support even in the South, where the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (see Chapter 9) enhanced his popularity. In 1828, while Adams was still president, some of Jackson's supporters in Congress had helped pass a high protective tariff that strongly favored western agriculture and New England manufacturing over the South, which had few industries to protect and would now face higher prices for manufactured goods. Taking for granted southern support in the coming election, Jackson's supporters had calculated that southerners would blame the Adams administration for this "Tariff of Abominations." Instead, they leveled their fury at Jackson.

The people's choice was between "the democracy of the country, on the one hand, and a lordly purse-proud aristocracy on the other."



MAP 10.1 THE ELECTION OF 1828



ANDREW JACKSON, BY RALPH EARL Jackson during the nullification crisis, looking serene in the uniform of a major-general and determined to face down the greatest challenge to his presidency. (*Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, TN, Memphis Park Commission Purchase*)

Nullification

The tariff of 1828 opened a major rift between Jackson and his vice president, John C. Calhoun, which would shake the foundations of the Republic. Early in his career, Calhoun had been an ardent nationalist. He entered Congress in 1811 as a war hawk, supported the protectionist tariff of 1816, and dismissed strict construction of the Constitution as philosophical nonsense. During the late 1820s, however, Calhoun the nationalist became Calhoun the states' rights sectionalist. The reasons for his shift were complex. He had supported the tariff of 1816 to encourage fledgling industries and provide revenue for military preparedness. By 1826, however, national defense was no longer a priority, and the infant industries of 1816 had grown into troublesome adolescents demanding even higher tariffs.

Calhoun also burned with ambition to be president. Jackson had stated that he would serve for only one term, and Calhoun planned to succeed him. But to become president, the one-time protectionist had to maintain the support of the South, which was growing opposed to tariffs. Calhoun's own home state of South Carolina, suffering economically from the migration of cotton cultivation into Alabama and Mississippi, blamed its troubles on tariffs. Tariffs, according to Calhoun's constituents, not only drove up the price of manufactured goods; they also threatened to damage the American market for British textiles and thus reduce British demand for southern cotton. The more New England industrialized, the more protectionist its Congressmen became. And the more the South came to rely on King Cotton, the more vigorously Southerners opposed the tariff.

Opposition to tariffs in the South was not just economic. Many Southerners feared that if the federal government could pass tariff laws favoring one section over another, it could also pass laws meddling with slavery. Because Jackson himself was a slaveholder, the fear of federal interference with slavery was perhaps farfetched. But South Carolinians had especially strong reasons for concern. Theirs was one of only two states in which blacks comprised a majority of the population. In 1831, they became alarmed over a slave revolt led by Nat Turner in Virginia. That same year in Massachusetts, William Lloyd Garrison launched an abolitionist newspaper called *The Liberator*. These developments convinced many South Carolinians that a line had to be drawn against tariffs and possible future interference with slavery.

Calhoun opposed the tariff on constitutional grounds. He embraced the view, set forth in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798–1799, that the Union was a compact by which the states had conferred limited and specified powers on the

federal government. Although the Constitution did empower Congress to levy tariffs, Calhoun insisted that only tariffs that raised revenue for such common purposes as defense were constitutional. Because the tariff of 1828 was set so high that it deterred foreigners from shipping their products to the United States, it could raise little revenue and was thus, he argued, unconstitutional. In 1828, Calhoun anonymously wrote the *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*, arguing that aggrieved states had the right to nullify the law within their borders.

Like Calhoun, Jackson was strong-willed and proud. Unlike Calhoun, he was already president and the leader of a national party that included supporters in such protariff states as Pennsylvania. To retain key northern support while soothing the South, Jackson devised two policies.

The first was to distribute surplus federal revenue to the states. In the years before federal income taxes, tariffs on foreign imports were a major source of federal revenue. Jackson hoped these funds, fairly distributed among the states, would remove the taint of sectional injustice from the tariff, while forcing the federal government to restrict its own spending. Second, Jackson hoped to reduce tariffs from the

sky-high levels of 1828. Calhoun, reluctant to break openly with Jackson, muffled his protest, hoping that Jackson would lower the tariff and thus protect Calhoun's presidential hopes. In 1832, Congress did pass slightly reduced tariff rates, but these did not satisfy South Carolinians.

Meanwhile, two personal issues further damaged relations between Calhoun and Jackson. In 1829, Jackson's secretary of war, John H. Eaton, had married the widowed daughter of a Washington tavern keeper. By her own account, Peggy O'Neale Timberlake was "frivolous, wayward, [and] passionate." While still married to a naval officer away on duty, Peggy had openly flirted with Eaton, a boarder at her father's tavern. After her husband died and she married Eaton, the newlyweds were snubbed socially by Calhoun's wife and his friends in the cabinet.

By her own account, Peggy O'Neale Timberlake was "frivolous, wayward, [and] passionate."

Jackson, who blamed his wife's recent death on the campaign mudslinging against her, befriended the Eatons. The Calhouns, he decided, had snubbed the Eatons to discredit Jackson and advance Calhoun's presidential aspirations.

To make matters worse, in 1830 Jackson received conclusive evidence supporting his long-time suspicion that in 1818, then-secretary of war Calhoun had urged that Jackson be punished for his unauthorized raid into Spanish Florida. This confirmation combined with the Eaton affair to convince Jackson that he had to "destroy [Calhoun] regardless of what injury it might do me or my administration." At a Jefferson Day dinner in April 1830, when Jackson proposed the toast, "Our Union: It must be preserved," Calhoun pointedly responded, "The Union next to Liberty the most dear. May we always remember that it can only be preserved by distributing equally the benefits and burdens of the Union."

The stage was now set for the **nullification crisis**, a direct clash between the president and vice president. In 1831, Calhoun acknowledged authorship of the *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*. In November 1832, a South Carolina convention nullified the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 and forbade the collection of customs duties within the state. Jackson reacted quickly. He labeled nullification an "abominable doctrine" that would reduce the government to anarchy, and berated the nullifiers as "unprincipled men who would rather rule in hell, than be subordinate in heaven." Jackson even sent weapons to loyal Unionists in South Carolina. In December 1832, he issued a proclamation that, while promising South Carolinians further tariff reductions,



JOHN C. CALHOUN, BY CHARLES BIRD KING, CA. 1825 The magnetic John C. Calhoun, Jackson's vice president, broke with Jackson over nullification and the Peggy Eaton affair and resigned the vice presidency in 1832. (*National Portrait Gallery/Art Resource, NY*)

condemned nullification as itself unconstitutional. The Constitution, he emphasized, had established “a single nation,” not a league of states.

The crisis eased in March 1833 when Jackson signed into law two measures, called by one historian “the olive branch and the sword.” The olive branch was the Compromise Tariff of 1833, which provided for a gradual reduction of duties between 1833 and 1842. The sword was the Force Bill, authorizing the president to use arms to collect customs duties in South Carolina. Although South Carolina promptly nullified the Force Bill, it construed the Compromise Tariff as a concession and rescinded its nullification of the tariffs of 1828 and 1832.

Like most of the accommodations by which the Union lurched from one sectional crisis to the next in the decades before the Civil War, the Compromise of 1833 mixed partisanship with statesmanship. The moving spirit behind this compromise was Kentucky senator Henry Clay. Clay, who had long favored high tariffs, supported tariff reduction because he feared that without some concessions to South Carolina, the Force Bill would produce civil war. He also feared that without compromise, the basic principle of protective tariffs would be destroyed. Clay preferred to take responsibility for lowering tariffs himself, rather than pass the responsibility to the Jacksonians.

For their part, the nullifiers defiantly toasted “Andrew Jackson: On the soil of South Carolina he received an humble birthplace. May he not find in it a traitor’s grave!” Although recognizing that South Carolina had failed to gain broad southern support for nullification and that they would have to bow to pressure, the nullifiers preferred that Clay, not Jackson, be the hero of the hour. So they supported Clay’s Compromise Tariff. Everywhere Americans hailed Clay as the Great Compromiser. Even Martin Van Buren acknowledged that Clay had “saved the country.”

The Bank Veto and the Election of 1832

Andrew Jackson recognized that the gap between rich and poor was widening during the 1820s and 1830s (see Chapter 9). He did not object to wealth acquired by hard work. But he disapproved of the wealthy growing wealthier by securing favors or “privileges” from corrupt legislatures. In addition, his own disastrous financial speculations early in his career had left him with a deep suspicion of all banks, paper money, and monopolies. The Bank of the United States was guilty on every count.

The **second Bank of the United States** had received a twenty-year charter from Congress in

1816. As a creditor to state banks, with the option of demanding repayment in specie (gold or silver coinage), the Bank of the United States held the power to restrain the state banks from excessive printing and lending of money. Such power provoked hostility. Many Americans blamed the bank for precipitating the Panic of 1819. Further, as the official depository for federal revenue, the bank’s capital of \$35 million was more than double the annual expenditures of the federal government. Yet this powerful institution was only distantly controlled by the government. Its stockholders were private citizens. Although chartered by Congress, the bank was located in Philadelphia. Its directors enjoyed considerable independence, and its president, the aristocratic Nicholas Biddle, viewed himself as a public servant, duty-bound to keep the bank above politics.

Encouraged by Henry Clay, who hoped that supporting the bank would help carry him to the White House in 1832, Biddle secured congressional passage of a bill to recharter the bank. Jackson vetoed it, denouncing the bank as a private and privileged monopoly that drained the West of specie, eluded state taxation, and made “the rich richer and the potent more powerful.” Failing to persuade Congress to override Jackson’s veto, Clay pinned his hopes on gaining the presidency himself.

By 1832, Jackson had made his views on major issues clear. He was simultaneously a staunch defender of states’ rights and a staunch Unionist. Although he cherished the Union, he believed the states were too diverse to accept strong direction from Washington. The safest course was to allow the states considerable freedom so they would remain content within the Union and reject dangerous doctrines like nullification.

Breaking his earlier promises to retire, Jackson again ran for the presidency in 1832, with Martin Van Buren as his running mate. Henry Clay ran on the National Republican ticket, touting his American System of protective tariffs, national banking, and federal support for internal improvements. Jackson won. Secure in office for another four years, he was ready to finish dismantling the Bank of the United States.

The Bank Controversy and the Second Party System, 1833–1840

Jackson’s veto of the recharter ignited a searing controversy. His efforts to destroy the Bank of the United States gave rise to the opposition Whig Party, stimulated popular interest in politics, and contributed to the severe economic downturn,

known as the Panic of 1837, that would greet his successor, Martin Van Buren. By 1840, the Whig and Democratic parties had divided fundamentally over the bank.

