Reform & Culture in Antebellum America: 1790-1860

I. The Second Great Awakening
   A. State of American religion in early 18th century
      1. 75% of 23 million Americans attended church regularly
      2. Many had become more liberal in their thinking
         a. Accepted rationalist (Enlightenment) ideas of the French
            Revolution era influential.
         b. Deism, promoted by Thomas Paine, influenced Jefferson,
            Franklin & other "children" of the Enlightenment.
            i. Relied on reason rather than revelation; on science rather
               than Bible.
            ii. Rejected concept of original sin and denied Christ's divinity.
            iii. Believed in Supreme Being who created a knowable
                 universe and endowed human beings with a capacity for
                 moral behavior.
         c. Deism inspired an important break from Puritanism –
            Unitarianism
            i. God exists in one person and not the Trinity (Father, Son &
               Holy Spirit)
            ii. Stressed essential goodness of human nature rather than evil
               nature.
            iii. Free will and salvation through good works
            iv. God a loving Father, not a stern creator
         d. Unitarianism appealed to intellectuals like Ralph Waldo
            Emerson who championed rationalism and optimism
   B. Impact of Second Great Awakening
      1. Reaction to growing liberalism (Deism, Unitarianism) in religion
         around 1800.
         a. Began on southern frontier but soon spread to northeastern
            cities.
         b. Became perhaps the most important era in history of American
            religion
         c. Influenced more people than the First Great Awakening.
      2. Effects
         a. Hundreds of thousands became "born-again" Christians
         b. Shattered and reorganized churches and new sects.
         c. Fostered new reform movements: Abolitionism, temperance,
            women's movement, prison reform.
      3. Revivalism spread to masses via "camp meetings"
         a. As many as 25,000 persons gathered for several days to hear
            hellfire gospel.
         b. Methodists and Baptists benefited most from revivalism.
i. Both sects stressed personal conversion (contrary to Predestination)
ii. Relatively democratic control of church affairs.
iii. Emotionalism

4. Peter Cartwright best known of Methodist "circuit riders" (traveling preachers)

5. Charles Grandison Finney the greatest of revival preachers
   a. Believed in earthly perfectionism (Puritan strain of thought)
   b. Inspired major reform movements: Education, temperance, and abolitionism

6. The Methodist and Baptist Churches became the two largest Protestant denominations in the U.S.

C. New Sects
1. "Burned-Over District: Western NY, many New England Puritans settled there and region became known for its "hellfire and damnation" sermons
   -- Fragmentation occurred; New sects included Adventists and Mormons

2. Adventists (or Millerites) had several hundred thousand members.
   a. William Miller predicted Christ would return on Oct 22, 1844.
   b. Even though the "millennium" never came, the movement continued to grow

3. Mormons
   a. Joseph Smith founded Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) in 1830 and wrote the Book of Mormon after having experienced a revelation.
      -- Church of Latter Day Saints founded in "Burned-Over District"
   b. Mormons persecuted in Ohio, then in Missouri and Illinois.
      i. Practice of polygamy created enemies
      ii. 1844, Joseph Smith and his brother murdered by mob in Illinois.
   c. Brigham Young led Mormons to Salt Lake City, Utah, 1846-47
      i. Community became prosperous frontier theocracy and cooperative commonwealth.
      ii. Cultivated semi-arid Utah by effective & cooperative methods of irrigation.
   d. Mormons later broke polygamy laws passed by Congress in 1862 & 1882.
      -- As a result, it was refused statehood until 1896.

4. Wealthier, better-educated levels of society not as affected by revivalism
   -- Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists & Unitarians.
5. Poorer communities in the rural South and West most affected by revivalism
   -- Methodists, Baptists, and other sects.

6. Slavery issue split Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians along sectional lines.
   -- Secession of southern churches foreshadowed secession of southern states.

II. Age of Reform

A. Most reforms driven by evangelical religion (Second Great Awakening).
   1. Many reformers held the old Puritan view of perfectionism (the belief in creating a perfect society by following God's laws).
   2. Many reformers troubled by modernization of society; held traditional values
   3. Women vital in reform crusades, especially in their struggle for suffrage.
      -- Movements offered many middle-class women opportunities to escape the "cult of domesticity" and take part in public life.

