The Pursuit of Perfection
Revivalists and Utopians

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Painting by J. Maze Burbank. © The New Bedford Whaling Museum
Revivalists and Utopians

Visual Source Documents 2 & 3

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The Rise of Evangelicalism

- Separation of church and state gave all churches the chance to compete for converts
  - Government sponsorship and funding for established churches ended
  - Dissenting groups such as, Baptists and Methodists, began to grow
- Pious Protestants formed voluntary associations to combat sin, “infidelity”

During the Second Great Awakening, church membership rose sharply.
The Second Great Awakening: The Frontier Phase

- Camp meetings contributed to frontier life
  - Provided emotional religion
  - Offered opportunity for social life

- Camp meeting revivals conveyed intensely personal religious message

- Camp meetings rarely led to social reform

1835 Evangelical camp meeting
The Second Great Awakening in the North

- New England reformers led by **Timothy Dwight** defended Calvinism against the Enlightenment
  - 8th president of Yale College (1795–1817)
  - Fought against Unitarians (denied the Trinity)

- **Nathaniel Taylor**: Individuals are free agents and can overcome natural inclination to sin

- **Lyman Beecher** and evangelical Calvinism
  - Father of Harriet Beecher Stowe
  - Moved west to Ohio to begin revivals in this “virgin” territory
  - In 1834, students at Lane Theological Seminary chose to adopt the cause of abolitionism; Beecher opposed their "radical" position and refused to offer classes to African-Americans; 50 students (the "Lane Rebels") left the Seminary
The Second Great Awakening in the North

- Charles G. Finney
  - Departed radically from Calvinist doctrine
  - Appeal based in emotion, not reason
  - Finney preached in upstate New York and stressed revival techniques

- Beecher and others were disturbed by the emotionalism of Finney’s methods

- Revivals led to organization of more churches
From Revivalism to Reform

- Northern revivals stimulated reform
  - Rev. Samuel John Mills organized the American Bible Society
  - American Tract Society targeted groups beyond reach of churches, such as seamen

- Middle-class participants adapted evangelical religion to preserve traditional values
  - Some wanted to curb irreligious activity on the Sabbath
  - Others sought to eliminate dueling, gambling, prostitution
  - Asylum for “abandoned women” established in New York
  - As women became involved focus shifted to men patronizing prostitutes
From Revivalism to Reform

“The benevolent empire” of evangelical reform movements altered American life

- Lyman Beecher was influential in the temperance movement
- Per capita annual consumption of distilled beverages in the 1820s was triple what it is today
- Temperance movement cut alcohol consumption by 50+%
Temperance Movement

Grappling with the Monster, or the Curse and the Cure of Strong Drink. 
New York: John W. Lovell Company, 1877
You uphold the rum-traders madly
When you cannot hold up yourself
You swallow their poison, and gladly
You aid them in robbing yourself.

This illustrated comic valentine shows a drunkard stepping on the Maine Liquor Law, which prohibited the sale of liquor in that state.
Domesticity and Changes in the American Family

- New conception of family’s role in society
- Child-rearing seen as essential preparation for self-disciplined Christian life
- Women confined to domestic sphere
- Women assumed crucial role within home
Marriage for Love

- Mutual love must characterize marriage
- Wives became more of a companion to their husbands and less of a servant
- Legally, the husband was the unchallenged head of the household
The Cult of Domesticity

- “The Cult of True Womanhood”
  - Placed women in the home
  - Glorified home as center of all efforts to civilize and “Christianize” society

- In the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, men and women both worked side by side in or near the home to support families.

- Industrialization disrupted this way of life, by sending men to factories and depriving women of a productive economic role

- Middle- and upper-class women became increasingly dedicated to the home as mothers

- Women of leisure entered reform movements
The Discovery of Childhood

- Nineteenth-century child the center of family
- Each child seen as unique, irreplaceable
- Ideal to form child’s character with affection
- Parental discipline to instill guilt, not fear
- Train child to learn self-discipline
- Family size declines from average of 7.04 children to 5.42 by 1850

Peterson's Magazine - Sep. 1858
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Institutional Reform

- Domesticity informed public institutions
- Schools continued what family began
- Asylums, prisons mended family’s failures
The Extension of Education

- Before the 1820s, most schools were private
  - Wealthy in the North and South sent children to private schools
  - Some poor sent children to charity or “pauper” schools financed by local governments
  - New England towns were often required to support elementary schools
- Public schools expanded rapidly from 1820 to 1850
- Means of advancement for working class
- Means of inculcating values of hard work, responsibility to middle-class reformers
The Extension of Education

- Horace Mann argued that schools saved immigrants, poor children from parents’ bad influence
- Worked to establish a state board of education and adequate tax support
- Advocated using moral influence rather than corporal punishment, as Calvinists used
- Argued that public schools were a means of social discipline
- Many parents believed public schools alienated children from their parents
Discovering the Asylum