In part, tempers flared over banking because the U.S. government issued no official paper currency. Instead, money took the form of notes (promises to redeem in specie) dispensed by banks. These IOUs fueled economic development by making it easier for businesses and farmers to acquire loans for building factories or buying land. But when notes depreciated because of public doubts about a bank's solvency, wage earners who had been paid in paper rather than specie suffered. Further, paper money encouraged economic speculation. Farmers who bought land on credit in the expectation of rising values could be left mired in debt when agricultural prices dropped. Would the United States embrace swift economic development at the price of allowing some speculators to languish, while others got rich quickly? Or would the nation opt for more modest growth based on "honest" manual work and

frugality? Between 1833 and 1840 these questions dominated American politics.

The War on the Bank

Jackson could have allowed the bank to die quietly when its charter ran out in 1836. But Jackson and some of his followers feared the bank's power too much to wait. When Biddle, anticipating further attacks, began to call in the bank's loans and contract credit during the winter of 1832–1833, Jacksonians saw their darkest fears confirmed. The bank, Jackson assured Van Buren, "is trying to kill me, but I will kill it." Jackson then began to remove federal deposits from the Bank of the United States and place them in state banks, called "pet banks" by their critics because they were usually selected for loyalty to the Democratic Party.

The bank, Jackson assured Van Buren, "is trying to kill me, but I will kill it."



JACKSON VERSUS THE BANK Andrew Jackson, aided by Martin Van Buren (center), attacks the Bank of the United States which, like the monstrous Hydra of Greek mythology, keeps sprouting new heads. The largest head belongs to Nicholas Biddle, the bank's president. (© Collection of the New York Historical Society)

But Jackson's redistribution of federal deposits backfired. He himself opposed paper money and easy credit, which encouraged ordinary Americans to undertake risky get-rich-quick schemes. But as state banks became depositories for federal revenue, they were able to print more paper money and extend more loans to farmers and speculators eager to buy public lands in the West. Government land sales rose from \$6 million in 1834 to \$25 million in 1836. Jackson's policy was producing exactly the kind of economy he wanted to suppress.

Jackson had hoped to limit the number of state banks that would receive federal deposits. But all demanded a piece of the action, and the number of state-bank depositories grew to twenty-three by the end of 1833. Jackson was caught between crosswinds. Some Democrats resented the Bank of the United States because it periodically contracted credit and restricted lending by state banks. Western Democrats, in particular, had long viewed the Cincinnati branch of the Bank of the

Jackson believed that paper money sapped “public virtue” and “robbed honest labour of its earnings to make knaves rich, powerful and dangerous.”

United States as inadequate to supply their credit needs. Advocating “soft” or paper money, these Democrats in 1836 pressured a reluctant Jackson to sign the Deposit Act, which increased the number of deposit banks and loosened federal control over them. But Jackson continued to believe that paper money sapped “public virtue” and “robbed honest labour of its earnings to

make knaves rich, powerful and dangerous.” Seeking to reverse the damaging effects of the Deposit Act, Jackson issued a proclamation in 1836 called the Specie Circular, which provided that only specie could be accepted in payment for public lands.

Prior to the depression of 1837, most Democrats favored soft money. The hard-money (specie) view was advocated within Jackson's inner circle and by a faction of the New York Democratic Party called the Locofocos. The Locofocos grew out of several different “workingmen's” parties that called for free public education, the abolition of imprisonment for debt, and a ten-hour workday. Most of these parties proved short-lived, but in New York the “workies” were gradually absorbed by the Democratic Party. A mixture of intellectuals, small artisans, and journeymen, they worried about inflation, demanded payment in specie, and distrusted banks and paper

money. In 1835, a faction of workingmen broke away from Tammany Hall, the main Democratic Party organization in New York City, and met in a hall whose candles were lit by a newfangled invention called the “locofoco,” or match. Thereafter, these radical workingmen were called Locofocos.

The Rise of Whig Opposition

During Jackson's second term, the opposition National Republican Party gave way to the new **Whig Party**. Jackson's magnetic personality had swept him to victory in 1828 and 1832. But his opposition to federal aid for internal improvements and protective tariffs, to the Bank of the United States and nullification, prompted his opponents to align with the new Whig Party.

Jackson's crushing of nullification drove some southerners into the Whig Party simply because they opposed Jackson. His war on the Bank of the United States produced similar results. Jackson's policy of redistributing federal deposits pleased some southerners but dismayed others who did not need cheaper and easier credit. The president's suspicion of federal aid for internal improvements also alienated some southerners who feared that the South would lag behind the North unless it initiated improvements. Because so much southern capital was tied up in slavery, southerners looked to the federal government for funding, and when rebuffed, they drifted into the Whig Party. Despite these defections, the South remained the Democrats' strongest base. But the Whigs were making significant inroads, particularly in market towns and among planters with close ties to southern bankers and merchants.

Meanwhile, Northern social reformers were strengthening the opposition to Jackson. These reformers wanted to improve American society by ending slavery and liquor consumption, improving public education, and elevating public morality. Most reformers found Whig philosophy more compatible with their goals than Democratic ideas. Democrats believed that government should not impose a uniform standard of conduct on a diverse society. By contrast, the Whigs' commitment to Clay's American System implied an acceptance of government intervention to improve society—morally as well as economically. Reformers also indirectly stimulated Whig support from native-born Protestant workers. The reformers, overwhelmingly Protestant, distrusted immigrants, especially Irish Catholics, who viewed drinking as a normal recreation and opposed public schools because they promoted Protestantism. The rise of reform drove the Irish

into the Democratic Party. By the same token, reform activities won Whig support from many native-born Protestant workers who were contemptuous of the Irish.

No source of Whig strength, however, was more remarkable than Anti-Masonry. Freemasonry had long provided prominent men, including George Washington, with fraternal fellowship based in exotic rituals. What sparked the Anti-Masonic crusade was the abduction and disappearance in 1826 of William Morgan, a Mason who had threatened to expose the order's secrets. Every effort to solve the mystery of Morgan's disappearance failed when local officials who were themselves Masons obstructed the investigation. Throughout the Northeast, the public became increasingly aroused against the perceived evils of the Masonic order. Rumors spread that Masonry was a powerful, anti-Christian conspiracy to suppress popular liberty and provide a safe haven for wealthy drunkards. Anti-Masonry brought many northeastern small farmers and artisans into the Whig Party.

By 1836, the Whigs had become a national party with widespread appeal. In both the North and South, they attracted those with close ties to the market economy—commercial farmers, planters, merchants, and bankers. In the North, they picked up additional support from reformers, evangelical clergymen (especially Presbyterians and Congregationalists), Anti-Masons, and manufacturers. In the South, they appealed to some former nullificationists including, briefly, Calhoun himself. Everywhere the Whigs attacked Jackson as “King Andrew I”; and they named their party after that of the American patriots who opposed King George III in 1776.

The Election of 1836

Jackson's popularity was a tough act to follow. In 1836, the Democrats ran Martin Van Buren for president. Party leaders reminded voters that Van Buren was Jackson's chosen favorite, and that the Democratic Party itself was the real heir to Jackson, because it perfectly embodied the popular will. The less cohesive Whigs produced three candidates: William Henry Harrison of Ohio, Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, and W.P. Mangum of North Carolina. A fourth candidate, Democrat Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee, also ran against Van Buren, whom he distrusted, then defected to the Whigs after the election.

Democrats responded to this proliferation of Van Buren opponents by accusing the Whigs of a plot to divide the vote so that no candidate would receive the required majority in the Electoral College. The election would then be thrown into the House of

Representatives, where once again, as in 1824, damaging bargains would be struck. In reality, the Whigs were simply divided, and Van Buren won a clear majority. But there were signs of trouble ahead for the Democrats. The popular vote was close. In the South, where four years earlier the Democrats had won two-thirds of the votes, they now won barely half.

The Panic of 1837

Jackson left office and returned to Nashville in a burst of glory. But the public's mood quickly darkened, for no sooner was Van Buren in office than a severe depression, called the **Panic of 1837**, struck (see *Beyond America*).

In the speculative boom of 1835 and 1836, the total number of banks doubled, the value of bank notes in circulation nearly tripled, and commodity and land prices soared. Encouraged by easy money and high commodity prices, states made new commitments to build canals. Then in May 1837, prices began to tumble, and bank after bank suspended specie payments. After a short rally, the economy crashed again in 1839. The Bank of the United States, which had continued to operate as a state bank with a Pennsylvania charter, failed. Nicholas Biddle was charged with fraud and theft. Once again, banks throughout the nation suspended specie payments.

The ensuing depression was far more severe than the economic downturn of 1819. Those lucky enough to find work saw their wage rates drop by roughly one-third. In despair, many workers turned to the teachings of William Miller, a New England religious enthusiast convinced that the end of the world was imminent. Dressed in black coats and stovepipe hats, Miller's followers roamed urban sidewalks and rural villages in search of converts. Many sold their possessions and purchased white robes to ascend into heaven on October 22, 1843, the day the world was supposed to end. By then, the worst of the depression was over; but at its depths, the economic slump made despairing people receptive to Miller's predictions.

“Little Magician” Martin Van Buren needed all his political skills to confront the depression that was damaging not only ordinary citizens but the Democratic Party itself. Whigs dubbed him “Martin Van Ruin,” and in 1838 succeeded in sweeping the governorship and most legislative seats in Van Buren's own New York. To seize the initiative, Van Buren called for the creation of an independent Treasury. The idea was simple: the federal

Everywhere the Whigs attacked Jackson as “King Andrew I.”



Beyond America

GLOBAL INTERACTIONS

The Panic of 1837

Historians long blamed Andrew Jackson's policies for the Panic of 1837. Jackson's veto of the Bank of the United States in 1832, they argued, destroyed the institution that had policed the state banks. His transfer of deposits from the Bank of the United States to state banks expanded their reserves and led them recklessly to print paper money and extend loans. Finally, his Specie Circular of 1836 drastically reduced the amount of money in circulation. The money supply fell by 34 percent between 1838 and 1842, with catastrophic results for commodity prices. In a nation of small agricultural producers, collapsing commodity prices spelled personal misery. But farmers were not the only victims of the

Panic. Half the skilled workers in New York City reportedly lost their jobs, and those fortunate enough to find work saw their wages drop by one-third between 1836 and 1842.