4. Major Issues
   a. Abolition of slavery (most important reform movement -- see next chapter)
   b. Temperance
   c. Women’s rights
   d. Education reform
   e. Mental institutions (sought improvements)
   f. Prison reform (sought reformatories rather than punitive institutions)
   g. Debtors prisons (sought to end imprisonment for debt)
   h. War (sought to end all wars)

Memory Aid: A Totally Wicked Elephant Made People Devour Worms

B. Temperance
   1. Alcohol abuse rampant in 19th century America ("the Alcoholic Republic")
      a. Decreased the efficiency of labor while increasing injuries in the workplace.
      b. Family hindered by physical danger to women and children.
   2. American Temperance Society (formed in Boston in 1826)
      a. Within a few years about 1000 local groups emerged.
      b. Urged drinkers to give up alcohol and organized children's clubs.
c. T.S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Barroom and What I Saw There* (1854) depicted how a stable village was transformed by a new tavern. -- 2nd best seller of the 1850s behind Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

3. Two Major strategies in early battles against alcohol
   a. Temperance -- Moderate use of alcohol rather than abstention
   b. Prohibition -- Make alcohol illegal
      i. Dow Law: Neal S. Dow "Father of Prohibition" sponsored *Maine Law* of 1851 -- Prohibited the manufacture and sale of liquor.
      ii. By 1857, 12 states had passed various prohibitory laws.
      iii. Yet, during 1850s, many prohibition laws repealed or overturned

4. Results
   a. Much less drinking among women than earlier in the century
   b. Less per capita consumption of hard liquor.

5. Temperance was the least sectional of all the reform movements.

C. Women's Rights
   1. Gender lines more sharply drawn in 19th century due to Industrial Revolution.
      b. Women viewed physically and emotionally weak but also artistic and refined.
      c. "Republican Motherhood": Women seen as keepers of society's conscience with special responsibility to raise children to become productive citizens.
      d. Some women wanted to break away from role of homemaker and participate in the public world of men.

2. Female reformers advocated women’s suffrage and other rights for women
   a. Also participated in general reform movement -- temperance & abolition
   b. Lucretia Mott -- Along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, organized Seneca Falls Convention
   c. Elizabeth Cady Stanton
      i. Urged equality for women, rights to sue, rights to own property.
      ii. Sought end to *feme corverre* where a husband took control of his wife's property upon marriage.
   d. Susan B. Anthony -- Quaker; protégé of Stanton; militant lecturer for woman's rights
e. **Grimke sisters**
   i. **Angelina Grimke** -- Southern abolitionist and women’s rights advocate
   ii. **Sara Grimke** -- Powerful writer on behalf of women’s rights movement.

f. **Lucy Stone** -- Helped organize 1st national women’s rights convention in 1850.
   i. An avid abolitionist
   ii. After Civil War, created womens-only suffrage organization.
   iii. Retained her maiden name after she was married
        -- Women who follow her example are known as "Lucy Stoners"

g. **Amelia Bloomer** -- Popularized short skirt with Turkish trousers.
   -- "Bloomers" were challenged as too masculine and immoral.

h. **Margaret Fuller**: Edited a transcendentalist journal, *The Dial*.

3. **Seneca Falls Convention** (1848) also "Women’s' Rights Convention"
   a. Organized by Stanton and Mott
   b. "Declaration of Sentiments": "...all men and women are created equal."
   c. One resolution formally demanded women’s' suffrage.
   d. **Launched the modern woman's rights movement**
      -- Fiercely opposed by the press and churches.
   e. Attended by 61 women and 34 men.

4. Woman's movement overshadowed by abolitionism and Civil War.

5. **Gains prior to Civil War**
   a. Women gradually admitted to college
   b. Starting in Mississippi in 1839, women could own property after marriage.

D. **Education**

1. Public Education
   a. Support for free public education gradually supported by wealthy citizens
   b. **Tax-supported public education triumphed between 1825 and 1850 in the East and West (less so in the South)**
      i. Laborers increasingly demanded education for their children.
      ii. Increased manhood suffrage meant workers pushed free education for their children.
c. Horace Mann  
   i. Argued key to reform in U.S. society was better education  
   ii. Established state normal schools to better train teachers in Massachusetts  
   iii. Influence spread to other states and impressive improvements made.

d. Secondary education lagged; 1 million people still illiterate by 1860  
   -- Slaves forbidden to learn reading or writing; even free northern blacks were usually excluded from schools

2. Noah Webster  
   a. Dictionary helped standardize American English  
   b. Readers and grammar books used by millions of children in 19th century  
      -- Partly designed to promote patriotism

3. William H. McGuffey  
   a. Grade school readers 1st published in 1830's; sold 122 million copies.  
   b. Lessons emphasized morality, patriotism, and idealism.

