

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860 Chapter Contents
Book Title: Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People
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Chapter 12

Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860

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Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860 Chapter Introduction
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Chapter Introduction

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Harriet Beecher Stowe was a daughter of Rev. Lyman Beecher, an evangelist who helped start the temperance movement in the United States. Her sister, Catharine Beecher, was a prominent reformer of housekeeping and domestic life. Her brother, Henry Ward Beecher, was an ardent antislavery advocate and a nationally famous

preacher, and her husband, Calvin Stowe, designed the public school system for the state of Ohio. Harriet wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a huge best seller and the most powerful of antislavery tracts. She filled her book with the well-documented horrors of slavery, but she grounded it in the reform culture in which she grew up and which she helped to shape. Stowe and her family and coworkers wanted more than the end of slavery and alcohol abuse. They wanted to shape America in the image of northern evangelicalism and the middle-class home.

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BETWEEN 1820 AND 1845, Thomas Jefferson's agrarian republic became Andrew Jackson's mass democracy. Politicians who built the Whig and Democratic parties participated in the economic and social transformations of those years. They were also consumers and producers of the new forms of popular culture. In making their political appeals, they tapped skillfully into the national patchwork of aspiration, fear, and resentment. John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and their National Republican and Whig allies envisioned smooth-running, government-sponsored transportation and financial systems. Such visions echoed the faith in cosmic order, material progress, and moral improvement that had become cultural axioms for the more prosperous and cosmopolitan Americans. Democrats, on the other hand, defended Jefferson's republic of limited government and white liberty and equality. They portrayed a haunted political universe in which trickery, deceit, and special privilege—the old signs of encroaching power—lurked behind the promises of the Whigs.

Whigs and Democrats constructed their coalitions largely at the neighborhood and state levels. Their arguments for and against state-supported internal improvements and state-chartered banks and corporations mirrored the national debate, and thus strengthened and nationalized party loyalties. Local cultural battles—arguments over alcohol, sexual morality, education, crime, and much more—also sharpened Democratic and Whig attitudes.

In the North, the churchgoing middle class provided the Whig Party with a political culture, a reform-oriented social agenda, and most of its electoral support. Whig evangelicals believed that with God's help they could improve the world by improving the individuals within it, and they enlisted the Whig Party in that campaign. On a variety of issues, including prostitution, temperance, public education, and state-supported insane asylums and penitentiaries, Whigs used government to improve individual morality and discipline. Democrats argued that attempts to legislate morality were antirepublican and wrong. Questions of social reform provoked the angriest differences between Democrats and Whigs, particularly in the North. Not all reform movements, however, strengthened the party system. When some whiggish northerners insisted upon women's rights and the immediate emancipation of all slaves, they attacked the foundations of the white republic and the party system, opening important questions that the political parties wanted to

ignore.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-1 The Politics of Progress
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12-1 The Politics of Progress

Whigs assumed that both markets and government were agents of progress. Democrats, locally as well as nationally, preached that markets were good and governments were necessary, but that collaboration between the two produced corruption.

Focus Question

What were Whig and Democratic conceptions of the duties and limits of government?

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12-1a Markets and Governments

Whigs praised the new market economy as more than a means of producing national wealth. The market was, they insisted, an engine of social and moral progress. Markets created opportunities, and individuals who developed good work habits and moral discipline would prosper. Thus, the market would discourage laziness and ignorance and encourage social harmony, good manners, and disciplined ambition. At the same time, it would fill American homes with comfortable furniture and moral housewives. William H. Seward, the Whig governor of New York, supported transportation projects because they broke down neighborhood isolation and hastened the emergence of a market society, with “all the consequent advantages of morality, piety, and knowledge.” The market, in short, produced moral progress.

Whigs believed that Americans enjoyed a harmony of class interests and an equality of opportunity that every virtuous person would recognize and that only the resentful, the

mean-spirited, and the unworthy would doubt. (Almost as much as the Democrats, Whigs excluded racial minorities from the “Americans.”) To poor farmers and city workers who believed that the Market Revolution undermined traditional forms of independence, Whigs promised social mobility within a new system of interdependence, but only to deserving individuals. Pointing to self-made Whigs such as Daniel Webster and Abraham Lincoln, Whigs promised national prosperity in a world that rewarded virtue.

Chronology

1819	New York State builds the first prison under the Auburn system
1826	Reformers found the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance
1831	William Lloyd Garrison begins publication of the antislavery <i>Liberator</i> • New York Magdalen Society publishes its first annual report
1833	Abolitionists found the American Anti-Slavery Society
1840	Working-class drinkers found the Washington Temperance Society
1848	First Women’s Rights Convention held in Seneca Falls, New York
1851	Maine becomes the first of 17 states to enact statewide prohibition
1860	New York enacts the Married Women’s Property Act

As they did nationally, Whigs at the state and local levels wanted government to subsidize economic development and the moral improvement that would come along with it. Government should build roads, establish public schools, and create and oversee a stable, reliable currency. It should also foster virtue. “The government,” remarked a New York City Whig in 1848, “is not merely a machine for making wars and punishing felons, but is bound to do all that is within its power to promote the welfare of the People.” *The American Review*, a Whig periodical, went further: “Forms of government are instituted for the protection and fostering of virtue, and are valuable only as they accomplish this.”

Democrats saw things differently. Few of them condemned market society, but they argued forcefully against activist government, high taxes, and government partnerships with private interests. In contrast to Whig optimism, they tended to view human nature through a grim combination of classical republicanism and gothic romance and saw government not as a tool of progress but as a potential evil—a concentration of power in the hands of imperfect, self-interested men. The only safe course was to limit its power. In 1837, the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* declared: “The best government is that which governs least,” and went on to denounce the “natural imperfection, both in wisdom and judgment and purity of purpose, of all human legislation, exposed constantly to the pressure of partial interest; interests which, at the same time that they are essentially selfish and tyrannical, are ever vigilant, persevering, and subtle in all the arts of deception and corruption.” It was a lot like what Democrats saw in stage melodramas, read in cheap fiction, and heard in their conservative churches. Most of all, Democrats insisted that Whig governments would create privilege and inequality. Corporate charters, banks, and subsidies to turnpike, canal, and railroad companies, they said, benefited insiders and transformed republican government into an engine of corruption and inequality.

Jackson himself acknowledged that varying levels of talent and energy (not to mention inheritance and social connections) create inequalities of power and wealth. He and other Democrats never talked of economic leveling. But they constantly accused Whigs of using government to make the rich richer. The granting of government privileges, warned one Democrat, was sure “to break up that social equality which is the legitimate foundation of our institutions, and the destruction of which would render our boasted freedom a mere phantom.” By contrast, the government favored by the Whigs would enrich a favored few. Democrats demanded limited government that was deaf to the demands of special interests. Neither government nor the market, they said, should be allowed to subvert the democracy of white men on which the republic rested.

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12-1b Banks, Roads, Canals

Andrew Jackson's national administration destroyed the Bank of the United States (see [Chapter 11](#)). As a result, regulation of banking, credit, and currency fell to the state governments. Banks emerged as a central political issue in nearly every state, particularly after the widespread bank failures following the crash of 1837. Whigs defended banks as agents of economic progress, arguing that they provided credit for roads and canals, loans to businessmen and commercial farmers, and the banknotes that served as the chief medium of exchange. Democrats branded banks as government-protected agents of inequality dominated by insiders who controlled artificial concentrations of money, who enjoyed chartered privileges, and who issued banknotes and expanded or contracted credit to suit their own advantage.

In state legislatures, Whigs defended what had become a roughly standard system of private banks chartered by state governments. They had the right to circulate banknotes and had [limited liability \(Liability that protected directors and stockholders of corporations from corporate debts by separating those debts from personal liabilities.\)](#) to protect directors and stockholders from debts incurred by the bank. Many Democrats proposed abolishing all banks—"a set of swindling machines," said one western Democrat. Others proposed reforms, demanding, for example, a high ratio of specie reserves to banknotes as a guard against inflationary paper money. Democrats also wanted to hold bank directors and stockholders responsible for corporate debts and bankruptcies. Some proposed banning corporate charters altogether.

By these and other means, Democrats in the states protected currency and credit from the government favoritism, dishonesty, and elitism that, they argued, enriched Whig insiders and impoverished honest Democrats. Whigs responded that corporate privileges and immunities and an abundant, elastic currency were keys to economic development, and they fought Democrats every step of the way.

Democrats in Congress and the White House blocked federally funded roads and canals (see [Chapter 11](#)). In response, the states launched the transportation revolution themselves,

either by taking direct action or by chartering private corporations to do the work. State legislatures everywhere debated the wisdom of direct state action, of corporate privileges, of subsidies to canals and railroads, and of government debt. Predictably, Whigs favored direct action by state governments. Democrats often supported internal improvements, but they opposed “partial” legislation that would benefit part of a state at the expense of the rest. They also opposed projects that would lead to higher taxes and put state governments into debt. They made the same argument in every state: Beneath Whig plans for extensive improvements lay schemes to create special privilege, inequality, debt, and corruption—all at the expense of a hoodwinked people.

