



Chapter 15

An Era of Reform

1820-1860

What's Ahead

Section 1

The Spirit of Reform

Section 2

The Fight Against Slavery

Section 3

Struggle for Women's Rights

Section 4

American Literature and Art

In the mid-1800s, dedicated reformers sought to better American society. Many of these reformers acted out of political ideals. They wanted the nation to live up to its promise of "liberty and equality for all." Religious feeling also spurred many reformers.

Reform took many directions. Two of the most sweeping goals were equal rights for women and the abolition of slavery. Reformers often faced opposition, criticism, and even threats. Yet, they continued to struggle and slowly gained support. In this chapter, you will read about the individuals who contributed to this era of reform.

Why Study History?

Today, as in the 1800s, the reforming impulse is strong in the United States. Americans still work to correct many types of social problems. To learn more about one reform movement that has attracted many Americans, young and old, see the *Why Study History?* feature, "The Fight Against Alcohol Abuse Continues," in this chapter.

American Events

1826

James Fenimore Cooper publishes *The Last of the Mohicans*

1831

William Lloyd Garrison begins antislavery newspaper

1837

Horace Mann begins educational reforms in Massachusetts

World Events

1822 World Event

Liberia is established in Western Africa

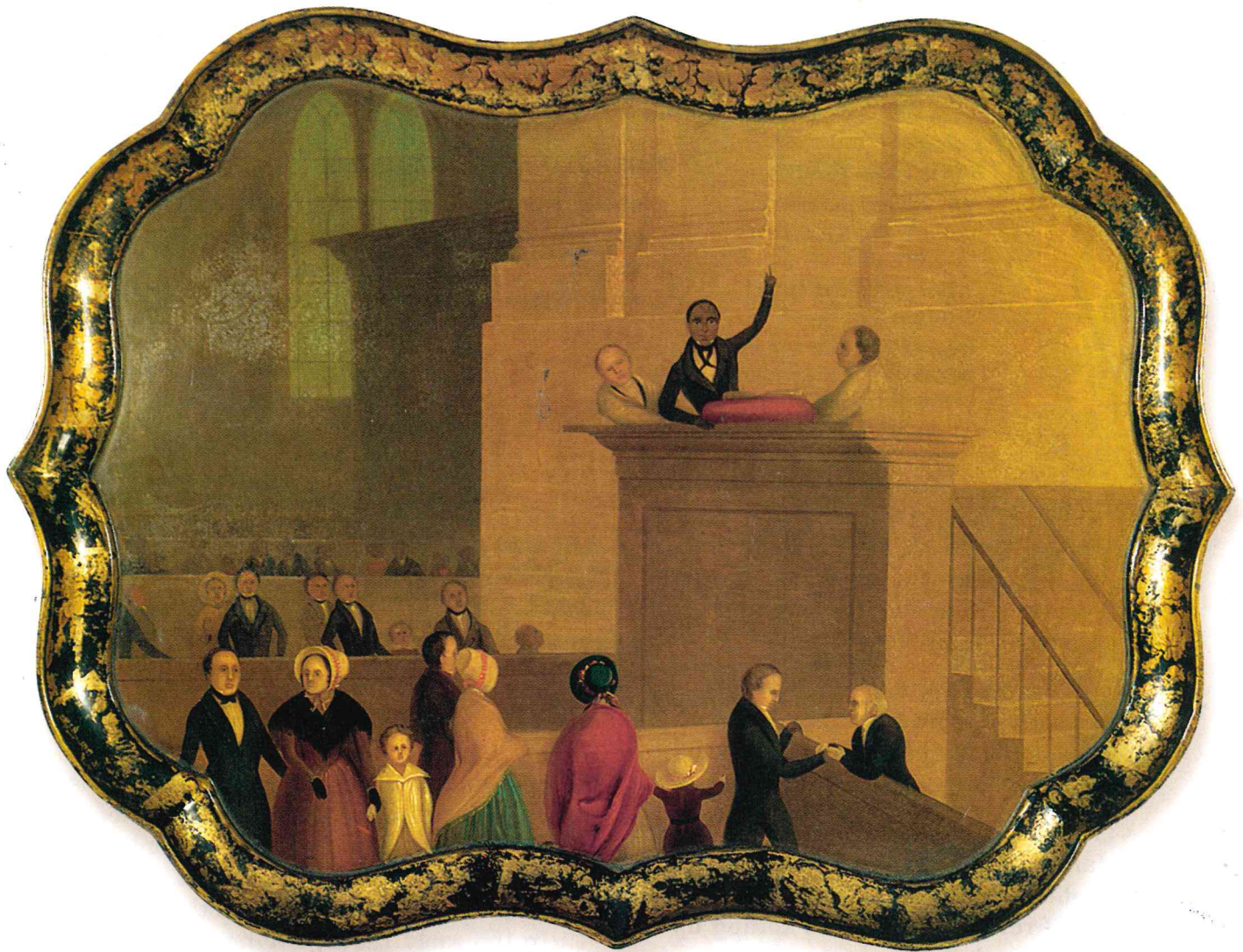


1837 World Event

First kindergarten opens in Germany



1820 1825 1830 1835 1840



Viewing HISTORY Spirit of Religion

This painted tray honors Lemuel Haynes, a famous African American preacher. From the nation's earliest years, religion was a powerful influence in the United States. In the early 1800s, a religious revival movement fed a new spirit of reform. ★ **Why would religious feelings lead some people to try to find ways to improve society?**