4. Higher Education  
   a. 2nd Great Awakening -- creation of many small, denominational, liberal arts colleges, mostly in South and West.  
   b. Women's schools gained some respectability in 1820s.  
      i. Emma Willard established in 1821 the Troy (NY) Female Seminary.  
      ii. Oberlin College open to both men and women in 1837; and blacks.

5. Lyceums: provided venues for traveling lecturers in science, literature, & moral philosophy; 3,000 lyceum lecture associations existed by 1835.

E. Dorothea Dix worked to improve treatment of the mentally handicapped.  
   1. Reported horrible conditions in poorhouses and basements where the insane were often kept in chains.  
   2. Efforts resulted in improved conditions and influenced the view that the insane were not willfully perverse but mentally ill.  
      -- 15 states created new hospitals and asylums as a result.

F. Prison reforms  
   1. Gave inmates increased access to religious services  
   2. Increasingly shifted to rehabilitation rather than punishment

G. Practice of imprisoning people for debts reduced significantly
H. American Peace Society
   1. Sought peace and gained some influence in the pre-Civil War years.
   2. Shattered by the Civil War in the 1860s

III. Wilderness Utopias
   A. Various reformers set up more than 40 communities of a cooperative, communistic, or "communitarian" nature.
      -- Disillusioned by materialistic and rapidly industrialized society
   B. 1825, New Harmony, Indiana: about 1,000 persons led by Robert Owen
      -- Communitarian society founded first American kindergarten, first free public school and the first free public library.
   C. Brook Farm in Massachusetts by 20 intellectuals lasted between 1841 & 1846
      -- Several well-known American authors lived there at various times including Nathaniel Hawthorne.
   D. Oneida Colony founded in NY in 1848; more radical
      1. Practiced free love, birth control, and eugenic selection of parents to produce superior offspring.
         a. Believed in corporate marriage of all members to each other.
         b. Communal care of children; equality of genders
      2. Colony flourished for over 30 years largely due to its craftsmen making superior steel traps and the manufacturing of silver plates.
   E. Shakers -- United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing
      1. Established in communistic society in Lebanon, New York.
      2. Longest-lived sect beginning in 1776 finally extinct in 1940.
      3. Set up about 20 religious communities; membership about 6,000 in 1840
      4. Opposition to both marriage and free love led to their extinction.
         a. Believed in celibacy, equal spiritual value of men and women, and simplicity of architecture and furnishings.
         b. New members were adopted as orphans or recruited through conversion.
   F. Amana Community founded in Iowa in 1855
      1. Perfectionist communal society; believed in the imminent millennium

G. Mormons considered by some to be a utopian society – most successful
IV. The Changing American Family

A. Women increasingly challenged their inferior status.
   1. Women better off in U.S. than in Europe especially on the frontier where women were more scarce.
   2. Increased numbers of women avoided marriage; 10% by 1860
   3. Women began working as schoolteachers and in domestic service.
      a. 10% of white women worked for pay outside own homes in 1850
      b. 20% had been employed at some time prior to marriage.

B. Most women left their jobs upon marriage and became homemakers
   1. "Cult of domesticity" glorified traditional function of the homemaker.
   2. Women had large moral power and influence in family affairs.
   3. Godey's Lady's Book, founded in 1830, survived until 1898; promoted "cult of domesticity"
      -- Circulation reached a staggering 150,000.
      a. Called on American inventors to improve life for homemakers
      b. Ironically, labor-saving inventions made many women’s life more challenging as more work was expected of them.

C. Changes in the family
   1. Most marriages based on love, not "arrangement".
      -- Families became more close-knit and affectionate
   2. Families grew smaller
      a. Avg. of 6 kids in 1800; less than 5 in 1900; births fell 1/2 during the 19th century.
      b. Contraception practiced (although seldom discussed in public)
   3. Smaller families meant child-centered families
      -- Corporal punishment reduced; more emphasis on shaping than breaking.
   4. Children raised to be independent and moral individuals.
   5. Outlines of the "modern family" were clear by mid-century.

