

AMERICAN CULTURE COMES OF AGE

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

The Excitement of Progress
Technological Change and Economic
Development

THE ROLE OF REFORMERS

American Women
Fighting Ills, Woes, and Evils
Communitarianism
Progress in Education

FAITH AND INTELLECT

Religion and the People
Mormons
The Unitarian Influence
Romanticism Revisited

THE GOLDEN AGE OF LITERATURE

Emerson and Transcendentalism
Henry David Thoreau
The Boston Brahmins
Nathaniel Hawthorne
Herman Melville
James Fenimore Cooper
Southern Romanticism
Edgar Allan Poe

JOURNALISM AND POPULAR CULTURE



Writing for the People
Magazines and Books for Women
Sports, Humor, and Realism

ARTS, SCIENCES, AND POPULAR TASTE

The “Higher Culture”
Popular Music and Drama
Sculpture, Architecture, Painting

SLAVERY AND DEMOCRACY

Garrison and Abolition
The Literary Antecedents to Civil War
Alexis de Tocqueville’s America

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

THE EXCITEMENT OF PROGRESS

In the half-century preceding 1830, the United States had made great progress in establishing itself as a viable nation. The victory at Yorktown, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Louisiana Purchase, the Battle of New Orleans, the Missouri Compromise, and the Monroe Doctrine were landmarks passed within the memory of many citizens living in 1830. The increase in the population, the growth of the national domain, and the development of cities and industries were only a few of the reasons for Americans' sense of gratification

The wonder was that one could see such substantial cultural growth in so short a time. At the close of the Jacksonian Era, only about six decades had elapsed since the eventful months of ratification of the Constitution. Yet distinctive intellectual, artistic, and scientific progress had been made, especially during the most recent 20 years. Authors, artists, and scientists already were giving eloquent and sustained proof of the richness and variety of American life and thought. Ordinary Americans were participating. They and their descendants reaped the benefits.

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Such heady developments should not obscure the fact that the majority of Americans lived simple lives. In the decades before the Civil War, most of them still were farmers and most farms still were small. Subtly or abruptly, however, what happened to them from dawn to dusk was changing. Since the arrival of Europeans in the New World, the amount of physical labor that had been required to convert unimproved land to cultivated fields had limited agricultural productivity. The agriculturalists of the eastern United States had spent countless hours swinging axes against trees, removing stumps, and digging rocks out of their fields. As Americans opened land further west, rainfall declined, but so did the number of trees; and much of the soil further west was less rocky than that in the East, especially New England. In 1813, Richard B. Chenoweth developed a cast iron plow made in three separate pieces that made possible the replacement of broken parts. The plow was used with success in the East, but the heavy western soils would stick to the cast-iron plow that then proved too brittle to break the ground of the western prairies. In

1837, John Deere patented a steel plow that provided the solution to breaking the western land.

In 1834, Cyrus McCormick patented the mechanical reaper, which greatly reduced the labor involved in harvesting grain. Prior to McCormick's invention, farmers still cut grain by hand, swinging cradles that cut swathes through the grain. The cut grain then was gathered in sheaves and hauled away for threshing. The mechanization of this process through use of McCormick's reaper greatly increased agricultural production. With the coming of the cast-iron plow, the steel plow, and the mechanical reaper, more food and fiber could be produced on the same amount of land. This led many farmers to acquire and cultivate more soil. It also meant that increasing numbers of them, no longer agriculturally essential, would be free to move to cities where—mainly in the Northeast—mills and factories were springing up.

No invention wrought more changes in everyday living than the steam engine. Machines found their way into diverse settings, most importantly the new factories that were located in towns and small cities, thereby transforming once-rural people into urbanized workers with year-around income. Steam-propelled riverboats, with their cheap and smooth transportation, speeded the expansion of river cities like Cincinnati and St. Louis. Railways, from the 1830s and 1840s on, were to have a similar impact on inland communities. One of the most amazing changes, barely beginning in this period, was the coming together of ship and rail traffic, notably at a spot where a small village, Chicago, was incorporated in 1837.

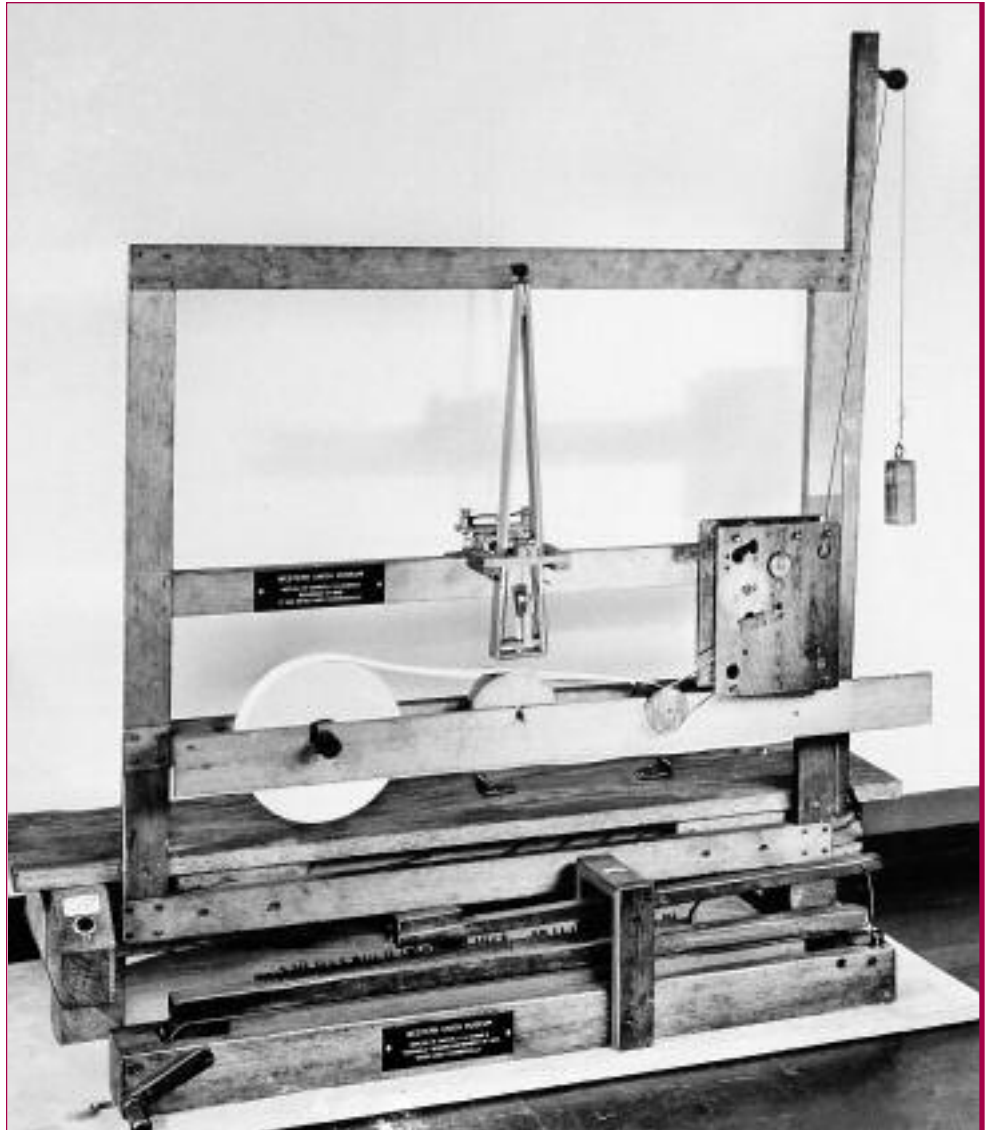
The first steam locomotive (a European invention) built in America was that of Peter Cooper in 1830. By 1850, 9,000 miles of rail had been laid, most of it on the Eastern seaboard. By 1860, 30,000 miles of rail had been laid, more miles of track than that built by the rest of the world combined. Railroads had tremendous spin-offs into the American economy at large. Trains traveling at 20 miles per hour allowed farmers in far-flung locations to get their produce to market before it spoiled. The railroads also allowed a real agricultural specialization as different areas of the country could import agricultural products rather than grow their own. Railroads stimulated movement west and the development of frontier towns as water stops for the trains. Railroads also stimulated the production of iron, steel, coal, and timber to meet the needs of the trains. They also stimulated the telegraph industry as telegraph lines were built alongside railroad tracks so that the railroad men could signal by telegraph from any location whether or not there were problems with tracks or anything else along the way.

The railroads were essentially financed by federal land grants to private railroad corporations. The federal government granted to the railroads up to six square miles of land for every mile of track laid by the railroad corporation. The railroads then sold their land to settlers for profits, thus both financing the railroad operation and spurring settlement of the American West. By 1860, Congress had granted to the railroads 20 million acres of federal land, thus providing great wealth to the railroads that would last for decades.

The railroads also stimulated the American banking system since the building of the railroads required large amounts of capital. The number of state chartered banks in the United States at the close of the War of 1812 was less than 100, but by 1830, there were over 300. Banks stimulated the economy by making loans to railroads, manufacturers, and merchants, thus expanding the money supply and enabling the expansion of America's rail, manufacturing, and commerce.

Concurrently, the ever-increasing use of the cotton gin (invented by Eli Whitney in 1793 for separating the cotton fiber from the seed) combined with the stepped-up demands for cotton to influence the Southerners' way of life. Prior to Whitney's cotton gin, farmers tediously plucked cotton fibers from each cottonseed by hand. Because of the gin, the southern climate, the nature of the land, and the presence of cheap slave labor, the South was in an economic position to supply what expanding American and international markets needed. If there had been no cotton gin, slavery might have been far less profitable. Thus it is clear that the gin was a potent factor, affecting both the status of slavery and the proslavery thinking of many Southerners. By the time of the Civil War, a full 20 percent of the British workforce was employed in the textile industry, most of which was driven by cotton from the American south. In the words of British historian Lord Macaulay, "What Peter the Great did to make Russia dominant, Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin has more than equaled in relation to the power and progress of the United States."