● 1848

Women's Rights Convention is held at Seneca Falls

● 1851

Maine bans the sale of alcohol

1840

1845

1850

1855

1860

▲ **1843 World Event**

Charles Dickens publishes *A Christmas Carol*



▲ **1848 World Event**

First women's college in Great Britain opens



The Spirit of Reform



Explore These Questions

- What were the political and religious roots of reform?
- What goals did social reformers pursue?
- How did Americans improve public education in the mid-1800s?

Define

- social reform
- predestination
- revival
- penal system
- temperance movement

Identify

- Second Great Awakening
- Charles Grandison Finney
- Dorothea Dix
- Horace Mann
- Prudence Crandall
- Thomas Gallaudet
- Samuel Gridley Howe
- Laura Bridgman

SETTING the Scene

In 1840, New England philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote about Americans' growing passion for improving society:

“We are all a little wild here with numberless projects for social reform. But what is man born for but to be a Reformer... a restorer of truth and good?”

Many idealistic Americans shared Emerson's beliefs. Between 1820 and 1860, a wide variety of reform movements sprang up to cure the nation's ills.

The Reforming Impulse

Social reform is an organized attempt to improve what is unjust or imperfect in society. The reforming impulse had both political and religious roots. The political roots went back to the ideals of liberty and equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence. The religious reform involved new teachings about salvation and the individual.

Political ideals

The election of Andrew Jackson in 1828 unleashed a wave of democratic change in the nation. More people could vote and take part in government than ever before.

Still, some critics argued that “Jacksonian democracy” was far from democratic. Many said that a true democracy would not

allow slavery. Others questioned why women had fewer rights than men. Reformers hoped that by changing such injustices, they might move the nation closer to its political ideals.

★ A new religious movement

Many early American Protestants believed that God decided in advance which people would gain salvation in heaven. This idea is known as **predestination**. Belief in predestination led many people to think that society could not be changed. In fact, they felt it was sinful to want to improve the world.

In the early 1800s, a dynamic religious movement, known as the **Second Great Awakening**, swept the nation. Its leaders stressed free will rather than predestination. They taught that individuals could choose by their own actions to save their own souls.

Throughout the nation, preachers held huge outdoor meetings. The goal of these **revivals** was to stir religious feelings. Revivals often lasted for days and attracted thousands of people. A witness described the excitement of a revival in Kentucky:

“The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by storm. I counted seven ministers all preaching at once... Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy.”

Deeply affected, converts vowed to reform their lives.

One of the leaders of the Second Great Awakening was a Presbyterian minister named **Charles Grandison Finney**. A powerful speaker, Finney wrote articles giving tips on effective preaching. He also taught that individual salvation was the first step toward improving society. He told followers that their goal was “the complete reformation of the whole world.” Through teachings like these, the Second Great Awakening encouraged the growing spirit of reform.

Helping the Mentally Ill

Some reformers turned their attention to what one minister called the “outsiders” in society—criminals and the mentally ill. One of the most vigorous of these reformers was a Boston schoolteacher named **Dorothea Dix**.

One day in 1841, Dix visited a jail for women near Boston. She was shocked to discover that some of the prisoners had committed no crime. These women were in jail because they were mentally ill.

The jailer locked the mentally ill prisoners in small, dark, unheated cells. The women were half frozen. Dix demanded to know why these women were treated so cruelly. The jailer replied that “lunatics” did not feel the cold.

That moment changed Dix’s life forever. During the next 18 months, Dix visited every jail, poorhouse, and hospital in Massachusetts. Her report shocked state legislators:

“I proceed, gentlemen, briefly to call your attention to the present state of Insane Persons confined . . . in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience.”

Eventually, legislators agreed to fund a new mental hospital. Dix then went on to inspect jails in states as far away as Louisiana and Illinois. In nearly every state, her reports persuaded legislatures to treat the mentally ill as patients, not criminals.

Reforming Prisons

Dix also joined others in trying to reform the **penal system**, or system of prisons.



