

## Chapter 15- The Ferment of Reform and Culture

### 1790-1860

#### A. Reviving Religion

1. Church attendance was still a regular ritual for about three-fourths of the 23 million Americans in 1850; religion of these years was not the old-time religion of colonial days
  1. The austere Calvinist rigor had long been seeping out of the American churches; the rationalist ideas of the French Revolutionary era had done much to soften orthodoxy
  2. Many of the Founding Fathers, including Jefferson and Franklin, embraced the liberal doctrines of Deism that Thomas Paine promoted in his book *The Age of Reason*
  3. Deists relied on reason rather than revelation, on science rather than the Bible; they rejected the concept of original sin and denied Christ's divinity; yet deists believed in a Supreme Being who created a knowable universe (humans and moral behavior)
2. Deism helped to inspire an important spin-off from the severe Puritanism of the past—the Unitarian faith, which began to gather momentum in NE at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century
  1. Unitarians held that God existed in only one person and no in the orthodox Trinity
  2. Although denying the deity of Jesus, Unitarians stressed the essential goodness of human nature rather than its vileness (belief in free will and salvation through works)
  3. They pictured God not as a stern Creator but as a loving Father; the Unitarian movement appealed mostly to intellectuals whose rationalism and optimism contrasted sharply with the hellfire doctrines of Calvinism (predestination, depravity)
3. A boiling reaction against the growing liberalism in religion set in about 1800
  1. A fresh wave of roaring revivals, beginning on the southern frontier but soon rolling even into the cities of the Northeast, sent the Second Great Awakening surging
  2. Sweeping up even more people than the First Great Awakening, the Second Awakening was one of the most momentous episodes in history of American religion
  3. The tidal wave of spiritual fervor left converted souls, many shattered and reorganized churches, and numerous new sects; it also encouraged an effervescent evangelicalism that bubbled up into innumerable areas of American life—prison reform, temperance cause, women's movement, and the crusade to abolish slavery
4. The Second Great Awakening was spread to the masses on the frontier by huge "camp meetings"; as many as 25,000 people would gather for an encampment of several days to drink the hellfire gospel as served by an itinerant preacher; revivals boosted church membership and stimulated a variety of humanitarian reforms (missionary work)

5. Methodists and Baptists reaped the most abundant harvest of souls from the fields fertilized by revivalism; both sects stressed personal conversion, a relatively democratic control of church affairs, and a rousing emotionalism; powerful Peter Cartwright was the best known of the Methodist “circuit riders” or traveling frontier preachers
6. Charles Grandison Finney was the greatest of the revival preachers; Finney abandoned being a lawyer to become an evangelist after a conversion experience as a young man
  1. Finney held huge crowds spellbound with the power of his oratory and the pungency of his message; he led massive revivals in Rochester and NYC in 1830 and 1831
  2. He devised the “anxious bench,” where repentant sinners could sit in full view of the congregation, and he encouraged women to pray aloud in public
7. A key feature of the Second Great Awakening was the feminization of religion, both in terms of church membership and theology; middle-class women were the first and most fervent enthusiasts of religious revivalism (majority of new church members)
8. Evangelicals preached a gospel of female spiritual worth and offered women an active role in bringing their husbands and families back to God; that accomplished, many women turned to saving the rest of society (epitomized the era’s ambitious reforms)

#### **B. Denominational Diversity**

1. Revivals also furthered the fragmentation of religious faiths; Western New York, where descendants of NE Puritans had settled, came to be known as the “Burned-Over District”
2. Millerites, or Adventists, who had several hundred thousand adherents, rose from the super-heated soil of the Burned-Over region in the 1830s; named after William Miller, they interpreted the Bible to mean that Christ would return to earth on October 22, 1844
3. The failure of Jesus to descend on schedule dampened but did not destroy the movement
4. Like the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening tended to widen the lines between classes and regions; more prosperous and conservative denominations in East were little touched by revivalism, and Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Unitarians continued to rise mostly from wealthier, better-educated levels of society
5. Methodists, Baptists, and other new sects spawned by swelling evangelistic fervor tended to come from less prosperous, less “learned” communities in the rural South and West
6. Religious diversity further reflected social cleavages when the churches faced up to the slavery issue; by 1844-1845 both the southern Baptists and the southern Methodists had split with their northern brethren over human bondage (Presbyterians split)
7. The secession of the southern churches foreshadowed the secession of the southern states