Other scientific thought and technological action had similar economic and social impacts. Samuel F. B. Morse, an admirable portrait painter, invented the telegraph and sent his first message in 1844. For the first time in human history, communication over long distances became instantaneous. Charles Goodyear discovered the process known as the vulcanization of rubber, which made rubber much more useful by preventing it from sticking and melting in hot weather. Goodyear's process made possible the manufacture of a wide array of rubber products, most notably the



The invention of the telegraph (a replica of the first telegraph is shown here) enabled instantaneous communication over long distances for the first time in human history.

overshoe. From the mind and skill of Samuel Colt came the first practical firearm with a revolving chamber, and Elias Howe is given credit for the first sewing machine. Indeed, the sewing machine reminds us that during this period there were countless other inventions of a more humble nature that changed the nature of housework, such as the first appearance of the cast iron stove for cooking—as opposed to cooking over an open hearth.

During this period, too, medical and dental pioneers in Georgia and New England helped ease the suffering of future millions by applying anesthesia to surgery. In 1842, Crawford Long was the first to administer ether in surgery, thus reducing both pain and the risk of patients going into shock during surgery. William Beaumont, an

American army doctor on the Michigan frontier, was the first student of gastric digestion in a living patient; and Oliver Wendell Holmes, the Massachusetts poet-physician, saved the lives of countless mothers and babies by showing that antiseptics could prevent puerperal (“child-bed”) fever.

Because of the technological changes, the growth of industrial production, and improved transportation, more and more goods that had previously been produced at home began to be commercially available—goods such as soap, textiles, and men’s clothing. This, in turn, meant that the women who had traditionally produced them could now fill their days with other activities. They had more time to read, for example, and more time for needlework of an aesthetic nature. They also began to be able to join a variety of new organizations, in some cases through their churches and in others, organizations of an explicitly reformist nature.

THE ROLE OF REFORMERS

AMERICAN WOMEN

By twenty-first-century standards white women received very inequitable treatment. Most of them spent their lives at hard, repetitious labor in frontier cabins, isolated farm houses, or urban dwellings, though their work was being somewhat lightened by the new goods. Some left farms and villages to tend machines in such new “mill towns” as Lowell and Lawrence, Massachusetts, where textile mills provided the primary employment in the towns. Newly arrived immigrant girls took menial jobs—often as domestic servants—in Atlantic Seaboard cities and interior communities.

Certain legal restrictions on women carried over from earlier periods into the Jacksonian Era and down toward modern times. Women still could not vote. Wives’ property rights were circumscribed at best. Often laws prevented wives from controlling their own inheritances. With rare exceptions, women, no matter how talented or ambitious, found themselves excluded from most professions. Yet in these years, women began to lay the groundwork for considerable progress.

The 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s marked the start of major reforms, many of them spearheaded by women. Fundamental to these efforts were the improved education opportunities being extended to girls in hundreds of private female academies that emerged all over the United States. Beginning in the 1830s, states began to open

teacher-training academies known as “normal schools,” which were exclusively for female students. Many of the noteworthy reformers—women’s rights advocate Elizabeth Cady Stanton being the prime example—had attended one of the new academies.

Oberlin College in Ohio began admitting white women and black men in 1851 and graduated its first women in 1855. No other colleges admitted women until after the Civil War, but several private “female seminaries” were established to provide college-equivalent education to women. Emma Willard, who founded Troy Seminary in New York in 1821, and Mary Lyon, who founded Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts in 1837, were the two most well-known pioneer educators. Mention should also be made of Catherine Beecher, sister of the novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe, who founded the Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who taught at the Hartford Seminary, argued that women are better teachers than men. In the words of Stowe, “If men have more knowledge, they have less talent at communicating it. Nor have they the patience, the long-suffering, and gentleness necessary to superintend the formation of character.”

Women also became involved in the abolitionist movement. Sarah and Angelina Grimké, of a prominent South Carolina family, were among the many who crusaded in the North for the abolition of slavery, thereby challenging the taboo against respectable women speaking in public. The Grimkes were among the first, but they would be followed by many other courageous women, white and black alike. Dorothea Dix was another earnest friend of the unfortunates. (See *Dorothea Lynde Dix: Humanitarian*.) Many women were widely known as writers and editors. It was an augury of the future when Elizabeth Blackwell entered medical school in the 1840s, becoming the first woman to receive an M.D. degree in 1849.

Above all, these years were distinguished by the first appearance of a women’s suffrage movement, launched at a gathering in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The two women who called the meeting, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, had first met at an anti-slavery convention in London in 1840. There they had been denied the right of full participation on account of their gender. This slight had rankled the women. When they met again in the upstate New York town where Stanton lived with her husband and four children, they decided to call a meeting for a week hence—the first national women’s rights convention in the United States—and, thereby, inaugurated what would become a revolution in gender mores. Stanton drew up a document, modeled on the Declaration of Independence, to present to the approximately 300 people who attended the meeting. In this “Declaration



Lucretia Mott

of Sentiments” she announced “All men and women are created equal” and cited 18 specific injuries that women suffered at the hands of men (as Jefferson had adduced evidence against George III), including the denial of access to the professions and to higher education. Stanton stated, “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” Stanton added that

through the doctrine of male supremacy men had “endeavored in every way that could to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.” Stanton demanded that women be granted all the rights and privileges that men have as United States citizens, including—most radical of all—the vote, an act which was then seen as belonging entirely to “the male sphere.” The great black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, was in attendance; and he spoke on behalf of woman suffrage, which the delegates voted to support after a lively debate. It would be decades before suffrage was attained, but many of the other items on the list, such as a married woman’s right to control her own property, began to be redressed in that era. From 1848 forward, a network of women’s rights advocates emerged. Over 20 other women’s rights conventions would be assembled before the Civil War, each also calling for the franchise. It was not yet a social movement, and its progress would be interrupted by the Civil War; but it was the beginning of one.

FIGHTING ILLS, WOES, AND EVILS

The zeal of reformers, both men and women, found many targets in the very nation where so many opportunities for improvement

and advancement beckoned. The number of people arriving from Europe, particularly from the 1840s on, was larger than America could neatly accommodate. Many immigrants, poor and uneducated, crowded into port cities where they received low wages for working long hours and lived in squalor in what later came to be known as slums.

Attempts to cope with such problems in 1824–1848 proved rudimentary and, on the whole, unsuccessful. Most of the effort to improve the lot of urban workers came from the relatively weak labor unions, which will be analyzed in greater detail in Chapter 11. The unions, however, consisted mainly of skilled artisans. They were interested principally in bettering their own lot, not that of the unskilled newcomers. In general, the chief gain for both groups stemmed from workers' demands for free public schools, which were established in New York in 1832 and in Philadelphia two years later.

Both urban and rural Americans ate too much fat meat, too many fried foods, and too few fruits and vegetables. Reformers like Sylvester Graham, for whom Graham bread and Graham crackers were named, did their best to promote dietary change. Graham, in the 1830s, argued that the keys to better health could be found through proper diet, exercise, and hygiene. Graham also argued, however, that celibacy was essential to proper health and that women should have intercourse only for procreation. A medical doctor, and associate of Grahams, added that women ought not to be educated because the blood needed for the women and procreation would be diverted to the head, thus breeding "puny men." As for men, Graham's associate argued that semen was not to be expelled, but should be saved for reproductive purposes and should not be used for pleasure either in masturbation or in intercourse. Such use of semen, the doctor argued, would lead to "enervation, disease, insanity, and death." Furthermore, the doctor argued that expenditure of sperm would mean a loss of needed energy from the economy and that such a drain of energy from business to sex was wasteful and a contributor to social disorder.

While Graham was preaching clean living and celibacy, the heavy drinking in America, by children and teenagers as well as adults, had been appalling (by modern standards) ever since colonial times. In the words of one historian, "A house could not be raised, a field of wheat cut down, nor could there be a log-rolling, husking, quilting, a wedding, or a funeral, without alcohol." The evil of what we now call *alcoholism* and the reformers' determination to reduce or exterminate it are set forth in Chapter 12. Many men, women, and children "took the pledge" that they would drink no more alcoholic beverages. Then

PEOPLE THAT MADE A DIFFERENCE

Dorothea Lynde Dix: Humanitarian

by James M. McPherson



Dorothea Lynde Dix

The remarkable career of Dorothea Lynda Dix illustrates several important themes in early and mid-nineteenth century America: the upwelling of humanitarian reform; the changing role of women; the development of modern institutions for deviant members of society; the growth of more humane and scientific concepts of “insanity.” She is known primarily as a pioneer in the field of mental health. Although her achievements were built on the foundation of earlier reforms, her single-minded dedication to improving conditions for people suffering from mental illness or retardation was the most important agency of progress in this field.

Dorothea Dix was born on April 4, 1802, in the frontier village of Hampden, Maine (then part of Massachusetts). From her Puritan forebears she gained an intense commitment to education, duty, hard work, and

self-discipline. But these Protestant Ethic values seem to have skipped her improvident, ne’er-do-well father, from whose chaotic household Dorothea escaped at the age of twelve to live in Boston with her stern but supportive grandmother, the widow of a successful physician and businessman.

At the age of nineteen, Dorothea opened a grammar school for girls in Boston, the type of school then known as a “dame school.” For the next twenty years she alternated between teaching and periods of recovery from incipient tuberculosis. Much influenced by the great Unitarian clergyman, William Ellery Channing, Dorothea became a Unitarian and published several undistinguished books of a devotional and poetic nature.

Approaching her fortieth year, Dix seemed headed for a typically genteel but sterile existence as a New England spinster. But an incident in March 1841 changed her life and launched her career as a reformer. Visiting an East Cambridge jail to teach a Sunday school class for women inmates, she found female “lunatics” freezing in filthy, unheated cells. Shocked by such cruelty, she publicized the conditions and won public support for improving them.