In the late 1960s, economic historians trained in new quantitative techniques started to chip away at this interpretation. If the Specie Circular had really drained specie from banks, they reasoned, large volumes of specie would have flowed from eastern banks, which had the largest specie reserves, to the West, where land was being purchased. But only slight specie flows occurred. Finding little evidence to support the traditional interpretation of the Panic, historians began to look for explanations outside the borders of the United States.



THE TIMES Panicked depositors crowd a bank, customers besiege a pawnbroker, drunks stagger, and beggars plead for charity in this ironic depiction of the Fourth of July, 1837. (*Bridgeman Art Library Ltd.*)



THE BANK OF ENGLAND, 1833 The Bank of England moved to this impressive neo-classical building in 1833. At the time, Britain was the world's leading industrial nation. The bank's influence over interest rates and financial markets gave it enormous global influence. *(Guildhall Library, City of London or Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London)*

This approach made sense, for the American economy of the 1830s depended heavily on foreign investment to build its canals, and on foreign markets to buy its cotton.

It now appears that market exchanges involving Mexico, China, and Britain far outweighed Jackson's policies in causing the collapse. During the 1820s, the United States imported freshly mined silver from Mexico, which Americans then used to pay for silk and tea from China. In the 1830s, the Chinese used that silver to pay British merchants for opium grown in India, then under British control. As long as silver was flowing *into* Britain, the Bank of England did not have to worry about the specie flowing *out* of Britain to the United States for investment in canals and other projects. In 1836, however, the Bank of England decided that British investors were overextending themselves in America, and raised interest rates to keep specie at home. American banks responded by raising their interest rates in an effort to continue to attract foreign investment. As a result, credit became more expensive on both sides of the Atlantic.

This bad situation grew worse when cotton prices plummeted early in 1837. Since loans in the United States, especially in the South, were often secured by cotton, the collapsing price wiped out many lenders. Once again, the causes lay beyond America's borders. Raw cotton had commanded high prices from 1832 to 1835 because bumper wheat harvests in England had cut the cost of food, making it possible for British workers to spend more on cotton goods.

But poor harvests from 1836 through 1838 raised British food prices, leaving workers with less money to spend on clothing. As a result, British demand for American raw cotton declined. In 1839, an unusually large cotton crop in the United States drove down the price of cotton even further.

When British wheat harvests declined, Britain had to import wheat to feed its people. To pay for these imports, the Bank of England had to attract capital from abroad by raising interest rates, which more than doubled between mid-1838 and mid-1839. Soaring rates spelled disaster for Americans, who had started a new round of canal building with the expectation that British investors would lend the money. But British investors could now get a higher return keeping their money at home. As British investment dried up, the United States was left with half-built canals that went nowhere.

So, who was to blame for the American collapse? Though Whigs and Democrats raged at each other for causing the depression, its roots lay in transatlantic events over which the United States, with its undeveloped economy and dependence on cotton exports, had little control. When Britain caught a cold, the United States came down with the flu.

QUESTION FOR ANALYSIS

- How did the reliance of the American economy on cotton as its main export make it vulnerable to poor wheat harvests in Britain?

government, instead of depositing its money in banks, which would use it as the basis for speculative loans, would hold onto its revenues and keep them from the grasp of corporations. When Van Buren finally signed the Independent Treasury Bill into law on July 4, 1840, his supporters hailed it as America's second Declaration of Independence.

The independent Treasury reflected the deep Jacksonian suspicion of an alliance between government and banking. But the Independent Treasury Act failed to address the banking issue on the state level, where newly chartered state banks—over nine hundred of them by 1840—lent money to farmers and businessmen. The Whigs, who blamed the depression on Jackson's Specie Circular rather than on the banks, continued to encourage bank charters

as a way to spur economic development. In contrast, growing numbers of Democrats blamed the depression on banks and paper money, and swung toward the hard-money stance long favored by Jackson and his inner circle. In Louisiana and

Arkansas, Democrats prohibited banks altogether, and elsewhere they imposed severe restrictions—banning, for example, the issuing of paper money in small denominations. After 1837, the Democrats became an antibank, hard-money party.

“Tippecanoe and Tyler too.”

Log Cabins, Hard Cider, and a Maturing Second Party System

Despite the depression, the Democrats renominated Van Buren for president. The Whigs avoided their mistake of 1836 by settling on a single candidate, Ohio's William Henry Harrison, and ran former Senator John Tyler of Virginia as vice president. Harrison, who at age sixty-seven was barely eking out a living as a farmer, was picked because he had few enemies. Early in the campaign, the Democrats made a fatal mistake by ridiculing Harrison as “Old Granny,” a man who desired only to spend his declining years sipping cider in a log cabin. Unwittingly, the Democrats had handed their opponents the most famous campaign symbol in American history. The Whigs immediately praised Harrison as a rugged frontiersman, the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe, and a defender of all western settlers living in log cabins.

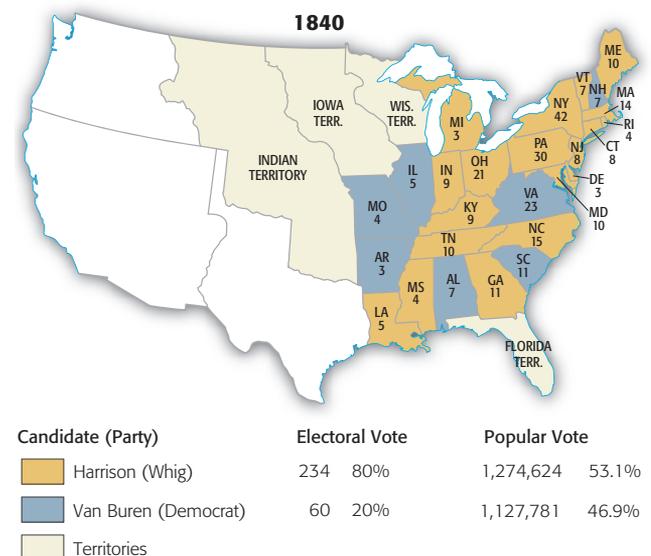
Refusing to publish a platform, the Whigs ran a “hurrah” campaign, trumpeting “Tippecanoe and Tyler too.” They used log cabins for headquarters, sang log-cabin songs, passed around log-cabin cider, and called their newspaper *Log Cabin*. Van Buren, they charged, was a soft aristocrat who lived in “regal splendor,” drinking fine wines from silver goblets while people went hungry in the streets. Harrison,

by contrast, was content to drink hard cider from a plain mug. Just twelve years after Jackson's triumph over the “purse-proud aristocrat” Adams, the Whigs were effectively using Democratic tactics against the Democratic candidate.

The election results gave Harrison a clear victory (see Map 10.2). Van Buren carried only seven states, even failing to hold his home state of New York. The depression would probably have made it impossible for any Democrat to have triumphed in 1840, but Van Buren had other problems. Unlike Harrison and Jackson, he wore no halo of military glory. He also ran a surprisingly old-fashioned campaign. While Van Buren was writing encouraging letters to key supporters, Harrison was breaking with tradition to travel by railroad around the country. Van Buren, the master politician, was beaten at his own game.

In addition to electioneering tactics like log cabins and hard cider, the 1840 election ushered in a significant long-term trend in voting. Between 1836 and 1840, the popular vote expanded by 60 percent, the greatest proportional jump between consecutive elections in American history. Since 1828, the total number of votes cast in presidential elections had risen from 1.2 million to 2.4 million. Neither reduced suffrage requirements nor population growth was the main cause of this increase. Rather, it resulted from a jump in voter turnout. In 1828, 1832, and 1836, the proportion of white males who voted had fluctuated between 55 percent and 58 percent. In 1840, it shot to 80 percent.

Both severe economic depression and the noisy log-cabin campaign brought voters to the polls in 1840. Yet voter turnout remained high even after prosperity returned during the following decade. The second party system, which had been developing



MAP 10.2 THE ELECTION OF 1840

Americans demanded theological doctrines that put individuals in charge of their own religious destiny. They moved away from the Calvinist creed that God had selected some people for salvation and others for damnation, and toward the belief that anyone could attain heaven.

Americans were democratizing heaven itself. The harmony between religious and democratic impulses owed much to a series of religious revivals known as the Second Great Awakening.

The Second Great Awakening

The **Second Great Awakening** ignited in Connecticut during the 1790s and swept one region after another during the half-century that followed. At first, educated Congregationalists and Presbyterians such as Yale president Timothy Dwight had dominated the revivals. But as they spread

to frontier states like Tennessee and Kentucky, revivals underwent striking changes that were typified by the rise of camp meetings. These were gigantic, prolonged revivals in which members of several denominations gathered into sprawling open-air camps to hear revivalists proclaim that the Second Coming of Jesus was near and the time for repentance was now.

The most famous camp meeting occurred at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in August 1801, when a huge crowd assembled to hear thunderous sermons, sing hymns, and experience the influx of divine grace. One eyewitness described the meeting:

At night, the whole scene was awfully sublime. The ranges of tents, the fires, reflecting light amidst the branches of the towering trees; the candles and lamps illuminating the encampment; hundreds moving to and fro, with lights or torches, like Gideon's army; the preaching, praying, singing, and shouting, all heard at once, rushing from different parts of the ground, like the sound of many waters, was enough to swallow up all the powers of contemplation.

Among the more extreme features of frontier revivals was the “exercises” in which men and women rolled around like logs, jerked their heads furiously, and barked like dogs. Critics blasted the frontier frenzy for encouraging more lust than spirituality and complained that “more souls were begot [meaning conceived] than saved.” The early frontier revivals fundamentally challenged traditional religious customs. The most successful revivalists were not college graduates but ordinary farmers and artisans who had

themselves experienced powerful religious conversions and regarded learned ministers with contempt for their dry expositions of orthodox theology.

No religious denomination proved more successful on the frontier than the Methodists. With fewer than seventy thousand members in 1800, the Methodists became America's largest Protestant denomination by 1844, claiming over a million members. In contrast to New England Congregationalists and Presbyterians, Methodists emphasized that religion was primarily a matter of the heart rather than the head. The frontier Methodists disdained “settled” ministers tied to fixed parishes. They preferred itinerant circuit riders—young, often unmarried men who traveled from place to place on horseback and preached in houses, open fields, and wherever listeners gathered. As circuit rider Peter Cartwright explained, it was his mission to “carry the gospel to destitute souls that had, by their removal into some new country, been deprived of the means of grace.”

