26f. Transcendentalism, An American Philosophy

Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* introduced the "free verse" style of poetry, reflecting the individualistic tone of transcendentalism. This picture of Whitman with a butterfly appeared in the 1889 edition.

TRANSCENDENTALISM is a very formal word that describes a very simple idea. People, men and women equally, have knowledge about themselves and the world around them that "transcends" or goes beyond what they can see, hear, taste, touch or feel.

This knowledge comes through intuition and imagination not through logic or the senses. People can trust themselves to be their own authority on what is right. A **TRANSCENDENTALIST** is a person who accepts these ideas not as religious beliefs but as a way of understanding life relationships.

The individuals most closely associated with this new way of thinking were connected loosely through a group known as **THE TRANSCENDENTAL CLUB**, which met in the Boston home of **GEORGE RIPLEY**. Their chief publication was a periodical called "The Dial," edited by Margaret Fuller, a political radical and feminist whose book "Women of the Nineteenth Century" was among the most famous of its time. The club had many extraordinary thinkers, but accorded the leadership position to **RALPH WALDO EMERSON**.

Margaret Fuller played a large part in both the women's and Transcendentalist movements. She helped plan the community at Brook Farm, as well as editing *The Dial*, and writing the feminist treatise, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.

Emerson was a Harvard-educated essayist and lecturer and is recognized as our first truly "American" thinker. In his most famous essay, "**THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR**," he urged Americans to stop looking to Europe for inspiration and imitation and be themselves. He believed that people were naturally good and that everyone's potential was limitless. He inspired his colleagues to look into themselves, into nature, into art, and through work for answers to life's most perplexing questions. His intellectual contributions to the philosophy of transcendentalism inspired a uniquely American idealism and spirit of reform.

6c. Women's Rights

Amelia Bloomer's magazine, *The Lily*advocated a new outfit for women, consisting of a loose top, long pantaloons, and a knee-length dress. While some reformers adopted the costume, many were afraid that it would bring riducule to the cause and began wearing more traditional clothes by the 1850s.

Although women had many moral obligations and duties in the home, church and community, they had few political and legal rights in the new republic. When **ABIGAIL ADAMS** reminded her husband John during the Constitutional Convention to "**REMEMBER THE LADIES**!" her warning went unheeded. Women were pushed to the sidelines as dependents of men, without the power to bring suit, make contracts, own property, or vote. During the era of the "**CULT OF DOMESTICITY**," a woman was seen merely as a way of enhancing the social status of her husband. By the 1830s and 40s, however, the climate began to change when a number of bold, outspoken women championed diverse social reforms of prostitution, capital punishment, prisons, war, alcohol, and, most significantly, slavery.

ACTIVISTS began to question women's subservience to men and called for rallying around the abolitionist movement as a way of calling attention to all human rights. Two influential Southern sisters, **ANGELINA AND SARAH GRIMKE**, called for women to "participate in the freeing and educating of slaves."
Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter kept a scrapbook of her mother's activities with the women's rights movement, now housed at the Library of Congress.

HARRIET WILSON became the first African-American to publish a novel sounding the theme of racism. The heart and voice of the movement, nevertheless, was in New England. **LUCRETIA MOTT**, an educated Bostonian, was one of the most powerful advocates of reform, who acted as a bridge between the feminist and the abolitionist movement and endured fierce criticism wherever she spoke. **SARAH MARGARET FULLER** wrote ***WOMEN IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY***, the first mature consideration of **FEMINISM** and edited ***THE DIAL*** for the Transcendental Club.

Around 1840 the abolitionist movement was split over the acceptance of female speakers and officers. Ultimately snubbed as a delegate to a **WORLD ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION** in London, **ELIZABETH CADY STANTON** returned to America in 1848 and organized the first convention for women's rights in Seneca Falls, New York. Under the leadership of Stanton, Mott, and **SUSAN B. ANTHONY**, the convention demanded improved laws regarding child custody, divorce, and property rights. They argued that women deserved equal wages and career opportunities in law, medicine, education and the ministry. First and foremost among their demands was **SUFFRAGE** — the right to vote. The women's rights movement in America had begun in earnest. **AMELIA BLOOMER** began publishing ***THE LILY***, which also advocated "the emancipation of women from temperance, intemperance, injustice, prejudice, and bigotry." She also advocated the wearing of **PANTALOONS** for women that would allow for greater mobility than the expected Victorian costume — now these garments are called "**BLOOMERS**."

Sarah Grimke and her sister Angelina Grimke Weld came from a slaveholding family in South Carolina. Their involvement in the abolitionist movement eventually lead to their involvement in the struggle for women's rights.

