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The Ferment of Reform and Culture, 1790–1860

PART I: Reviewing the Chapter

A. Checklist of Learning Objectives

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to

1. describe the changes in American religion and their effects on culture and social reform.
2. describe the cause of the most important American reform movements of the period.
3. explain the origins of American feminism and describe its various manifestations.
4. describe the utopian and communitarian experiments of the period.
5. identify the early American achievements in the arts and sciences.
6. analyze the American literary flowering of the early nineteenth century, especially in relation to transcendentalism and other ideas of the time.

B. Glossary

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms.

1. **polygamy** The practice of having two or more spouses at one time. (**Polygyny** refers specifically to two or more wives; **polyandry** to two or more husbands.) “Accusations of polygamy likewise arose and increased in intensity.” (p. 323)
2. **theocracy** Literally, rule by God; the term is often applied to a state where religious leaders exercise direct or indirect political authority. “. . . the community became a prosperous frontier theocracy and a cooperative commonwealth.” (p. 324)
3. **zealot** One who is carried away by a cause to an extreme or excessive degree. “But less patient zealots came to believe that temptation should be removed by legislation.” (p. 330)
4. **utopian** Referring to any place or plan that aims at an ideal social order. “Bolstered by the utopian spirit of the age, various reformers . . . set up more than forty [cooperative] communities. . . .” (p. 333)
5. **communistic** Referring to the theory or practice in which the means of production are owned by the community as a whole. “. . . various reformers . . . set up more than forty communities of a . . . communistic nature.” (p. 333)
6. **communitarian** Referring to the belief in or practice of the superiority of community life or values over individual life, but not necessarily the common ownership of material goods. “. . . various reformers . . . set up more than forty communities of a . . . ‘communitarian’ nature.” (p. 333)
7. **free love** The principle or practice of sexual relations unrestricted by law, marriage, or religious constraints. “It practiced free love (‘complex marriage’). . . .” (p. 333)
8. **eugenic** Concerning the improvement of the human species through selective breeding or genetic control. “It practiced . . . the eugenic selection of parents to produce superior offspring.” (p. 333)

9. **coitus reservatus** The practice of sexual intercourse without the male's release of semen. "It practiced . . . birth control through 'male continence' or *coitus reservatus*." (p. 333)
10. **classical** Concerning the culture of ancient Greece and Rome, or any artistic or cultural values presumed to be based on those enduring ancient principles. "He brought a classical design to his Virginia hilltop home, Monticello. . . ." (p. 338)
11. **mystical** Referring to the belief in the direct apprehension of God or divine mystery, without reliance on reason or human comprehension. "These mystical doctrines of transcendentalism defied precise definition. . . ." (p. 341)
12. **nonconformist** One who refuses to follow established or conventional ideas or habits. "Henry David Thoreau . . . was . . . a poet, a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a nonconformist." (p. 341)
13. **nonviolence** The principle of resolving or engaging in conflict without resort to physical force. "His writings . . . inspired the development of American civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.'s thinking about nonviolence." (p. 341)
14. **urbane** Sophisticated, elegant, cosmopolitan. "Handsome and urbane, he lived a generally serene life. . . ." (p. 342)
15. **providential** Under the care and direction of God or other benevolent natural or supernatural forces. ". . . he lived among cannibals, from whom he providentially escaped uneaten." (p. 344)

PART II: Checking Your Progress

A. True-False

Where the statement is true, mark T. Where it is false, mark F, and correct it in the space immediately below.

- ___ 1. The Second Great Awakening reversed the trends toward religious indifference and rationalism of the late eighteenth century.
- ___ 2. The religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening broke down regional, denominational, and social-class divisions in favor of a common Christianity.
- ___ 3. The Mormon church migrated to Utah to escape persecution and to establish a tightly organized cooperative social order without persecution.
- ___ 4. The common public schools aimed at the goal of educating all citizens for participation in democracy, without regard to wealth.
- ___ 5. Women achieved equality with men in higher education before the Civil War.
- ___ 6. Many early American reformers were middle-class idealists inspired by evangelical Protestantism.
- ___ 7. The key role of women in American reform movements was undergirded by a growing "feminization" of the churches that spawned many efforts at social improvement.
- ___ 8. A major demand put forward by the more advanced women's-rights advocates was women's suffrage.
- ___ 9. Most early American communal experiments involved attempts to create a perfect society based on brotherly love and communal ownership of property.