Although the frontier revivals disrupted religious custom, they also promoted social and moral order on the frontier. After Methodist circuit riders left an area, their converts formed weekly “classes” which served as the grassroots structure for Methodist churches. The classes established a Methodist code of behavior, called the Discipline, which reinforced family and community values amidst the social disorder of frontier life. Class members not only worshipped together, they provided mutual religious and moral encouragement, and reprimanded one another for drunkenness, fighting, fornication, gossiping, and even sharp business practices.

Eastern Revivals

By the 1820s, the Second Great Awakening had begun to shift eastward. The fires of revival blazed hottest in an area of western New York that came to be known as the “Burned-Over District.” This region was filling with descendants of Puritans who hungered for religious experience and with enterprising people drawn by the hope of wealth after the completion of the Erie Canal. The Burned-Over District offered a fertile field for both high expectations and bitter discontent.

The man who harnessed these social forces to religion was **Charles G. Finney**. In 1821, while studying to become a lawyer, Finney experienced a powerful religious conversion. When a church deacon arrived at his office to remind him that he had retained Finney's legal services for a trial that morning, Finney replied, “I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead yours.” He became a Presbyterian minister

“I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause,” Finney replied, “and I cannot plead yours.”



LORENZO DOW AND THE JERKING EXERCISE Lorenzo Dow (1777–1834) was a spellbinding Methodist revivalist who preached throughout the United States early in the Second Great Awakening. His unkempt appearance, harsh voice, and jerky physical movements earned him a reputation for eccentricity. But his success in winning souls demonstrated the democratic appeal of revivalism. (*Caricature of Fundamentalist Prayer-Meeting 1840 by Lossing-Barrett/ Picture Research Consultants & Archives*)

and conducted dozens of revivals in towns along the canal, as well as in New York City and Boston. But his greatest “harvest” of souls was gathered in the thriving canal city of Rochester in 1830–1831.

The Rochester revival had several features that justify Finney’s reputation as the “father of modern revivalism.” First, it was a citywide revival in which all denominations participated. Finney was a pioneer of cooperation among Protestant denominations. Second, in Rochester and elsewhere, Finney introduced new devices for speeding conversions,

such as the “anxious seat,” where those ready for conversion were led so they could be made objects of special prayer, and the “protracted meeting” which went on nightly for up to a week.

Finney’s emphasis on special techniques distinguished him from eighteenth-century revivalists, such as Jonathan Edwards. Whereas Edwards had portrayed revivals as the miraculous work of divine grace, Finney understood them to be human creations. Although a Presbyterian, Finney flatly rejected the Calvinist doctrine of innate depravity—the belief that humans had an inborn, irresistible inclination to sin. Sin, according to Finney, was a voluntary act, and sinners could will themselves out of sin just as readily as they had chosen it. They even exercised the power to lead perfect lives free of all sin, on the model of Christ. Finney’s converts left his meetings convinced that all their past guilt had been washed away and they were beginning a new life. “I have been born again,” a young convert wrote. “I am three days old when I write this letter.”

Originally controversial, Finney’s ideas came to dominate “evangelical” Protestantism—forms of Protestantism that focused on the need for an emotional conversion experience. He was successful because he told nineteenth-century Americans what they wanted to hear: that their destinies were in their own hands. A society that celebrated the self-made man embraced Finney’s assertion that, even in religion, people could make of themselves what they chose. As a frontier revivalist with a relatively dignified style, Finney had an appeal that extended to merchants, lawyers, and small manufacturers in the towns and cities of the Northeast.

More than most revivalists, Finney recognized that revivals seldom succeeded without the active participation of women. During the Second Great Awakening, female converts outnumbered male converts by about two to one. Finney encouraged women to give public testimonies of their religious experiences, and often succeeded in converting men by first converting their wives and daughters. After a visit from Finney, Melania Smith, the religiously inactive wife of a Rochester physician, greeted her husband with a blunt reminder of “the woe which is denounced against the families which call not on the Name of the Lord.” Dr. Smith soon joined one of Rochester’s Presbyterian churches.

Critics of Revivals: The Unitarians

The revivals drew criticism. Some people openly doubted that revivals produced permanent changes in behavior. Critics condemned them for encouraging “such extravagant and incoherent expressions,

and such enthusiastic fervor, as puts common sense and modesty to the blush.”

One small but influential group of critics was the Unitarians. Their basic doctrine—that Jesus was not divine, but rather a human model for the moral life—had gained quiet acceptance among religious rationalists during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Only in the early nineteenth century did Unitarianism emerge as a separate denomination. In New England, hundreds of Congregational churches were divided by the withdrawal of Unitarians, and ensuing legal battles over which group—Congregationalists or Unitarians—could occupy church property. Although Unitarianism won relatively few converts outside New England, its tendency to attract the wealthy and educated gave Unitarians influence beyond their numbers.

Unitarians criticized revivals as uncouth emotional exhibitions. They argued that moral goodness should be cultivated, not through a dramatic conversion experience, but through a gradual process of “character building” in which believers modeled their behavior on that of Jesus. Yet both Unitarians and revivalists rejected the Calvinist emphasis on innate depravity and shared the belief that human behavior could be changed for the better. William Ellery Channing, the Unitarian leader who most influenced Dorothea Dix, claimed that

all Christianity had but one purpose: “the perfection of human nature, the elevation of men into nobler beings.”

The Rise of Mormonism

The Unitarians’ assertion that Jesus was not divine challenged a fundamental doctrine of orthodox Christianity. Yet Unitarianism proved far less controversial than another new denomination of the 1820s and 1830s—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or **Mormons**. Its founder, Joseph Smith, grew to manhood in one of those families that seemed to be in constant motion to and fro, but never up. His ne’er-do-well father moved his family nearly twenty times in ten years before settling in Palmyra, New York, in the heart of the Burned-Over District. As a boy, Smith dreamed of finding buried treasure and wrestled with religious uncertainty created by the conflicting claims of the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists who surrounded him. Who was right and

who was wrong, he wondered, or were they “all wrong together”?

Smith’s religious perplexity was common in the Burned-Over District, but his path to resolving the confusion was unique. An angel named Moroni, he reported, led him to a buried book of revelation and special seer stones to help with its translation, which he completed in 1827. The Book of Mormon tells the story of an ancient Hebrew prophet, Lehi, whose descendants came to America and created a prosperous civilization to await Jesus as its savior. Jesus had actually appeared and performed miracles in the New World, but the American descendants of Lehi had departed from the Lord’s ways. As punishment, God had cursed some with dark skin—thus creating the American Indians who, by the time of Columbus’s arrival, had forgotten their history. Mormonism—one of the few major religions to originate in the United States—placed America at the center of religious history (see *Going to the Source*).

Smith quickly gathered followers. For some believers, the Book of Mormon resolved the turmoil created by conflicting Protestant interpretations of the Bible. But Smith’s claim to a new revelation guaranteed a hostile response from many American Protestants, who believed he had undermined the authority of their Scripture. To escape persecution, and move closer to the Indians whose conversion was one of their goals, Smith and his followers began relocating west from New York. In Illinois, they built a model city called Nauvoo and a magnificent temple supported by thirty huge pillars (see Map 10.3). But in 1844, a group of dissident Mormons accused Smith and his inner circle of practicing plural marriage. When Smith destroyed the group’s newspaper press, militias moved in to restore law and order. They arrested Smith and his brother Hiram and threw them into jail in Carthage, Illinois, where a lynch mob killed them both. One of Joseph’s plural wives wrote, “Never, since the Son of God was slain/ Has blood so noble flow’d from human vein.”

Joseph Smith had once hoped that Americans would fully embrace Mormonism. But ongoing persecution had gradually convinced the Mormons’ prophet that their survival lay in separation from American society. In removing from the larger society of “Gentiles,” the Mormons mirrored the efforts of many other religious communities during the 1830s and 40s. One in particular, the Shakers, has held an enduring fascination for Americans.

The Shakers

The Shakers were founded by Mother Ann Lee, the illiterate daughter of an English blacksmith, who

Critics condemned revivals for encouraging “such extravagant and incoherent expressions, and such enthusiastic fervor, as puts common sense and modesty to the blush.”

The Mormon Land of Promise

Joseph Smith presented the Book of Mormon as a record of ancient American Christians, translated from golden plates that had been buried near Palmyra, New York. In this passage, Nephi recorded a prophecy by his father Lehi regarding the land of promise, the place where Lehi and his children

had recently arrived from Jerusalem (ca. 600 BCE). Though Joseph Smith did not explicitly identify the location of this “promised land,” these revelations were understood by Mormons to have particular application to the United States and to the Americas more widely.

And he also spake unto them concerning the land of promise, which they had obtained: how merciful the Lord had been in warning us that we should flee out of the land of Jerusalem. For, Behold, said he, I have seen a vision, in which I know that Jerusalem is destroyed; and had we remained in Jerusalem, we should also have perished. But, said he, notwithstanding our afflictions, we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever; and also all those who should be led out of other countries, by the hand of the Lord. Wherefore, I, Lehi, prophesy according to the workings of the spirit which is in me, that there shall none come into this land, save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord. Wherefore, this land is consecrated unto him whom he shall bring. And if it so be that they shall serve him according to the commandments which he hath given, it shall be a land of liberty unto them; wherefore, they shall never be brought down into captivity; if so, it shall be because of iniquity: for if iniquity shall abound, cursed shall be the land for their sakes; but unto the righteous it shall be blessed forever. And behold, it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other

nations: for behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance. Wherefore, I, Lehi, have obtained a promise, that inasmuch as they which the Lord God shall bring out of the land of Jerusalem shall keep his commandments, they shall prosper upon the face of this land; and they shall be kept from all other nations, that they may possess this land unto themselves. And if it so be that they shall keep his commandments, they shall be blessed upon the face of this land, and there shall be none to molest them, nor to take away the land of their inheritance; and they shall dwell safely forever. But behold, when the time cometh that they shall dwindle in unbelief, after they have received so great blessings from the hand of the Lord . . . behold, the judgments of him that is just, shall rest upon them; yea, he will bring other nations unto them, and he will give unto them power, and he will take away from them the lands of their possessions; and he will cause them to be scattered and smitten.

The Book of Mormon by Joseph Smith, Junior, Author and Proprietor [because copyright law wasn't yet applicable to translations]. Palmyra [New York]: Printed by E.B. Grandin, for the Author. 1830 Excerpt from *The Second Book of Nephi*, Chapter I, pp. 59–61.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the major elements of the ancient American history recorded in *The Book of Mormon*?
2. How, in your view, might this historical treatment of America as “promised land” have appealed to the thousands of people who flocked to the new Mormon religion in the antebellum period?