From this experience, Dix went on to make an eighteen-month study of jails, almshouses, and other public institutions in Massachusetts. In 1843 she presented to the legislature a hair-raising report of “helpless, forgotten, insane and idiotic men and women” confined “in cages, closets, cellars, stalls,

pens: Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience!" Five years later, after traveling 30,000 miles to make similar investigations in more than a dozen states, she presented a petition to Congress: "I have myself seen *more than nine thousand idiots, epileptics, and insane in these United States, destitute of appropriate care and protection* ... bound with galling chains, bowed beneath fetters and heavy iron balls attached to drag chains, lacerated with ropes, scourged with rods, and terrified beneath storms of profane execrations and cruel blows."

In truth, the treatment of the mentally ill was not this bad everywhere. There had been much progress beyond the medieval practice of treating insanity as a form of possession by demons, to be cured or punished by exorcism or scourging. The Quakers, in particular, had in the eighteenth century influenced the establishment of "lunatic asylums" where the mentally ill received humane treatment. About a dozen such asylums existed in the United States at the time Dix began her crusade.

These hospitals reached only a small percentage of the mentally ill. Most persons believed to be insane were either locked up at home by embarrassed relatives or incarcerated as lunatic paupers in jails and poorhouses, where conditions were often as bad as Dix portrayed them.

Dix's tireless, selfless work in state after state, all the more heroic because of personal shyness and chronic ill health, paid off with extraordinary victories. Her first success was the enlargement of the state insane asylum at Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1843. From there she went on to persuade the New Jersey legislature in 1845 to establish the state's first mental hospital, which Dix called "my firstborn child."

During the next thirty years she was directly responsible for the founding of 32 mental hospitals at home and abroad, and indirectly responsible for the establishment of many more. From 1854 to 1856 she visited several European countries and inspired the same kinds of reforms in the care and treatment of the insane there as she had done in the United States. Wherever Dix went, a network of voluntary associations was created to aid her cause and sustain her initiatives after she moved on. By 1880, when she retired from active work, the dozen American mental hospitals of 1840 had increased tenfold to 123.

Dix's observations of jails and penitentiaries led her into the cause of prison reform, a subject on which she produced influential writings. She also sympathized with other reform movements, especially the movements for temperance, women's rights, and education, but she focused her active efforts on the plight of the mentally ill, except during the Civil War when she served as Superintendent of Female Nurses for the Union army.

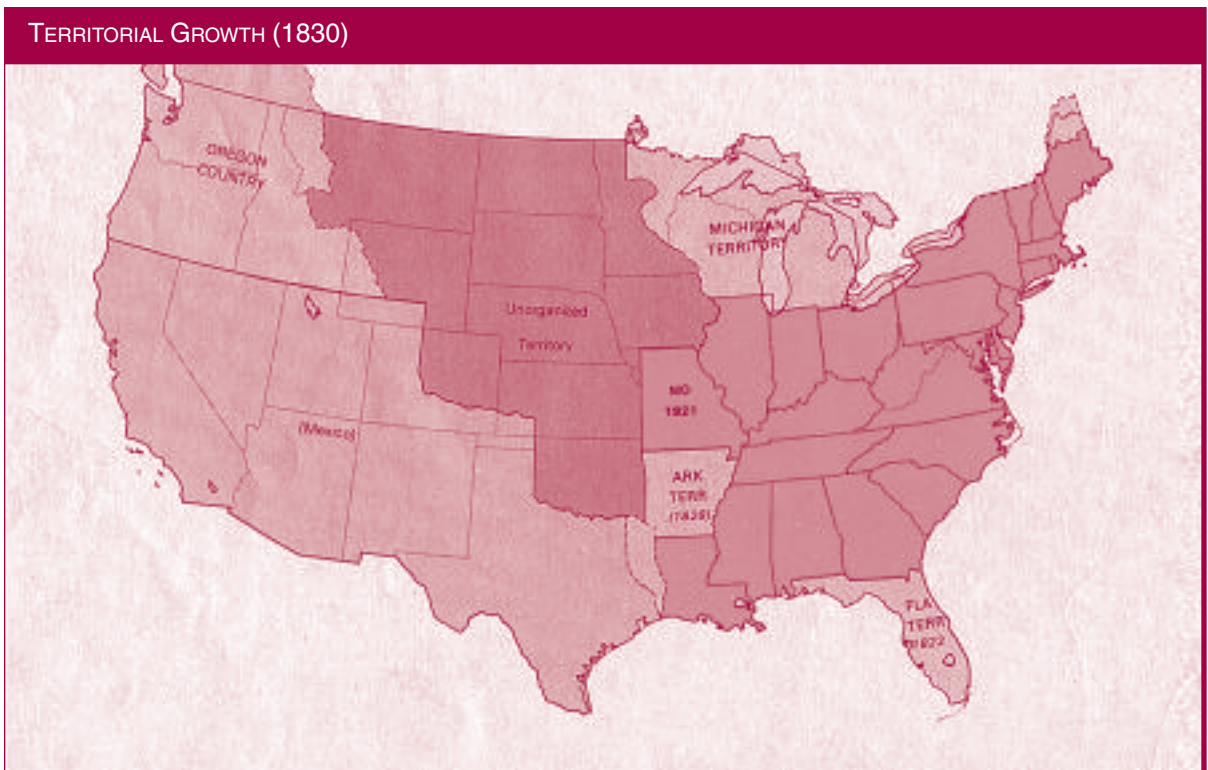
Single-minded in her ideas of how things should be done and no longer shy about expressing herself, Dix sometimes clashed with army surgeons and intimidated inefficient nurses, who called her "Dragon Dix"; but she also won the commendation of the secretary of war for her services. Dix's wartime activities were part of a broader development in which nursing was evolving from a menial occupation into a genuine profession. This in turn opened up new career opportunities for women.

After the war Dix resumed her work for better institutional treatment of the insane. Although she favored therapeutic rather than merely custodial care, she contributed little directly to the development of psychiatry or to the psychology of mental illness. However, her institutional achievements did create a framework for future advances in psychiatry. In 1881, old and infirm, she retired to live with her "firstborn child," the Trenton State Mental Hospital, where she died on July 18, 1887.

as now, of course, there was cynicism as to how well such pledges would be kept, but vast improvement in drinking habits did occur in the Jacksonian period—far more than with respect to eating.

Reformers similarly progressed substantially in many other areas. One was the struggle to eliminate imprisonment for debt. In addition, headway was made in the movement to end the traditional flogging of wayward sailors. The horrors of war anywhere and everywhere led Elihu Burritt, the learned blacksmith of Connecticut, to champion the cause of pacifism. Thomas H. Gallaudet labored ably on behalf of the deaf. Samuel G. Howe, with equal dedication, educated the deaf and the blind. Horace Mann was an effective crusader for public education in Massachusetts. As a member of the Massachusetts legislature in the 1830s, Mann persuaded the legislature to provide support for the schools in the form of taxation and to establish a state board of education, of which he became the head. Mann argued that private property was actually held in trust for the good of the community and, therefore, “is pledged for the education of all its youth up to such a point as will save them from poverty and vice, and prepare them for the adequate performance of their social and civil duties.” Mann’s framing of the argument for public education as a means to teach morality, discipline, and order to potential ruffians and revolutionaries converted the middle and upper classes to support the funding of education with tax money. As a consequence, the public schools of the nineteenth century taught not only math, English, and science, but also the Protestant values of industry, punctuality, sobriety, and frugality stressed in *McGuffey’s Eclectic Readers* (1836). Millions of American children, therefore, learned to read while also learning of the terrible consequences of sloth, drunkenness, or wastefulness, as taught in McGuffey’s parables. Critical thinking, unfortunately, was largely ignored.

That so much humanitarian reform was taking place in mid-nineteenth century owed much to religious changes, to be discussed more fully later in the chapter. In brief, the older emphasis on original sin and human depravity was giving way to a more optimistic set of beliefs in human possibility, doctrines appearing in many sectors of American Protestantism. The theory and practice of democracy, when carried to their logical conclusions, likewise led humanitarians to devote days, years, and even lifetimes to helping unfortunates. Numerous reformers were motivated also by the desire to impose order on the fast-changing society of which they were a part. Finally, we should consider the influence of the Romantic Movement, with its emphasis on the individual’s insights, intuitions, and personal responsibilities.



Just as not everyone was politically active, the number of steadfast participants in some of these reforms was small; but enough Americans believed in human perfectibility to make reform a key characteristic of this period.

COMMUNITARIANISM

For some idealists, devotion to reforms *within* established society could not suffice. A small minority of American men and women looked upon the current social order, in which the majority toiled and suffered so many privations and indignities, as so utterly harsh and materialistic that it should be forsaken in favor of communitarianism. The communitarians' idea was for a limited number of people to live together in a little community, wholly or mainly self-sufficient and more or less apart from the general society surrounding it.

These communities could be either religious or secular. Among the Christian communitarians were the Shakers, who founded settlements in New England, New York, Kentucky, and elsewhere, and who believed in separation from the cruel and wicked world, in simplicity of language, and in celibacy. Religious communities were sponsored also by the Mormons and by several Adventist sects.

Secular communities resembled the Christian communities in that the purpose was to join people together so as to face collectively the challenge of the frontier or to confront collectively the trends toward industrialization. Among the secular experiments were New Harmony in Indiana, the North American Phalanx in New Jersey, and Fruitlands in Massachusetts. A number of transcendentalists inaugurated a Massachusetts community named Brook Farm, widely known because of its gifted residents.

One of the longest-lived communities was Oneida, founded in upstate New York by the sexual radical John Humphrey Noyes. Deeply religious, Noyes also believed in a system of “complex marriage,” which was a rejection of monogamy. Noyes argued that the root of evil was in marriage and in “men’s conviction that women are their private property.” Noyes also argued that when the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven, there would be no marriage on earth because Jesus stated that in heaven people do not marry. In order to reproduce this vision of heaven on earth, Noyes advocated complete sharing in family relationships as a step toward what he called “perfect cooperation.” That being the case, Noyes and his 51 followers shared everything, both economic and sexual. Child rearing was the responsibility of the entire community, and there was no differentiation of gender roles in work. All private property was relinquished to the community.