As with the Civil War, the seeds of the quest for women's rights were sown in the Declaration of Independence, claiming that "all men are created equal." Sarah Grimke wrote in 1837 that "men *and women* were created equal ... whatever is right for men to do is right for women." That language was mirrored in the **SENECA FALLS DECLARATION**. Thus, in this era of reform and renewal women realized that if they were going to push for equality, they needed to ignore criticism and what was then considered acceptable social behavior. The new republic's experiment in government was going to need all of its citizens to have "every path laid open" to them. However, the ardent feminists discovered that many people felt women neither should nor could be equal to men. The nation soon became distracted by sectional tension and the climate for reform evaporated. This important struggle would continue for many generations to come.

26a. Religious Revival

Charles Grandison Finney was one of the most famous and most controversial travelling preachers during the Second Great Awakening. His work is still commended and criticized by a number of groups.

Standing on a hilltop in upstate New York, with the breeze blowing lightly through his hair, the **REVEREND CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY** surveys his audience. He is about to say something startling. In his grand baritone, he begins by exhorting them to listen carefully; he is about to change their lives. **SALVATION** is the beginning of a life of good works here on earth! Man can, therefore, achieve his own salvation. God is not angry! God is merciful and loving. Therefore, go forth, and *do* as well as *believe!*

His flock was duly astounded. This was a unique and welcome message coming from the mouths of Reverend Finney and other American evangelists who began spreading the news of the **SECOND GREAT AWAKENING**from New England to the West from approximately 1795 to 1835. This was a message of hope and opportunity. Religion was not only revived it was being transformed. Gone were the warnings that man was totally depraved; that he was "**PREDESTINED**" to salvation or damnation; that God was angry and full of vengeance. The amazing assurance that life on earth had its own rewards and was not just a way station on the road to heaven (or hell) touched people's hearts. And they rushed to hear it.

Thus, the revolt against **JONATHAN EDWARDS**' strict **CALVINISM** produced many new sects. The area around central New York and along the Erie Canal was a fertile ground for **PENTECOSTAL** fervor and conversion so intense it was referred to as the "**BURNED OVER DISTRICT**." **WILLIAM MILLER** founded the **ADVENTIST**sect based on the notion that he could pinpoint the exact day when the Messiah would return to earth.

Revival meetings like the one illustrated here were filled with exuberant outbursts of religious fervor.

After having a series of religious visions, **JOSEPH SMITH**, a young man from Palmyra, New York published the ***BOOK OF MORMON*** and established the **CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS** in 1830. The church was plagued with persecution from the very beginning because of its evangelizing, its separation from surrounding communities, and its radical ideas, including polygamy. Its members, commonly referred to as Mormons, were constantly on the move to avoid harassment. After Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were killed by an angry mob in Nauvoo, Illinois in 1844, the church members headed West under the leadership of **BRIGHAM YOUNG**. After a long, difficult trek, 140,000 Mormons settled in Salt Lake City, Utah.

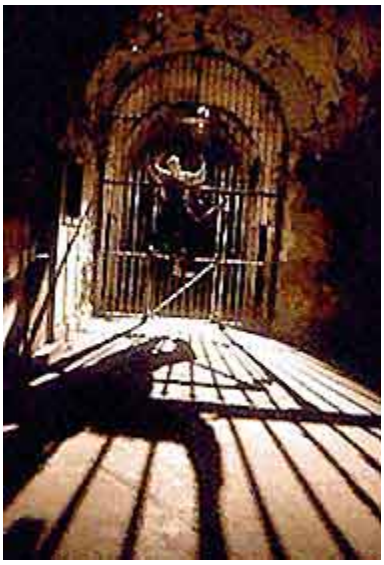
Ultimately, many of these groups as well as established **PROTESTANT** churches like **BAPTISTS**, **METHODISTS**, and **CONGREGATIONALISTS** moved to the West, carrying their message of revival and redemption with them. Since danger and uncertainty abounded on the frontier, evangelists discovered that the promise of salvation could be delivered with even more zeal. **JAMES MCCREADY** made his name preaching "**HELLFIRE AND BRIMSTONE**." **PETER CARTWRIGHT** traveled across the frontier and brought religious services to countless remote Americans as one of the premier Methodist circuit riders. Sin and repentance dominated the camp meeting, a gathering that often lasted for days and attracted thousands of shrieking, sobbing, fainting converts. The message was simple: Repent your vices and God will forgive you!