The argument about government and economic development in the states mirrored the national debate. Whigs wanted to use government and the market to make an economically and morally progressive—albeit hierarchical—republic. Democrats viewed both government and the new institutions of market society with suspicion and vowed not to subvert the equal rights and rough equality of condition that were, in their view, the preconditions of republican citizenship. In language that echoed their Jeffersonian forebears, Jacksonian Democrats demanded that the market remain subservient to the republic. These state-level debates helped to cement party loyalties and make them national. Whig and Democratic arguments about banks and internal improvement were essentially the same in every state. In arguing their cases in Alabama or Pennsylvania, legislators and voters strengthened their identities as Democrats or Whigs and their ties with like-minded people throughout the republic. Thus, these state-level fights bolstered a national two-party system that did its best to ignore regional differences.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-2 The Politics of Social Reform: Schools and Asylums

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12-2 The Politics of Social Reform: Schools and Asylums

The establishment of public schools and institutions for criminals and the insane worked the same way. Whigs and Democrats agreed that such state-supported institutions had become

Focus Question

What were Whig and Democratic positions on the issues of public schools, prisons, and

necessary. But Whigs wanted them to improve the character and morals of their inmates, and were willing to spend money for that purpose.

asylums?

Democrats wanted to educate children and incarcerate criminals and the insane, but they wanted to do it cheaply. The debates over state-run institutions, in short, gave Americans another opportunity to behave like Democrats and Whigs.

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12-2a Public Schools

During the second quarter of the 19th century, local and state governments built systems of tax-supported public schools, known as [common schools \(Tax-supported public schools built by state and local governments.\)](#). Before that time, most children learned reading, writing, and arithmetic at home, in poorly staffed town schools, in private schools, or in charity schools run by churches or other benevolent organizations. Despite the lack of any system of education, most children learned to read and write. That was, however, more likely among boys than among girls, among whites than among blacks, and among northeasterners than among westerners or southerners.

By the 1830s, Whigs and Democrats agreed that providing common schools was a proper function of government, and Democrats often agreed with Whigs that schools could equalize opportunity. Massachusetts Democrat Robert Rantoul, for example, believed that rich and poor children should “be brought equally and together up to the starting point at the public expense; after that we must shift for ourselves.” More radical Democrats, however, wanted public schooling that would erase snobbery. Marcus Morton, Democratic governor of Massachusetts, wrote that it was the job of the common schools to democratize children “before the pride of family or wealth, or other adventitious distinction has taken a deep root in the young heart.”

The reformers who created the most advanced, expensive, and centralized state school systems were Whigs: Horace Mann of Massachusetts, Henry Barnard of Connecticut, Calvin Stowe (husband of Harriet Beecher) of Ohio, and others. These reformers talked more

about character building and Whig Protestant culture than about the three R's. They wanted schools that would downplay class divisions, but they were interested less in democratizing wealthy children than in civilizing the poor. Calvin H. Wiley, the Whig superintendent of schools in North Carolina, promised that proper schools would make Americans "homogeneous ... intelligent, eminently republican, sober, calculating, moral and conservative." William Seward, the Whig governor of New York, insisted that "education tends to produce equality, not by leveling all to the condition of the base, but by elevating all to the association of the wise and good."

The schools taught a basic Whig axiom: that social questions could be reduced to questions of individual character. A textbook entitled *The Thinker, A Moral Reader* (1855) told children to "remember that all the ignorance, degradation, and misery in the world, is the result of indolence and vice." To teach that lesson, the schools had children read from the King James Bible and recite prayers acceptable to all of the Protestant sects. Such texts reaffirmed a common Protestant morality while avoiding divisive doctrinal matters. Until the arrival of significant numbers of Catholic immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s, few parents complained about Protestant religious instruction in the public schools.

The Eureka Schoolhouse in Springfield, Vermont

Mandated by state law and supported by local taxes, such one-room schools taught generations of American children the three R's.



North Wind Picture Archives

Political arguments centered less on curriculum than on organization. Whigs wanted state-level centralization and proposed state superintendents and state boards of education, [normal schools \(State colleges established to train teachers.\)](#) (state teachers' colleges), texts chosen at the state level, and uniform school terms. They also (often with the help of economy-minded Democrats) recruited young women as teachers. In addition to fostering civility and Protestant morality in the schools, these women were a source of cheap labor. Salaries for female teachers in the northern states ranged from 40 percent to 60 percent lower than the salaries of their male coworkers. Largely as a result, the proportion of women among Massachusetts teachers rose from 56 percent in 1834 to 78 percent in 1860.

Democrats objected to the Whigs' insistence on centralization as elitist, intrusive, and expensive. They gave power to individual school districts, thus enabling local school committees to shape the curriculum, the length of the school year, and the choice of teachers and texts to local needs and preferences. Centralization, they argued, would create a metropolitan educational culture that served the purposes of the rich but ignored the

preferences of farmers and working people. It was standard Democratic social policy: inexpensive government and local control. Henry Barnard, Connecticut's superintendent of schools, denounced his Democratic opponents as "ignorant demagogues" and "a set of blockheads."

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12-2b Ethnicity, Religion, and the Schools

The argument between Whig centralism and Democratic parsimony dominated the debate over public education until the children of Irish and German immigrants entered schools by the thousands in the mid-1840s. Most immigrant families were poor and relied on their children to work and supplement the family income. Consequently, their children's attendance at school was irregular at best. Moreover, most immigrants were Catholics. The Irish regarded Protestant prayers and the King James Bible as heresies and as hated tools of British oppression. Some of the textbooks were worse. Olney's *Practical System of Modern Geography*, a standard textbook, declared that "the Irish in general are quick of apprehension, active, brave and hospitable; but passionate, ignorant, vain, and superstitious." A nun in Connecticut complained that Irish children in the public schools "see their parents looked upon as an inferior race." Whigs, joined by many native-born Democrats, saw Catholic complaints as popish assaults on the Protestantism that they insisted was at the heart of American republicanism.

Some school districts, particularly in the rural areas to which many Scandinavian and German immigrants found their way, created foreign-language schools and provided bilingual instruction. In other places, state support for church-run charity schools persisted. New York City supported both Catholic and Protestant schools until 1825. So did Lowell, Massachusetts; Hartford and Middletown, Connecticut; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, at various times from the 1830s through the 1860s. New Jersey provided state support to Catholic as well as other church schools until 1866. In northeastern cities, however, where immigrant Catholics often formed militant local majorities, such demands led to violence and to organized nativist (anti-immigrant) politics. In 1844, the Native American Party, with the endorsement of the Whigs, won the New York City elections. That same year in Philadelphia, riots that pitted avowedly Whig Protestants against Catholic immigrants,

ostensibly over the issue of Bible reading in schools, killed 13 people. Such conflicts would severely damage the northern Democratic coalition in the 1850s.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-2c Prisons

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12-2c Prisons

From the 1820s onward, state governments built institutions to house orphans, the dependent poor, the insane, and criminals. The Market Revolution increased the numbers of such persons and made them more visible, more anonymous, and more separated from family and community resources. Americans in the 18th century (and many in the 19th century as well) had assumed that poverty, crime, insanity, and other social ills were among God's ways of punishing sin and testing the human capacity for both suffering and charity. By the 1820s, however, reformers were arguing that deviance was the result of childhood deprivation. "Normal" people, they argued, learned discipline and respect for work, property, laws, and other people from their parents. Deviants were the products of brutal, often drunken households devoid of parental love and discipline. The cure was to place them in a controlled setting, teach them work and discipline, and turn them into useful citizens.

In state legislatures, Whigs favored putting deviants into institutions for rehabilitation. Democrats, although they agreed that the states should incarcerate criminals and deviants, regarded attempts at rehabilitation as wrongheaded and expensive. They favored institutions that isolated the insane, warehoused the dependent poor, and punished criminals. Most state systems were a compromise between the two positions.

Pennsylvania built prisons at Pittsburgh (1826) and Philadelphia (1829) that put solitary prisoners into cells to contemplate their misdeeds and to plot a new life. The results of such solitary confinement included few reformations and numerous attempts at suicide. Only New Jersey imitated the Pennsylvania system. Far more common were institutions based on the model developed in New York at Auburn (1819) and Sing Sing (1825). In the [Auburn system](#) (Prison system designed to reform criminals and reduce expenses through the sale of items produced in workshops. Prisoners slept in solitary cells, marched in military formation to meals and workshops, and were forbidden to speak to one another at any

[time.](#)), prisoners slept in solitary cells and marched in military formation to meals and workshops. They were forbidden to speak to one another at any time. The rule of silence, it was believed, encouraged both discipline and contemplation. The French writer Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting a New York prison in 1830, remarked that “the silence within these vast walls ... is that of death ... There were a thousand living beings, and yet it was a vast desert solitude.”

Auburn Prison

Inmates at New York’s Auburn Prison were forbidden to speak and were marched in lockstep between workshops, dining halls, and their cells.



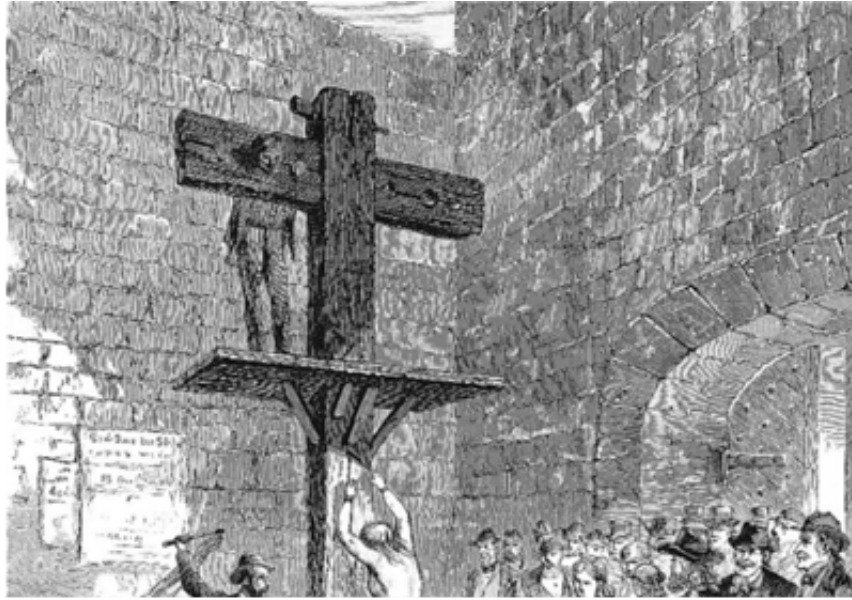
The Granger Collection, NYC

The Auburn system was designed both to reform criminals and to reduce expenses, for the prisons sold workshop products to the outside. Between these two goals, Whigs favored rehabilitation. Democrats favored profit-making workshops, and thus lower operating costs

and lower taxes. Robert Wiltse, named by the Democrats to run Sing Sing prison in the 1830s, used harsh punishments (including flogging and starving), sparse meals, and forced labor to punish criminals and make the prison pay for itself. In 1839, William Seward, as the newly elected Whig governor of New York, fired Wiltse and appointed administrators who substituted privileges and rewards for punishment and emphasized rehabilitation over profit making. They provided religious instruction; they improved food and working conditions; and they cut back on the use of flogging. When Democrats took back the statehouse in the 1842 elections, they discovered that the Whigs' brief experiment in kindness had produced a \$50,000 deficit, so they swiftly reinstated the old regime.