In Noyes’ complex marriage, every “saved” man was married to every “saved” woman. All who were “saved” were considered to be without sin. Although Noyes preached complete sharing of everything, he also decreed that only certain “spiritually advanced” males were allowed to have sex and father children. Noyes also taught that women could become “spiritually advanced” through sex with “spiritually advanced” males. Noyes considered himself to be “first husband,” helping many women to “spiritual advancement.” One Oneida community woman, Mary Cragin, appears to have been one of Noyes’ favorite partners, and she describes her sexual experiences with Noyes as spiritual experiences as well. In the words of Cragin, “In view of God’s goodness to me and of his desire that I should let him fill me with himself, I yield and offer myself, to be penetrated by his spirit, and desire that love and gratitude may inspire my heart so that I shall sympathize with his pleasure in the thing, before my personal pleasure begins, knowing that it will increase my capability for happiness.”

Noyes also argued that sex should be a public act that should be performed in public to the pleasure of all, much like music or dancing. Noyes even argued that watching such public sex would give pleasure

to “older people who have nothing to do in the matter.” In addition to these oddities, to his credit, Noyes also tried a number of expedients to give women more freedom, such as communal nurseries. Oneida lasted from 1848 to 1879, when Noyes fled to Canada to avoid prosecution for adultery. After that, his followers abandoned complex marriage and set up an animal trap, silverware, and kitchenware manufacturing enterprise that survived into the twenty-first century.

The Oneida community was consistent with other religious and secular communitarianism in that it usually shared such features as vegetarianism, prohibition of alcoholic beverages, equitable division of labor (though not necessarily in terms of gender), and community ownership and control of property. Many secular communities had their philosophical bases in the social contract theories of the eighteenth century.

Most secular experiments did not last long, perhaps owing to an absence of explicitly Christian zeal that, in the case of the Mormons and the Shakers, proved a reliable source of community strength. In all, only a few thousand people committed themselves to communitarianism. Those communities, however, have received much attention then and since because they embodied visionary goals of social justice, perhaps inspired by the French theorist Charles Fourier or, in the case of New Harmony, by the ideas of the British thinker, Robert Owen.

PROGRESS IN EDUCATION

Among the most striking reforms of the Jacksonian period were those in the field of education. If some citizens objected to paying for the instruction of other people’s children, most of them—at least in the Northeast—endorsed the drive for public schools below the college level. The impetus came from sources as contrasting as Harvard graduates and New York union members. Parents wanted sons and daughters to have the educational exposure they themselves had lacked. More and more children grew familiar with Noah Webster’s excellent grammar and speller. As young Americans read and memorized the offerings of William Holmes McGuffey, some of the finest literature of the ages became part of their consciousness.

What we now take for granted as public elementary and high schools did not spread evenly across the face of the land. Primary and secondary education in rural regions was handicapped by the long distances separating farm families, with the resultant problem of assembling students under one roof. As there were more situations of this sort in the South and West than in the Northeast, it was

Southern and Western girls and boys living outside towns and cities who were most frequently deprived of the advantages of public education. Wealthy parents tried to compensate by sending their children to private academies or by hiring tutors for them, but this practice was of no help to any but the well-to-do.

In higher education, prestige continued to be identified with Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. The University of Virginia admitted its first students in 1825. Generally, however, small denominational colleges were more typical, making Latin, Greek, and mathematics available in out-of-the-way places. Such institutions received marginal support from their respective churches.

There were few medical schools, and fewer still in engineering. Most young lawyers got their training in offices of established attorneys. Nevertheless, sons of farm and village families had access to opportunities denied their fathers—even though few state universities thrived. The era also provided a beginning for the higher education of women when coeducation was inaugurated at Ohio's Oberlin College in the 1830s.

FAITH AND INTELLECT

RELIGION AND THE PEOPLE

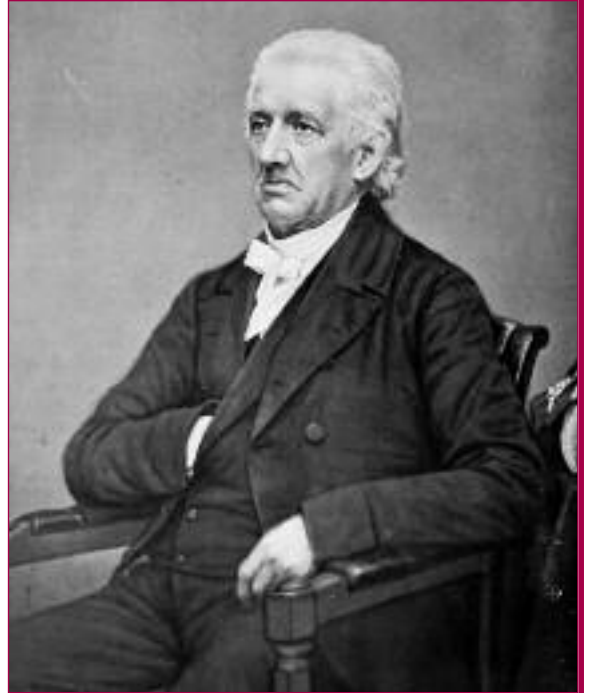
Religion played an important part in the lives of average Americans. The Baptist and Methodist churches had more members than any others, but the Presbyterian, Congregational, Episcopal, and other denominations also appealed to substantial numbers. Sunday schools constituted a standard medium for indoctrinating the young, and Methodists and Baptists were successful in developing black congregations.

Religious diversity should likewise be stressed. With the influx of Irish and German immigrants by the hundreds of thousands during the 1840s and 1850s, growing numbers of Americans adhered to the Roman Catholic and Lutheran faiths. Supplementing churches with European origins were indigenous ones like the Disciples, Mormons, and various Adventist groups.

Widespread evangelistic endeavors also characterized the era. Especially in the South and West, the example of Bishop Francis Asbury inspired his Methodist successors to “ride the circuit” and present in graphic language the punishments for sin and the rewards of salvation. In the East and then in Ohio and Indiana, Lyman Beecher and his sons preached powerful Calvinistic sermons and attacked

such social ills as dueling and alcoholic indulgence.

More popular than any other evangelist in the West and North, Charles Grandison Finney in countless revival meetings emphasized the individual's ability to repent. Salvation, Finney believed, represented only the start of a useful life: The person saved should then save others. Finney's theology, lacking the orthodox Calvinistic tenet of predestination, won converts by the tens of thousands.



Lyman Beecher

No longer were clergymen as apt as in the past to bewail a “low state” of American Protestantism. No longer did religion—as in the 1790s—appear to be removed from the masses in Middle Atlantic and other communities, with church memberships declining and the dissensions and arguments of ministers severely damaging their sects. If—as the French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville thought in the 1830s—religion was the foremost American institution, there were solid reasons for its number one rank. The “Second Great Awakening,” which had begun with the turn of the century, continued into the time of de Tocqueville’s visit and its spiritual force was felt long after that.

The evangelists of the Second Great Awakening did much of their preaching and exhorting outside the doors of churches, reaching the people at huge camp meetings in the countryside or at medium-sized revivals. A significant part of their ultimate effect was to lead zealous converts into Baptist and other church folds where continuing inspiration, strength, and comfort could be found.

There was also a close relationship between the assailing and reforming of social sins and the Protestant Ethic concept of hard work as a glorification of God. The excitement of economic progress and the challenge of technology had an undeniable identification with thrift, industry, and self-discipline. So it was not accidental that Christianity was far from being a Sunday-only affair in the Jacksonian period. Both rural and urban faithful attended prayer meetings on week

nights. Grace was said before meals in innumerable homes, and devotional services were held in family circles with parents and children devoutly kneeling.

A preoccupation with the expected return of Christ also experienced a boost in the mid-nineteenth century when William Miller, a farmer from upstate New York, claimed in 1842 that he had mathematically calculated the exact time of the second coming of Christ as March 21, 1843. According to Miller, the correct meaning of Daniel 8:14, which states that “the sanctuary will be cleansed after 2300 days,” was that the earth would be destroyed by fire 2,300 years after the prophecy, thus mandating Christ’s return in 1843. Miller also concluded that the earth would be 6,000 years old on that date.

Miller published his conclusions in the 1830s and began preaching at churches and camp meetings, rapidly building a following. It is estimated that by 1843, some 50,000 Americans believed Miller’s predictions and an estimated million more expected “something” to happen. Miller and his followers gave away their worldly belongings in March of 1843, donned white robes and flocked to the hills and tops of buildings to wait for Jesus’ return. March 21 passed without incident, causing Miller to recalculate several times; but Christ failed each time to return.

Miller died in 1848 as a discredited prophet in terms of the date of his prediction. His followers continued to adhere to his teaching that Christians must still “Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy” and, therefore, must worship on Saturday (instead of Sunday) and perform no work on that day. Miller’s followers eventually became known as the Seventh Day Adventists who continue to honor the Sabbath as Miller instructed in the twenty-first century.

MORMONS

Perhaps no new religious group of the early nineteenth century has placed a greater stamp on America than the Mormons, founded by Joseph Smith of Palmyra, New York, in the 1820s. Smith claimed to have been visited by the Angel Moroni, who led him to dig on a particular day for some golden plates buried in the ground near his home. Written on the plates in an indecipherable language, which Smith described as “reformed Egyptian,” were more than 500 pages of the Book of Mormon. Smith also uncovered two sacred stones, Urim and Thummim, with which he could interpret the plates.

Smith then went about the business of interpreting the plates and dictated the Book of Mormon to a scribe who wrote down what Smith interpreted from behind a curtain. Some witnesses were

amazed that Smith could interpret the plates using the Sacred Stones when the plates themselves were under a sheet. At least eight other people testified, however, that they had personally seen the plates before Smith returned them to the Angel Moroni.

The plates described the one true church and a “lost tribe of Israel” that had been missing for centuries. The Book of Mormon essentially provided an explanation that had bewildered Christians everywhere for centuries as to how the Native Americans had come to be in the Western Hemisphere. The Native Americans were explained to be the lost tribe of Israel, and Jesus Christ had come to America after his Resurrection and preached to the Native Americans. The original sight of the Garden of Eden was identified as a place near Independence, Missouri. The Book of Mormon also predicted the appearance of a prophet in America who would establish a new, pure kingdom of Christ in the United States. The Book also predicted the coming of the Civil War, proof later to many that Smith was a true prophet of God.