- ___ 10. Early American science was stronger in biology, botany, and geology than it was in basic theoretical science or medicine.
- ___ 11. The first American national literature written by Irving and Cooper appeared in the immediate aftermath of the American Revolution.
- ___ 12. Although it rejected most Americans' materialism and focus on practical concerns, transcendentalism strongly reflected American individualism, love of liberty, and hostility to formal institutions and authority.
- ___ 13. Ralph Waldo Emerson taught the doctrines of simple living and nonviolence, while his friend Henry David Thoreau emphasized self-improvement and the development of American scholarship.
- ___ 14. The works of Walt Whitman, such as *Leaves of Grass*, revealed his love of democracy, the frontier, and the common people.
- ___ 15. Most early American imaginative writers and historians came from the Midwest and the South.

B. Multiple Choice

Select the best answer and write the proper letter in the space provided.

- ___ 1. The tendency toward rationalism and indifference in religion was reversed about 1800 by
- the rise of Deism and Unitarianism.
 - the rise of new groups like the Mormons and Christian Scientists.
 - the revivalist movement called the Second Great Awakening.
 - the influx of religiously traditional immigrants.
- ___ 2. Two denominations that especially gained adherents among the common people of the West and South were
- Episcopalians and Unitarians.
 - Congregationalists and Mormons.
 - Transcendentalists and Adventists.
 - Methodists and Baptists.
- ___ 3. The Second Great Awakening derived its religious strength especially from
- intensely organized "prayer groups" of lay believers.
 - the efficient institutional organization of the major American churches.
 - the popular preaching of evangelical revivalists in both the West and eastern cities.
 - the frontier interest in religious pilgrimages and religious art.
- ___ 4. Evangelical preachers like Charles Grandison Finney linked personal religious conversion to
- the construction of large church buildings throughout the Midwest.
 - the expansion of American political power across the continent.
 - the Christian reform of social problems.
 - the organization of effective economic development and industrialization.

- ___ 5. The term "Burned-Over District" refers to
- parts of the West where fires were used to clear the land for farming.
 - areas that were fiercely contested by both Baptist and Methodist revivalists.
 - the region of western New York State that experienced especially frequent and intense revivals.
 - the area of Illinois where the Mormon settlements were attacked and destroyed.
- ___ 6. The major effect of the growing slavery controversy on the churches was
- a major missionary effort directed at converted African-American slaves.
 - the organization of the churches to lobby for the abolition of slavery.
 - an agreement to keep political issues out of the religious area.
 - the split of Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians into separate northern and southern churches.
- ___ 7. Besides their practice of polygamy, the Mormons aroused hostility from many Americans because of
- their cooperative economic practices that ran contrary to American economic individualism.
 - their efforts to convert members of other denominations to Mormonism.
 - their populous settlement in Utah, which posed the threat of a breakaway republic in the West.
 - their practice of baptizing in the name of dead ancestors.
- ___ 8. The major promoter of an effective tax-supported system of public education for all American children was
- Joseph Smith.
 - Horace Mann.
 - Noah Webster.
 - Susan B. Anthony.
- ___ 9. Reformer Dorothea Dix worked for the cause of
- women's right to higher education and voting.
 - international peace.
 - better treatment of the mentally ill.
 - temperance.
- ___ 10. One cause of women's subordination in nineteenth-century America was
- the sharp division of labor that separated women at home from men in the workplace.
 - women's attention to causes other than women's rights.
 - the higher ratio of females to males in many communities.
 - the prohibition against women's participation in religious activities.
- ___ 11. The Seneca Falls Convention launched the modern women's rights movement with its call for
- equal pay for equal work.
 - an equal rights amendment to the Constitution.
 - equal rights, including the right to vote.
 - access to public education for women.