The Whipping Post and Pillory at New Castle, Delaware

Delaware was a slave state that continued to inflict public, corporal punishment on lawbreakers. Many of the witnesses to the whipping depicted here are small children, who are supposedly learning a lesson.



North Wind/North Wind Picture Archives

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12-2d Asylums

The leading advocate of humane treatment of the insane was [Dorothea Dix \(Boston reformer who traveled throughout the country campaigning for humane, state-supported](#)

[asylums for the insane.](#)), a Boston humanitarian who was shocked by the incarceration and abuse of the insane in common jails. She traveled throughout the country, urging citizens to pressure their state legislatures into building asylums committed to what reformers called “moral treatment.” The asylums were to be clean and pleasant places, preferably outside the cities, and the inmates were to be treated humanely. Attendants were not to beat inmates or tie them up, although they could use cold showers as a form of discipline. Dix and other reformers wanted the asylums to be safe, nurturing environments in which the insane could be made well.

By 1860, the legislatures of 28 of the 33 states had established state-run insane asylums. Whig legislators, with minimal support from Democrats, approved appropriations for the more expensive and humane moral treatment facilities. Occasionally, however, Dorothea Dix won Democratic support as well. In North Carolina, she befriended the wife of a powerful Democratic legislator as the woman lay on her deathbed. The dying woman convinced her husband to support building an asylum. His impassioned speech won the approval of the lower house for a state asylum to be named Dix Hill. In the North Carolina senate, however, the proposal won the votes of 91 percent of the Whigs and only 14 percent of the Democrats—a partisan division that held in state after state.

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12-3 The Politics of Alcohol

Central to party formation in the North was the fight between evangelical Whigs who demanded that government regulate public (and often private) morality and Democrats who feared both big government and the Whig cultural agenda. The most persistent issue in that argument was the question of alcohol—so much so that in many places the temperance question defined

Focus Question

Trace the history of alcohol as a social and political question from the 1820s through the 1840s. Which Americans favored temperance? Which opposed it?

the differences between Democrats and Whigs.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-3a The Alcoholic Republic

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12-3a The Alcoholic Republic

The years 1790 to 1830 witnessed a dramatic rise in alcohol consumption. Americans had been drinking alcohol since the time of the first settlements. (The Puritan flagship *Arabella* had carried three times as much beer as water.) But drinking, like all other “normal” behaviors, took place within a structure of paternal authority. Americans tumbled every day in the course of their ordinary activities: at family meals and around the fireside, at work, and at barn raisings, militia musters, dances, court days (even judges and juries passed the bottle), weddings, funerals, corn huskings—even at the ordinations of ministers. Under such circumstances, drinking—even drunkenness—seldom posed a threat to authority or to the social order.

Barroom Dancing, circa 1820

In this democratic, neighborly scene in a country inn in the early republic, celebrants of different classes drink, dance, and indulge in amorous adventures while an African American man, in slippers, plays the fiddle.



Niday Picture Library/Alamy

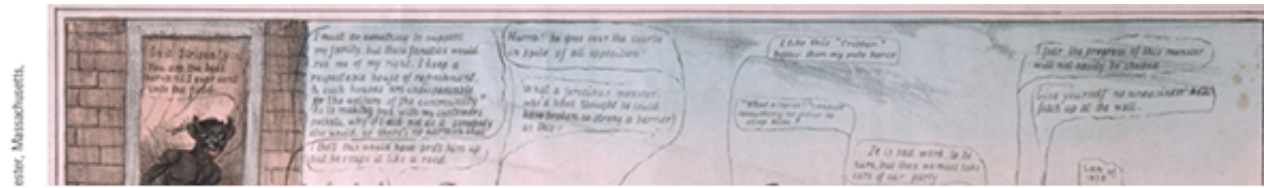
That old pattern of communal drinking persisted into the 19th century, but during the 50 years following the Revolution, it gradually gave way to a new pattern. Farmers, particularly those in newly settled areas, regularly produced a surplus of grain that they turned into whiskey. In Washington County in western Pennsylvania, for example, 1 family in 10 operated a distillery in the 1790s. Whiskey was safer than water and milk, which were often tainted, and it was cheaper than coffee or tea. It was also cheaper than imported rum, so Americans embraced whiskey as their national drink and consumed extraordinary quantities of it. Per capita consumption of pure alcohol in all its forms increased from three to nearly four gallons annually between 1790 and 1830, and most of the increase was in the form of cheap and potent whiskey. By 1830, per capita consumption of distilled spirits was more than five gallons per year—the highest it has ever been, and three times what it is in the United States today. The United States had become, as one historian has said, an

“alcoholic republic.”

The nation’s growing thirst was driven not by conviviality or neighborliness but by a desire to get drunk. Most Americans drank regularly, although with wide variations. Men drank far more than women, the poor and the rich drank more than the emerging middle class, city dwellers drank more than farmers, westerners drank more than easterners, and southerners drank a bit more than northerners. Throughout the nation, the heaviest drinking took place among the increasing numbers of young men who lived away from their families and outside the old social controls: soldiers and sailors, boatmen and other transport workers, lumberjacks, schoolmasters, journeyman craftsmen, college students. Among such men, the controlled tipping of the 18th century gave way to the binge and to solitary drinking. By the 1820s, American physicians were learning to diagnose delirium tremens—the trembling and the paranoid delusions brought on by withdrawal from physical addiction to alcohol. By that decade, social reformers branded alcohol as a threat to individual well-being, domestic peace, public order, and the republic itself.

Striped Pig

This cartoon, filled with the individual sin and misery and the social destruction caused by alcohol, portrays the Massachusetts tavern keeper’s famous striped pig as an instrument of the devil.



Death on the Striped Pig, 1839 (colour litho), Johnston, David Claypoole (1798-1865) (after)/American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA/The Bridgeman Art Library

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12-3b Temperance Movement

Drinking had been a part of social life since the beginnings of English settlement, but the withering of authority during the Market Revolution led to increased consumption, increased public drunkenness, and a perceived increase in alcohol-fed violence and social problems. After repeated false starts, the temperance crusade began in earnest in 1826,

when northeastern evangelicals founded the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance, soon renamed the **American Temperance Society** ([Society established in 1826 by northeastern evangelicals that headed the crusade for alcohol temperance.](#)) . The movement's manifesto was Lyman Beecher's *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance* (1826). Addressing the churchgoing middle class, Beecher declared alcohol an addictive drug and warned that even moderate drinkers risked becoming hopeless drunkards. Thus, temperance, like other evangelical reforms, was presented as a contest between self-control and slavery to one's appetites. By encouraging total abstinence, reformers hoped to stop the creation of new drunkards while the old ones died out. Even though Beecher pinned his hopes on self-discipline, he wanted middle-class abstainers to spread reform through both example and coercion. As middle-class evangelicals eliminated alcohol from their own lives, they also ceased to offer it to their guests, buy or sell it, or provide it to their employees, and they encouraged their friends to do the same.

Beecher's crusade gathered strength in the middle-class revivals of the 1820s and 1830s. Charles Grandison Finney (see [Chapter 10](#)), in his revival at Rochester, made total abstinence a condition of conversion. Many other ministers and churches followed suit, and by the mid-1830s, the evangelical middle class had largely disengaged from alcohol and the people who drank it. Following a temperance lecture by Finney's coworker Theodore Dwight Weld, Rochester grocers Elijah and Albert Smith rolled their stock of whiskey out on the sidewalk, smashed the barrels, and let the liquor spill into the street. Other Rochester merchants threw their liquor into the Erie Canal or sold it off at cost. Hundreds of evangelical businessmen pledged that they would refuse to rent to merchants who sold liquor, sell grain to distillers, or enter a store that sold alcohol. Many of them made abstinence a condition of employment, placing ads that carried the line "None But Temperate Men Need Apply." Abstinence and opposition to the use of distilled spirits (people continued to argue about wine and beer) had become a badge of middle-class respectability.

The Drunkard's Progress

This popular print describes the drunkard's progression from social drinking to alcoholism, isolation, crime, and death by suicide. His desolate wife and daughter and his burning house are at bottom.



Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division [LC-DIG-ppmsca-32719]

Among themselves, the reformers achieved considerable success. By 1835, the American Temperance Society claimed 1.5 million members and estimated that 2 million Americans had renounced ardent spirits (whiskey, rum, and other distilled liquors); 250,000 had formally pledged to completely abstain from alcohol. The society further estimated that 4,000 distilleries had gone out of business, and that many of the survivors had cut back their production. Many politicians stopped buying drinks to win votes. The Kentucky Whig Henry Clay, once known for keeping late hours, began to serve only cold water when he entertained, and in 1833 members of Congress formed the American Congressional Temperance Society. The U.S. Army put an end to the age-old liquor ration in 1832, and increasing numbers of militia officers stopped supplying their men with whiskey. The annual consumption of alcohol, which had reached an all-time high in the 1820s, dropped by more than half in the 1830s (from 3.9 gallons of pure alcohol per adult in 1830 to 1.8 gallons in 1840).

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-3c The Origins of Prohibition
Book Title: Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People
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12-3c The Origins of Prohibition

In the middle 1830s, Whigs made temperance a political issue. Realizing that voluntary abstinence would not end drunkenness, Whig evangelicals drafted coercive, prohibitionist legislation. First, they attacked the licenses granting grocery stores and taverns the right to sell liquor by the drink and to permit it to be consumed on the premises. The licenses were important sources of revenue for local governments. They also gave local authorities the power to cancel the licenses of troublesome establishments. Militant temperance advocates, usually in association with local Whigs, demanded that the authorities use that power to outlaw all public drinking places. In communities throughout the North, the licensing issue, always freighted with divisions over religion and social class, became the issue around which local parties organized. The question first reached the state level in Massachusetts, when in 1838 a Whig legislature passed the Fifteen-Gallon Law, which decreed that merchants could sell ardent spirits only in quantities of 15 gallons or more, thus outlawing every public drinking place in the state. In 1839, Massachusetts voters sent enough Democrats to the legislature to rescind the law.

The Whig attempt to cancel tavern licenses proved unenforceable because proprietors simply operated without licenses or found ways to get around the laws. While the Massachusetts Fifteen-Gallon Law was in effect, one Boston tavern keeper painted stripes on a pig and charged patrons an admission fee of six cents (the old price of a drink) to view the “exhibition.” He then provided customers—who paid over and over to see the pig—with a “complimentary” glass of whiskey.

Leading Democrats agreed with Whigs that Americans drank too much, but whereas Whigs insisted that regulating morality was a proper function of government, Democrats warned that coercive government intrusion into areas of private choice would violate republican liberties. In many communities, alcohol became the defining difference between Democrats and Whigs. In 1834, for instance, a Whig campaign worker ventured into a poor neighborhood in Rochester and asked a woman how her husband planned to vote. “Why, he has always been Jackson,” she said, “and I don’t think he’s joined the Cold Water.”

12-3d The Washingtonians

Not all temperance movements sprang from organized political and evangelical action. One evening in 1840—in the depths of a devastating economic depression—six craftsmen were drinking at Chase’s Tavern in Baltimore. More or less as a joke, they sent one of their number to a nearby temperance lecture. He came back a teetotaler and converted the others. They then drew up a total abstinence pledge and promised to devote themselves to the reform of other drinkers. Within months, from this beginning a national movement had emerged, called the **Washington Temperance Society** ([Society established in 1840 by reformed drinkers of the laboring classes who operated separate from the church and converted drinkers through compassion and persuasion.](#)). With a core membership of men who had opposed temperance in the 1830s, the Washingtonians differed from older temperance societies in several ways. First, they identified themselves as members of the laboring classes. Second, they were separated from the churches. Although many of them were churchgoers (usually Methodist or Baptist), many were not, and the Washingtonians avoided religious controversy by avoiding religion. Third, the Washingtonians—at least those who called themselves True Washingtonians—rejected recourse to politics and legislation and concentrated instead on the conversion of drinkers through compassion and persuasion. Finally, they welcomed “hopeless” drunkards—who accounted for about 10 percent of the membership—and hailed them as heroes when they sobered up.

Whig reformers welcomed the Washingtonians at first, but they soon had second thoughts. The nonreligious character of the movement disturbed those who saw temperance as an arm of evangelical reform. Previous advocates of temperance had assumed that sobriety would be accompanied by evangelical decorum. Instead, the meetings, picnics, and parades held by the Washingtonians were continuous with a popular culture that Whig evangelicals opposed. While the temperance regulars read pamphlets and listened to lectures by clergymen, lawyers, and doctors, the Washingtonians enjoyed raucous sing-alongs, comedy routines, barnyard imitations, dramatic skits, and even full-dress minstrel shows geared to temperance themes. Meetings featured experience speeches by reformed drunkards. Speaking extemporaneously, they omitted none of the horrors of an alcoholic life—attempts at suicide, friendships betrayed, fathers and mothers desolated, wives beaten and

abandoned, children dead of starvation. Although Washingtonians had given up alcohol, their melodramatic tales, street parades, songbooks, and minstrel shows—even when presented with a Methodist or Baptist accent—were not the temperance reformation that Lyman Beecher and the Whigs had had in mind.

Nowhere did the Washingtonians differ more sharply from the temperance regulars than in their visions of the reformed life. The Whig reformers tied abstinence to individual ambition and middle-class domesticity. They expected men who quit drinking to withdraw from the male drinking world and to retreat into the comfort of the newly feminized middle-class family. Washingtonians, on the other hand, translated traditional male sociability into sober forms. Moreover, they called former drinkers back to the responsibilities of traditional fatherhood. Their experience stories began with the hurt drunkards had caused their wives and children and ended with their transformation into dependable providers and authoritative fathers. While the Whig temperance regulars tried to extend the ethos of individual ambition and the new middle-class domesticity into society at large, Washingtonians sought to rescue the self-respect and moral authority of working-class fathers.

The Washington Temperance Society collapsed toward the end of the 1840s, but its legacy survived. Among former drinkers in the North, it had introduced a new sense of domestic responsibility and a healthy fear of drunkenness. Consumption of pure alcohol dropped from 1.8 to 1.0 gallons annually in the 1840s. Along the way, the Washingtonians and related groups created a self-consciously respectable native Protestant working class in American cities.

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Book Title: Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People
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12-3e Ethnicity and Alcohol

In the 1840s and 1850s, millions of Irish and German immigrants poured into neighborhoods recently stirred by working-class revivals and temperance agitation. The newcomers had their own time-honored relations to alcohol. The Germans introduced lager beer to the United States, thus providing a wholesome alternative for Americans who wished to give up spirits without joining the teetotalers. The Germans also built old-country

beer halls in American cities, complete with sausage counters, oompah bands, group singing, and other family attractions. For their part, the Irish reaffirmed their love of whiskey—a love forged in colonial oppression and in a culture that accepted trouble with resignation—a love that legitimized levels of male drunkenness and violence that Americans, particularly the temperance forces, found appalling. Differences in immigrant drinking were given architectural expression. German beer halls provided seating arrangements for whole families. Irish bars, on the other hand, provided a bar but no tables or chairs. If a drinker had to sit down, they reasoned, it was time for him to go home.

In the 1850s, native resentment of Catholic immigrants drove thousands of Baptist and Methodist “respectables” out of the Democratic coalition and into nativist Whig majorities that—beginning with Maine in 1851—established legal prohibition in several northern and mid-Atlantic states. Many of these Democrats became part of the North’s Republican majority on the eve of the Civil War.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-3f The South and Social Reform
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12-3f The South and Social Reform

On economic issues, southern state legislatures divided along the same lines as northern legislatures: Whigs wanted government participation in the economy, Democrats did not. On social questions, however, southern Whigs and Democrats both opposed moralizing legislation. The South was a rural, conservative region of father-dominated households. Southern voters, Whigs as well as Democrats, perceived attempts at “social improvement” as intrusive, wrongheaded assaults on the autonomy of neighborhoods and families.

The southern states enacted school laws and drew up blueprints for state school systems, but the white South had little need for schools to enforce a common culture. Moreover, the South had less money and less faith in government. Consequently, southern schools tended to be locally controlled, to be infused with southern evangelical culture, and to have a limited curriculum and a short school year. In 1860, northern children attended school for an average of more than 50 days a year; white children in the South attended school for an average of 10 days annually.

By 1860, every slave state except Florida and the Carolinas had built prisons modeled on the Auburn system. Southern prisons, however, stressed punishment and profits over rehabilitation. Some southern Whigs favored northern-style reforms, but they knew that voters would reject them. Popular votes in Alabama in 1834 and in North Carolina in 1846 brought in resounding defeats for proposals to build or reform penitentiaries in those states. While northern evangelicals preached that criminals could be reformed, southern preachers demanded Old Testament vengeance, arguing that hanging, whipping, and branding were inexpensive, more effective than mere incarceration, and sanctioned by the Bible. Other southerners, defending the code of honor, charged that victims and their relatives would be denied vengeance if criminals were hidden away in prisons. Some southern prisons leased convict labor (and sometimes whole prisons) to private entrepreneurs, and the dream of reforming criminals was never taken seriously in the South.

The South did participate in temperance. By the 1820s, Baptists and Methodists had made deep inroads into southern society. Southern ministers preached against alcohol, while churchgoing women discouraged their husbands, sons, and suitors from drinking. (An Alabama man complained that “the women our way seem determined to deprive us of all of our privileges; if I offer to take a drink of whiskey as I used to do, my wife tells me of the *Temperation Society*, and says its mean, and low, and sinful.”) Many southern men either stopped or reduced their drinking, and the South contributed its share to the national drop in alcohol consumption. During the 1840s, the Washington Temperance Society and other voluntary temperance groups won a solid footing in southern cities and county-seat towns, with leaders who included Whigs and Democrats alike. But legal prohibition, which became dominant in the North, got nowhere in the South. In the 1850s, while 17 northern legislatures passed statewide prohibition, the only slave state to follow was tiny, northern-oriented Delaware.