Skeptics point out, however, that the book also mentions the presence of horses, steel, and wheat in the Western Hemisphere prior to the arrival of Columbus. Furthermore, in 1835 Smith purchased and translated Egyptian Papyrus that he claimed were written by Abraham. Twentieth century Egyptologists, however, contend that Abraham did not write Smith’s papyrus; but they are copies of the Egyptian Book of the Dead.

Theologically speaking, Smith’s Mormonism is a protestant Christian religion. The teachings of Smith’s Mormonism include not only belief in the one true God of Christianity, but in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and savior of all humanity. Smith’s Mormonism also taught that human life on earth is part of the human progress toward eventual status in heaven equivalent to that of God in the Old Testament. The logic, essentially, is that if humans are God’s children, then when humans “grow up” in the afterlife, they will be “Gods” residing on a distant planet near the orbiting the star Kolob, the closest place to God that keeps time. While in heaven, human males will be sexually active with wife or wives in a paradise of jewels and gold. In Mormonism, marriage is eternal, and people will be reunited in the afterlife.

While on earth, Mormons avoided strong drink, including alcohol, coffee, and tea. Mormonism also taught that prosperity is a path to Godliness; and, thus, the Mormons stressed work. Mormonism is also hierarchical, and a “First President” and 12 Apostles head the Church. At first, Mormonism also taught that converts must give all their property to the Church; but Joseph Smith found that the wealthy

rebelled against the practice, so he changed the requirement from “all property,” to a tithe. This alteration is an early example of the doctrine of “continuous revelation,” which allows doctrine to evolve with changing times. Famously, Mormonism also allowed polygamy. Joseph Smith himself had 28 wives; but the Mormon Church abandoned the practice in 1890 after it was struck down as unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

Polygamy, of course, was controversial and caused the Mormons to be persecuted by the larger communities around them. Mormonism also requires evangelism, which aids in the growth of Mormonism but, also, alienates those who do not care to be evangelized. Thus, Smith and his followers were forced to migrate from Palmyra, New York, to Ohio, Missouri, and then Nauvoo, Illinois. Nevertheless, Nauvoo had a Mormon population of 15,000 by 1844, and Smith petitioned Congress for separate territorial status and even ran for president. The entire Mormon population at the time of Smith’s untimely death at the hands of an angry mob in 1844 is estimated at 26,000.

The persecution of Mormons by the larger community was undoubtedly severe, thus leading to the multiple migrations. Smith’s (and later Brigham Young’s) Mormonism itself was not entirely pacific, and the Mormons at times lashed back at their persecutors. Mormonism contained the idea of “blood atonement,” whereby Mormon believers can kill enemies of the Church. Furthermore, those who had fallen away from the Mormon Church could be justly killed by be-



Brigham Young

lievers. Those that had fallen away and desired to return to the Church could regain their salvation by killing the enemies of the Church. In doing so, the throats of the victims were slit, and it was required that their blood be spilled on the ground. At Haun’s Mill near Kirtland, Ohio, in 1838, 17 people were killed in this manner when they refused to migrate with the rest of the Mormon community. Even more horrific, in 1857 at Mountain

Meadows, Utah, Mormons slaughtered 140 men, women, and children from Arkansas who were in the process of crossing Utah in a wagon train. Twenty children age seven and under were spared as “innocents,” adopted by the Mormons, and later as adults lived to tell the truth of the massacre. If it were not for the coming of the Civil War, the United States government might have invaded Utah and arrested Brigham Young for his responsibility in the Mountain Meadows massacre; but the magnitude of the sectional crisis in the United States at the time forced the United States government to direct its energy elsewhere. More discussion of Brigham Young and the Mormon’s migration to Utah will be presented in Chapter 11.

THE UNITARIAN INFLUENCE

For the Christians whose ardor and faith have just been depicted, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost were as integral in the deity as God the Father. But concurrently spreading in New England was the influence of Unitarians, who rejected the doctrine of the trinity, believing that God exists in only one person.

Unitarians accepted Christian revelation, but only so far as it accorded with what they conceived to be human reason. The Calvinistic belief in the doctrine of election was not for them because it implied an arbitrary God. Instead, Unitarians underscored the deity’s benevolence. They declared that Jesus was divine in the sense that all people are divine. To a degree, they were reacting against both the creed and the formalism of Congregationalists and the fire-and-brimstone evangelism of the Great Awakenings, although one also finds links between the latter and Unitarian individualism. To Unitarians, the life of Jesus represented an example to be emulated by persons who already were innately good and spiritually free.

A spokesman for Unitarian thought and action was the Boston clergyman, William Ellery Channing. Implicit in his ideas was the prominence of the individual—independent, yet spiritually obliged to “transcend” individualistic self by intimate identification with the Deity. Though Channing had been reared in the creed of Calvinism, he came to deny the doctrine of original sin and to believe firmly in the freedom of the will. Many of the era’s reformers and intellectuals were Unitarian in their beliefs.

ROMANTICISM REVISITED

It is not difficult to understand why Channing and other Unitarian thinkers appealed to young scholars and writers who had been

impressed by the ideas of Romanticism because the belief in human possibility was very congruent with Romanticism. Romanticism had already had an important influence on the thinking of the young republic. Now, in 1824–1848, Romanticism's influence was, if anything, even more pervasive.

Romantic writers and artists had as their goal the “liberation” of the individual—the full realization of the human potential. To accomplish this, they felt that individuals should give free rein to imagination and emotion, experimenting with new ways and new ideas. The emphasis was on informality, the picturesque, the exotic, and the sensuous as ways of appreciating external nature and capturing the transient aspects of life. They shunned tradition, feeling that human intuition and poetic sensibility were best qualified to lead people to truth.

The growth of democratic government during the Jacksonian period also reflected this new emphasis on the value of the individual and faith in the ability of the common person. This individualism was not necessarily “nonconformist”: Most Americans still took their cue for behavior from the majority. They did tend, however, to admire the rugged individualists among them, whether in life or in literature, such as the heroes of James Fenimore Cooper (*The Last of the Mohicans*), to be discussed shortly.

The ultimate liberated men were those who invaded the wilderness, drove the Native Americans out, and established settlements in the West. These men saw themselves as economically self-reliant and capable of almost any achievement and developed versatility, robustness, and resilience, along with the physical courage and (sometimes) moral obtuseness that was required of them.

The Romantics felt that society was a growing organism that could be changed and improved. Thus, Romanticism as well as Christianity nourished the reform movements of the period. Most American Romanticists, however, thought their country already had the political foundations it needed and so concerned themselves largely with social and humanitarian reforms.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF LITERATURE

EMERSON AND TRANSCENDENTALISM

The period from the triumph of Jacksonian democracy to the Civil War was one of the greatest eras in American literary history. It has been called “The Golden Day,” “The New England Renaissance,” and

“The Flowering of New England.” We begin with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau, who were among the leading proponents of the Boston-based transcendentalist movement into which the two intellectual streams we have just observed, Unitarianism and Romanticism, flowed.

Transcendentalism has been defined philosophically as “recognition in man of the capacity of knowing truth intuitively, or attaining knowledge transcending the reach of the senses.” Transcendentalists believed that the power of the solitary individual was limitless and that people should not conform to the materialistic world. Instead, people should look within themselves and within the natural world for guidance.

In his first little book *Nature*, published in 1836, Emerson asked penetrating questions:

Foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?

Emerson pointed out that Jesus “spoke of miracles,” for Jesus felt “man’s life was a miracle” and man’s “daily miracle shines, as the character ascends.” The churches’ interpretation of the word miracle, Emerson added, gave a false impression and was “not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain.”

The allusion to clover and rain as miracles symbolized the transcendentalists’ search for revelations of divinity in external nature as well as in the individual’s own nature. Emerson viewed the different aspects of the universe as diverse manifestations of a central spirit, which he called the Over-Soul. Man and woman, according to Emerson, could be channels for the higher truths of the Over-Soul by developing their intuitive powers to



Statue of Ralph Waldo Emerson

the fullest. Emerson's doctrine of the Over-Soul also implied a belief in self-reliance, as expounded in his famous essay of that name. When he wrote about self-reliance, Emerson's meaning was that the human being could reach a direct, exalted relationship with the universal spirit.

Emerson's philosophy was essentially a variety of philosophical idealism, as distinct from materialism. Broadly speaking, an idealist is one who sees basic reality as spiritual; the materialist is one who sees it as physical or material. Emerson's idealism was concerned ultimately with the conduct of life. For this he felt that men and women have the capacity to draw upon a power greater than their own.

One of Emerson's chief allies in the transcendentalist project was Margaret Fuller, America's first great woman intellectual. A few years younger than Emerson, Fuller was unable to attend Harvard as so many men did, but she pursued a ferociously ambitious program of reading and was able to hold her own with any and all of the other transcendentalists. In the fall of 1836 a number of these Boston intellectuals began meeting informally in what evolved into the Transcendentalist Club. For a brief period they published a journal, the *Dial*, of which Fuller was the editor. A brilliant conversationalist, Fuller would visit the Emerson household in Concord, where she and her host would talk by the hour. After her untimely death in 1850, Emerson wrote a memoir about her.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Although Emerson published many volumes of poetry and essays, he was more widely known in his lifetime as the most popular lecturer of his day, while Fuller was known for her journalism, of which more will be said later in the chapter. In contrast, Henry David Thoreau's contacts with his contemporary Americans were minimal. Very few bought or read his *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) or even his now-celebrated *Walden* (1854), both of which related his experience and thinking in the 1840s.

Today Thoreau is considered one of the major American writers of all time. Emerson comprehended the younger man's greatness as a stylist, testifying that "Thoreau illustrates with excellent images that which I convey in a sleepy generality." An erstwhile schoolteacher and local handyman, Thoreau spent the years 1845–1847 in a shack on the edge of Walden Pond near Concord. Here he dwelt among the birds and beasts, reading and writing with few distractions. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately" he explained, "to front only the essential facts of life."