Go to the website at www.cengage.com/history/boyerenduring7e for additional primary sources on this period.



MAP 10.3 RELIGIOUS AND UTOPIAN COMMUNITIES, 1800–1845 The desire to construct a perfect society gave rise to hundreds of utopian communities between 1800 and 1845. Some, like the Shaker and Mormon communities, arose from religious motives. Others, as discussed later in this chapter, were more secular in origin, attempting to allay the selfish excesses of social and economic competition.

emigrated to America in 1774. Mother Ann’s followers believed she was the second incarnation of God: as Jesus had been the Son of God, she was God’s Daughter. Called “Shakers” for their convulsive religious dancing at worship services, the group established tightly knit agricultural-artisan communities, whose purpose was the pursuit of religious perfection. “Hands to work, and hearts to God” was their guiding motto. Shaker artisans produced furniture renowned for its beauty and strength and invented such conveniences as the clothespin and the circular saw.

For all their achievements as artisans, the Shakers were fundamentally otherworldly. Mother Ann, who had lost four infant children, had a religious vision in which God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden for their sin of sexual intercourse. Shaker communities practiced celibacy and carefully separated the sleeping and working quarters of men and women to discourage contact between them. To maintain their membership, Shakers relied on new converts and the adoption of orphans, and at their peak in the 1830s and 1840s they numbered about six thousand members in eight states. As part of their pursuit of religious perfection, they practiced a form of Christian socialism, pooling their land and implements to

create remarkably prosperous villages. A British visitor observed that “the earth does not show more flourishing fields, gardens, and orchards than theirs.”

While the Shakers chose to separate themselves from the competitive individualism of the larger society, the message of most evangelical Protestants, including Charles G. Finney, was that religion and economic self-advancement were compatible. Most revivalists taught that the pursuit of wealth was acceptable as long as people were honest, temperate, and bound by conscience. But many of them recognized that the world was in serious need of improvement, and they believed that converts had a religious responsibility to pursue moral and social reform.

The Age of Reform

The heart of religious revival was the democratic belief that individual men and women could take charge of their own spiritual destinies, and strive toward perfection. For many converts, similar expectations applied to the society around them. Saved souls, they believed, could band together to stamp out the many evils that plagued the American republic. Like John Quincy Adams, they embraced

“the spirit of improvement,” forming a wide range of voluntary associations whose purpose was to improve society. The abolition of slavery, the rights of women, temperance, the humane treatment of criminals and the insane, and public education were high on reformers’ agendas. Carrying the moralism of revival into their reform activities, they tended to view all social problems as clashes between good and evil and to assume that God was on their side.

Not all reformers were converts of revival. Many school reformers and women’s rights advocates were religious liberals—either hostile or indifferent to revivals. Dorothea Dix’s work on behalf of the mentally ill drew more power from her involvement in Boston Unitarianism than from the Methodism of her early childhood. Abolitionists openly criticized the churches for condoning slavery and often separated themselves from denominational bodies that refused to condemn the institution. But by portraying slaveholding as a sin that called for immediate repentance, even religiously liberal abolitionists borrowed their language and their psychological appeal from revivalism. Whatever a reformer’s personal relationship to the revivals of the Second Great Awakening, the Age of Reform drew much of its fuel from that evangelical movement.

The War on Liquor

Early nineteenth-century Americans were very heavy drinkers. In 1825, the average adult male drank about seven gallons of alcohol annually (mostly whiskey and hard cider), in contrast to less than two gallons in our own time (mostly beer and wine). One reason for this heavy consumption was the state of western agriculture. Before the transportation revolution, western farmers could not make a profit by shipping grain in bulk to eastern markets. But they could profit by condensing their corn and rye into a distilled liquor called whiskey, which poured out of the west in large quantities. Drunkenness pervaded all social classes and occupations. The relatively new habit of binge-drinking generated the medical diagnosis of delirium tremens. Other problems generated by heavy drinking included domestic violence, disease, and economic failure.

Before 1825, temperance reformers advocated moderation in consuming alcohol. But in that year, Connecticut revivalist Lyman Beecher delivered six widely acclaimed lectures that condemned all use of alcoholic beverages. A year later, evangelical Protestants created the **American Temperance Society**, the first national temperance organization, which followed Beecher’s lead in demanding

total abstinence. By 1834, some five thousand state and local temperance societies were affiliated with the American Temperance Society. Although usually led by men, their membership was between one-third and one-half women, who, along with their children, endured the bulk of drink-induced domestic violence and poverty.

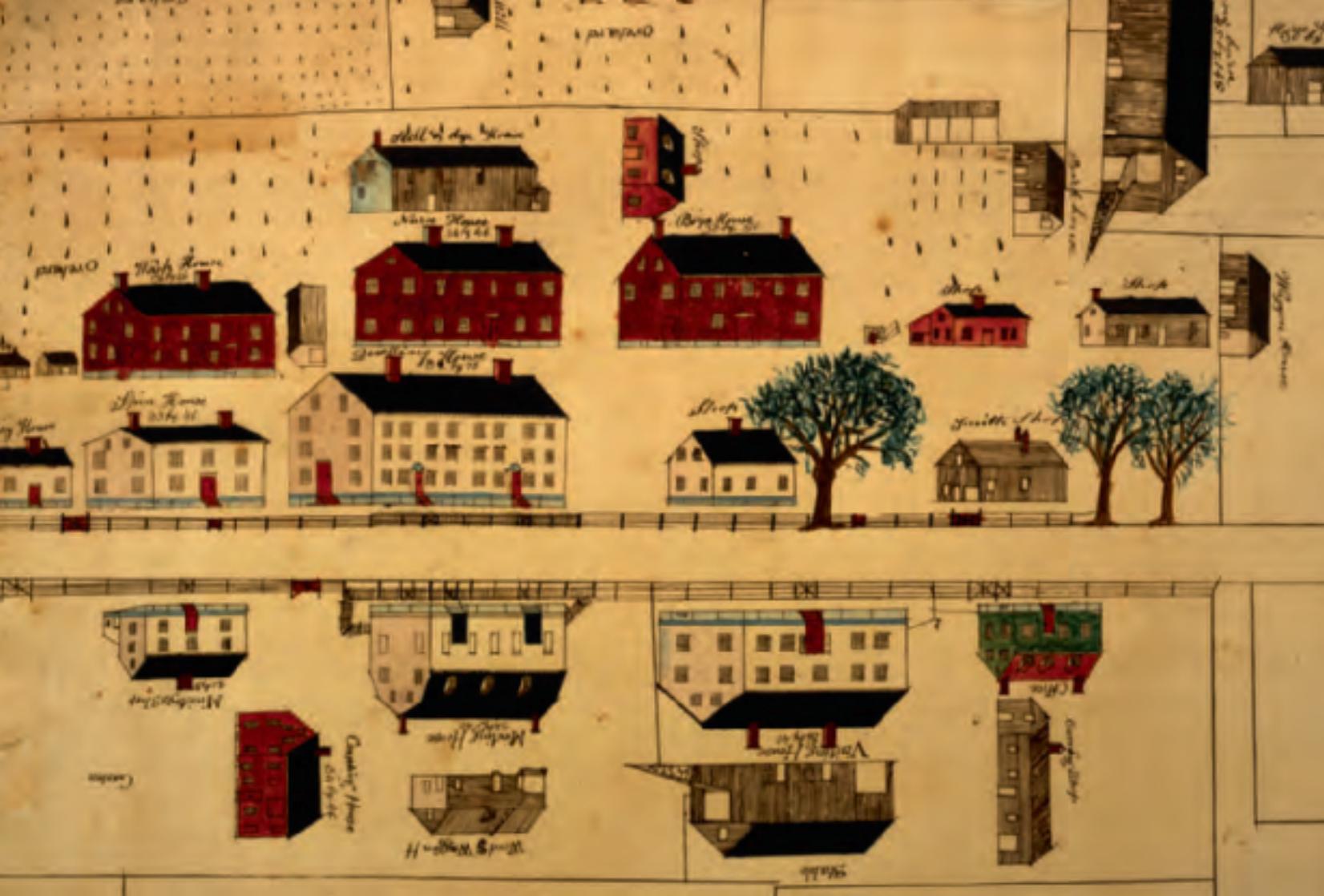
The primary strategy of the American Temperance Society was to use “moral suasion” to persuade people to “take the pledge”—the promise never to consume any alcoholic beverage. To that end, temperance reformers flooded the country with tracts denouncing the “amazing evil” of strong drink, paid reformed drunkards to deliver public lectures, and produced temperance plays. They even formed a children’s organization called the “Cold Water Army.” Its small members pledged, “We, Cold Water Girls and Boys,/ Freely renounce the treacherous joys/ Of Brandy, Whiskey, Rum and Gin;/ The Serpent’s lure to death and sin.”

Among the main targets of evangelical temperance reformers were the laboring classes. In the small workshops of the pre-industrial era, passing the jug every few hours throughout the workday was a time-honored practice. But early factories demanded a more disciplined, sober work force, so industrial employers were quick to embrace temperance reform. In East Dudley, Massachusetts, three manufacturers refused to sell liquor in their factory stores, calculating that any profits from the sale would be wiped out by lost work time and “the scenes of riot and wickedness thus produced.”

Industrial employers in Rochester, New York, invited Charles G. Finney to preach up a revival in their city as part of an effort to convince their workers to abstain from alcohol.

Workers themselves initially showed little interest in temperance. But after the Panic of 1837, some grew convinced that their economic survival depended on a commitment to sobriety. In 1840, in Baltimore, they formed the Washington Temperance Society, and a branch for women called the Martha Washingtonians. Drawing more mechanics (workingmen) than ministers or manufacturers, the Washington Societies offered mutual self-help. Many members were themselves reformed drunkards, like Boston baker Charles Woodman, who blamed his business collapse on his return to his “old habit” of excessive drinking. Men like Woodman reasoned that, while the forces of economic dislocation were beyond their

“We, Cold Water
Girls and Boys,
Freely renounce the
treacherous joys/ Of
Brandy, Whiskey, Rum
and Gin;/ The Serpent’s
lure to death and sin.”