At bottom, southern resistance to social reform stemmed from a conservative, Bible-based acceptance of suffering and human imperfection and a commitment to the power and independence of white men who headed families—“families” that included their slaves as well as their wives and children. Any proposal that sounded like social tinkering or the invasion of paternal rights was doomed to failure. Moreover, many reforms—public schools, Sunday schools, reform-oriented prisons, prohibition, humane asylums—were seen as the work of well-funded missionaries from the Northeast who wanted to shape society in their own image. The Virginian John Randolph spoke for many southerners when

he warned against the Yankees' "meddling, obtrusive, intrusive, restless, self-dissatisfied spirit," exhibited in "Sunday schools, Missionary Societies, subscriptions to Colonization Societies—taking care of the Sandwich Islanders, free negroes, and God knows who." The southern distrust of reform was powerfully reinforced after 1830, when northern reformers began to call for the abolition of slavery and equality of the sexes—reforms that most white southerners found unthinkable.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-4 The Politics of Slavery and Race
Book Title: Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People
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12-4 The Politics of Slavery and Race

Most whites in antebellum America believed in "natural" differences based on sex and race. God, they said, had given women and men and whites and blacks different mental, emotional, and physical capacities. Because humankind (female and nonwhite more than others) was innately sinful and prone to disorder, God ordained a fixed social hierarchy in which white men exercised power over others. Slaves and free blacks accepted their subordinate status only as a fact of life, not as something that was natural and just. Some women also opposed patriarchy, but before 1830, hierarchy based on sex and race was seldom questioned in public, particularly by persons who were in a position to change it.

Focus Question

How did Whigs and Democrats differ on questions of slavery and race?

In the antebellum years, as southerners and most northerners stiffened their defense of white supremacy (see [Chapter 10](#)), a radical minority of Whig evangelicals began to envision a world based on Christian love and individual worth and accomplishment, not "natural" differences. They also questioned the more virulent forms of racism. While conservative Christians insisted that relations based on dominance and submission were the lot of a sinful humankind, reformers argued that such relations interposed human power, too often in the form of brute force, between God and the individual spirit. They called for a world that substituted spiritual freedom and Christian love for every form of

worldly domination. The result was a community of uncompromising radical reformers who attacked slavery as America's great national sin. In doing so, they assaulted the white republic and the core compromise of the American political system.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-4a Democratic Racism
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12-4a Democratic Racism

Whigs and Democrats both wanted to keep slavery and race out of politics, and neither encouraged the aspirations of slaves or free blacks. But it was the Democrats who incorporated racism into their political agenda. Minstrel shows, for example, often reflected the Democratic line on current events, and Democratic cartoonists featured minstrelsy's bug-eyed, woolly-haired caricatures of blacks. By the time of the Civil War, Democrats mobilized voters almost solely with threats of “amalgamation” and “Negro rule.” Meanwhile, educated Democrats learned to think in racist terms. Among most scientists, biological determinism replaced historical and environmental explanations of racial differences; many argued that whites and blacks were separate species. Democrats welcomed that “discovery.” John Van Evrie, a New York doctor and Democratic pamphleteer, declared that “it is a palpable and unavoidable fact that Negroes are a different species,” and that the story of Adam and Eve referred only to the origin of *white* people. In 1850, the *Democratic Review* confided, “Few or none now seriously adhere to the theory of the unity of the races. The whole state of the science at this moment seems to indicate that there are several distinct races of men on the earth, with entirely different capacities, physical and mental.”

As whites came to perceive racial differences as God-given and immutable, they changed the nature of those differences as well. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, whites had stereotyped blacks as ignorant and prone to drunkenness and thievery, but they had also maintained a parallel stereotype of blacks as loyal and self-sacrificing servants. From the 1820s onward, racists continued to regard blacks as incompetent, but they found it harder to distinguish mere carelessness from dishonesty. Now they saw blacks as treacherous, shrewd, and secretive—individuals who only *pretended* to feel loyalty to white families and affection for the white children they took care of, while awaiting the chance to steal from them or poison them. The writer Herman Melville, a lifelong Democrat who shared little of

his compatriots' racism but who helped codify their fascination with duplicity and deceit, dramatized these fears in *Benito Cereno*, a novel about slaves who commandeer a sailing ship and its captain and crew, then (with knives secretly at the throats of their captives) act out a servile charade for unsuspecting visitors who come aboard.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-4b Antislavery before 1830
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12-4b Antislavery before 1830

Before 1830, few whites opposed slavery politically. Quakers had condemned both the slave trade and slavery in the 1750s, and Methodists and some Baptists had done the same late in the century. Washington, Jefferson, and other Chesapeake gentlemen doubted the wisdom, if not the morality, of holding slaves. New England Federalists had condemned slavery in the course of condemning southern Jeffersonians. But there were too few Quakers to make a difference, and the movement to free slaves in the Upper South and the antislavery sentiments of southern evangelicals both died out early in the 19th century. Southerners and most northerners—when they bothered to think about it at all—tended to accept slavery as an unchangeable institution that they had inherited, an institution grounded, ultimately, in human (read “black”) depravity and God’s unknowable plan. The New England and mid-Atlantic states freed (and then shunned) their slaves but seldom argued that the South should do the same.

The biggest organization that addressed questions of slavery and race before 1830 was the [American Colonization Society \(Established by elite gentlemen of the middle and upper-south states in 1816, this organization encouraged voluntary emancipation of slaves, to be followed by their emigration to the West African colony of Liberia.\)](#), founded in 1816. This elite organization of white men never attacked slavery. The rising population of free blacks was their principal concern. “The rapid increase of the black population in some parts of our country,” said a Boston colonizationist in 1822, “is becoming every year more serious.” Their answer was to colonize free blacks (but not slaves) in Liberia, on the west coast of Africa. The society held its first meeting in the chamber of the House of Representatives, with Bushrod Washington, stepson of George Washington, as president. Early members included Henry Clay, John Taylor of Caroline, Andrew Jackson, and other political leaders of the West, the middle states, and the Upper South. Blacks, they said, would continue to

suffer from white prejudice and their own deficiencies as long as they stayed in the United States. They would exercise freedom and learn Christian and republican ways only if exported to Liberia. Among the favored fundraising sites for the ACS were July 4 celebrations—festivities from which blacks were excluded.

Free blacks had agitated against slavery and legal racism for many years, demanding both abolition and equal rights. While a few sailed to Liberia, most insisted that colonization was not an offer of freedom but an attempt to round up black people and make them disappear. The black abolitionist James Forten spoke for many when he insisted that colonization “originated more immediately from prejudice than from philanthropy.” Opposition to colonization created an immediatist, confrontational black antislavery movement—a movement that decisively shaped the later abolition crusade.

The Resurrection of Henry Box Brown

One of the most resourceful of escaped slaves was Henry Brown of Richmond. Distraught at the sale of his wife and children, in 1849 he paid a white storekeeper to ship him as “dry goods” to James Miller McKim, a well-known abolitionist in Philadelphia. Brown was nailed into a small shipping crate and, after moving by two freight wagons, two trains, and a steamboat on which he was packed upside down, he arrived at McKim’s house in free territory. He became a hero to abolitionists, who renamed him “Box” Brown. Afraid of recapture, he moved to England.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division[LC-USZC4-4659]

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-4c Abolitionists

Book Title: Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People

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12-4c Abolitionists

Few white Americans actively opposed slavery before 1830, but the writing was on the wall. Emancipation in the North constituted an implicit condemnation of slavery in the South. So did events outside the United States. Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful slave revolution in Saint-Domingue threatened slavery everywhere (see [Chapter 7](#)). Mexico, Peru, Chile, Gran Colombia (present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama), and other new republics carved out of the Spanish mainland empire emancipated their slaves. The British, whose navy could enforce their dictates at sea, outlawed the Atlantic slave trade in 1808, and the United States followed suit. The most powerful blow came in 1830, when the

British Parliament emancipated the slaves of Jamaica, Bermuda, and other Caribbean islands ruled by Britain.

Historians usually date American **abolitionism** (Movement begun in the North about 1830 to abolish slavery immediately and without compensation to owners.) from 1831, when the veteran reformer **William Lloyd Garrison** (Commander of U.S. military forces during much of the Vietnam War and whose claims that a war of attrition would produce an inevitable victory over communist forces were seemingly disproven by the Tet Offensive of 1968.) published the first issue of the *Liberator* in Boston. Garrison condemned slavery not simply as a social problem or a bad idea but as America's great national sin. He demanded immediate emancipation and equal citizenship for African Americans. "I am in earnest," he declared in his first editorial. "I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I will be heard!" Garrison opposed discrimination as well as slavery, thus coupling southern slavery with the national question of race. From the beginning, he enjoyed the support and influence of northern free blacks. In its first year fully three-fourths of the *Liberator's* subscribers and one-fifth of its writers were black, and when Garrison and his coworkers formed the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832 blacks made up one-fourth of the membership. Black orators such as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth became stars of a well-organized abolitionist lecture circuit, and the heartfelt autobiographies of escaped slaves (many of them "as told to" white abolitionists) were mainstays of abolitionist literature, steering the movement away from the legalism of the colonizationists and toward personal, emotional appeals. When the wealthy abolitionist Gerrit Smith harbored the fugitive slave Harriet Powell on his estate, he invited his friends to meet her. He told Powell to "make good abolitionists of them by telling them the story of your life."

