

Chapter 12

Antebellum Culture and Reform

Chapter Summary

By the 1820s America was caught up in the spirit of a new age, and Americans, who had never been shy in proclaiming their nation's promise and potential, concluded that the time for action had come. Excited by the nation's technological advances and territorial expansion, many set as their goal the creation of a society worthy to be part of it all. What resulted was an outpouring of reform movements, the like of which had not been seen before. Unrestrained by entrenched conservative institutions and attitudes, these reformers attacked society's ills wherever they found them, producing in the process a list of evils so long that many were convinced that a complete reorganization of society was necessary. Most, however, were content to concentrate on their own particular cause; thus, at least at first, the movements were many and varied. But in time, most reformers seemed to focus on one evil that stood out above the rest. The "peculiar institution," slavery, denied all the Enlightenment ideals for which they stood—equality, opportunity, and, above all, freedom. With world opinion on their side, Slavery became the supreme cause.

Objectives

A thorough study of Chapter 12 should enable the student to understand

1. The two basic impulses that were reflected in the reform movements and examples of groups illustrating each impulse.
2. The contributions of a new group of literary figures such as James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, and Edgar Allan Poe to American cultural nationalism.
3. The transcendentalists and their place in American society.
4. The sources of American religious reform movements, why they originated where they did, their ultimate objectives, and what their leadership had in common.
5. The two distinct sources from which the philosophy of reform arose.
6. American education reform in the antebellum period and the contribution of education to the growth of nationalism.
7. The role of women in American society and the attempts to alter their relationships with men.
8. The origins of the antislavery movement, the sources of its leadership, and the interaction between American antislavery thought and similar movements abroad.
9. The role of abolitionism in the antislavery movement, and the strengths and weaknesses of that part of the movement.
10. The role world opinion played in ending slavery.

Main Themes

1. How American intellectuals developed a national culture committed to the liberation of the human spirit.
2. How this commitment to the liberation of the human spirit led to and reinforced the reform impulse of the period.
3. How the crusade against slavery became the most powerful element in this reform movement.

AP US History
Chapter 12 Questions
Assignment 1

Sources:

Textbook: pg. 315 to mid-pg. 322.

Questions:

1. How was the work of James Fennimore Cooper the culmination of an effort to produce a truly American literature? What did the work suggest about the nation and its people?
2. List the major characteristics of the early 19c artistic movement known as the Hudson River School.
3. Why was Whitman called the "poet of American democracy?"
4. Who were the transcendentalists? What was their philosophy? How did they express it in literature?
5. How were the transcendentalists among the first Americans to anticipate the environmental movement of the 20c?
6. What are the basic characteristics of utopian socialism?
7. How did the transcendentalists attempt to apply their beliefs to the problems of everyday life at Brook Farm? What was the result?
8. What other utopian schemes were put forth during this period? How did these utopian societies propose to reorder society to create a better way of life?
9. How did the antebellum utopian communities attempt to redefine gender roles? Which communities were most active in this effort? What did they accomplish?
10. Who were the Mormons? What were their beliefs? Why did they end up in Utah?

AP US History
Chapter 12 Questions
Assignment 2

Sources:

Textbook: mid-pg. 322 to top of pg. 330.

Questions:

1. The "philosophy of reform" that shaped this era rose from what two distinct sources?
2. How were early 19c political ideals connected to evangelical Christianity?
3. What was the view of 18c Americans concerning crime, poverty, and deviance? How did this view change in the 19c?
4. How did these changes in attitude impact ideas on prison, work house, and asylum reform during the first half of the 19c?
5. What gave rise to the crusade against drunkenness? What successes and failures resulted from the movement's efforts?
6. What was the biggest problem facing American medicine during this period? What impact did this problem have on health care in the United States?
7. How did efforts to produce a system of universal public education reflect the spirit of the age?
8. What were the problems facing public education? What types of institutions were created to deal with them?
9. Why did New England play a significant role in the education reform movement?
10. How did the rise of feminism reflect not only the participation of women in social crusades, but also a basic change in the nature of the family?
11. What is the historical significance of the Seneca Falls Convention and its adoption of the Declaration of Sentiments?
12. What legal rights did single women have in the early 19c? married women?
13. How did feminists benefit from their association with other reform movements, most notably abolitionists, and at the same time suffer as a result?
14. Explain how sentimental novels of the antebellum era "gave voice to both female hopes and female anxieties."

AP US History
Chapter 12 Questions
Assignment 3

Sources:

Textbook: top of pg. 330 - pg. 337.

Questions:

1. What was the anti-slavery philosophy of William Lloyd Garrison? How did he transform abolitionism into a new and "dramatically different phenomenon?"
2. What role did black abolitionists play in the movement? How did their philosophy compare with that of Garrison?
3. Who was David Walker? What was the response of free African-Americans to gradualism and colonization as methods of dealing with the institution of slavery?
4. Why did many northern whites oppose the abolitionist movement? How did they show this opposition?
5. What efforts did abolitionists make to find political solutions to the question of slavery? How successful were they initially?
6. How did abolitionists attempt to arouse widespread public anger over slavery through the use of propaganda? What was the most significant work to emerge from this effort? Why did it have such an impact?
7. What was the impact of anti-slavery reform on American national politics in the 1840s?
8. How effective was the Liberty Party on the national level?
9. How did pressure of world opinion and Enlightenment ideals combine to end the slave trade and slavery in countries other than the United States?
10. How did world opinion and Enlightenment ideals influence the abolition movement in the United States? How, in turn, did American abolitionism help reinforce the movements abroad?