CHAPTER 15

The Ferment of Reform and Culture, 1790–1860

PART I: REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

A. Checklist of Learning Objectives

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the widespread revival of religion in the early nineteenth century and its effects on American culture and social reform.
2. Describe the cause of the most important American reform movements of the period, identifying which were most successful and why.
3. Explain the origins of American feminism, describe its essential principles, and summarize its early successes and failures.
4. Describe the utopian and communitarian experiments of the period, and indicate how they reflected the essential spirit of early American culture despite their small size.
5. Identify the most notable early American achievements in science, medicine, the visual arts, and music, and explain why advanced science and culture had difficulty taking hold on American soil.
6. Analyze the American literary flowering of the early nineteenth century, especially the transcendentalist movement, and identify the most important writers who dissented from the optimistic spirit of the time.

B. Glossary

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms.

1. **polygamy**  The practice of having two or more spouses at one time. (More specifically, **polygyny** is marriage two or more wives; **polyandry** is marriage to two or more husbands.) “Accusations of polygamy likewise arose and increased in intensity.”
2. **theocracy**  Literally, rule by God; the term is often applied to a state where religious leaders exercise direct or indirect political authority. “. . . the community became a prosperous frontier theocracy and a cooperative commonwealth.”
3. **zealot**  One who is carried away by a cause to an extreme or excessive degree. “But less patient zealots came to believe that temptation should be removed by legislation.”
4. **utopian**  Referring to any theoretical plan that aims to establish an ideal social order, or a place founded on such principles. “Bolstered by the utopian spirit of the age, various reformers . . . set up more than forty [cooperative] communities. . . .”
5. **communistic**  Referring to the economic theory or practice in which the means of production are owned by the community as a whole. “. . . various reformers . . . set up more than forty communities of a . . . communistic nature.”
6. **communitarian** Referring to the belief in or practice of the superiority of community life or values over individual life, but not necessarily the common ownership of material goods. “... various reformers ... set up more than forty communities of a ... ‘communitarian’ nature.”

7. **free love** The principle or practice of open sexual relations unrestricted by law, marriage, or religious constraints. “It practiced free love (‘complex marriage’)...”

8. **eugenic** Concerning the improvement of the human species through selective breeding or genetic control. “It practiced ... the eugenic selection of parents to produce superior offspring.”

9. **coitus reservatus** The practice of sexual intercourse without the male’s release of semen. “It practiced ... birth control through ‘male continence’ or **coitus reservatus’.”

10. **classical** Specifically, in Western civilization, the culture of ancient Greece and Rome, and the artistic or cultural values presumed to be based on those ancient principles; more generally, any cultural form whose value has been established and recognized over time. “He brought a classical design to his Virginia hilltop home, Monticello....”

11. **mystical** Referring to the belief in the direct apprehension of God or divine mystery, without reliance on reason or human comprehension. “These mystical doctrines of transcendentalism defied precise definition. ...”

12. **nonconformist** One who refuses to follow established or conventional ideas or habits. “Henry David Thoreau ... was ... a poet, a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a nonconformist.”

13. **nonviolence** The principle of resolving hostilities or managing conflict without resort to physical force. “His writings ... inspired the development of American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.’s thinking about nonviolence.”

14. **urbane** Sophisticated, elegant, cosmopolitan. “Handsome and urbane, he lived a generally serene life. ...”

15. **providential** Under the care and direction of God or other benevolent natural or supernatural forces. “... he lived among cannibals, from whom he providentially escaped uneaten.”

**PART II: CHECKING YOUR PROGRESS**

**A. True-False**

Where the statement is true, circle T; where it is false, circle F.

1. **T** **F** The Second Great Awakening reversed the trends toward religious indifference and rationalism of the late eighteenth century.

2. **T** **F** The religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening occurred almost entirely in rural frontier communities.

3. **T** **F** The Mormon church migrated to the Utah frontier to escape persecution and to establish its tightly organized cooperative social order without persecution.

4. **T** **F** The primary purpose for establishing taxpayer-supported free public schools was to educate all citizens for participation in democracy, without regard to wealth.

5. **T** **F** Most practical, hard-working Americans disliked highly educated intellectuals and writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson.

6. **T** **F** Many early American reformers were middle-class idealists inspired by evangelical Protestantism.
7. T F The key role of women in American reform movements was undergirded by a growing feminization of the churches that spawned many efforts at social improvement.

8. T F The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 was considered most radical for issuing the demand for women’s right to vote.

9. T F Many of the prominent utopian communities of early nineteenth century involved communal ownership of property and sexual practices different from the conventional norm.