Abolitionists proposed not only emancipation but also racial equality. Assuming that God had created blacks and whites as members of one human family, they opposed the "scientific" racism spouted by Democrats and many Whigs. Moderates and latecomers to the movement spoke of inherent racial characteristics, but still tended to view blacks in benign (if condescending) ways. Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance, portrayed blacks as simple, innocent, loving people who possessed a capacity for sentiment and emotionalism that most whites had lost. In 1852, Horace Mann told an audience of blacks in Ohio that "in intellect, the blacks are inferior to the whites, while in sentiment and affections, the whites are inferior to the blacks." Radical abolitionists, however, remained committed to racial equality. Lydia Maria Child of New York City declared, "In the United States, colored

persons have scarcely any chance to rise. But if colored persons are well treated, and have the same inducements to industry as others, they [will] work as well and behave as well.” The abolitionists backed up their equalitarian rhetoric with successful campaigns against segregation in Boston’s schools and public transportation, and against legal bans on miscegenation. Most of their fellow citizens disliked the abolitionists—not only because their attack upon slavery threatened the Union and the party system that held it together, but because their integrated movement and their anti-racist campaigns undermined the white republic.

The radicalized abolitionists were a combination of old and new reformers. Some of them—Wendell Phillips, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Theodore Parker—were cultivated Bostonians who opposed slavery as an affront to reason and humanity. Others were Quakers—the poet John Greenleaf Whittier, the lay minister Lucretia Mott, and many more—who added their antislavery experience and convictions to the cause. Abolitionists found their greatest support, however, in southern New England, western New York, northern Ohio, and among the new middle classes of the cities—ground that Yankee settlement, the Market Revolution, and Finneyite revivals had turned into the heartland of the northern Whig Party.

Interpreting the Visual Past

An Abolitionist View of Southern Society

This provocative woodcut appeared in the *Anti-Slavery Almanac for 1840* (Boston, 1839). At the center, a southern mob lynches slaves and their abolitionist allies. Surrounding the hanging tree are men (there are no women in the picture) engaged in other activities that northern reformers insisted grew from the brutality and despotism of southern society. Men duel with pistols and knives, others engage in a no-holds-barred wrestling match, others gamble and get drunk, and still others cheer for (and bet on) cockfights and horse races. At one corner of the picture, a white man tortures a slave by drawing a cat’s claws down his back. At the other corner, a white master whips a slave child. The enemy here is not simply slavery but the debauchery and unbridled passions that abolitionists associated with it.

Q

Both pictures are extreme overstatements, but they overstate their cases in different ways. Why do you think a southern apologist and a northern abolitionist chose these specific ways to portray the same society? Why do white women and children appear in the southern picture? Why are they absent in the abolitionist portrayal? Why is the southern picture set in a domestic environment? Why are all traces of family life absent from the abolitionist portrayal?

Henry E. Peach/Old Sturbridge Village

It was also the center of the new evangelical domesticity, and of the questioning of traditional roles for women and men. Women from evangelical families participated in church affairs and in the temperance movement, and the more radical of them moved into abolitionism. The American Colonization Society and other early antislavery societies were largely elite and entirely male and they made male arguments: Slavery, they said, was

economically and socially irrational and dangerous. Abolitionists, on the other hand, enrolled blacks, women, and white men who questioned the old rigidities of gender and race. They attacked slavery on moral grounds, and their appeals were unabashedly emotional. Abolitionist speeches, pamphlets, and escaped-slave narratives attacked slavery less for its supposed irrationality as a labor system than for what it did to slaves. The crucial argument, repeated over and over, was that slavery crushed the family, and particularly the sentimental relation between mothers and small children.

This argument reached its culmination in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was first published in installments in an antislavery newspaper. When published as a book in 1852, it became the most powerful antislavery tract, in part because it successfully dramatized the moral and political imperatives of the northern middle class. At its core, [Uncle Tom's Cabin \(Published by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852, this sentimental novel told the story of the Christian slave Uncle Tom and became a best seller and the most powerful antislavery tract of the antebellum years.\)](#) indicts slavery as a system of absolute power at odds with domesticity and Christian love. The novel reverses the power relations of this world: In it, the home, and particularly the kitchen, is the ultimate locus of good, whereas law, politics, and the marketplace—the whole realm of white men—are moved to the periphery and defined as unfeeling destroyers. Based solidly in revival Christianity, the novel lambasts the rational calculation, greed, and power-hunger of the “real world” that was made and governed by white men and upholds the domestic space filled with women, slaves, and children who gain spiritual power through submission to Christ. The two most telling scenes—the deaths of the Christian slave Uncle Tom and the perfect child Eva St. Claire—reenact the crucifixion of Jesus. Uncle Tom prays for his tormentors as he is beaten to death, and little Eva extracts promises of Christian behavior from her deathbed. Both are powerless, submissive characters who die in order to redeem a fallen humankind. Their deaths are thus Christian triumphs that convert the powerful and hasten the millennial day when the world will be governed by a feminized Christian love and not by male power.

12-4d Agitation

Antislavery, unlike other reforms, was a radical attack on one of the nation's central institutions, and the movement attracted a minority even among middle-class evangelicals. Both Lyman Beecher and Charles Finney opposed the abolitionists in the 1830s, arguing that emancipation would come about sooner or later through the religious conversion of slave owners; antislavery agitation and the denunciation of slaveholders, they argued, would divide Christians, slow the revival movement, and thus actually delay emancipation. Finney warned his abolitionist friend Theodore Dwight Weld that the logical end of antislavery was civil war. Other opponents, including some within the antislavery ranks, were outraged that blacks and whites and men and women met, organized, and socialized together, and that women and blacks delivered speeches to mixed audiences. When the American Antislavery Society held an organizing convention in Philadelphia in 1833, the city's hotels, churches, and meeting halls refused to admit its members, and the police announced that they could not protect "the amalgamationist conclave." Most of the delegates boarded in black households, and they met in a black-owned hall next door to Philadelphia's oldest black church.

Woman and a Sister

For many years, the British antislavery forces had used the iconic image of a male slave, kneeling and holding up his chains, with the words "Am I not a man and a brother?" American abolitionists used that image as well, but added a similar image of a supplicant female slave, underlining the participation of women and the emerging centrality of women's issues in the American antislavery movement.

The Granger Collection, NYC

Radical abolitionists knew that they were a small, despised minority, and that government and most citizens wanted to ignore the question of slavery. The abolitionists staged a series of campaigns to force government and the public to face the South's "peculiar institution." In 1835, the society launched its **Postal Campaign** (Abolitionist tactic to force the nation to confront the slavery question by flooding the mails, both North and South, with antislavery literature. Their hope was to raise controversy within an area that was the province of the federal government.) and then deluged Congress with petitions to curtail slavery (see [Chapter 11](#)). Two-thirds of the signers of these petitions were women, prompting a Mississippi senator to declare that there would be less trouble "if the ladies and Sunday school children would let us alone."

From the beginnings of antislavery agitation, the public response was often violent. Riots aimed at blacks and their white friends exploded in nearly every northern city. Mobs destroyed black neighborhoods in New York and Philadelphia. A mob surrounded a convention of the Boston Female Anti-slavery Society in 1835, forced the women to leave,

then went looking for Garrison. Garrison was roughed up, but then he escaped the mob by going into police custody, where he was charged with disturbing the peace. In July 1834, a New York City mob sacked the house of the white abolitionist merchant Lewis Tappan; moved on to the Reverend Charles Finney's Chatham Street Chapel, where abolitionists were said to be meeting, and finished the evening by attacking a British (and thus supposedly aristocratic) actor at the Bowery theater. The manager saved his theater by waving two American flags and ordering an American actor to perform popular minstrel routines for the mob. Democracy and working-class aspirations—not to mention local authorities—were in league with racism.

Southern whites had fewer free blacks or abolitionists to attack, but they found their own ways to respond. A crowd in Charleston rushed the post office, removed antislavery literature that was held there, and made a bonfire at the center of town. A committee in Mississippi invited Garrison and other antislavery leaders to come south and be hanged. In Congress, southerners and their northern friends forced President Jackson to permit southern postal workers to censor the mails. They also forced Democrats and southern Whigs to adopt the gag rule, abridging the right of petition to avoid discussion of slavery in Congress (see [Chapter 11](#)).

In these ways, abolitionists demonstrated the complicity of the party system (and the Democrats in particular) in the institution of slavery. They brought the slavery question to public attention and tied it to questions of civil liberties in the North and political power nationally. They thus threw light on the compromises with slavery that made the United States possible, and they undermined the white republic at its foundations. Moreover, they did all that with an active, public membership that included prominent women and blacks. The abolitionists were a dangerous minority indeed.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-5 The Politics of Gender and Sex
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12-5 The Politics of Gender and Sex

Whigs valued a reformed masculinity that was lived out in the

Focus Question

sentimentalized homes of the northern business classes or in the Christian gentility of the Whig plantation and farm. Jacksonian voters defended domestic patriarchy. Whereas most were unimaginative paternalists, Democrats often made heroes of men whose flamboyant, rakish lives directly

challenged Whig domesticity. Whigs denounced Andrew Jackson for allegedly stealing his wife from her lawful husband; Democrats often admired him for the same reason. Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky, who was vice president under Martin Van Buren, openly kept a mulatto mistress and had two daughters by her; with his pistols always at hand, he accompanied her around Washington, D.C. “Prince” John Van Buren, the president’s son and a prominent New York Democrat, met a “dark-eyed, well-formed Italian lady,” who called herself Amerigo Vespucci and claimed to be a direct descendant of the man for whom America was named. She became young Van Buren’s “fancy lady,” remaining with him until he lost her in a high-stakes card game.

How did Democrats and Whigs differ on questions of gender and sex? Knowing what you know about the political cultures of the two parties, how do you explain those differences?