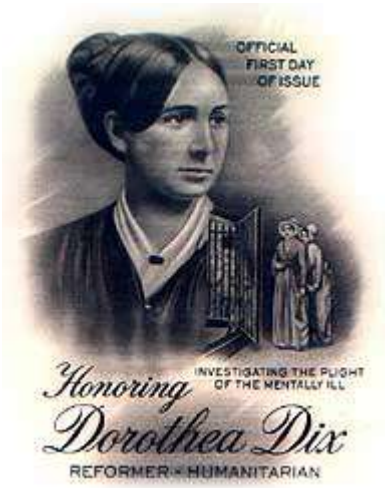
With the exception of the Society of Friends (the Quakers), no church in the nation took a public stance against slavery. Northern churches, like the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, were segregated.

The movement was perfectly in tune with Jacksonian America. Methodists and Baptists made the greatest gains in numbers of members. With a less formal clergy and the notion that anyone could be saved, these groups meshed nicely with Jacksonian Democracy. Women became more involved than men, and preachers soon used the revival to promote "women's sphere." Soon reform movements designed to improve the worst evils of industrial emerged from the churches America.

At the same time the Second Awakening was freeing men and women in the north and west, churches in the south began adopting a more authoritarian, paternalistic tone and did not encourage thinking about or questioning of social institutions, since such probing might have an undesired effect. The idea that all men have a spark of divinity and are therefore to be treated equally and benevolently did not mesh well with the existence of slavery. But everywhere else in America, the church and the clergy became, at least in spirit, a champion for the common man, his individual dignity and salvation, and the betterment of his condition.

26d. Prison and Asylum Reform





Eastern State Penitentiary

Eastern State Penitentiary was designed to intimidate prisoners by its appearance. Today a historical society runs tours of the prison, as well as a haunted house around Halloween.

The pretty woman who stood before the all-male audience seemed unlikely to provoke controversy. Tiny and timid, she rose to the platform of the Massachusetts Legislature to speak. Those who had underestimated the determination and dedication of **DOROTHEA DIX**, however, were brought to attention when they heard her say that the sick and insane were "confined in this Commonwealth in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, beaten with rods, lashed into obedience." Thus, her crusade for humane hospitals for the insane, which she began in 1841, was reaching a climax. After touring prisons, workhouses, almshouses, and private homes to gather evidence of appalling abuses, she made her case for state-supported care. Ultimately, she not only helped establish five hospitals in America, but also went to Europe where she successfully pleaded for human rights to Queen Victoria and the Pope.

Dorothea Dix, a tireless crusader for the treatment of the mentally ill, was made the Superintendent of Nurses for the Union Army during the Civil War. After the war, she retired to an apartment in the first hospital that she had founded, in Trenton, New Jersey.

The year 1841 also marked the beginning of the superintendence of **DR. JOHN GALT** at **EASTERN LUNATIC ASYLUM**, in Williamsburg, Virginia, the first publicly supported **PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL** in America. Warehousing of the sick was primary; their care was not. Dr. Galt had many revolutionary ideas about treating the insane, based on his conviction that they had dignity. Among his enlightened approaches were the use of drugs, the introduction of "**TALK THERAPY**" and advocating outplacement rather than lifelong stays.

In addition to the problems in asylums, prisons were filled to overflowing with everyone who gave offense to society from committing murder to spitting on the street. Men, women, children were thrown together in the most atrocious conditions. Something needed to be done — but what?

Until the 19th century, juveniles offenders were passed into the custody of their parents. During the time of prison and asylum reform, juvenile detention centers like the House of Refuge in New York were built to reform children of delinquent behavior.

After the War of 1812, reformers from Boston and New York began a crusade to remove children from jails into **JUVENILE DETENTION CENTERS**. But the larger controversy continued over the purpose of prison — was it for punishment or penitence? In 1821, a disaster occurred in **AUBURN PRISON** that shocked even the governor into pardoning hardened criminals. After being locked down in solitary, many of the eighty men committed suicide or had mental breakdowns. Auburn reverted to a strict disciplinary approach. The champion of discipline and first national figure in **PRISON REFORM** was **LOUIS DWIGHT**. founder of the **BOSTON PRISON DISCIPLINE SOCIETY**, he spread the Auburn system throughout America's jails and added salvation and Sabbath School to further penitence.

After several bad starts, America finally enjoyed about a decade of real reform. Idealism, plus hope in the perfectibility of institutions, spurred a new generation of leaders including **FRANCIS LIEBER**, **SAMUEL GRIDLEY HOWE** and the peerless Dix. Their goals were prison libraries, basic literacy (for Bible reading), reduction of whipping and beating, commutation of sentences, and separation of women, children and the sick.