10. T F Advances in medicine and science raised the average life expectancy of Americans to nearly 60 years by 1850.

11. T F The Knickerbocker group of American writers sharply criticized the militant nationalism and western expansionism that followed the War of 1812.

12. T F Although it rejected most Americans’ materialism and focus on practical concerns, transcendentalism strongly reflected American individualism, love of liberty, and hostility to formal institutions and authority.

13. T F Ralph Waldo Emerson taught the doctrines of simple living and nonviolence, while his friend Henry David Thoreau emphasized self-improvement and the development of a uniquely American scholarship.

14. T F The works of Walt Whitman, such as *Leaves of Grass*, revealed his love of democracy, the frontier, and the common people.

15. T F The fiction of Edgar Allan Poe and Herman Melville reflected most Americans’ optimism and belief in social progress and reform.

**B. Multiple Choice**

Select the best answer and circle the corresponding letter.

1. The tendency toward rationalism and indifference in religion was reversed beginning about 1800 by
   a. the rise of Deism and Unitarianism.
   b. the rise of new groups like the Mormons and Christian Scientists.
   c. the revivalist movement called the Second Great Awakening.
   d. a large influx of religiously traditional immigrants.
   e. the emergence of Roman Catholicism.

2. Two denominations that became the dominant faiths among the common people of the West and South were
   a. Episcopalians and Unitarians.
   b. Congregationalists and Presbyterians.
   c. Quakers and Seventh Day Adventists
   d. Lutherans and Catholics.
   e. Methodists and Baptists.

3. Which of the following was not characteristic of the Second Great Awakening?
   a. Enormous revival gatherings, over several days, featuring famous evangelical preachers
   b. A movement to overcome denominational divisions through a united Christian church
   c. The spilling over of religious fervor into missionary activity and social reform
   d. The prominent role of women in sustaining the mission of the evangelical churches
   e. An intense focus on emotional, personal conversion and a democratic spiritual equality
4. Evangelical preachers like Charles Grandison Finney linked personal religious conversion to  
a. the construction of large church buildings throughout the Midwest.  
b. the expansion of American political power across the North American continent.  
c. the Christian reform of social problems in order to build the Kingdom of God on earth.  
d. the organization of effective economic development and industrialization.  
e. a call for Christians to withdraw from worldly materialism and politics.  

5. The term Burned-Over District refers to  
a. an area where fires were used to clear land for frontier revivals.  
b. areas where Baptist and Methodist revivalists fiercely battled one another for converts.  
c. the region of western New York State that experienced especially frequent and intense revivals.  
d. the areas of Missouri and Illinois where the Mormon settlements were attacked and destroyed.  
e. the church conventions where Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians split over slavery.  

6. The major effect of the growing slavery controversy on the churches was  
a. a major missionary effort directed at converting African American slaves.  
b. the organization of the churches to lobby for the abolition of slavery.  
c. an agreement to keep political issues like slavery out of the religious area.  
d. a prohibition on slaveowning by clergy.  
e. a split of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians into separate northern and southern churches.  

7. Besides their practice of polygamy, the Mormons aroused hostility from many Americans because of  
a. their cooperative economic practices that ran contrary to American economic individualism.  
b. their efforts to convert members of other denominations to Mormonism.  
c. their populous settlement in Utah, which posed the threat of a breakaway republic in the West.  
d. their practice of baptizing the dead without the permission of living relatives.  
e. the political ambitions of their leaders Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.  

8. The major promoter of an effective tax-supported system of free public education for all American children was  
a. Mary Lyons.  
b. Horace Mann.  
c. Noah Webster.  
d. Susan B. Anthony.  
e. Abraham Lincoln.  

9. Reformer Dorothea Dix worked for the cause of  
a. women’s right to higher education and voting.  
b. international peace.  
c. better treatment of the mentally ill.  
d. temperance.  
e. antislavery.  

10. One primary cause of women’s subordination in nineteenth-century America was  
a. the cult of domesticity that sharply separated women’s sphere of the home from that of men in the workplace.  
b. women’s primary involvement in a host of causes other than that of their own rights.  
c. the higher ratio of females to males in many communities.  
d. the prohibition against women’s participation in religious activities.  
e. the widespread belief that women were morally inferior to men.
11. Besides the hostility and ridicule it suffered from most men, the pre–Civil War women’s movement failed to make large gains because
   a. it was overshadowed by the larger and seemingly more urgent antislavery movement.
   b. women were unable to establish any effective organization to advance their cause.
   c. several prominent feminist leaders were caught up in personal and sexual scandals.
   d. it became bogged down in pursuing trivial issues like changing women’s fashions.
   e. most ordinary women could not see any advantage to gaining equal rights.