Whigs made Democratic contempt for sentimental domesticity a political issue. William Crane, a Michigan Whig, claimed that Democrats “despised no man for his sins,” and went on to say that “brothel-haunters flocked to this party, because here in all political circles, and political movements, they were treated as nobility.” Much of the Whig cultural agenda (and much of Democratic hatred of that agenda) was rooted in contests between Whig and Democratic masculine styles.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-5a Moral Reform
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12-5a Moral Reform

Sexual self-control became a badge of middle-class status. Men supposedly had the greatest difficulty taming their appetites. The old image—beginning with Eve and including Delilah and Jezebel and other dangerous women of the Old Testament—of woman as seductress persisted in the more traditionalist churches and in the pulp fiction from which middle-class mothers tried to protect their sons (see [Chapter 10](#)). Whig evangelicals, on the other

hand, believed that women were naturally free of desire and that only men were subject to the animal passions. “What terrible temptations lie in the way of your sex,” wrote Harriet Beecher Stowe to her husband. “Tho I did love you with an almost insane love before I married you, I never knew yet or felt the pulsation which showed me that I could be tempted in that way. I loved you as I now love God.” The middle-class ideal combined female purity and male self-control. For the most part, it was a private reform, contained within the home. Sometimes, however, evangelical domesticity produced moral crusades to impose that ethos on the world at large. Many of these crusades were led by women from Whig families.

In 1828, a band of Sunday school teachers, most of them women, initiated an informal mission to prostitutes that grew into the [New York Magdalen Society \(Female established society whose mission was to separate prostitutes from male power, pray with them, and convert them to middle-class morality.\)](#) . Taking a novel approach to an age-old question, the society argued that prostitution was created by brutal fathers and husbands who abandoned their young daughters or wives, by dandies who seduced them and turned them into prostitutes, and by lustful men who bought their services. Prostitution, in other words, was not the result of the innate sinfulness of prostitutes; it was the result of the brutality and lust of men. The solution was to separate prostitutes from bad male power, pray with them, and convert them to middle-class morality.

The Magdalen Society’s *First Annual Report* (1831) inveighed against male lust and printed shocking life histories of prostitutes. Some men, however, read it as pornography. Others used it as a guidebook to the seamier side of New York City. The wealthy male evangelicals who had bankrolled the Magdalen Society withdrew their support, and the organization fell apart. Thereupon many of the women reformers set up the Female Moral Reform Society, with a House of Industry in which prostitutes were taught morality and household skills to prepare them for new lives as domestic servants in pious middle-class homes. This effort also failed, largely because few prostitutes were interested in domestic service or evangelical religion. That fact became distressingly clear when in 1836 the society was obliged to close its House of Industry after the residents had taken it over during the caretaker’s absence.

The Female Moral Reform Society was more successful with members of its own class. Its newspaper, the *Advocate of Moral Reform*, circulated throughout the evangelical North, eventually reaching 555 auxiliary societies with 20,000 readers. Now evangelical women fought prostitution by publishing the names of customers. They campaigned against

pornography, obscenity, lewdness, and seduction and taught their sons to be pure, even when it meant dragging them out of brothels. Occasionally, they prosecuted men who took advantage of servant girls. They also publicized the names of adulterers, and they had seducers brought into court. In the process, women reformers fought the sexual double standard and assumed the power to define what was respectable and what was not.

Chapter 12: Antebellum Reform, 1820–1860: 12-5b Women's Rights
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12-5b Women's Rights

From the late 1820s onward, middle-class women in the North assumed roles that would have been unthinkable to their mothers and grandmothers. Evangelical domesticity made loving mothers (and not stern fathers) the principal rearers of children. Housewives saw themselves as missionaries to their families, influencing the moral choices their children and husbands made. In that role, women became arbiters of fashion, diet, and sexual behavior. Many joined the temperance movement and moral reform societies, where they became public reformers while posing as mothers protecting their sons from rum sellers and seducers. They gained a sense of spiritual empowerment that led some to question their own subordinate status within a system of gendered social roles. Lydia Maria Child, a writer of sentimental fiction and manuals on household economy as well as a leading abolitionist and moral reformer, proclaimed, “Those who urged women to become missionaries and form tract societies ... have changed the household utensil to a living, energetic being, and they have no spell to turn it into a broom again.”

Nearly all early feminists, like Child, were veterans of the antislavery crusade. Abolitionists, following the perfectionist implications of Whig evangelicalism to their logical ends, called for absolute human equality and a near-anarchist rejection of impersonal institutions and prescribed social roles. It became clear to some female abolitionists that the critique of slavery (a root-and-branch denunciation of patriarchy and prescribed hierarchy) applied as well to inequality based on sex.

Radical female abolitionists reached the conclusion that they were human beings first and women second. In 1837, [Sarah Grimke \(Along with her sister Angelina, this elite South Carolina woman moved north and campaigned against slavery and for temperance and](#)

women's rights.) announced, "The Lord Jesus defines the duties of his followers in his Sermon on the Mount ... without any reference to sex or condition ... never even referring to the distinction now so strenuously insisted upon between masculine and feminine virtues Men and women are CREATED EQUAL! They are both moral and accountable beings, and whatever is right for a man to do is right for woman."

History Through Film

***Not For Ourselves Alone* (1999)**

Directed by Ken Burns (PBS)

In 1999, Ken Burns made a documentary film on the women's rights movement. Part One tells the story from about 1840 through the Civil War. It is vintage Ken Burns: old photographs scanned to give them the appearance of movies, period documents read over the pictures by actors (in this case, Sally Kellerman), modern-day experts speaking with authority, the same period music that Burns used in *The Civil War* and his other forays into the 19th century, and the same undercurrent of sentimentality. The film focuses on the collaboration and friendship between Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and through that medium and within its limits, it tells its story well.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was descended, on her mother's side, from one of the great landholding families of colonial New York. Her father was a prosperous lawyer and judge. Young Elizabeth hungered for education, but no American college admitted women. She enrolled at Emma Willard's Female Seminary in Troy, New York, and shared her family's interest in the temperance and antislavery movements. She met lawyer and well-known antislavery speaker Henry B. Stanton through her cousin, wealthy abolitionist Gerrit Smith, and married Stanton in 1840. (Elizabeth excised the word "obey" from the ceremony.) The Stantons honeymooned at an antislavery convention in London that year. Organizers of the convention segregated women and men and forbade the women to speak. Stanton realized—as legions of women would realize—that the logic of antislavery applied to women as well as slaves, and that rights reform that was less than universal was badly flawed. The Stantons took up housekeeping in Boston, then moved to Seneca Falls in western New York. Henry Stanton was frequently away on lecture tours, and Elizabeth stayed at home,

had babies, and grew weary of housework.

In 1848, after a visit with her friend and fellow activist Lucretia Mott, she helped organize the first Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. She authored the declaration demanding civil and legal equality for women, including the demand (truly shocking to contemporaries) that women be allowed to vote. Shortly after the Seneca Falls Convention, Stanton met Susan B. Anthony, another veteran reformer. Anthony, a Quaker, had been born into much humbler circumstances than Stanton, remained unmarried, and often upbraided other women reformers for marrying and having children. The differences between Stanton and Anthony added up to a lifelong collaboration: The educated and housebound Stanton wrote the manifestos, and the brave and unencumbered Anthony took them into lecture halls and the state legislature. They and their coworkers won some battles (in the area of women's property rights in particular), but could do little more than publicize their radical demands for the legal reform of marriage and for civil and political equality. This limitation became painfully clear during the Civil War, when their fellow reformers told Stanton and Anthony to delay women's rights while slaves were freed and given the same rights for which the women's movement had fought. At the close of Part One, women's civil and legal equality remain far from realization.

Not For Ourselves Alone tells a familiar story clearly and entertainingly. Along the way, it portrays a friendship between women within the antebellum reform community and (intermittently) throws light on the workings of a reform culture that enlisted much of the zeal and intellect of the antebellum North.

Not For Ourselves Alone focuses on the long friendship between Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony to tell the story of the early women's rights movement.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.[LC-USZ61-791]

The Declaration of Sentiments Published by the First Woman's Rights Convention in 1848

This account of the proceedings and list of resolutions announced that there was an organized women's rights movement in the United States. It also announced that women's rights activists knew how to organize a convention and how to publicize their activities in print. (Ties between the women's and antislavery movements led the women to have their report printed at the offices of the *North Star*, an antislavery paper published by the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass—the only male member of the convention—in Rochester.)

Picture History/Newscom

Such talk—and worse, the fact that women were delivering such speeches in public—aroused opposition even among abolitionists. In 1840, the American Antislavery Society

sent a delegation to an international convention in London—with women delegates and the woman abolitionist Abbey Kelley on the business committee. The convention voted to exclude women, and the Americans came home angry and divided. Garrison and the radicals supported full rights for women and published their speeches and writings in the *Liberator*. Others wished to win public favor for antislavery issues and argued that the woman question was at best a distraction. The result was a split in the antislavery crusade, largely over the question of women's rights, and intensification of the feminist movement.

Beginning about 1840, women lobbied state legislatures against the common-law custom that women and children were under the protection and authority of their husbands and fathers, and thus had limited rights to property and over themselves. The reformers won significant changes in the laws governing women's rights to own and inherit property, to keep the wages of their own labor, and to retain custody of children in cases of divorce. Fourteen northern states passed such legislation, culminating in New York's wide-ranging Married Women's Property Act in 1860.

What They Said

Making Fun of Women's Rights

In 1848, delegates to the first women's rights convention issued a Declaration of Sentiments modeled on the Declaration of Independence. Here is their list of demands (as reported in the *New York Herald*, 30 July 1848):

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 fact be submitted to a candid world.

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

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

... Having deprived her of this first right of citizens, 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 eyes of the law, civilly dead.

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

... 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 monopolized nearly all the means of profitable employment, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a paltry 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 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 woman from society are not only tolerated but deemed of little account in men.

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 her God.