- _____ 12. Many of the American utopian experiments of the early nineteenth century focused on
- communal economics and alternative sexual arrangements.
 - temperance and diet reforms.
 - advanced scientific and technological ways of producing and consuming.
 - free-enterprise economics and trade.
- _____ 13. Two leading female imaginative writers who added to New England's literary prominence were
- Sarah Orne Jewett and Kate Chopin.
 - Louisa May Alcott and Emily Dickinson.
 - Sarah Grimké and Susan B. Anthony.
 - Harriet Beecher Stowe and Abigail Adams.
- _____ 14. The Knickerbocker Group of American writers included
- Henry David Thoreau, Thomas Jefferson, and Susan B. Anthony.
 - George Bancroft, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Herman Melville.
 - Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and William Cullen Bryant.
 - Walt Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Edgar Allan Poe.
- _____ 15. The transcendentalist writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller stressed the ideas of
- inner truth and individual self-reliance.
 - political community and economic progress.
 - personal guilt and fear of death.
 - love of chivalry and return to the medieval past.

C. Identification

Supply the correct identification for each numbered description.

- _____ 1. Liberal religious belief, held by many of the Founding Fathers, that stressed rationalism and moral behavior rather than Christian revelation
- _____ 2. Religious revival that began on the frontier and swept eastward, stirring an evangelical spirit in many areas of American life
- _____ 3. The *two* religious denominations that benefited from the evangelical revivals of the early nineteenth century
- _____ 4. Religious group founded by Joseph Smith that eventually established a cooperative commonwealth in Utah
- _____ 5. Memorable 1848 meeting in New York where women made an appeal based on the Declaration of Independence
- _____ 6. Commune established in New Harmony, Indiana by Scottish industrialist Robert Owen
- _____ 7. Intellectual commune in Massachusetts based on "plain living and high thinking"
- _____ 8. Thomas Jefferson's stately self-designed home in Virginia that became a model of American architecture
- _____ 9. New York literary movement that drew on both regional and national themes
- _____ 10. Philosophical and literary movement, centered in New England, that greatly influenced many American writers of the early nineteenth century

- _____ 11. The doctrine, promoted by American writer Henry David Thoreau in an essay of the same name, that later influenced Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.
- _____ 12. Walt Whitman's shocking collection of emotional poems
- _____ 13. A disturbing New England masterpiece about adultery and guilt in the old Puritan era
- _____ 14. The great but commercially unsuccessful novel about Captain Ahab's obsessive pursuit of a white whale
- _____ 15. The masterpiece of New England writer Louisa May Alcott

D. Matching People, Places, and Events

Match the person, place, or event in the left column with the proper description in the right column by inserting the correct letter on the blank line.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. Dorothea Dix | A. Leader of a radical New York commune that practiced "complex marriage" and eugenic birth control |
| _____ 2. Brigham Young | B. Bold, unconventional poet who celebrated American democracy |
| _____ 3. Elizabeth Cady Stanton | C. The "Mormon Moses" who led persecuted Latter-Day Saints to their promised land in Utah |
| _____ 4. Lucretia Mott | D. Influential evangelical revivalist of the Second Great Awakening |
| _____ 5. Emily Dickinson | E. New York writer whose romantic sea tales were more popular than his dark literary masterpiece |
| _____ 6. Charles G. Finney | F. Pioneering women's educator, founder of Mount Holyoke Seminary in Massachusetts |
| _____ 7. Robert Owen | G. Idealistic Scottish industrialist whose attempt at a communal utopia in America failed |
| _____ 8. John Humphrey Noyes | H. Second-rate poet and philosopher, but first-rate promoter of transcendentalist ideals and American culture |
| _____ 9. Mary Lyon | I. Eccentric southern-born genius whose tales of mystery, suffering, and the supernatural departed from general American literary trends |
| _____ 10. Louisa May Alcott | J. Quietly determined reformer who substantially improved conditions for the mentally ill |
| _____ 11. James Fenimore Cooper | K. Reclusive New England poet who wrote about love, death, and immortality |
| _____ 12. Ralph Waldo Emerson | L. Leading feminist who wrote the "Declaration of Sentiments" in 1848 and pushed for women's suffrage |
| _____ 13. Walt Whitman | M. Novelist whose tales of family life helped economically support her own struggling transcendentalist family |
| _____ 14. Edgar Allen Poe | N. Path-breaking American novelist who contrasted the natural person of the forest with the values of modern civilization |
| _____ 15. Herman Melville | O. Quaker women's rights advocate who also strongly supported abolition of slavery |

