

Lesson 36

Whiskey, Slavery, and Women's Rights: Social Reform

A. Temperance Movement

¹During the Second Great Awakening, many citizens felt the need to improve themselves as well as reform the American society around them. ²As a result, groups formed around a number of social issues to stamp out the evils they saw in the United States in the mid-1800s.

³One of these issues was the high level of alcohol consumption.

⁴Whiskey was distilled liquor easily made from corn and rye grains which were in great supply in the West. ⁵By the 1820s, Americans were drinking whiskey and hard cider at rates higher than ever before. ⁶Public drunkenness, domestic violence, crime, disease, and unemployment resulted. ⁷Ministers who led the religious revivals of the early 1800s began to crusade against the use of alcohol. ⁸Women were also very involved in this movement.

⁹In 1826, the American Temperance Society was created. ¹⁰Temperance meant not drinking alcohol to excess. ¹¹Within a few years, thousands of local temperance societies were denouncing alcohol use and urging people to take a pledge to totally abstain from using alcohol. ¹²Temperance advocates also wanted the government to pass laws against alcohol. ¹³The movement against drinking liquor caught on by the 1830s partly because of the changes in manufacturing. ¹⁴As more Americans worked in factories, a sober, clear-headed work force was demanded by employers. ¹⁵Several New England towns passed laws outlawing the sale of alcohol in factory stores or near factory sites. ¹⁶For awhile, the state of Maine even passed prohibition—a law that banned the making or selling of any alcoholic beverages. ¹⁷Although national prohibition was discussed, it did not come about in the 1800s. ¹⁸However, the temperance movement did have success. ¹⁹By the 1840s, alcohol consumption in the U.S. had been cut in half from what it was in the 1820s.



B. Criminals and the Mentally Ill

²⁰At about the same time the temperance movement began, social reformers looked at ways to combat poverty, crime, and insanity. ²¹These social issues grew as the cities themselves grew. ²²Reformers felt that the urban environment was the root of the problem. ²³The plan was to remove paupers, criminals, and mentally ill people from the cities and place them in institutions with properly controlled surroundings. ²⁴With these changes, it was believed that these “socially undesirable” could be reformed.

²⁵In the 1700s, colonial jails were places that only held people temporarily while awaiting trial. ²⁶Convicted criminals were usually branded or whipped, then released or expelled from the community or, in extreme cases, executed. ²⁷The jails of the 1820s, in contrast, were built for extended stays. ²⁸Criminals were isolated in cells so that they could be away from the bad influences of society. ²⁹In some states, prisoners could not even have visitors or read the latest news.

³⁰The poor and the mentally ill were also removed from society.

³¹Those able-bodied poor who were not able to support themselves were assigned to workhouses (sometimes called poorhouses) where it was hoped the discipline of labor would make them good citizens. ³²The workhouses for



Dorothea Dix

the poor and the asylums for the mentally ill were very regulated and prison-like in many ways. ³³A reformer named Dorothea Dix championed the idea that communities should build special hospitals for the insane where they could receive medical care and religious instruction.

C. Abolition

³⁴The Constitution abolished the importation of new slaves after 1808, but slavery itself still existed in the United States. ³⁵The demand for slave labor on Southern cotton plantations grew as Eli Whitney's cotton gin allowed for even more cotton production. ³⁶Illegal importation of slaves continued as did the buying and selling of the children of American slaves. ³⁷The number of slaves in America actually doubled from the end of the War of 1812 to 1830.

³⁸However, a growing number of Northerners, living in states where slavery was now outlawed, pushed for abolition (the outlawing of slavery) in America. ³⁹One of the leaders was William Lloyd Garrison. ⁴⁰He started a newspaper in 1831 called *The Liberator* (to liberate means to set free). ⁴¹His newspaper described the horrible conditions of slavery. ⁴²He then organized the American Anti-Slavery Society. ⁴³By 1840 there were over 1,500 local anti-slavery organizations in the country and a new anti-



William Lloyd
Garrison

slavery political party, the Liberty Party, actually ran a candidate for president.

