

Topic 12

Reform and Revival in Antebellum America

With this topic I want to focus on the many diverse, but related, reform movements of the antebellum period. In addition to the social reform movements outlined in Ch. 13 (pp. 276–85), the antebellum reform movements also included **transcendentalism** (*Out of Many*, Ch. 12) and the **Second Great Awakening**, which was a religious revival (*Out of Many*, Ch. 12).

In *Out of Many* John Mack Faragher also talks around, but does not explicitly discuss, new attitudes towards women's role that arose during the antebellum period, the **Cult of Domesticity**. According to the Cult of Domesticity, men and women had different spheres of influence: for men it was the public world, for women it was the private world (that is, the home). Man's public sphere was political, financial, and economic. Woman's private sphere was moral and educational. Each gender reigned supreme in its sphere. As limiting for women as the Cult of Domesticity might seem to us today, many women during the antebellum period found it liberating! According to the Cult of Domesticity, the job of a woman as a wife and mother was to educate her children and instill in them good morals. Women were, in effect, the moral guardians of the family. Many Americans, especially Protestant middle-class Americans, viewed the cumulative effects of increased immigration, commercialization, industrialization, and westward expansion as threatening; they felt that the America they had grown up in was rapidly transforming beyond recognition (the first 3) or was literally being torn apart as family-members moved west. According to the Cult of Domesticity, the home was therefore a bulwark, protecting families in the midst of a rapidly changing society. For example, subscribers to the Cult of Domesticity believed that man, out in the public world, was tempted by greed, sin, and lust; returning home recharged man's moral batteries so that he could venture forth into the public world again and make good, moral choices. (Moral perfectibility and the responsibility of individuals to choose to follow a morally correct path are ideas that the antebellum social reform movements inherited from the Second Great Awakening.) Some women used their status of moral guardians of the family according to the Cult of Domesticity to push beyond the private sphere and into the public sphere. Women argued that as their role as moral guardians of the family extended to protecting the family outside the home – women were, in effect, the moral guardians of the *country*. Who better, therefore, to vote on social legislation than women? Hence some women used the Cult of Domesticity to agitate for the right to vote. In this way some antebellum reform movements that seem quite conservative to us now were, during the antebellum period, quite radical.

Moreover, many seemingly “positive” reform movements had dark sides. A major theme of Ch. 13 of *Out of Many* is the impact of increased immigration on American society during the antebellum period. Many Americans responded to increased immigration with **nativism**, which means anti-immigrant sentiment. Moreover, reformers, many of whom were white middle-class Protestants, attempted to use social control to make immigrants conform to white, middle-class Protestant values. Hence many of the social reform movements of the antebellum period involved **social control**. Social control is when one group tries to force its values on another group in the belief that doing so will make the second group “better”.

Remember:

- **Make sure that you are on track to do at least 4 student-responses by the end of the summer session. (Including Topic 12, there are only 4 topics left!)**
- If you are not the first person to answer a particular question, make sure that your answer covers *new ground*.
- Graded posts need to be *at least* 300 words long.
- When discussing a source, go into lots of detail! Show me that you have carefully read, understood, and thought about the source.
- If every question gets answered at least once, everyone who submitted a graded post by the deadline gets a point of extra credit.

Key terms (Use and discuss relevant key terms in your answer.)

Transcendentalism

Second Great Awakening

Cult of Domesticity

nativism

social control

General Trades Union (GTU)

temperance

Dorothea Dix

utopianism and communitarian movements

the Shakers

World's Anti-Slavery Convention (London, 1840)

Seneca Falls Convention (1848) / the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions"

Mormonism / Joseph Smith

abolitionism

American Colonization Society

William Lloyd Garrison

Frederick Douglass

Sarah and Angelina Grimké

Thomas Story Kirkbride

Worcester State Hospital (Massachusetts)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Focus Questions

Tying the readings together (Tie together information from both the textbook and at least one of the sources.)

1. What was the relationship between abolitionism and the women's rights movement? Why might supporters of these movements be natural allies? Why might they be competitors?
2. What does Elizabeth Cady Stanton have to say about the Irish immigrants who lived near her? How do her views of and interactions with these immigrants reflect or contradict American attitudes towards immigrants that you have read about in Ch. 13 of *Out of Many*?
3. What do the prison reform movement and asylum movement have in common with other reform movements of the antebellum period?

***Out of Many*, Ch. 13 (Draw on multiple sections of the chapter in your answer.)**

4. What ethnic groups immigrated to the United States during the antebellum period? Why did they choose to immigrate and what challenges did they face after they reached the United States?
5. Apart from the women's rights movement, what role did women play in the reform movements of the antebellum period? Why did women play such a prominent role in these reform movements?

6. How do the utopian movements of the antebellum period relate to other reform movements of the period? What goals or beliefs did they share?
7. How and why did the abolition movement change from the 1830s?

Excerpt from *Eighty Years and More* and The Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and resolutions

8. Why was Cady Stanton's attendance at the World's Antislavery Convention in 1840 important to her development as a women's rights advocate? And how did Stanton's life between the World's Antislavery Convention in 1840 and the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 deepen her commitment to women's equal rights?
9. How did women's rights advocates use and alter the wording of the Declaration of Independence? Discuss specific examples. (*Hint: the answer is not simply that they added the word woman.*)

Excerpt on Prisons and Asylums from *Moralists and Modernizers* by Steven Mintz

10. How successful were the prison reform and asylum reform movements during the antebellum period and what accounts for that success (or lack of success)?