- Poor, criminal, insane seen as lacking self-discipline
- Harsh measures to promote rehabilitation
  - Solitary confinement of prisoners
  - Strict daily schedule
- Public support for rehabilitation skimpy
- Prisons, asylums, poorhouses became warehouses for the unwanted
- **Dorothea Lynde Dix** was an activist on behalf of the indigent insane
  - She lobbied state legislatures and the United States Congress to create the first generation of American mental asylums.
  - During the Civil War, she served as Superintendent of Army Nurses.
Reform Turns Radical

- Most reform aimed to improve society
- Some radical reformers sought destruction of old society, creation of perfect social order

The Liberator’s Banner, by William Lloyd Garrison
Divisions in the Benevolent Empire

- Radical perfectionists impatient by 1830s, split from moderate reform
  - Temperance movement
  - Peace movement
  - Antislavery movement
- Moderates sought gradual end to slavery and colonization of freed slaves to its colony of Liberia
Divisions in the Benevolent Empire

- Before 1830, many people expressed religious and moral concern over slavery, but viewed it as deeply rooted social and economic system that could only be eliminated gradually.
  - 1817: American Colonization Society

- Radicals like William Lloyd Garrison demanded immediate emancipation
  - 1831: Garrison founded *The Liberator*
  - 1833: American Anti-Slavery Society
The Abolitionist Enterprise: Theodore Dwight Weld

- Weld an itinerant minister converted by Finney
- Adapted his revivalist techniques to abolition
- Successful mass meetings in Ohio, New York
The Abolitionist Enterprise: Public Reception

- Appealed to hard-working small town folk
- Opposition in cities and near Mason-Dixon line
- Opposition from the working class
  - Disliked blacks
  - Feared black economic and social competition
- Solid citizens saw abolitionists as anarchists
The Abolitionist Enterprise: Obstacles

- Abolitionists hampered by infighting
- William Lloyd Garrison disrupted movement by associating with radical reform efforts
  - Urged abolitionists to abstain from participating in the political process
  - Also involved in women’s rights movement
- Some abolitionists helped form the Liberty Party in 1840
Black Abolitionists

- Former slaves related the horrible realities of bondage
  - Prominent figures included Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth

- Black newspapers, books, and pamphlets publicized abolitionism to a wider audience

- Blacks were also active in the Underground Railroad
From Abolitionism to Women’s Rights

- Abolitionism opened to women’s participation
- Involvement raised awareness of women’s inequality
- Seneca Falls Convention in 1848
  - Organized by Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton
  - Prompted by experience of inequality in abolition movement
  - Began movement for women’s rights
Utopian socialists

- Inspired by Robert Owen
- New Harmony, Indiana—Owenite
- Josiah Warren, who was one of the participants in the New Harmony Society, asserted that community was doomed to failure due to a lack of individual sovereignty and private property.

New Moral World, Owen's envisioned successor of New Harmony. Owenites fired bricks to build it, but construction never took place.

*Radical Ideas and Experiments: Utopian Communities*

- Utopian socialism
Utopian socialism

- Inspired by Charles Fourier, declared that concern and cooperation were the secrets of social success.
- Believed that a society that cooperated would see an immense improvement in their productivity levels.
- Workers would be recompensed for their labors according to their contribution.
- Fourierite phalanxes
Radical Ideas and Experiments: Utopian Communities

- Religious utopianism - Shakers
  - The first members of the group were known as “Shaking Quakers” because of the ecstatic nature of their worship services.
  - Believed in equality of the sexes, communal living, & celibacy

- Members were acquired through conversion, indenturing children, and adoption of orphans.
- Made furniture

Shaker dance and worship
Radical Ideas and Experiments: Utopian Communities

- Religious utopianism – **Oneida Community**
  - Was a religious commune founded by John Humphrey Noyes in 1848 in Oneida, New York.
  - Believed that Jesus had already returned in the year 70 CE, making it possible for them to bring about Jesus's millennial kingdom, and be free of sin and perfect in this world, not just Heaven (a belief called *Perfectionism*).
  - Practiced *Communalism* (in the sense of communal property and possessions), *Complex Marriage, Male Continence, Mutual Criticism* and *Ascending Fellowship*.
  - Produced silverware to support community.
Radical Ideas and Experiments: Transcendentalism

- A group of ideas in literature and philosophy in the 1830s and 1840s in New England as a protest against the general state of culture and society, intellectualism, and Unitarianism.

- Belief was the inherent goodness of both man and nature.

- Society and its institutions - particularly organized religion and political parties - ultimately corrupted the purity of the individual.

- They had faith that man is at his best when truly "self-reliant" and independent.
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson
  - Margaret Fuller
  - George Ripley - Founded cooperative community at Brook Farm
  - Henry David Thoreau and *Walden*
Counterpoint on Reform

- Reform encountered perceptive critics
  - Nathaniel Hawthorne allegorically refuted perfectionist movements, suggesting the world was inherently an imperfect place
- Reform prompted necessary changes in American life