

The Second Great Awakening and Social Reform Movements

Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening was a religious revival that occurred in the United States beginning in the late eighteenth century and lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century. While it occurred in all parts of the United States, it was especially strong in the Northeast and the Midwest.

By the late 1700s, many Americans no longer regularly attended church services. This occurred for several reasons. Some people now believed that God did not play an important role in everyday life. God also supposedly was not concerned with a person's church attendance; rather, God would judge the person on how he or she had lived his or her life on Earth. Other people had become too consumed with earning a living to have time to worship God. As a result of declining religious convictions, many religious faiths sponsored religious revivals. These revivals emphasized human beings' dependence upon God.

Most of the religious revivals occurred as camp meetings. Adherents and interested parties would spend several days hearing the word of God from various religious leaders. While these services were very emotional, they did not become hysterical gatherings as many earlier revivals had become. They also served as social gatherings. Many Americans living on the frontier did not have regular contact with their neighbors. The revivals allowed these people an opportunity to hear God's word, but they also provided rural families an opportunity to talk and trade with other people.

Perhaps the most influential evangelist of the Second Great Awakening was Charles Finney. He began to spread his message in western New York during the early 1820s. In 1835, he became a professor of theology at Oberlin College in Ohio. He eventually served as Oberlin College's president. Numerous religious groups benefited from the Second Great Awakening. Baptists and Methodists found the largest number of converts, swelling their numbers across the United States including in Ohio. New religious groups also resulted from the revivals. These groups did not find true happiness with the already established faiths and created their own doctrine. One of these groups was the Mormons.

The revivals encouraged people to return to God. Americans should dedicate their lives to God and to living in a Godly manner. As a result, church attendance increased during the first half of the nineteenth century. A desire to reform America also arose among the people. Attempts to limit alcohol consumption and to abolish slavery came directly out of the Second Great Awakening and its message.

Abolitionists

From slavery's very beginning in Europe and Europe's colonies, some people had opposed it and wished to see it abolished. People opposed to slavery in any form came to be called abolitionists. Before the late 1700s, many abolitionists were people who were currently slaves themselves or were former slaves who had gained their freedom. But by the 1780s, abolitionists in Great Britain and the United States, where most enslaved people were African, began to include white people as well.

In North America, one of the earliest groups to speak out against slavery was the Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers. The Quakers believed in an Inner Light. According to their religious beliefs, a piece of God, the Inner Light, existed in all human beings. Because God exists in all people, the Quakers opposed violence and war. During the late 1700s and the 1800s, the Society of Friends also protested against slavery. If God existed in all humans, how could another human, the Quakers pondered, own or whip a piece of God?

Other white people also began to oppose slavery during the late 1700s in the United States. Unlike the Quakers, most of these people did not necessarily oppose slavery on religious grounds. Some white Americans contended that slave owners violated the principles that the Founding Fathers and the Declaration of Independence had established in 1776. They argued that whites were hypocrites for fighting for their own freedom from England during the American Revolution while keeping African Americans enslaved. White Americans were not creating a country where all people had the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

At the same time, other whites, including some slave owners, began to believe that slavery was no longer cost effective. Many farmers in the South used slave labor to grow tobacco. By the 1770s, the tobacco market had become glutted due to over-production. In some cases, it began to cost the slave owners more money to grow the crop than they received when they sold it. As a result, some whites began to believe that slavery would soon come to an end.

Another group dedicated to slavery's abolition was the American Colonization Society. Founded in 1817, most members of the American Colonization Society came from religious groups, especially the Society of Friends, in the North or were slave owners from states in the Upper South like Kentucky and Virginia... Many of the organization's members advocated gradual emancipation. In this way, slaves would gain their freedom in small numbers. Many Northern states passed laws in the late 1700s that stipulated a slave would gain his or her freedom upon reaching a certain age. Gradual emancipation laws would hopefully reduce the fears of reluctant whites. Many Northern and Southern whites opposed an end to slavery because they did not want to face competition from or to live next to former slaves. To deal with these objections, the American Colonization

Society proposed sending former slaves and African Americans who had been born free to Liberia in Africa. The American Colonization Society also pressured the federal government to compensate slave owners who freed their slaves. By 1830, the American Colonization had managed to send only 1,400 blacks to Liberia. More slaves were born every week in the United States than the American Colonization Society sent back to Africa in an entire year.

During the 1830s, a new type of radical abolitionist appeared. These abolitionists called for the immediate end to slavery. One of the most prominent radical abolitionists was a man named William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison called for slavery's immediate end as well as equal rights for African Americans with whites. Not all radical abolitionists agreed with Garrison on the granting of equal rights to African Americans. But they did declare that slavery was a crime against humanity and that it must end.

In 1831, Garrison began to publish an anti-slavery newspaper known as *The Liberator*. This paper's purpose was to educate white Northerners, many of whom had never seen a slave, about slavery's cruelty. By informing white Northerners about slavery's injustices, Garrison hoped to recruit members to the abolition movement. In 1833, he helped establish the American Anti-Slavery Society. This organization sent lecturers across the North to convince people of slavery's brutality. In 1839, the society split. Garrison and his supporters called for the creation of a new government that disallowed slavery from the very beginning. He contended that the United States Constitution was an illegal document for denying African Americans their freedom. If the South would not agree to create a new nation that outlawed slavery, Garrison argued that the North should secede from the United States and form its own country.

Other members of the American Anti-Slavery Society contended that Garrison's views were too radical. They agreed that slavery was wrong but also said that the United States Constitution had created a legitimate government under which the people had the right to end oppression. Rather than threatening to break apart the United States, these abolitionists hoped to elect people of their beliefs to political office. Then the elected representatives could make laws outlawing slavery. To achieve this end, these abolitionists formed a political party, the Liberty Party. Over time the Liberty Party evolved into the Free-Soil Party and eventually became part of the new Republican Party. This division between abolitionists remained until the end of the American Civil War. In 1865, the United States officially outlawed slavery with the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

The Call for Women's Rights 1848

Seneca Falls Declaration

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they were accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

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. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men--both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming to all intents and purposes, her master--the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women--the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church, as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he 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.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation--in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