12. Many of the American utopian experiments of the early nineteenth century focused on all of the following except for
   a. communal economics and alternative sexual arrangements.
   b. temperance and diet reforms.
   c. advanced scientific and technological ways of producing and consuming.
   d. developing small-business enterprises and advanced marketing techniques.
   e. doctrines of reincarnation and transcendental meditation.

13. Two leading female imaginative writers who added luster to New England’s literary reputation were
   a. Sarah Orne Jewett and Kate Chopin.
   b. Toni Morrison and Mary McCarthy.
   c. Sarah Grimké and Susan B. Anthony.
   e. Louisa May Alcott and Emily Dickinson.

14. The Knickerbocker Group of American writers included
   b. George Bancroft, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville.
   d. Walt Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Edgar Allan Poe.

15. The transcendentalist writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller stressed the ideas of
   a. inner truth and individual self-reliance.
   b. political democracy and economic progress.
   c. personal guilt and fear of death.
   d. love of chivalry and return to the medieval past.
   e. religious tradition and social reform.

C. Identification
Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.

1. _________ Liberal religious belief, held by many of the Founders such as Paine, Jefferson, and Franklin, that stressed rationalism and moral behavior rather than Christian revelation while retaining belief in a Supreme Being

2. _________ Religious revival that began on the frontier and swept eastward, stirring an evangelical spirit in many areas of American life

3. _________ The two religious denominations that benefited most from the evangelical revivals of the early nineteenth century

4. _________ Religious group founded by Joseph Smith that eventually established a cooperative commonwealth in Utah

5. _________ Area of western New York state where frequent, fervent religious revivals produced intense religious controversies and numerous new sects
Memorable 1848 meeting in New York where women made an appeal based on the Declaration of Independence

Evangelical college in Ohio that was the first institution of higher education to admit blacks and women

Short-lived intellectual commune in Massachusetts based on “plain living and high thinking”

Thomas Jefferson’s stately self-designed home in Virginia that became a model of American architecture

Long-lived communal religious group, founded by Mother Ann Lee, that emphasized simple living and prohibited all marriage and sexual relationships

Philosophical and literary movement, centered in New England, that greatly influenced many American writers of the early nineteenth century

The doctrine, promoted by American writer Henry David Thoreau in an essay of the same name, that later influenced Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Walt Whitman’s originally shocking poetic masterpiece that embraced sexual liberation and celebrated America as a great democratic experiment

Herman Melville’s great but commercially unsuccessful novel about Captain Ahab’s obsessive pursuit of a white whale

Popular nineteenth-century musical entertainments that featured white actors and singers with painted black faces

D. Matching People, Places, and Events

Match the person, place, or event in the left column with the proper description in the right column by inserting the correct letter on the blank line.

1. ___ Dorothea Dix  
2. ___ Brigham Young  
3. ___ Elizabeth Cady Stanton  
4. ___ Lucretia Mott  
5. ___ Emily Dickinson  
6. ___ Charles Grandison. Finney  
7. ___ Amelia Bloomer  
8. ___ John Humphrey Noyes  
9. ___ Mary Lyon  
10. ___ Louisa May Alcott  
11. ___ James Fenimore Cooper  
12. ___ Ralph Waldo Emerson  
13. ___ Walt Whitman  
14. ___ Edgar Allan Poe  
15. ___ Herman Melville  

a. Leader of a radical New York commune that practiced complex marriage and eugenic birth control  
b. Bold, unconventional poet who celebrated American democracy  
c. The “Mormon Moses” who led persecuted Latter-Day Saints to their promised land in Utah  
d. Influential evangelical revivalist of the Second Great Awakening  
e. New York writer whose romantic sea tales were more popular than his dark literary masterpiece  
f. Pioneering women’s educator, founder of Mount Holyoke Seminary in Massachusetts
g. Female reformer who promoted short skirts and trousers as a replacement for highly restrictive women’s clothing

h. Second-rate poet and philosopher, but first-rate promoter of transcendentalist ideals and American culture

i. Eccentric genius whose tales of mystery, suffering, and the supernatural departed from general American literary trends

j. Quietly determined reformer who substantially improved conditions for the mentally ill

k. Reclusive New England poet who wrote about love, death, and immortality

l. Leading feminist who wrote the “Declaration of Sentiments” in 1848 and pushed for women’s suffrage

m. A leading female transcendentalist who wrote Little Women and other novels to help support her family

n. Path-breaking American novelist who contrasted the natural person of the forest with the values of modern civilization

o. Quaker women’s rights advocate who also strongly supported abolition of slavery

E. Putting Things in Order

Put the following events in correct order by numbering them from 1 to 5.