Any Romanticist, any fellow-transcendentalist, would have no trouble grasping the logic of what Thoreau said. "... I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pondside. ... How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity."

Independence and self-reliance dominated Thoreau's life. He actively helped the "underground railroad" to convey run-

away slaves to the freedom of Canada. He spent a night in jail rather than pay a tiny tax to support a government then prosecuting what he considered an unjust war against Mexico.

Out of the latter experience came *Civil Disobedience*, a highly influential political essay that the modern author and critic Henry S. Canby referred to as "Gandhi's textbook in his campaign of passive resistance" against the British in twentieth-century India. Together Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi later greatly influenced the nonviolent resistance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Thoreau declared it the duty of citizens to deny allegiance to a government they feel is wrong.

Such an attitude is essential to the health of a democracy. It is the opposite of that apathy which prevents citizens from taking a stand, allowing important contests to go by default. Thoreau was not antisocial. He merely took his duties as a citizen more seriously than most Americans.



Henry David Thoreau

THE BOSTON BRAHMINS

In his own day, Thoreau was not nearly so well known as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, or Oliver Wendell Holmes. Each of these was an admired poet (and Holmes, somewhat later, the author of well-regarded prose). Although Lowell and Longfellow attacked slavery in verse, all three were primarily literary aristocrats. Holmes applied the label "Brahmin caste of New England" to the cultivated, exclusive class he typified.

These “Brahmins” were inclined to view literature as something lofty and ennobling. Much of the time in their writing, they erected barriers against unpleasant or perplexing social and philosophic questions. In the 1830s and 1840s, the dreamy utopias of Emerson and the back-to-nature living of Thoreau were not for them—nor were the portrayals of evil that characterized the books of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Benevolent toward others, the “Brahmins” were usually satisfied to savor the pleasant intellectual life of Boston and Harvard—where all three were professors. Although (or perhaps because) he had a sense of humor, Holmes considered Boston “the thinking center of the continent, and therefore of the planet.”

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

The writer who most brilliantly opposed transcendentalist tendencies was Nathaniel Hawthorne of Salem, Massachusetts. He was the chief inheritor, in literature, of the old Puritan tradition, and his works—particularly his novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)—embodied Puritan ideas. His ancestors had been Puritan magistrates charged with persecuting Quakers and condemning “witches” at Salem court. While disapproving of their bigotry and cruelty, he recognized the ancestral tie: “Strong traits of their nature,” he said, “have intertwined themselves with mine.

Hawthorne rejected both the optimism inherent in transcendentalism and the reform movements abetted by it. He held the Puritan belief that people are innately sinful, that evil is an ever-present reality (not an illusion to be brushed aside), and that self-reliant individualism alone cannot save a person from destruction. In Hawthorne, we see the persistence of the Puritan point of view into the Jacksonian Era.

Unlike Emerson, who denied that evil existed in an ultimate form, Hawthorne made evil central in his stories and novels. *The Scarlet Letter* deals with secret guilt, the effects of crime on man and woman, and the need for expiation through confession or love. In *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), evil appears as a hereditary taint visiting the sins of the fathers on the children in a study of degeneration and decay. *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) is, in part, a satire on the secular community Brook Farm—the villain showing how a reformer’s zealotry can mesh with unconscionable ambition and thus serve evil rather than good.

HERMAN MELVILLE

A writer close to Hawthorne both in his concern with the “deep mystery of sin” and in his revulsion against Emersonian currents of opti-

mism was Herman Melville. Born in New York, reared there and in the Berkshires of Massachusetts, Melville as a youth shipped as a sailor on a merchantman plying the Atlantic and later on a whaler bound for the South Seas. On these voyages he saw first hand, a world of violence, crime, and misery.

Such early Melville books as *Typee* and *Omoo* were popular, but his increased pessimism caused the novelist to be neglected after the 1840s. He was “rediscovered” in the 1920s by post-World War I readers, to whose mood of disillusionment *Moby Dick* (1851) had a powerful appeal.

Although Melville, like Hawthorne, was a philosophical pessimist, he arrived at his pessimism along intellectual avenues differing from Hawthorne’s in three ways. First, Hawthorne still cherished Calvinist values though critical of them and all others, whereas Melville rebelled against the religious conservatism he had known as a boy. Second, in Liverpool and in the South Seas Melville was shocked by the roughness and cruelty of “civilized” men—brutalities that neither Hawthorne nor Emerson experienced. Finally, just as he lacked Emerson’s optimism, he lacked Hawthorne’s resignation.

Said Hawthorne in reference to an 1856 meeting with Melville in England:

Melville, as he always does, began to reason of providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had “pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated”; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wandering to-and-fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sand hills amid which we were sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other.

Modern literary critics give Melville high ratings and are fascinated by his imagery. Sometimes they remind us that we should not forget his love of the exotic, the sensually attractive, and the humorous, for Melville was a many-sided man. While the dilemma of the author of *Moby Dick* has been variously analyzed, it is probable that Hawthorne’s interpretation was not wide of the mark.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER

The disparity between the dream of a peaceful, democratic society in the virgin wilderness and the reality of frontier life was frequently

reflected in the thought and literature of this period. The real Western frontier posed many problems of adjustment for its settlers. Land speculation, political corruption, and immorality were common in the poorly organized towns. In short, the real frontier bore little resemblance to the literary legend or to the popular tall tale.

The first major writer of fiction to exploit the literary potential of the frontier was James Fenimore Cooper, whose series of “Leatherstocking Tales” both romanticized the wilderness and conveyed the loss many Americans felt when they became aware of the crude fashion in which the frontier was being settled. For instance, Cooper convincingly expressed the tragedy of the Native American, pushed out of ancestral lands by the advancing white settler.

Although it is easy to lampoon his didacticism, stock characters, and strained and starchy dialogue, at his best Cooper was a captivating storyteller with a talent for both description and perceptive social criticism. “The Leatherstocking Tales” represents a Romantic view of the West, just as Sir Walter Scott’s novels and ballads romanticized with charm and skill the people and places of a lost Europe. Cooper’s West, however, was confined mainly to upper New York state before 1800. He himself never saw the prairie, never neared the Rocky Mountains—in fact, never even crossed the Mississippi River.

SOUTHERN ROMANTICISM

The South produced numerous authors before the Civil War, yet there were few direct literary connections with New England. Sectional interests influenced literature, just as they influenced politics. With many Southerners convinced that slavery must be maintained and allowed to spread, Southerners liked to idealize their plantations as happy feudal domains where blacks benefited from the most humane treatment. Southern writers praised Greek democracy where *inequality*, rather than *equality*, had prevailed. There and in the American South, they held, competent individuals directed and cared for the less competent—acting in the interest of all.

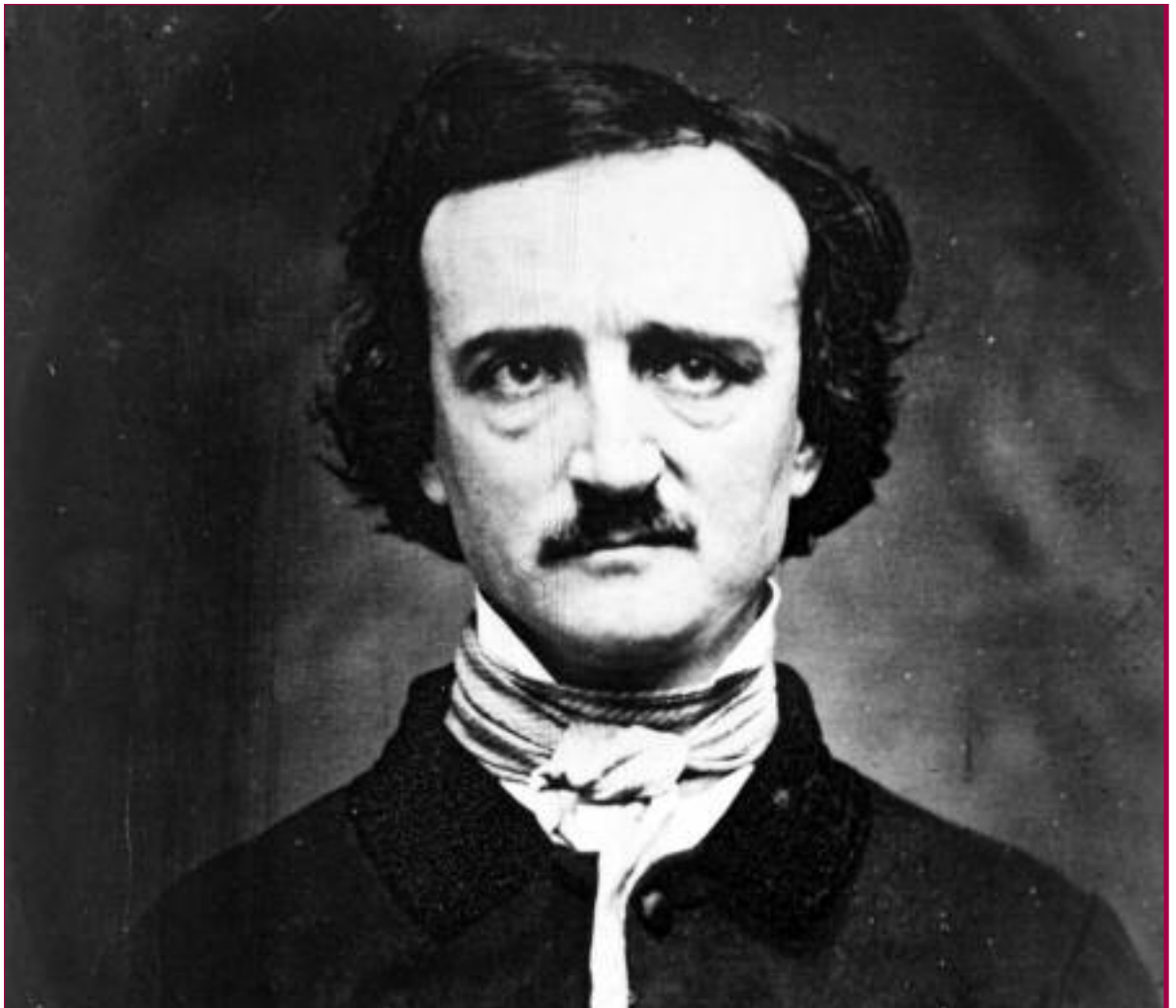
Because of the feudal emphasis, the dominant influence on Romantic Southern literature during these years was the British author Sir Walter Scott. Scott’s fictional recreation of the Middle Ages, his knights in shining armor, his defenders of glamorous ladies in distress, and his heroes’ exemplary characters fitted in with notions of Southern chivalry—as opposed to Northern commercialism and reformism.