SHAKER VILLAGE AT ALFRED, MAINE, 1845 A Shaker cobbler named Joshua Bussell created this illustrated map of the Shaker Village at Alfred, Maine. It documents the Shakers' belief that spatial organization was an important part of the pursuit of spiritual perfection. (*Library of Congress*)

control, their own sobriety lay within their control. Take care of temperance, one Washingtonian assured his Baltimore audience, and the Lord will take care of the economy.

Despite the early resistance of working-class drinkers to middle-class temperance reform, the Washingtonians' debt to religious revivalism was actually greater than that of the American Temperance Society. Washingtonians viewed drinking as sinful and held "experience meetings" in which members testified to their "salvation" from liquor and their "regeneration" through total abstinence or "teetotalism" (an emphatic form of the word *total*). Martha Washingtonians pledged to smell their husbands' breath each night, and paraded with banners that read "Teetotal or No Husband." The Washington Societies spread farther and faster than any other antebellum temperance organization.

As the temperance movement won new supporters, some crusaders began to demand legal

prohibition—the banning of liquor traffic at the local and state level. In 1838, Massachusetts prohibited the sale of distilled spirits in amounts less than fifteen gallons, thereby restricting small purchases by individual drinkers. In 1851, Maine banned the manufacture and sale of all intoxicating beverages. Prohibition was controversial, even within the movement. But taken together, the two central strategies of the temperance movement—moral suasion and legal prohibition—scored remarkable success. Per capita consumption of distilled spirits, which had risen steadily between 1800 and 1830, began to fall during the 1830s. By the 1840s, consumption had dropped to less than half its peak rate in the 1820s.

Public-School Reform

In the early nineteenth century, the typical American school was a rural one-room schoolhouse. Here students ranging in age from three to twenty or older

sat on benches learning to read and count, but little more, and spending only a few months in school each year. Their teachers were typically recent college graduates who took teaching jobs just to tide them over until they entered other professions. Students never forgot the primitive conditions and harsh discipline of these schools, especially the floggings until “the youngster vomited or wet his breeches.”

Expecting little more than basic literacy-training for their children, rural parents were generally content with these schools. But reformers found them unacceptable. They wanted schools to equip students for an increasingly competitive industrial economy. **Horace Mann**, the first secretary of the Massachusetts board of education, created in 1837, set out to achieve this goal through several different strategies: shifting the burden of school financial support from parents to the state, extending the school term to as many as ten months each year, standardizing textbooks, dividing students into grades based on their age and achievements, and compelling attendance. Within Mann’s educational vision, school should occupy the bulk of every child’s time and energy.

School reformers sought to spread industrial values as well as combat ignorance. Requiring students to arrive on time would teach punctuality, and matching students against their peers would stimulate competitiveness. Assigned textbooks would teach such lessons as “Idleness is the nest in which mischief lays its eggs.” The McGuffey readers, which sold 50 million copies between 1836 and 1870, preached industry, honesty, sobriety, and patriotism.

Success did not come easily. Educational reformers faced challenges from farmers who were satisfied with the district schools and reluctant to remove their children from the fields for most of the year. Urban Catholics, led by New York City’s Bishop John Hughes, pointed out that the textbooks used in public schools were anti-Catholic and anti-Irish. In both rural and urban areas, the laboring poor opposed compulsory education because their family economy depended on children’s wage-earning.

Yet school reformers prevailed, at least in the North, in part because their opponents failed to unify (schooling in the South is discussed in Chapter 12). Reformers also enlisted influential allies. Urban workingmen’s parties were converted to the cause by the prospect of free, tax-supported schools. Industrial employers were won over by the promise that public schools would help create a disciplined work force. Women were drawn by the recognition that dividing students into different grade levels would improve their own opportunities to become

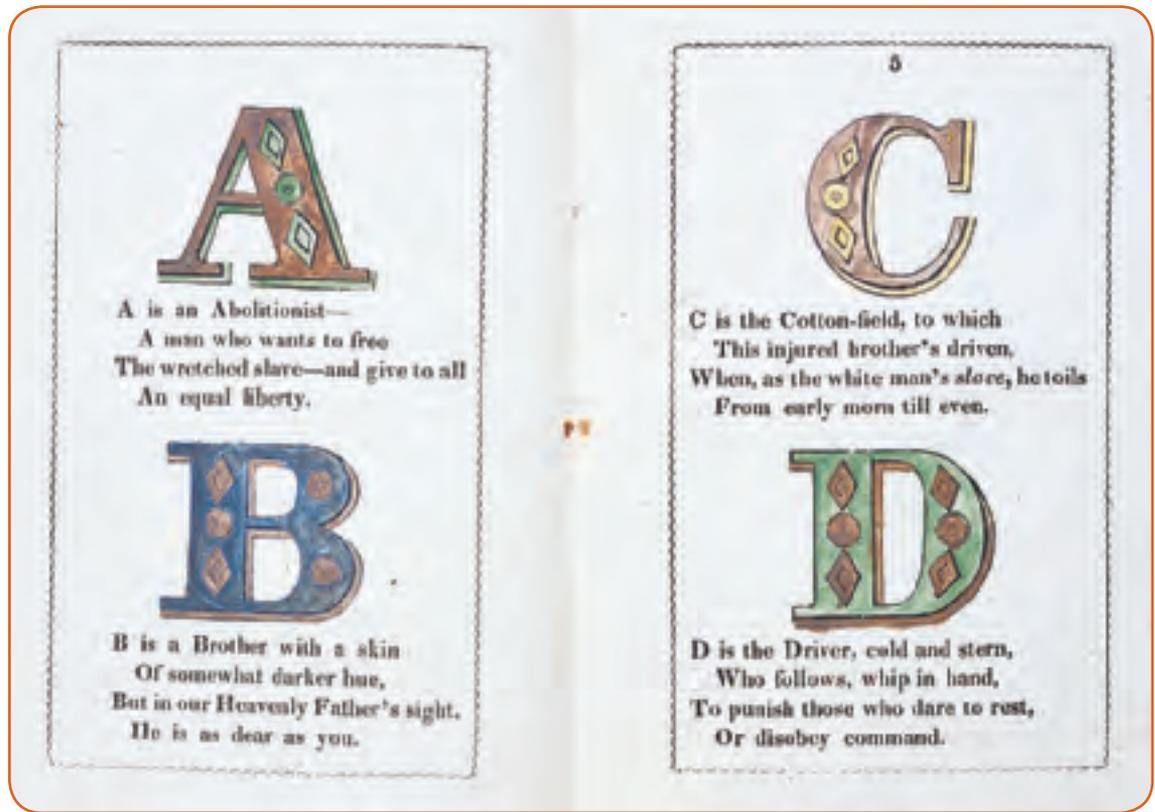
teachers. It was generally assumed that women were incapable of controlling one-room schools whose pupils included rambunctious young men. But few people doubted a woman’s ability to manage a class of eight-year-olds. Educational reformer Catharine Beecher (Lyman’s daughter) accurately predicted that school reform would open the teaching profession to women. By 1900, about 70 percent of the nation’s schoolteachers were women.

School reform also appealed to native-born Americans alarmed by the influx of immigrant foreigners. The public school was coming to be seen as the best mechanism for creating a common American culture out of an increasingly diverse society. As one reformer observed, “We must decompose and cleanse the impurities which rush into our midst” through the “one infallible filter—the SCHOOL.” Very few educational reformers, however, called for the integration of black and white children. When black children did enter public schools, they encountered open hostility and sometimes violence.

Abolition

Antislavery sentiment flourished in the Revolutionary era, encouraging northern states to establish emancipation schemes within their borders. But opposition to slavery declined in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. The American Colonization Society (founded in 1816) did propose a limited plan for emancipation, under which slaveholders would be compensated for voluntarily freeing their slaves, and free blacks would be “colonized” in Liberia in West Africa. But colonization expressed little moral outrage against slavery, and actually enlisted some slaveholders who opposed emancipation but wanted free blacks removed from their vicinity. And colonization had virtually no hope of succeeding. Owing to the South’s growing dependence on slavery, even compensated manumission was unacceptable to most slaveholders. In addition, the Society never had enough funds to buy freedom for significant numbers of slaves. Between 1820 and 1830—a period when the slave population nearly doubled in size—only 1,400 blacks migrated to Liberia, and most of them were already free blacks, rather than recently enslaved people who had been manumitted by colonizationists.

Students never forgot the harsh discipline of these schools, especially the floggings until “the youngster vomited or wet his breeches.”



THE ANTISLAVERY ALPHABET Abolitionists tried to enlist what they viewed as the natural purity of children to their cause by producing antislavery toys, games, and even alphabet books. (*Boston Athenaeum*)

Most African-Americans opposed colonization. As native-born Americans, they asked, how could they be sent back to a continent they had never known? “We are natives of this country,” one black pastor proclaimed. “We only ask that we be treated as well as foreigners.” In opposition to colonization, blacks formed their own abolition societies. David Walker, a North Carolina-born free black who owned a used-clothing store in Boston, smuggled antislavery tracts into the South by stuffing them into the pockets of clothes he shipped there. In 1829, Walker published an *Appeal... to the Colored Citizens of the World*, urging slaves to rise up and murder their masters if slavery were not

abolished. He warned whites that “your DESTRUCTION is at hand, and will be speedily consummated unless you REPENT.” In 1830, black leaders began holding annual conventions devoted to abolishing slavery in the South and repealing discriminatory black codes in the North.

Some white abolitionists also began to move toward more radical positions. In 1821, the Quaker

Benjamin Lundy began a newspaper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, which proposed that no new slave states be admitted to the Union, the internal slave trade be outlawed, and the three-fifths clause of the Constitution repealed, and that Congress abolish slavery wherever it had the authority to do so. In 1828, Lundy hired a young New Englander, **William Lloyd Garrison**, as his assistant editor. With his premature baldness and steel-rimmed glasses, Garrison looked more like a schoolmaster than a revolutionary. But in 1831, when he launched his own newspaper, *The Liberator*, he quickly established himself as the most prominent and provocative white abolitionist. “I am in earnest,” Garrison wrote. “I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—AND I WILL BE HEARD.” He filled the pages of *The Liberator* with stories of slaves beaten to death or burned alive by their masters, and appealed to the humanity of his readers to abolish the institution.