Biography Dorothea Dix

Dorothea Dix was shocked by the sight of “harmless lunatics” shackled in dark cells. When she was told that “nothing” could be done, Dix replied, “I know no such word.” Largely through her efforts, more than 15 states established special hospitals for the care of the mentally ill by 1860. ★ How did Dix go about achieving reform?

Prisons were at the time fairly new to the United States. In colonial days, states generally imposed the death penalty for serious offenses. People who committed minor offenses received some form of physical punishment, such as a public whipping.

In the early 1800s, imprisonment gradually replaced physical punishment. In the early prisons, men, women, and children were often crammed together in cold, damp rooms. When food supplies were low, prisoners might go hungry—unless they had money to buy meals from jailers. Some jailers even made extra money selling rum to prisoners.

Five out of six people in northern jails were in jail because they could not pay their debts. While behind bars, debtors had no way to earn money to pay back their debts.

Why Study *History?*

Because the Fight Against Alcohol Abuse Continues

Historical Background

Americans in the early 1800s consumed more alcohol per person than at any other time in American history. Some American reformers grew concerned about the impact of alcohol on society. The temperance movement that began in the 1820s hoped to end alcohol abuse.

In the late 1800s, the temperance movement grew. Groups like the Women's Christian Temperance Union attracted many followers. Finally, in 1919, the states ratified the Eighteenth Amendment, prohibiting the production and sale of alcoholic drinks. However, law enforcement officials found it nearly impossible to enforce Prohibition. It was repealed in 1933 by the Twenty-first Amendment.

Connections to Today

Reformers now focus on the problems of underage and excessive drinking. Today, the legal drinking age in every state is 21 years. A variety of organizations and programs exist to help people who suffer from alcoholism. Still, as many as 40 million Americans are problem drinkers—people whose drinking causes harm to themselves or their family and friends.

One of the most destructive forms of alcohol abuse is drinking and driving. In the early 1990s, more than 25,000 Americans died each year in accidents involving drunk drivers. Young people were often the victims. In fact, alcohol-related accidents were the number-one killer of teenagers.



Students organize to warn about the dangers of alcohol.

Connections to You

If you or someone you know has a problem with alcohol, there are several things you can do. You can seek support from your parents or other family members. You can get information from school counselors or a family physician. Also, your school may participate in the Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD) program. Students who belong to SADD promise to call their parents if they cannot get a safe ride with a sober driver.

- 1. Comprehension** Name and describe the two constitutional amendments related to the use of alcohol in the United States.
- 2. Critical Thinking** Why do you think some people make the irresponsible decision to drink and drive?

★Activity **Making a Poster** Construct a poster that warns people about the dangers of underage drinking, excessive drinking, or drinking and driving.

As a result, many debtors remained in prison for years.

Dorothea Dix and others called for changes in the penal system. Some states built prisons with only one or two inmates to a cell. Cruel punishments were banned, and people convicted of minor crimes received shorter sentences. Slowly, states stopped treating debtors as criminals.

* Battling “Demon Rum”

Alcohol abuse was widespread in the early 1800s. At political rallies, weddings, and funerals, men, women, and sometimes even children drank heavily. Men could buy whiskey in candy stores or barber shops as easily as at taverns.

During the late 1820s, reformers began the **temperance movement**, a campaign against alcohol abuse. Women often took a leading role in the temperance movement. They knew that “demon rum” could lead to wife beating, child abuse, and the breakup of families.

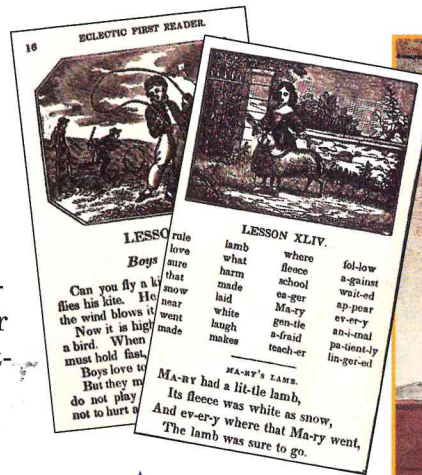
Some temperance groups urged people to drink less. Others sought to wipe out all drinking of alcohol. They won a major victory in the 1850s, when Maine banned the sale of alcohol. Eight other states passed “Maine laws.” Although most states later repealed the laws, temperance crusaders pressed on. They gained new strength in the late 1800s.