A number of American writers attempted to romanticize the “feudal” South in works of fiction. One of the best of those novels was

John P. Kennedy's *Swallow Barn* (1832), which depicted rural Virginia in the 1820s. A resident of Baltimore, Kennedy strung together sketches of idealized plantation aristocracy with a minimal plot. In it the master of the estate of Swallow Barn is genial and generous, his relatives and friends are virtuous, their hospitality is bountiful, and the blacks are cheerful.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

Reared as a foster child in Virginia, Edgar Allan Poe nevertheless can be treated only partly as a Southerner. Although in his personal life he was—or wanted to be—a conservative Southerner, and although he supported the works of other Southern authors and praised the Southern defense of slavery, Poe's writings rarely reveal a Southern



Edgar Allan Poe

tone or setting. In his tales he was more influenced by the “Gothic” tradition in English fiction—the kind of fiction that used certain stock properties like old castles, decayed houses, dungeons, secret passages, ancient wrongs, and supernatural phenomena.

Poe was not concerned with portraying contemporary scenes or providing moral reflections on life. He believed that poetry, for example, should exist for its own sake, never as an instrument of instruction. It may be that no other American has maintained more consistently that literature exists primarily and perhaps solely to entertain; but Poe did not take this function lightly. In his own poetry and prose, he applied the theories of literary technique that he expounded in his critical writings. There was a great deal of originality in Poe’s writing, particularly in his short stories and detective stories. Both his poetry and his prose were enormously admired abroad, especially in France.

JOURNALISM AND POPULAR CULTURE

WRITING FOR THE PEOPLE

Americans of the time read newspapers more avidly than even the most exciting fiction. New York City produced some of the best journalism in Horace Greeley’s *Tribune* and poet-editor William Cullen Bryant’s *Post*. James Gordon Bennett’s New York *Herald*, a pioneer in



Statue of New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley

the “penny press” field, presented national and world news alongside lurid accounts of murders and sex scandals. Nowhere else had there ever been so many newspapers as there were then in America. While quality varied from town to town, Americans knew more about what was going on than any other general population anywhere.

After stereotyping began in 1811 and electrotyping in 1841, the influence of technology on popular culture was evi-

dent. Printers used steam presses to mass-produce books which, cheaply bound and extensively distributed, sold for as little as 25 cents. Intellectuals read such magazines as the *North American Review* and the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Tillers of the soil preferred the *American Farmer*, the *American Agriculturist*, and the *Southern Cultivator*. In addition to agricultural articles, these offered fiction and verse to farm families.

Religious periodicals abounded—notably the *Biblical Repertory* (Presbyterian), the *Biblical Repository* (Congregationalist), the *Christian Review* (Baptist), the *Christian Examiner* (Unitarian), the *Methodist Magazine*, and the *United States Catholic Magazine*. Carrying theological arguments and sectarian messages, many of them also disseminated miscellaneous culture. “Of all the reading of the people,” a commentator observed in 1840, “three fourths is purely religious.” In 1848, 52 religious journals were published in New York City alone.

MAGAZINES AND BOOKS FOR WOMEN

Discerning innovators discovered that women could comprise one of the most dependable magazine markets. From 1830 on, a Philadelphia periodical called *Godey's Lady's Book* enjoyed an enviable circulation, helped along by the efforts of its gifted editor, Sarah Josepha Hale. By the 1850s, its subscription list reached 150,000. Eventually, its publisher amassed a million-dollar fortune. *Graham's Magazine*, which made its bow in 1841, instantly appealed to both women and men. Soon it had 40,000 subscribers and a \$50,000 annual profit. Its contents? Short stories, essays, poetry, colored fashion plates, book reviews, and a department on fine arts. Bryant, Cooper, Lowell, and Longfellow contributed to *Graham's*. For a time Poe was literary editor, and some of his best work graced its pages. Combining the insipid and sentimental with better things, *Graham's* and *Godey's* provided exactly what their readers wanted.

Women writers were widely published during the period. Authorship lent opportunity to women when most other vocational doors were shut. Mrs. Ann Stephens, co-editor of the *Ladies' National Magazine*, sent florid but thrilling tales to the *Lady's Wreath* and similar media. Poems (often lachrymose by modern standards) and articles by Mrs. Lydia Sigourney won acceptance in countless journals. Among women authors with large followings were Catharine M. Sedgwick and Mrs. Anna Mowatt. Mrs. Caroline Lee Hentz and Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, popular novelists of the 1850s, got their start in the previous decade. Margaret Fuller

edited the *Dial* in Boston, as we have noted; and later, in New York on Greeley's *Tribune*, she gained more admirers of her astute criticism. Her volume, *Women in the Nineteenth Century*, drawn from her writings for the *Tribune*, projected advanced views on women's rights.

SPORTS, HUMOR, AND REALISM

One of the liveliest periodicals was New York's *Spirit of the Times*. Its editor featured sports and pastimes like horse racing, boxing, hunting, shooting, and fishing. He also had an eye for realism and amusing exaggeration in fiction. In the *Spirit* and in books, small farmers and reckless frontiersmen of the Old Southwest—from Georgia to Arkansas—became subjects of wildly humorous yarns by such frontier writers as Thomas B. Thorpe, William T. Thompson, Augustus B. Longstreet, J. J. Hooper, and George W. Harris. Authentically depicting the speech, customs, and scenery of their region, they produced comedy combined with realism.

Harris, who wrote for the *Spirit* in the 1840s, created his fictional character Sut Livingood a bit later. There is no better example of the breed of men inhabiting these humorists' stories. A lanky mountaineer and self-confessed “nat-ral-born dum'd fool,” Sut loves liquor and women but hates Yankees and circuit-riding preachers, whom he describes as “dum'd, infurnel, hiperkritical, potbellied, scaley-hided, whiskey-wastin'.” These storytellers delighted in the boast and brag of the “tall tale”:

I'm that same David Crockett, fresh from the backwoods, half-horse, half-alligator, a little touched with the snapping-turtle; can wade the Mississippi, leap the Ohio, ride upon a streak of lightning, and slip without a scratch down a honey locust; can whip my weight in wild-cats—and if any gentleman pleases, for a ten-dollar bill, he may throw in a panther. ...¹

Here—chauvinism, boastfulness, and exaggeration—all reflected the influence of the West and Southwest on thinking and reading tastes. There are historians who believe that the “starting point of a truly American literature” can be located on the frontier, in just such tales, more logically than in the East.

¹Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, II (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1927), p. 176.

ARTS, SCIENCES, AND POPULAR TASTE

THE “HIGHER CULTURE”

As in literature, so in other arts: Americans valued both the light and the serious. Classical music had numerous appreciators, particularly in urban centers with their orchestras and choral societies. No actor won more plaudits than Edwin Forrest, who played major Shakespearean parts like Brutus and King Lear. No lecturer was more respected than Emerson, who discoursed on intellectual topics annually from New England westward. Margaret Fuller’s “conversations,” in Boston, attracted audiences of women—eager participants—hungry for mental stimulation; and in 1826 in Millbury, Massachusetts, Josiah Holbrook organized a series of public lectures that were to form the basis of the National American Lyceum movement. This movement, which was dedicated to the spread of information about the arts, sciences, history, and public affairs, spread to other states and became an important force in adult education and social reform.

Despite the fact that serious research was beyond the reach of most teachers, the period witnessed advances along scientific lines. There was keen public interest in science, and young and older people crowded scientific exhibitions and marveled at scientific experiments. Benjamin Silliman, professor at Yale, published *Elements of Chemistry* in 1830 and wrote learnedly on subjects ranging from gold deposits to sugar planting. Other scientific pioneers were Elisha Mitchell, geologist and botanist at the University of North Carolina; Edmund Ruffin, Virginia soil chemist; and Matthew F. Maury of the United States Navy, his generation’s expert in navigation and oceanography. George Ticknor at Harvard was the American trailblazer in the study and teaching of modern foreign languages. In the historical field, William H. Prescott was publishing his monumental works on Mexico and Peru, and another first-rate historian, Francis Parkman, was writing *The Oregon Trail* and *The Conspiracy of Pontiac*.

In some of the arts and sciences, America still leaned on Europe for much of its leadership. Thus John James Audubon, the ornithologist and painter whose *Birds of America* is a classic, was born in the West Indies and reared in France. Duncan Phyfe, famous for the furniture he produced in New York, came to America from Scotland. Louis Agassiz of Switzerland, who joined the Harvard faculty, did as much as anyone to arouse American interest in zoology and geology. Young Americans of promise went to Germany and France for



Soprano Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale"

graduate study. In philanthropy, too, the Old World pointed the way: an Englishman endowed Washington's Smithsonian Institution.

Among highly regarded performing artists appearing in the United States were many Europeans, including an Austrian ballet dancer, a Norwegian violinist, and countless British actors and actresses. The Swedish soprano Jenny Lind—the "Swedish Nightingale"—was one of the most beloved performers of her day.

Presented by the famed impresario, P. T. Barnum, Lind packed concert halls in several American cities. Objects from a style of crib to a locomotive were named in her honor.

POPULAR MUSIC AND DRAMA

Americans by no means depended exclusively on Europe for all their culture. Much folk art and folk craft—the beautiful furniture of the Shakers, for example—was far from being purely derivative, although many songs Americans hummed—"Home, Sweet Home" is an illustration—were at least partly of European origin. Well-loved ballads, fiddle tunes, and folk songs fused the native and imported. The same was true of hymns, work songs, political chants, and comic airs. Some were totally native. All were intimately integrated into the lives, worship, and fun of average people.