By 1835, America was considered to have two of the "best" prisons in the world in Pennsylvania. Astonishingly, reformers from Europe looked to the new nation as a model for building, utilizing and improving their own systems. Advocates for prisoners believed that deviants could change and that a prison stay could have a positive effect. It was a revolutionary idea in the beginning of the 19th century that society rather than individuals had the responsibility for criminal activity and had the duty to treat neglected children and rehabilitate alcoholics.

In reality it became clear that, despite intervention by outsiders, prisoners were often no better off, and often worse off, for their incarceration. Yet, in keeping with the optimistic spirit of the era, these early **REFORMERS** had only begun a crusade to alleviate human suffering that continues today.

Abolitionist Sentiment Grows

Most of the African American characters in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*are transported to Africa at the end of the novel, causing controversy amongst abolitionists and free African Americans.

As the cotton industry took hold and slavery became more and more entrenched across the American south, the opposition to the Peculiar Institution began to grow.

The first widely accepted solution to the slavery question in the 1820s was colonization. In effect, supporters of colonization wanted to transplant the slave population back to Africa. Their philosophy was simple: slaves were brought to America involuntarily. Why not give them a chance to enjoy life as though such a forced migration had never taken place? Funds were raised to transport freed African-Americans across the Atlantic in the opposite direction. The nation of Liberia was created as a haven for former American slaves.

But most African-Americans opposed this practice. The vast majority had never set foot on African soil. Many African-Americans rightly believed that they had helped build this country and deserved to live as free citizens of America. By the end of the decade, a full-blown Abolitionist movement was born.

Abolitionist Wendell Phillips spoke on behalf of fugitive slave Thomas Sims, and against the Fugitive Slave Law in 1851. Sims was later returned to Savannah where he was publicly whipped.

These new Abolitionists were different from their forebears. **ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETIES** had existed in America since 1775, but these activists were more radical. Early Abolitionists called for a gradual end to slavery. They supported compensation to owners of slaves for their loss of property. They raised money for the purchase of slaves to grant freedom to selected individuals.

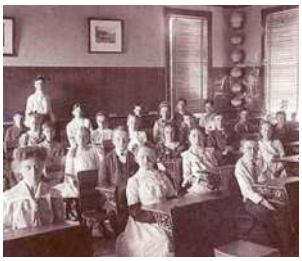
Many runaway slaves died on their way to freedom on the Underground Railroad. This stone marking the grave of a four-year-old fugitive slave orphan is in Oberlin, Ohio, a town noted for helping slaves escape.

The new Abolitionists thought differently. They saw slavery as a blight on America. It must be brought to an end immediately and without compensation to the owners. They sent petitions to Congress and the states, campaigned for office, and flooded the south with inflammatory literature.

Needless to say, eyebrows were raised throughout the north and the south. Soon the battle lines were drawn. President Andrew Jackson banned the post office from delivering Abolitionist literature in the south. A "**GAG RULE**" was passed on the floor of the House of Representatives forbidding the discussion of bills that restricted slavery. Abolitionists were physically attacked because of their outspoken anti-slavery views. While northern churches rallied to the Abolitionist cause, the churches of the south used the Bible to defend slavery.

Abolitionists were always a minority, even on the eve of the Civil War. Their dogged determination to end human bondage was a struggle that persisted for decades. While mostly peaceful at first, as each side became more and more firmly rooted, pens were exchanged for swords. Another seed of sectional conflict had been deeply planted.

EDUCATION REFORM



A major reform movement that won widespread support was the effort to make education available to more children. The man who led this movement was **Horace Mann**, "the father of American public schools." As a boy in Massachusetts, he attended school only 10 weeks a year. The rest of the time, he had to work on the family farm.

Few areas had public schools--schools paid for by taxes. Wealthy parents sent their children to private school or hired tutors at home. On the frontier, 60 children might attend a part-time, one-room school. Their teachers had limited education and received little pay. Most children simply did not go to school. In the cities, some poor children stole, destroyed property, and set fires. Reformers believed that education would help these children escape poverty and become good citizens.

In Massachusetts, Horace Mann became the state's supervisor of education. The citizens voted to pay taxes to build better schools, to pay teachers higher salaries and to establish special training schools for teachers. In addition, Mann lengthened the school year to 6 months and made improvements in school curriculum. By the mid-1800s, most states had accepted three basic principles of public education: that school should be free and supported by taxes, that teachers should be trained and that children should be required to attend school.

By 1850, many states in the North and West used Mann's ideas. But America still did not offer education to everyone. Most high schools and colleges did not admit females. When towns did allow African Americans to attend school, most made them go to separate schools that received less money. Education for women did make some progress. In 1837, Ohio's Oberlin College became the first college to accept women, in addition to men. In 1837, Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke, teh nation's first permanent women's college.