Improving Education

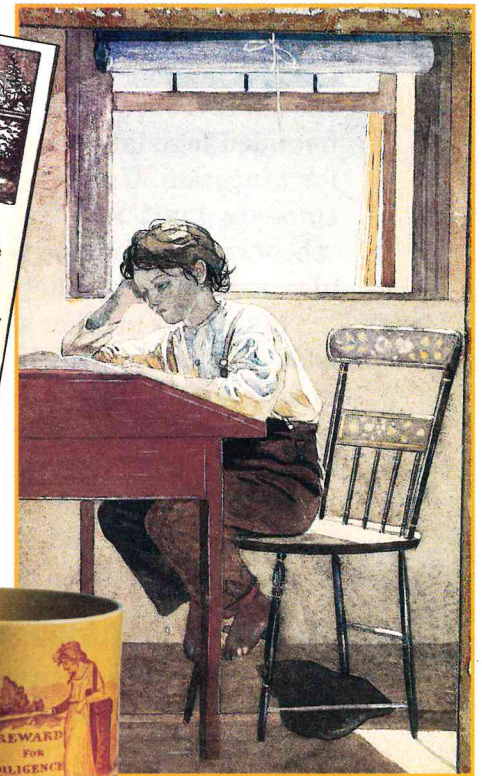
In 1816, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be.”

\$ Connections With Economics

The temperance movement got a lot of support from factory owners. They thought workers would be more productive if they did not drink. Today, many businesses pay for programs to combat alcohol and drug abuse among their employees. In what ways do you think drug or alcohol abuse can hurt the economy?



Pages from McGuffey's First Eclectic Reader



← Mug to reward good performance



Viewing HISTORY A Better Education

The painting *Homework* by Winslow Homer shows an elementary school student of the mid-1800s. This boy may be reading a lesson from one of William McGuffey's Eclectic Readers. First published in 1836, McGuffey's popular textbooks used rhymes and stories to teach spelling, grammar, and good behavior. ★ **What methods are used today to teach children to read?**

He knew that a republic needed educated citizens. As more men won the right to vote, reformers acted to improve education.

Before the 1820s, few American children attended school. Public schools were rare. Those that did exist were usually old and run-down. Teachers were poorly trained and ill paid. Students of all ages crowded together in a single room.

Growth of public schools

New York State took the lead in improving public education. In the 1820s, the state ordered every town to build a grade school. Before long, other northern states required towns to support public schools.

In Massachusetts, **Horace Mann** led the fight for better schools. Mann became head of the state board of education in 1837. He hounded legislators to provide more money for education. Under his leadership, Massachusetts built new schools, extended the school year, and raised teacher pay. The state also opened three colleges to train teachers.

Reformers in other states urged their legislatures to follow the lead of Massachusetts and New York. By the 1850s, most northern states had set up free tax-supported elementary schools. Schools in the South improved more slowly. In both the North and South, schooling usually ended in the eighth grade. There were few public high schools. *stop*

Education for African Americans

In most areas, African Americans had little chance to attend school. A few cities, like Boston and New York, set up separate schools for black students. However, these schools received less money than schools for white students did.

Some attempts to educate African Americans met with great hostility. In the 1830s, **Prudence Crandall**, a Connecticut Quaker,

began a school for African American girls. The community was outraged. Crandall continued to teach even when rocks crashed through the classroom window. She was jailed three times. Finally, a band of men broke in one night and destroyed the school.

Despite such obstacles, some free African Americans attended private colleges such as Harvard, Dartmouth, and Oberlin. In the 1850s, several colleges for African Americans opened in the North. The first was Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania.

Meeting special needs

Some reformers took steps to improve education for people with disabilities. In 1817, **Thomas Gallaudet** (gal uh DEHT) set up a school for the deaf in Hartford, Connecticut.

A few years later, **Samuel Gridley Howe** became director of the first American school for blind students. Howe created a system of raised letters that allowed blind students to read with their fingers. One of Howe's pupils, **Laura Bridgman**, was the first deaf and blind student to receive a formal education. She later assisted Howe in teaching other blind students.

★ Section 1 Review ★

Recall

1. **Identify** (a) Second Great Awakening, (b) Charles Grandison Finney, (c) Dorothea Dix, (d) Horace Mann, (e) Prudence Crandall, (f) Thomas Gallaudet, (g) Samuel Gridley Howe, (h) Laura Bridgman.
2. **Define** (a) social reform, (b) predestination, (c) revival, (d) penal system, (e) temperance movement.

Comprehension

3. Describe two reasons the reforming spirit grew in the mid-1800s.

4. What were the goals of (a) prison reformers, and (b) leaders of the temperance movement?
5. What improvements were made in public education after the 1820s?

Critical Thinking and Writing

6. **Linking Past and Present** Do churches and religious leaders still take an active role in promoting social reform today? Give examples.
7. **Understanding Causes and Effects** How would lack of educational opportunities for African Americans contribute to prejudice against them?



Activity Acting a Scene The year is 1843. You are a legislator. You are unwilling to raise taxes to improve conditions for prisoners while tax money is needed to improve conditions for law-abiding citizens. With a partner, act out a scene between you and Dorothea Dix. For each argument for prison reform given by Dix, present an opposing argument.