V. Frontier experience uniquely American

A. Alexis de Toqueville's Democracy in America (1835) –
   Individualism and equality characterized antebellum American.
   -- Compared to life in the East, western life was extremely rough; westerners were generally more "crude"; highly individualistic

B. Democracy on the frontier
   1. Equality reigned on the frontier; (except slavery)
   2. White manhood suffrage
   3. Cherished states' rights and localism
   4. Intensely patriotic and nationalistic
C. **Frederick Jackson Turner**, 1893: The frontier forged the American character

VI. Nationalistic Artistic Achievements
A. Thomas Jefferson probably finest American architect of his generation
   -- Brought classical design to Monticello while the quadrangle of the University of Virginia at Charlottesville is one of best examples of classical architecture in U.S.

B. Artists
   1. **Gilbert Stuart** among the best American painters of the era.
      -- Several portraits of Washington, all somewhat idealized
   2. **Charles Willson Peale** painted portraits of prominent Americans

C. **Hudson River School** of Art
   1. Romantic depictions of local landscapes
   2. Became a uniquely American genre; glorification of American landscape

D. Louis Daguerre invented a crude photograph--the daguerreotype.

E. Music: **Stephen Foster** wrote famous minstrel songs (“darky tunes”) and later, sentimental songs.
   -- Minstrel shows became most popular form of entertainment in mid- to late- 19th century (very racist by today’s standards)

VII. Nationalistic Literature
A. American literature received a strong boost from nationalism after War of 1812.

B. **Knickerbocker Group** in NY had some of America's greatest early writers.
   1. **Washington Irving** (1783-1859)
      a. First American to win international recognition as a literary figure.
      b. Also a historian: Washington's biography and other historical works.
   2. **James Fenimore Cooper** (1789-1851)
      a. First American novelist to gain world fame.
      b. Utilized American themes in his works.
      c. *The Spy* (1821), *Leatherstocking Tales; Last of the Mohicans*
   3. **William Cullen Bryant** (1794-1878)
      -- “Thanatopsis” (1817) -- One of first high-quality poems by an American.
C. Transcendentalism

1. Heavily influenced by Romanticism in Europe.
2. Emerged in New England during 2nd quarter of the 19th century
   a. Resulted in part from a liberalizing of Puritanism.
   b. Influenced by German romantic philosophers.
3. Philosophy
   a. Truth "transcends" the senses: cannot not be found by empiricism alone.
   b. Every person possesses an inner light that can illuminate the highest truth and put him/her in direct touch with God, or the "Oversoul."
   c. Individualism in matters of religion as well as social
      i. Commitment to self-reliance, self-culture, and self-discipline.
      ii. Hostile to formal institutions of any kind and conventional wisdom.
3. **Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803-1882)
   b. Advocated self-reliance, self-improvement, optimism, and freedom.
4. **Henry David Thoreau** (1817-1862)
   a. Associate of Emerson; a poet and nonconformist.
   b. *Walden: Or Life in the Woods* (1854)
   c. Essay on *Civil Disobedience* -- Inspired by his brief experience in jail when he refused to pay taxes to support the Mexican war effort.
      -- Writings later encouraged Gandhi to resist British rule in India and later Martin Luther King's thinking about nonviolence.
5. **Walt Whitman** (1819-1892) -- *Leaves of Grass* (1855) -- "America's Poet"
6. **Margaret Fuller** -- published "The Dial"

D. Poetry: **Henry Wadsworth Longfellow** (1807-1882)
1. One of most popular poets ever produced in America.
   -- Wrote historically-based poetry

E. Individualists and Dissenters
1. **Edgar Allan Poe** (1809-1849)
   -- Excelled in the short story: Explored the world of the spirit and the emotions
2. **Nathaniel Hawthorne**: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); *The Marble Faun* (1860)
3. **Herman Melville** (1819-1891): *Moby Dick; Typee; Billy Budd*
F. Journalism
   1. Newspaper industry bolstered by increased literacy
   2. Tabloid journalism focused on murders, scandals, & other human interest stories (similar to today)
   3. Decades just before the Civil War marked the golden age of personal journalism
      a. Horace Greeley -- editor and owner of New York Tribune (founded in 1841)
         i. Extremely influential in forming public opinion. (even outside New York)
         ii. Fierce abolitionist

Essay Questions for Review:

1. Analyze the extent to which the Second Great Awakening transformed American religion in the years prior to the Civil War.
2. Identify major reform movements of the Second Great Awakening. To what extent were reformers during the Second Great Awakening successful in achieving their goals?

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