⁴⁴Women and free blacks played a large role in the abolition movement. ⁴⁵Angelina and Sarah Grimke were white daughters of a South Carolina slaveholder. ⁴⁶They went on a widely reported speaking tour in New England and wrote abolitionist essays. ⁴⁷Frederick Douglass was a slave who taught himself to read. ⁴⁸He escaped to the North where he wrote an autobiography, gave public lectures, and started his own abolitionist newspaper called *The North Star*. ⁴⁹Harriet Tubman was a runaway slave who reported her own horror stories about slavery. ⁵⁰She repeatedly went back to the South to help other slaves escape. ⁵¹Another former female slave, Sojourner Truth, was one of the important abolitionists of her day. ⁵²She also worked for women's rights.

D. Women's Rights

⁵³The Grimke sisters and Sojourner Truth sometimes compared the condition of women in America to that of slaves. ⁵⁴Even in the North in the mid-1800s, women could not vote, go to college, or hold public office. ⁵⁵Married women could not own property and few men took action

against domestic violence. ⁵⁶It was difficult to get a divorce and, if they did, women rarely had custody of their children.

⁵⁷Middle class women became more and more involved in revivals, anti-slavery societies, and temperance movements, and they began to take up the cause for women's rights as well. ⁵⁸In 1848 two women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, organized the Seneca Falls Convention for women's rights in New York. ⁵⁹Hundreds of women attended this first of its kind event. ⁶⁰Frederick Douglass and dozens of other men were there as well.



Elizabeth Cady
Stanton

⁶¹Out of the convention came a document called the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments. ⁶²It was modelled on the Declaration of Independence and mimicked a famous line from it: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal." ⁶³The convention then passed twelve resolutions about women's rights, including the right to vote. ⁶⁴The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments was very controversial. ⁶⁵"The most shocking and unnatural event ever recorded in the history of womanity," one local newspaper wrote about the convention. ⁶⁶"Just what I wanted," Stanton said about the publicity. ⁶⁷"It will start women thinking, and men too; and when men and women think about a new question, the first step in progress is taken."

⁶⁸In a time when most Americans thought that men and women should live in different spheres, little actually changed after the convention. ⁶⁹The issues of slavery and the Civil War soon drowned out the pleas for women's rights. ⁷⁰Women were not given the national right to vote until the 1920 election.

Fun Fact Feature

The person who sent in this letter to the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* in May of 1852 is protesting what?

"The sphere of individual liberty must be shrunken, indeed, if it cannot enclose all that lies within a man's skin, and the powers of the government, extensive indeed, if they can reach down the citizen's throat and explore his digestive organs...The esophagus, the duodenum, and capillary ducts of free-born Americans are, and of right should be, forever inviolable; and that if the Declaration of Independence does not avail to save the contents of our stomachs and bladders from chemical analysis and legislative discussion, it is full time to make another declaration that shall mean something."

1. Many people associated with the social reform movement were also associated with:
- the communications revolution.
 - the Federalist party.
 - the Civil War.
 - the Second Great Awakening.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

2. Social reformers in the temperance movement were against the abuses of:
- alcohol.
 - slavery.
 - prisons.
 - women's rights.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

3. Give factual evidence that the temperance movement was successful.
- _____
- _____

4. Who championed the social cause of special hospitals for the mentally ill?
- Elizabeth Cady Stanton
 - Dorothea Dix
 - Sarah Grimke
 - Lucretia Mott

Which sentence best supports the answer?

5. "Abolition" was the word used to describe the cause of outlawing:
- alcohol.
 - penitentiaries.
 - slavery.
 - divorce.

Which sentence best supports the answer?

6. Which of these people was NOT associated with the abolitionist movement?
- William Lloyd Garrison
 - Sojourner Truth
 - Eli Whitney
 - Harriet Tubman

Which sentence best supports the answer?

7. What social reform cause was celebrated at the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848?
- prohibition
 - mental asylums
 - abolition
 - women's rights

Which sentence best supports the answer?

8. In the Declaration of Sentiments and Rights, what two words were added by convention delegates to a famous phrase from the Declaration of Independence?
- _____
- _____

9. Which African American abolitionist started a newspaper called *The North Star* and later attended the women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York?
- Harriet Tubman
 - Frederick Douglass
 - Elizabeth Cady Stanton
 - Sojourner Truth

Which sentences best support the answer?

Written Response Question

10. Pick one of the four social reforms discussed in this lesson. Write a paragraph in which you argue that this was the most important social cause of the mid-1800s.

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Fun Fact Finale

The writer of this anonymous letter was protesting the possibility that the government could pass laws regulating what a person chooses to consume in his/her own body.

What do you think? What is the counter-argument to the opinion expressed in this letter?