On the stage, light plays and musicals competed with the classical—though even the plays of Shakespeare might well have been presented in so rollicking a fashion as to constitute popular entertainment. With low admission prices, the urban theater boomed. Rowdy comedies and farces played to rowdy audiences. The versatile James H. Hackett helped make Rip Van Winkle famous and ridiculed "high society" in *The Moderns*, or *A Trip to the Springs*. The lighter side of cultural life developed with zest in rural areas as well. Heroes were applauded and villains hissed and booed in smaller

cities and towns—even in barns and log houses and on boats on Western waters.

Among indigenous American entertainments was the minstrel show with its interlocutor and end men, banjos, bones, and tambourines. The minstrel show featured white men wearing blackface make-up, and it was both a racist spectacle deriding black people and a vehicle for calling attention to aspects of African American folk culture. Audiences cheered minstrels like Ohio's Daniel Emmett, the singer and composer who subsequently gave "Dixie" to the South. Enchanting were the tunes of Stephen Collins Foster, the Pennsylvanian who immortalized Florida's "Swanee" River and evoked tears with the strains of "My Old Kentucky Home." Love of the spectacular as well as good music—in the case of Jenny Lind—led multitudes to line the pockets of Phineas T. Barnum, who amazed gaping compatriots with his museum of curios—from the woolly horse and bearded lady to the midget "General Tom Thumb."

SCULPTURE, ARCHITECTURE, PAINTING

American sculptors had a remarkable vogue. Among the most celebrated were Hiram Powers, whose "Greek Slave" Londoners greeted with admiration, and Thomas Crawford, whose "Armed Freedom" surmounts the Capitol in Washington, D.C. Pseudoclassical portrait busts were produced by the thousands. Average Americans took pride in this art form, although the nude "Greek Slave" did not please the prudish and Horatio Greenough's "George Washington"—partly draped in a Roman toga—drew its share of outraged criticism.

The Jefferson-Latrobe influence remained strong in Greek Revival architecture. But in the 1830s and 1840s young architects considered classical columns and porticos too formal and artificial. Devotees of Romantic theories, they stressed the organic in plan and construction. A multiplicity of styles, especially the Gothic, characterized the work of Alexander J. Davis and of Richard Upjohn, who designed Trinity Church in New York City. While most Americans did not employ architects, thousands of houses showed the influence of architectural handbooks.

Although, like Upjohn, the most successful portrait painter, Thomas Sully, had come to the United States from England, the canvases of the American-born artists John Neagle and Henry Inman also were popular. "Storytelling" or anecdotal painting—in which common human situations were depicted nostalgically or humorously—likewise was growing in public favor. Scenes of life on the farm or of raftsmen poling their flatboats upstream or of prairie schooners and Native Americans appeared in the work of George Caleb Bingham,

William Sidney Mount, and Alfred Jacob Miller. Romanticism and American pride in the land combined to inspire a group of painters known as the Hudson River School, who romantically portrayed the wilderness of forests, mountains, and streams.

SLAVERY AND DEMOCRACY

GARRISON AND ABOLITION

For all the progress and all the pride in the white American of these years—for all the artistry of the gifted, the technology of the inventive, and the fun and frolic and misery and strivings and achievements of the masses of people—the dark cloud of slavery deeply troubled first the few and then the many.

In the 1820s the ranks of abolitionists tended to be filled by Quakers, such as the Philadelphian, Benjamin Lundy. Then in Boston in 1831 a journeyman printer named William Lloyd Garrison founded *The Liberator*, a new kind of abolitionist paper, new because it carried an unprecedented tone of moral urgency. Garrison could see no good in the legal sanctions protecting slavery in half the country. Constitutionalism meant far less to him than securing freedom for his fellow human beings. It was no happenstance that Garrison's insistence on this reform occurred at the very time when other movers and shakers were spurring other reforms—both religious and secular.

According to Garrison's concept of Christianity, slavery was sinful. As *The Liberator's* editor, he was motivated primarily by this sinfulness. Fervent in his conviction, he attacked the Constitution as “a covenant with death and an agreement with hell” and called for an immediate end to slavery. It was hardly surprising that most “respectable” northerners would not subscribe to what was seen as extremism in a day when John Quincy Adams, himself against slavery but no Garrisonian, described the abolitionist faction as small and shallow.

Garrison was persistent, however. In 1843, he began the first of 22 terms as president of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The seed nourished by Garrison and fellow abolitionists eventually flowered in the emancipation of blacks from bondage. Long depicted in historical writing as a fanatic, Garrison is now regarded as one of the era's most influential reformers, primarily but not exclusively for his abolitionism. He also espoused women's rights and pacifism.

Yet, it must be stated that it would be the possibility of slavery's westward extension—rather than the existence of slavery in states where it was legal—to which millions of Northerners would strenu-

ously object from the outbreak of the Mexican War forward. The approach to the slavery issue of Abraham Lincoln and other political leaders was anything but that of Garrison.

Second only to Garrison in national fame among abolitionists, perhaps, was Frederick Douglass, an African American who had escaped from slavery and become an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Of commanding appearance and a gifted orator, Douglass established an antislavery paper—the *North Star*—and was well received by both American and British audiences. Another well-known black abolitionist was the eloquent Charles L. Remond, born free, who for a time rivaled Douglass on abolitionist platforms. Black clergymen also had significant parts in the antislavery cause. Two, the Presbyterian Henry H. Garnet and the Congregationalist Samuel R. Ward, held pastorates in upstate New York but were known chiefly as abolition spokesmen. Finally, there were a number of clubs composed of black women abolitionists; and two women, Frances Watkins Harper and the former slave Sojourner Truth were touring anti-slavery lecturers.

THE LITERARY ANTECEDENTS TO CIVIL WAR

From 1833 on, the New England Quaker, John Greenleaf Whittier, contributed poems and prose to the abolitionists' campaign. Longfellow in 1842 published a few antislavery poems but never became a Garrison adherent. James Russell Lowell wrote for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Other younger authors—Thoreau, Melville, and Walt Whitman—were repelled by slavery and said so. Then, while Holmes and Hawthorne continued to abstain from the agitation, Emerson swung around in the 1850s to laud the abolitionist crusader John Brown and to compare Brown's gallows—Brown was executed after being captured in the attempt to lead a slave revolt in 1859—to the cross of Jesus.

It was a powerful novel, however, that proved to be the most effective tool deployed by any of those who opposed slavery. Written by Harriet Beecher Stowe—daughter, wife, and sister of Calvinist ministers and a woman abundantly aware of her own New England conscience—*Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) provided a searing indictment of “the peculiar institution.” Stowe contended that God inspired the book, which depicted the separation of families, maternal loss, and other evils inherent in slavery. Inspired or not, it turned out to be the greatest work of propaganda ever written by an American, selling hundreds of thousands of copies and imbuing the anti-slavery crusade with a moral fervor that captured Northern attention and sympathy in an unprecedented way. Truly, it changed the nature of the discourse Stowe's treatment of slavery caused many Americans to



Harriet Beecher Stowe

see, for the first time, blacks as human and face the inhumanity of slavery. Southern fiction produced by way of reply had no comparable punch, though it is noteworthy that the sectional conflict was fought with words before it was fought with bullets.

The ablest Southern arguments were in essay form and came mostly from politicians and educators. Many slaveholders agreed with John C. Calhoun and William Harper of South Carolina and

Thomas R. Dew of Virginia that far from being harmful, slavery was a positive good. Other Southerners merely saw—or thought they saw—a practical necessity for retaining the slave labor system.

When *The Impending Crisis of the South*, a book attacking slavery on economic grounds, was published in 1857, its author, Hinton R. Helper of North Carolina, was bitterly assailed by Southerners. On the other hand, those who denounced Helper warmly praised the writings of a Virginian, George Fitzhugh, in the 1850s. In *Sociology for the South*, Fitzhugh said slavery was a social, political, and economic blessing—and avowed that people trying to eliminate it were blind to Southern realities.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE'S AMERICA

Alexis de Tocqueville, the young French magistrate who spent nine months in the United States in 1831 and 1832, has been mentioned previously for his views on life in America. His noteworthy contribution to political science, sociology, and history was *Democracy in America* (1835). He concluded that American democracy was functioning successfully; that its success depended chiefly on separation of church and state and on the absence of centralization; that American political morality was important; and that American democracy was not for export to Europe until such time as Europeans elevated their standards of governmental morality.



Prints of Uncle Tom's Cabin

The Frenchman was particularly struck by what he saw as an American tendency toward the practical, an avoidance of traditions, and an optimistic hope that in the new social system people would be able to progress rapidly toward perfection. One of his principal theses was that the American system of government derived from a dominant principle—the will of the people—that had been felt all during the nation's history.

The French magistrate, who stayed long enough to look around thoroughly and to reflect on what he saw and heard, was by no means oblivious to problems involved in the questions of slavery and race. “The most formidable of all the ills which threaten the future existence of the Union,” he wrote, “arises from the presence of a black population upon its territory; and in contemplating the cause of the present embarrassments or of the future dangers of the United States, the observer is invariably led to consider this as a primary fact.”

Social mobility was a feature of American life that intrigued de Tocqueville. He believed that, with one exception, such mobility would prevent both class stratification and extreme social conflict resulting from it. This exception he found in black-white relationships. If and when Southern blacks “are raised to the level of freemen,” he predicted, “they will soon revolt at being deprived of almost all their civil rights; and as they cannot become the equals of the whites, they will speedily show themselves as enemies.” Northern whites, he observed, “Avoided the Negroes with increasing care in proportion as the legal barriers of separation are removed.”

The French observer was not without other doubts concerning the American experiment. He saw a potential danger to freedom of the individual in the possibility that majorities would crush minorities or nibble away at minority rights. He also thought he discerned a trend toward mediocrity in popular leaders and in American culture—this in a country where Emerson, Fuller, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Stowe, and Lincoln all were living when de Tocqueville’s book went to press. Still, while the French visitor guessed wrong at times, he was remarkably correct in the aggregate.