E. Putting Things in Order

Put the following events in correct order by numbering them from 1 to 5.

- ___ A leading New England transcendentalist appeals to American writers and thinkers to turn away from Europe and develop their own literature and culture.
- ___ A determined reformer appeals to a New England legislature to end the cruel treatment of the insane.
- ___ A gathering of female reformers in New York declares that the ideas of the Declaration of Independence apply to *both* sexes.
- ___ Great evangelical religious revival begins in western camp meetings.
- ___ A visionary New Yorker creates a controversial new religion.

F. Matching Cause and Effect

Match the historical cause in the left column with the proper effect in the right column by writing the correct letter on the blank line.

Cause	Effect
___ 1. The Second Great Awakening	A. Created the first literature genuinely native to America
___ 2. The Mormon practice of polygamy	B. Captured in one long poem the exuberant and optimistic spirit of popular American democracy
___ 3. Women abolitionists' anger at being ignored by male reformers	C. Caused most utopian experiments to decline or collapse in a few years
___ 4. The women's rights movement	D. Inspired writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Margaret Fuller
___ 5. Unrealistic expectations and conflict within perfectionist communes	E. Aroused hostility and scorn in most of the male press and pulpit
___ 6. The Knickerbocker and transcendentalist use of new American themes in their writing	F. Made their works little understood in their lifetimes by generally optimistic Americans
___ 7. Henry David Thoreau's theory of "civil disobedience"	G. Aroused persecution from morally traditionalist Americans and delayed statehood for Utah
___ 8. Walt Whitman's <i>Leaves of Grass</i>	H. Inspired a widespread spirit of evangelical reform in many areas of American life
___ 9. Herman Melville's and Edgar Allan Poe's concern with evil and suffering	I. Led to expanding the crusade for equal rights to include women
___ 10. The Transcendentalist movement	J. Inspired later practitioners of nonviolence like Gandhi and King

G. Developing Historical Skills

Using Primary-Source Documents

Statements from historical contemporaries often reveal fundamental conflicts over values and demonstrate the shock that occurs when new ideas emerge. The quotations from the London *Saturday Review* and from Walt Whitman (p. 342) illustrate such opposing views.

Answer the following questions.

1. What is the London *Saturday Review*'s primary objection to Whitman's poetry?
2. How does Whitman answer such criticisms?
3. How does Whitman's statement reveal the values of individualism and democracy cherished by the emerging American culture?
4. What does the quotation from *Leaves of Grass* in the text (p. 342) indicate about Whitman's typically American view of Europe?

PART III: Applying What You Have Learned

1. What major changes in American religion occurred in the early nineteenth century, and how did they affect American culture and reform?
2. What were the successes and failures of the many American reform movements of the early nineteenth century? Was the failure of some of them (e.g., peace reforms) due to entrenched social conservatism, or to weaknesses in the movements themselves?
3. How did the first American feminists propose altering the condition of women, and what success did they have?
4. Compare the early American achievements in the sciences with those in the arts. Which were the most successful, and why?
5. What were the major concerns of America's greatest imaginative writers in the early nineteenth century? Did those writers fundamentally reflect the deepest values of American culture, or were they at odds with the main currents of American society and politics?
6. In what ways were the movements of American religion, reform, and culture an outgrowth of the American Revolution and American independence, and in what ways did they reflect qualities of American life reaching back to the Puritans?