In 1833, Garrison gathered with about sixty delegates, black and white, men and women, to form the American Antislavery Society. His battle cry was “immediate emancipation” without compensation to slaveholders. Free blacks, he insisted, should not be shipped to Africa, but granted full equality with

“We are natives of this country,” one black pastor proclaimed. “We only ask that we be treated as well as foreigners.”

whites. He pointedly greeted slaves as “a Man and a Brother,” “a Woman and a Sister.” But even Garrison did not think that all slaves could be freed at the stroke of a pen. “Immediate emancipation” meant that all Americans had to acknowledge that slavery was intolerable and must be destroyed. Garrison quickly gained support from the growing ranks of black abolitionists, who made up three-fourths of his newspaper subscribers in the early years. One black barber in Pittsburgh sent Garrison sixty dollars to support *The Liberator*.

Fugitive slaves played a central role in the abolitionist movement. The foremost of these was Frederick Douglass, who escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1838, and spoke out against slavery in his powerful autobiography, his newspaper the *North Star*, and his public lectures. Douglass could rivet an audience with an opening line. “I appear before the immense assembly this evening as a thief and a robber,” he proclaimed. “I stole this head, these limbs, this body from my master, and ran off with them.” Other fugitive slaves—including William Wells Brown and Harriet Tubman—served the cause by publicizing the horrors of slavery, telling tales of brutal treatment and families separated by sale.

Relations between black and white abolitionists were not always harmonious. Many white abolitionists supported legal but not social equality for blacks. They favored lighter-skinned Negroes and sometimes excluded black abolitionists from their meetings. Yet the racial prejudice of white abolitionists was mild compared to that of most whites, some of whom transferred their hatred of blacks to abolitionists. Mobs led by local elites attacked the homes and businesses of black and white abolitionists, destroyed their printing presses, and disrupted their meetings. In 1834, an anti-abolitionist mob destroyed forty-five homes in Philadelphia’s black community. In 1835, a Boston mob dragged Garrison through town with a hanging noose around his neck. And in 1837, a mob in Alton, Illinois, destroyed the printing press of antislavery editor Elijah P. Lovejoy, then shot him dead and dragged his mutilated corpse through the streets.

Abolitionists, like temperance reformers, drew on the language of revivals and condemned slavery as sin. But Protestant churches did not rally behind abolition as they rallied behind temperance. The Rev. Lyman Beecher roared against the evils of strong drink but merely whispered about those of slavery. In 1834, he tried to suppress abolitionists at Cincinnati’s Lane Theological Seminary where he was president. In response, a student named Theodore Dwight Weld, who was a follower of Charles G.

Finney, led the “Lane rebels” out of Beecher’s seminary to the more radical Oberlin College.

Issues of strategy and tactics divided abolitionists during the 1830s. Some believed that the legal and political arena presented the best opportunities for ending slavery. But Garrison and his followers were beginning to reject all participation not only in party politics, but in government itself. In 1838, they founded the New England Non-Resistance Society, based on Garrison’s radical new doctrine of nonresistance. According to that doctrine, the fundamental evil of slavery was its reliance on force, the opposite of Christian love. And just like slavery, government itself ultimately rested on coercion; even laws passed by elected legislatures required police enforcement. True Christians, Garrison concluded, should refuse to vote, hold office, or have anything to do with government.

The second major issue dividing abolitionists was the role of women in the movement. From the outset, women had actively participated in anti-slavery societies, but in separate female auxiliaries. Then in 1837, **Angelina and Sarah Grimké**, daughters of a South Carolina slaveholder, undertook an antislavery lecture tour of New England, speaking in public before mixed audiences of men and women. Such conduct, said critics, was indelicate; women should obey men, not lecture them. The Grimkés responded in 1838 by writing two classics of American feminism: Sarah Grimké’s *Letters on the Condition of Women and the Equality of the Sexes*, and Angelina Grimké’s *Letters to Catharine E. Beecher* (who opposed female equality). Some abolitionists dismissed their efforts: women’s grievances, said poet John Greenleaf Whittier, were “paltry” compared to the “great and dreadful wrongs of the slave.” Even Angelina’s husband, “Lane Rebel” Theodore Dwight Weld, thought women’s rights should be subordinated to antislavery.

In 1840, the issues of nonresistance and women’s rights split the American Antislavery Society. The precipitating event was the election of Abby Kelley to a previously all-male committee. In the battle that followed, Garrison, a strong supporter of women’s rights, won control of the organization, and his anti-feminist opponents—including wealthy New York philanthropists Arthur and Lewis Tappan and former slaveholder James G. Birney of Alabama—walked out. Some of them flocked to the new Liberty Party,

“I appear before the immense assembly this evening as a thief and a robber. I stole this head, these limbs, this body from my master, and ran off with them.”

which nominated Birney for president in 1840 on a platform that called on Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, end the interstate slave trade, and stop admitting new slave states to the Union. Others followed Lewis Tappan into the new American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

But the break-up of the American Anti-Slavery Society did not significantly damage the larger movement. By 1840, there were more than fifteen

hundred local antislavery societies circulating abolitionist tracts, newspapers, and even chocolates wrapped in antislavery messages. Local societies pursued a grassroots campaign to flood Congress with petitions calling for an end to slavery in the District of Columbia. When exasperated southerners in 1836 adopted a “gag rule” automatically tabling these petitions without discussion, they triggered a debate that shifted public attention

from abolitionism to the constitutional rights of free expression and Congressional petition—a debate that further served the antislavery cause. And the split between moderates and radicals within the antislavery ranks helped the movement by giving northerners a choice between different levels and strategies of commitment.

Women’s Rights

When Sarah and Angelina Grimké took up the cause of women’s rights in 1838, they were not merely defending their right to participate in the antislavery movement. They were responding to perceived similarities between the conditions of slaves and women. Garrison himself stressed the special degradation and sexual vulnerability of women under slavery, denouncing the slaveholding South as one vast brothel. Early issues of *The Liberator* contained a “Ladies’ Department” illustrated with a kneeling slave woman imploring, “Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?” When abolitionists such as Philadelphia Quaker **Lucretia Mott**, Lucy Stone, and Abby Kelley embraced women’s rights, they were acknowledging a sisterhood in oppression with female slaves.

In the early nineteenth century, American women were prohibited from voting or holding public office and denied access to higher education and the professions. Married women had no legal identity apart from their husbands: they could not own property or control their own earnings, sue or be sued, or enter a contract. Divorced women could not gain custody of their children. And in the midst of many humanitarian efforts to

eradicate violence—including movements against dueling and war, military flogging, and capital punishment—domestic violence went virtually unchallenged, except as a side issue within the temperance movement. According to the popular idea of separate spheres, women’s place was in the home, and even in their proper sphere their legal rights were severely limited.

But reform movements provided middle-class women with unprecedented opportunities to work in public without openly defying the dictate that their proper sphere was the home. When women left their homes to distribute religious tracts, battle intemperance, or work for peace, they could claim they were transforming wretched homes into nurseries of happiness. It was a tricky argument to make: justifying reform activities on behalf of family protection could undercut women’s demands for legal equality. But the experiences acquired in a range of reform activities provided invaluable skills for women to take up the cause of their own rights. And the women’s rights movement, at its most radical, openly challenged gender-based double standards. “Men and women,” Sarah Grimké wrote, “are CREATED EQUAL! They are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is right for man to do, is right for woman.”

Although feminism first emerged within abolitionism, the discrimination encountered by women in the antislavery movement drove them to make women’s rights a separate cause. In the 1840s, Lucy Stone became the first abolitionist to give a lecture devoted entirely to women’s rights. When Lucretia Mott arrived at the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, and was seated in a screened-off section for women, her own allegiance to women’s rights was sealed. So was that of **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**, who attended the London meeting with her abolitionist husband on their honeymoon. In 1848, Mott and Stanton together organized the **Seneca Falls Convention** for women’s rights at Seneca Falls, New York. That convention’s Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the Declaration of Independence, began with the assertion that “all men and women are created equal.” The convention passed twelve resolutions, eleven of them unanimously, and the twelfth, women’s right to vote, over a minority opposition. After the Civil War, however, woman suffrage became the main demand of women’s rights advocates.

Women’s rights advocates won a few notable victories. In 1860, Stanton’s lobbying helped secure passage of a New York law allowing married women to own property—not the first such law, but the most comprehensive to that date. But women’s rights had less impact than many other reforms

“Men and women are CREATED EQUAL! They are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is right for man to do, is right for woman.”



SOJOURNER TRUTH, 1864 Born into slavery in New York, the woman who named herself Sojourner Truth became a religious perfectionist, a powerful evangelical preacher, and one of the most influential abolitionists and feminists of her time. In the 1860s, she sold photographic portraits of herself printed on small cards, explaining, “I sell the shadow to support the substance.” (Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)

including temperance, school reform, and abolitionism. Women would not secure the national right to vote until 1920, fifty-five years after the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. Nineteenth-century feminists had to content themselves with piecemeal gains. The cause of women’s rights suffered from its association with abolitionism and met resistance from advocates of women’s separate sphere (see Chapter 9). Nevertheless, women made important strides toward equality.

Penitentiaries and Asylums

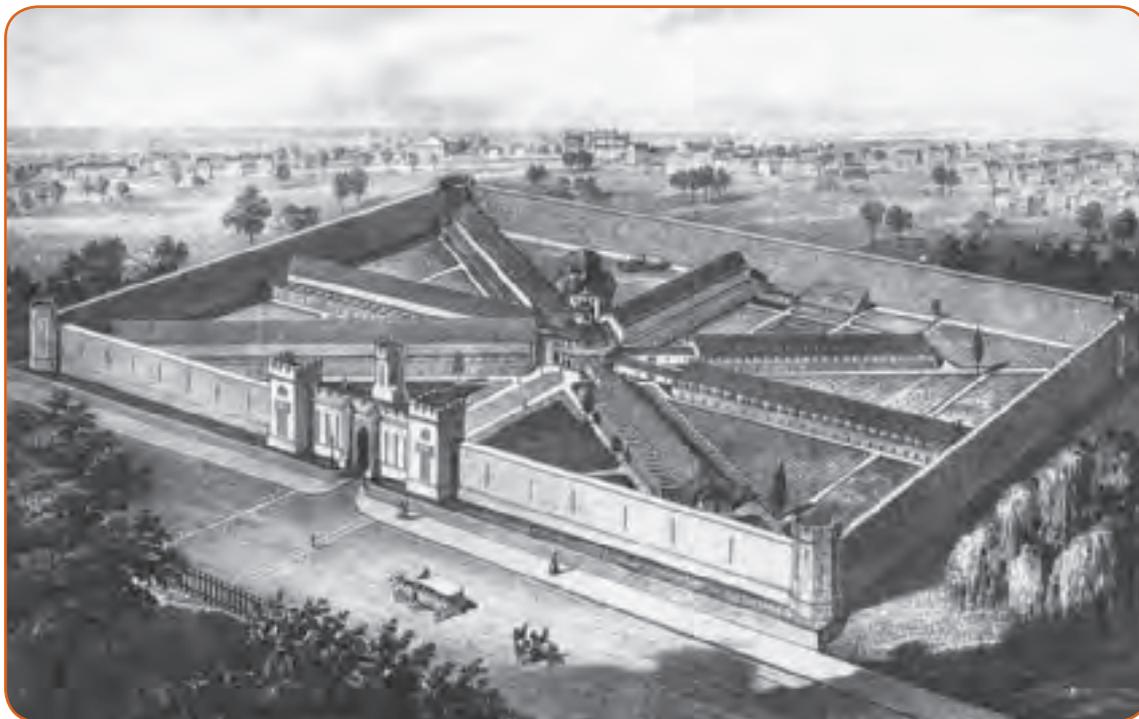
Beginning in the 1820s, reformers began to combat poverty, crime, and insanity by establishing new

model institutions based on innovative theories about the roots of deviancy. As urban poverty and crime grew increasingly visible, investigators concluded that such problems arose not from innate sinfulness, but from poor home environments, especially a failure of parental discipline. Both religious and secular reformers believed that human nature could be improved through placement in the proper moral environment. The reformers’ model of the proper moral environment for paupers, criminals, and the mentally ill was the asylum, an institution that would remove deviants from corrupting influences by placing them in a controlled, orderly environment, and provide them with moral supervision and disciplined work.

Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing hoped that “The study of the causes of crime may lead us to its cure.” The colonial jail had been merely a temporary holding cell for offenders awaiting trial; early American criminals were punished by flogging, branding, or hanging rather than extended prison terms. By contrast, the nineteenth-century penitentiary was an asylum designed to lead criminals to “penitential” reformation by isolating them and encouraging them to contemplate their guilt for designated terms of incarceration. Two different models for the penitentiary emerged in the antebellum era. New York’s “Auburn system” forbade prisoners to speak or look at one another as they worked together by day, and confined them in individual, windowless cells by night. Under the more extreme “Pennsylvania” or “separate system,” each prisoner was confined day and night in a single cell with a walled courtyard for exercise, deprived of human contact within the prison, and permitted no news or visits from the outside.

Antebellum reformers also designed special asylums for the poor and the mentally ill. The prevailing colonial practice of poor relief was “outdoor relief,” supporting the poor by placing them in other people’s households. The new “indoor relief” confined the infirm poor in almshouses, and the able-bodied poor in workhouses. Once again, reformers believed that removing the poor from their demoralizing surroundings and subjecting them to institutional regimentation and disciplined labor would transform them into virtuous, productive citizens. A parallel movement shaped new approaches to treating the mentally ill, as illuminated in the work of humanitarian reformer Dorothea Dix. Instead of imprisoning the insane in jails and sheds, she argued, society should house them in orderly hospitals where they should receive proper medical and moral care.

“The study of the causes of crime may lead us to its cure.”



PENNSYLVANIA'S EASTERN STATE PENITENTIARY Established in 1822, this penitentiary was the showcase of the Pennsylvania or “separate” system of prison discipline. Each inmate was confined to a single cell and denied all contact with other inmates. This sketch was done by inmate 2954 in 1855. (*The Free Library of Philadelphia*)

Penitentiaries, almshouses and workhouses, and insane asylums all reflected the same optimistic belief that the solution for deviancy lay in proper moral environments. From one point of view, such efforts were humanitarian: they confined criminals rather than flogging them, offered relief to the poor, and provided shelter and medical care to the homeless insane. But from another point of view, the asylum reformers were practicing extreme forms of social control. Convinced that criminals, the poor, and the insane required regimentation, they confined them in prison-like conditions, policed their social interaction, and controlled their every move. The idealism behind the new asylums was genuine, but utopian intentions did not protect asylum inmates from the sufferings of incarceration and regimentation.

Utopian Communities

The reformist belief in the possibility of human perfection assumed purest expression in the **utopian communities** that first began to surface in the 1820s, and flourished during the next few decades (see Map 10.3). Among the hundreds of utopian experiments undertaken in the antebellum period, most aimed at offering alternatives to the selfish excesses of social and economic competition. Modern Times

on Long Island and the North American Phalanx at Red Bank, New Jersey, were influenced by the ideas of Frenchman Charles Fourier, who sought to eradicate the evils of economic competition by establishing a harmonious society whose members all pursued “attractive” labor.

In 1825, British industrialist Robert Owen founded the New Harmony community in Indiana. As a successful Scottish mill-owner, Owen had substantially improved his workers’ living conditions and educational opportunities. If social arrangements could be perfected, he believed, then vice and misery would disappear, because human character was formed entirely by environment. Owen proposed to create small, planned communities—“Villages of Unity and Mutual Cooperation”—where occupational, religious, and political groups would live together in perfect balance. Upon founding New Harmony, Owen confidently predicted that northerners would embrace its principles within two years. Instead, the community became a magnet for idlers and fanatics, and failed within two years. But Owen’s ideas survived the wreckage of New Harmony. His insistence that human character was formed by environment and that cooperation was superior to competition had an enduring impact on urban workers, who took up his cause of educational reform in the years to come.

Experimental communities multiplied rapidly during the economic crises of the late 1830s and 1840s. Brook Farm, near Boston, was the creation of a group of religious philosophers called transcendentalists, who sought to revitalize Christianity by proclaiming the infinite spiritual capacities of ordinary men and women. Convinced that the competitive commercial life of the cities was unnatural, and committed (if only briefly) to balancing mental and manual labor in their own personal lives, Brook Farmers spent their days milking cows and mowing hay, and their evenings contemplating philosophy. This utopian community attracted several renowned writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and its literary magazine, *The Dial*, became an important forum for transcendentalist ideas about philosophy, art, and literature (as discussed further in Chapter 11). But its life-span was brief.

The most controversial utopian experiment was the Oneida Community, established in 1848 in New York by John Humphrey Noyes. A convert of Charles Finney, Noyes too became a theological

perfectionist. At Oneida, he advocated a form of Christian communism that challenged conventional notions of religion and property, gender roles, even dress and child rearing. The Oneidans renounced private property, put men to work in kitchens, and adopted the radical new bloomer costume for women. But what most upset their critics was the application of communism to marriage. In place of conventional marriage, which Noyes regarded as profoundly selfish, he advocated “complex marriage,” in which every member of the community was married to every other member of the other sex. Oneida did not promote sexual free-for-all: couplings were arranged through an intermediary, in part to track paternity. Contemporaries dismissed Noyes as a licentious crackpot. Yet Oneida achieved considerable economic prosperity and was attracting new members long after other, less radical utopias had failed.

Despite the ridicule of many of their contemporaries, utopian communities exemplified the idealism and hopefulness that permeated nearly all reform movements in the antebellum period.

CHRONOLOGY

1824–1840

1824 John Quincy Adams elected president by the House of Representatives.

1826 American Temperance Society organized.

1828 Andrew Jackson elected president.
“Tariff of Abominations.”
John Calhoun anonymously writes *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*.

1830 Jackson’s Maysville Road Bill veto.
Indian Removal Act.

1830–1831 Charles G. Finney’s Rochester revival.

1831 William Lloyd Garrison starts *The Liberator*.

1832 Jackson vetoes recharter of the Bank of the United States.
Jackson reelected president.
South Carolina Nullification Proclamation.

1833 Force Bill.
Compromise Tariff.
American Anti-Slavery Society founded.
South Carolina nullifies the Force Bill.

1834 Whig Party organized.

1836 Specie Circular.
Martin Van Buren elected president.

1837 Horace Mann becomes secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education.
Elijah Lovejoy murdered by proslavery mob.
Grimké sisters set out on lecture tour of New England.

1837–1843 Economic depression.

1838 Garrison’s New England Non-Resistance Society founded.
Sarah Grimké’s *Letters on the Condition of Women and the Equality of the Sexes* and Angelina Grimké’s *Letters to Catharine E. Beecher*.

1840 Independent Treasury Act passed.
William Henry Harrison elected president.
First Washington Temperance Society started.

1841 Dorothea Dix begins exposé of prison conditions.
Brook Farm community founded.

1848 Seneca Falls convention.

CONCLUSION

The voices of the common people resounded through politics during the 1820s and 1830s. As voting barriers such as property requirements collapsed, and the wheels of party machines began to turn, the surface harmony of the Era of Good Feelings gave way to the raucous huzzahs of mass politics. Similar developments transformed American religion. Revivals swelled the numbers of Methodists and Baptists, who did not require an educated ministry, while Presbyterians and Congregationalists, who insisted on an educated clergy, experienced relative decline. Calvinist clergymen found their doctrine of human depravity undermined by the revivalists' insistence that men and women hold the capacity to remake and even perfect themselves.

The louder the people spoke, the more divided they became. The cries of "foul" that had greeted the highly contested election of 1824 later catapulted Andrew Jackson into office as the embodiment of the popular will. But Jackson's dictatorial manner and his stands on internal improvements, tariffs, nullification, and banking provoked opposition and contributed to the emergence of the Whigs and the second party system. The Panic of 1837 deepened party divisions by pushing Democrats toward

a hard-money, antibank position. Similarly, religious revivals, which aimed to unite Americans in a religion of the heart, drew criticism for emotional excess and spawned controversial new religious groups such as the Mormons.

Seeded in part by religious revivals, a variety of reform movements sprouted in the 1820s and 1830s. Some reforms, such as women's rights and the abolition of slavery, promised legal equality for groups excluded from political participation. Others, such as temperance, education, prison reform, and utopian communitarianism, sought the radical improvement of human nature through a combination of individual and institutional efforts. Yet for all their optimism about improving human nature, reformers betrayed profound anxieties about the direction of American society. Many of them proved willing to coerce people into change by such measures as prohibiting liquor sales, requiring school attendance, and placing prisoners in solitary confinement. While disdaining politics as corrupt, many reformers enlisted strategies and tactics similar to those of politics, blasting liquor and slavery with the same fervor that Jacksonians directed at banks and monopolies, and stirring up public opinion in support of their causes. Mass democracy, their actions suggested, tended to politicize everything in its path.

KEY TERMS

political democratization (p. 279)

Henry Clay (p. 279)

Democratic Party (p. 280)

spoils system (p. 281)

nullification crisis (p. 283)

second Bank of the United

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