In 1856, the New York legislature received petitions making the same complaints and demanding the same rights. Here is the legislature's response (as reported in the *Plattsburgh Republican*, 29 March 1856):

Judge Foote, of Ontario, the learned chairman of the Assembly Judiciary Committee, last week made a report on "Women's Rights" that set the whole House in roars of laughter ... [The committee has] left the subject pretty much to the married gentlemen. They have considered it with the aid of the ... experience married life

has given them. Thus, aided they are enabled to state, that ladies always have the best piece, and choicest titbit at table—They have the best seat in the cars, carriages and sleighs; the warmest place in winter and the coolest place in summer. They have their choice on which side of the bed they will lie A lady's dress costs three times as much as that of a gentleman; and at the present time, with the prevailing fashion, one lady occupies three times as much space in the world as a gentleman. It has thus appeared to the married gentlemen of our committee ... that if there is any inequality or oppression in the case, the gentlemen are the sufferers. They, however, have presented no petitions for redress, having doubtless made up their minds to yield to an inevitable destiny.

On the whole, the committee have concluded to recommend no measure, except, that as they have observed several instances in which husband and wife have both signed the same petition. In such case, they would recommend the party to apply for a law authorizing them to change dresses, so that the husband may wear the petty coats, and, the wife the breeches, and thus indicate to their neighbors, and the public the true relation in which they stand to each other.

Q

Why did the women use the Declaration of Independence as a model, and why did they begin their list of demands with the rights of citizenship?

Q

At this time the idea of political, legal, and civil equality between women and men was, for the great majority of Americans, unthinkable. This was grounded in the cultural axiom that there were separate spheres of activity prescribed for the sexes by nature and God. Can you explain the antics of the legislature in terms of that cultural axiom?

Q

How would the women of Seneca Falls have responded to the legislature's statements?

Sources: (top) New York Herald, 30 July 1848; (bottom) Plattsburgh Republican, 29 March 1856.

The first Woman's Rights Convention met in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. The busiest organizer of the convention was **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** ([Feminist abolitionist who organized the Seneca Falls Convention.](#)), wife of the abolitionist Henry B. Stanton and an attendee at the London convention of 1840. Stanton was a lukewarm abolitionist, but the argument over women in the movement drove her into full-time feminism. Along with other feminist abolitionists, she organized the **Seneca Falls Convention** ([First national convention of women's rights activists.](#)). The only male delegate was the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Sojourner Truth, another prominent black opponent of slavery, also attended. Nearly all of the other delegates were white women abolitionists. Both as abolitionists and as feminists, they based their demands for equality not only on legal and moral arguments but also on the spirit of republican institutions. The principal formal document issued by the convention, a Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions based on the Declaration of Independence, denounced "the repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman."

Most of those "injuries and usurpations" were political. The central issue was the right to vote. Lucretia Mott and other Quaker delegates, along with many Garrisonian abolitionists, did not want a *political* movement. ("Lizzy," Mott chided Stanton, "thee will make us ridiculous.") But Stanton believed that political rights—voting in particular—were crucial. Voting was central to the "democratic" pattern that granted liberty and equality to white men regardless of class and excluded Americans who were not white and male. Thus, female participation in politics was a direct challenge to a male-ordained women's place. A distraught New York legislator agreed: "It is well known that the object of these unsexed women is to overthrow the most sacred of our institutions Are we to put the stamp of truth upon the libel here set forth, that men and women, in the matrimonial relation, are to be equal?" Later, Elizabeth Cady Stanton recalled such reactions: "Political rights," she said, "involving in their last results equality everywhere, roused all the antagonism of a dominant power, against the self-assertion of a class hitherto subservient."

12-6 Conclusion

By the 1830s, most citizens firmly identified with either the Whig or Democratic Party, so much so that party affiliation was a big part of personal identity. In the states and neighborhoods, Whigs embraced commerce and activist government, arguing that both would foster prosperity, social harmony, and moral progress. Faith in progress and improvement led northern and western Whigs, primarily the more radical evangelicals among them, to imagine that liberty and equality might apply to women and blacks as well as white men. The Democratic response to this was grounded in a defense of white patriarchy and the Old Republic. Like the Whigs, they did not doubt the value of commerce. But they worried that the market and its infrastructure of banking, credit, and paper money—all of it subsidized by government—forced inequality upon the white male citizenry and corrupted the republic. Democrats also looked with angry disbelief at attempts of Whigs (and rebellious members of Whig families) to govern private and public behavior, and sometimes even to attack the “natural” and fundamental distinctions of sex and race.

Whigs reformulated the revolutionary legacy of liberty and equality, moving away from classical notions of citizenship and toward liberty of conscience and equality of opportunity within a market-driven democracy. They often attempted to civilize that new world by using government power to encourage commerce, social interdependence, cultural homogeneity, and moral uplift. Democrats trusted none of that. Theirs was a Jeffersonian formulation grounded in a fierce defense of the liberty and equality of white men, and in a minimal, inexpensive, decentralized government that protected the liberties of those men without threatening their independence or their power over their households and within their neighborhoods. That was the fundamental political argument in the United States from the 1820s to the 1850s, and, for all its noise and uproar, it underwrote a party system that was outwardly stable and safe. But with the rise of antislavery and the acquisition of new territory, the political system was forced to address questions that the parties could not control.

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12-7 Chapter Review

12-7a Review

1. What were Whig and Democratic conceptions of the duties and limits of government?
2. What were Whig and Democratic positions on the issues of public schools, prisons, and asylums?
3. Trace the history of alcohol as a social and political question from the 1820s through the 1840s. Which Americans favored temperance? Which opposed it?
4. How did Whigs and Democrats differ on questions of slavery and race?
5. How did Democrats and Whigs differ on questions of gender and sex?
Knowing what you know about the political cultures of the two parties, how do you explain those differences?

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Chapter Review

12-7b Critical Thinking

1. Choose a position either defending or attacking this statement: “Differences between Whigs and Democrats on economic policy, social reform, race, and gender boil down to differences in Whig and Democratic conceptions of white manhood.”
2. What were the goals and assumptions that drove the movements for public schools, humane prisons and asylums, and temperance? Were those primarily Democratic or Whig assumptions?

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Chapter Review

12-7c Identifications

Review your understanding of the following key terms, people, and events for this chapter.

- **limited liability** (Liability that protected directors and stockholders of corporations from corporate debts by separating those debts from personal liabilities.)
- **common schools** (Tax-supported public schools built by state and local governments.)
- **normal schools** (State colleges established to train teachers.)
- **Auburn system** (Prison system designed to reform criminals and reduce expenses through the sale of items produced in workshops. Prisoners slept in solitary cells,

marched in military formation to meals and workshops, and were forbidden to speak to one another at any time.)

- **Dorothea Dix** (Boston reformer who traveled throughout the country campaigning for humane, state-supported asylums for the insane.)
- **American Temperance Society** (Society established in 1826 by northeastern evangelicals that headed the crusade for alcohol temperance.)
- **Washington Temperance Society** (Society established in 1840 by reformed drinkers of the laboring classes who operated separate from the church and converted drinkers through compassion and persuasion.)
- **American Colonization Society** (Established by elite gentlemen of the middle and upper-south states in 1816, this organization encouraged voluntary emancipation of slaves, to be followed by their emigration to the West African colony of Liberia.)
- **abolitionism** (Movement begun in the North about 1830 to abolish slavery immediately and without compensation to owners.)
- **William Lloyd Garrison** (Commander of U.S. military forces during much of the Vietnam War and whose claims that a war of attrition would produce an inevitable victory over communist forces were seemingly disproven by the Tet Offensive of 1968.)
- **Uncle Tom's Cabin** (Published by Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852, this sentimental novel told the story of the Christian slave Uncle Tom and became a best seller and the most powerful antislavery tract of the antebellum years.)
- **Postal Campaign** (Abolitionist tactic to force the nation to confront the slavery question by flooding the mails, both North and South, with antislavery literature. Their hope was to raise controversy within an area that was the province of the federal government.)
- **New York Magdalen Society** (Female established society whose mission was to separate prostitutes from male power, pray with them, and convert them to middle-

class morality.)

- **Sarah Grimke** (Along with her sister Angelina, this elite South Carolina woman moved north and campaigned against slavery and for temperance and women's rights.)
- **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (Feminist abolitionist who organized the Seneca Falls Convention.)
- **Seneca Falls Convention** (First national convention of women's rights activists.)

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Chapter Review

12-7d Suggested Readings

On state-level internal improvements, see **John Majewski**, *A House Divided: Economic Development in Pennsylvania and Virginia before the Civil War* (2000). An entertaining introduction to money and banking is **Stephen Mihm**, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (2007). **Carl F. Kaestle**, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (1983), surveys the politics of schools. Influential studies of prisons and asylums include **David J. Rothman**, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (1971); **Michael Meranze**, *Laboratories of Virtue: Punishment, Revolution, and Authority in Philadelphia, 1760–1835* (1996); and **Thomas J. Brown**, *Dorothea Dix: New England Reformer* (1998). Drinking and temperance are the subjects of **W. J. Rorabaugh**, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (1979). The literature on reform movements is synthesized in **Steven Mintz**, *Moralists & Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (1995), which can be supplemented by **Bruce Dorsey**, *Reforming Men & Women: Gender in the Antebellum*

City (2002) and **Richard S. Newman**, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (2002). See also **Robert H. Abzug**, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (1994); **John W. Quist**, *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan* (1998); **Lori D. Ginzberg**, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th-Century United States* (1990); and **Ginzberg**, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life* (2009). The cultural and moral underpinnings of reform are a subtext of **Karen Halttunen's** subtle and important *Murder Most Foul: The Killer and the American Gothic Imagination* (1998).

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