1. ___ A leading New England transcendentalist appeals to American writers and thinkers to turn away from Europe and develop their own literature and culture.

2. ___ A determined reformer appeals to a New England legislature to end the cruel treatment of the insane.

3. ___ A gathering of female reformers in New York declares that the ideas of the Declaration of Independence apply to both sexes.

4. ___ Great evangelical religious revival begins in western camp meetings.

5. ___ A visionary from New York state creates a controversial new religion.
F. Matching Cause and Effect

Match the historical cause in the left column with the proper effect in the right column by writing the correct letter on the blank line.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.  ___ The Second Great Awakening</td>
<td>a.  Created the first literature genuinely native to America</td>
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<td>2.  ___ The Mormon practice of polygamy</td>
<td>b.  Captured, in one long poem, the exuberant and optimistic spirit of popular American democracy</td>
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<td>3.  ___ Women abolitionists’ anger at being ignored by male reformers</td>
<td>c.  Caused most utopian experiments to decline or collapse in a few years</td>
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<td>4.  ___ The women’s rights movement</td>
<td>d.  Inspired writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller</td>
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<td>5.  ___ Unrealistic expectations and conflict within perfectionist communes</td>
<td>e.  Aroused hostility and scorn in most of the male press and pulpit</td>
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<td>6.  ___ The Knickerbocker and transcendentalist use of new American themes in their writing</td>
<td>f.  Made their works little understood in their lifetimes by generally optimistic Americans</td>
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<td>7.  ___ Henry David Thoreau’s theory of civil disobedience</td>
<td>g.  Aroused persecution from morally traditionalist Americans and delayed statehood for Utah</td>
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<td>8.  ___ Walt Whitman’s <em>Leaves of Grass</em></td>
<td>h.  Inspired a widespread spirit of evangelical reform in many areas of American life</td>
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<td>9.  ___ Herman Melville’s and Edgar Allan Poe’s concern with evil and suffering</td>
<td>i.  Led to expanding the crusade for equal rights to include women</td>
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<td>10. ___ The Transcendentalist movement</td>
<td>j.  Inspired later practitioners of nonviolence like Gandhi and King</td>
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G. Developing Historical Skills

Using Primary-Source Documents

Statements from historical contemporaries often reveal fundamental conflicts over values and demonstrate the shock that occurs when new ideas emerge. The quotations, in your textbook, from the London *Saturday Review* and from Walt Whitman illustrate such opposing views. Answer the following questions.

1. What is the London *Saturday Review*’s primary objection to Whitman’s poetry?

2. How does Whitman answer such criticisms?
3. How does Whitman’s statement reveal the values of individualism and democracy cherished by the emerging American culture?

4. What does the quotation from *Leaves of Grass* in the text indicate about Whitman’s typically American view of Europe?

**PART III: APPLYING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED**

1. What was the relationship between the evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening and the spread of American social reform movements and utopian ideas?

2. Why did the Second Great Awakening inspire so many new American religions and sects like Mormonism, Adventism, the Shakers, and others? In what ways were these religions an expression of general American ideals of democracy, individualism, and opportunity? In what ways were they dissenting from the general norms of nineteenth-century American religion and American life?

3. What were the greatest successes and failures of the many American reform movements of the early nineteenth century? Why did most of the reformers, and their reforms, address the ideals and goals of religious, middle-class Americans, while largely overlooking the growing problems of factory workers and cities?

4. What inspired the many utopian communities of the early nineteenth century? What issues or problems did various utopias attempt to address? Should the utopias be viewed as failures because most did not last long or attain the perfection they sought? Or should they be seen as natural, intense outgrowths of America’s own utopian ideals of liberty, equality, and democracy?

5. What were the motivations and goals of the first American feminists? Why did their movement spark such fierce opposition, including from some women themselves? Why was feminism generally less successful than abolitionism before the Civil War?

6. Compare the early American achievements in the sciences with those in the arts. Which were the most successful, and why?

7. What were the major concerns of America’s greatest imaginative writers in the early nineteenth century? How did most of those writers fundamentally reflect the deepest values of American culture? Would you agree that the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and others was an especially American philosophy?

8. Why were almost all the religious, social, and intellectual movements of the early nineteenth century so positive and optimistic about human nature and society? Was their goal of uplifting or even perfecting human character inspiring or naïve? Why did a few more critical writers like Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville dissent from this optimistic vision?

9. Which American writer or thinker would you select as the most important and insightful figure of the early nineteenth century: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or Herman Melville? Defend your choice by explaining that person’s impact on American culture and society.