#### **C. A Desert Zion in Utah**

1. The smoldering spiritual embers of the Burned-Over District kindled Joseph Smith, a rugged visionary, who reported that he had received some golden plates from an angel
  1. When deciphered, they constituted the Book of Mormon, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) was launched (American product)
  2. After establishing a religious oligarchy, Smith ran into serious opposition from his non-Mormon neighbors, first in Ohio and then in Missouri and Illinois
  3. His cooperative sect rasped rank-and-file Americans, who were individualistic and dedicated to free enterprise; the Mormons aroused further antagonism by voting as a unit and by openly but understandably drilling their militia for defensive purposes
  4. Accusations of polygamy likewise arose and increased in intensity (Smith)
2. Continuing hostility finally drove the Mormons to desperate measure; in 1844 Joseph Smith and his brother were murdered and mangled by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, and the movement seemed near collapse; the failing torch was seized by Brigham Young
  1. Brigham Young quickly proved to be an aggressive leader, an eloquent preacher, and a gifted administrator; determined to escape further persecution, Young in 1846-1847 led his oppressed and despoiled Latter-Day Saints over the rolling plains to Utah
  2. Overcoming pioneer hardships, the Mormons soon made the desert bloom like a new Eden by means of ingenious and cooperative methods of irrigation (gulls and crickets)
3. Semiarid Utah grew remarkably; by the end of 1848, some five thousand settlers had arrived and other large bands were to follow them; many dedicated Mormons in the 1850s actually made the 1,300 miles trek across the plains pulling carts
4. Under the rigidly disciplined management of Brigham Young, the community became a prosperous frontier theocracy and a cooperative commonwealth; Young married as many as twenty-seven women and populations were further swelled by thousands of immigrants from Europe, where the Mormons had established a missionary movement
5. A crisis developed when the Washington government was unable to control the hierarchy of Brigham Young, who had been made territorial governor in 1850; a federal army marched in 1857 against the Mormons but the quarrel was finally adjusted without war

#### **D. Free Schools for a Free People**

1. Tax-supported primary schools were scarce in the early years of the Republic; they existed chiefly to educate the children of the poor—the so-called ragged schools
2. Advocates of “free” public education met stiff opposition; well-to-do conservative Americans gradually saw the light; if they did not pay to educate “other folks’ brats,” their children might grow up into a dangerous, ignorant rabble—armed with the vote

1. Taxation for education was an insurance premium that the wealthy paid for stability and democracy; tax-supported public education triumphed between 1825 and 1850
  2. Although it lagged in the slavery-cursed South, laborers wielded increased influence and demanded instruction for children (a free vote cried aloud for free education)
  3. The famed little red schoolhouse—with one room, one stove, one teacher, and often eight grades—became the shrine of American democracy; still early free schools stayed open only a few months of the year and schoolteachers, most of them men in this era, were too often ill trained, ill tempered, and ill paid
  4. These knights of the blackboard often “boarded around” in the community and some knew scarcely more than their older pupils—they usually taught only the “three R’s”—“readin’, ‘ritin’, and ‘rithmetic” (rugged Americans thought this was enough)
3. Reform was urgently needed and into the breach stepped Horace Mann, a brilliant and idealistic graduate of Brown University; as secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, he campaigned effectively for more and better school houses, longer school terms, high pay for the teachers who worked in the schools, and an expanded curriculum
1. His influence radiated out to other states, and impressive improvements were chalked up but education still remained an expensive luxury for many communities
  2. Black slaves in the South were legally forbidden to receive instruction in reading or writing, and free blacks, in the North as well were usually excluded from schools
4. Educational advances were aided by improved textbooks, notably those of Noah Webster, a Yale-educated Connecticut Yankee who was known as the “Schoolmaster of the Republic”; his “reading lessons” used by millions of children in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were partly designed to promote patriotism (Webster devoted 20 years to his famous dictionary, published in 1828, which helped to standardize the American language)
5. Equally influential was Ohioan William H. *McGuffey*, a teacher-preacher of rare power; his grade-school readers sold 122 million copies in the following decades; *McGuffey’s Readers* hammered home lasting lessons in morality, patriotism, and idealism

#### E. Higher Goals for Higher Learning

1. Higher education was likewise stirring; the religious zeal of the Second Great Awakening led to the planting of many small, denominational, liberal arts colleges (South and West)
  1. Too often they were academically anemic, established more to satisfy local pride than to advance the cause of learning; like their more venerable, ivy-draped brethren, the new colleges offered a narrow, tradition-bound curriculum of Latin, Greek, mathematics, and moral philosophy (little intellectual vitality and much boredom)

2. The first state-supported universities sprang up in the South, beginning with North Carolina in 1795; federal land grants nourished the growth of state institutions of higher learning; conspicuous among the early group was the U of Virginia (1819)
3. The University of Virginia was largely the brainchild of Thomas Jefferson, who designed its beautiful architecture and dedicated university to freedom from religious or political shackles, and modern languages and the sciences received emphasis
2. Women's higher education was frowned upon in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century
  1. A woman's place was believed to be in the home, and training in needlecraft seemed more important than training in algebra; coeducation was regarded as frivolous
  2. Prejudices also prevailed that too much learning injured the feminine brain, undermined health, and rendered women unfit for marriage
3. Women's schools at the secondary level began to attain some respectability in the 1820s, thanks in part to the educated work of Emma Willard; in 1821 she established the Troy Female Seminary; Oberlin College, in Ohio, jolted traditionalists in 1837 when it opened its doors to women as well as men (Oberlin had already admitted black students)
4. Adults who craved more learning satisfied their thirst for knowledge at private subscription libraries or, increasingly, at tax-supported libraries (traveling lecturers helped to carry learning to the masses through the lyceum lecture associations)
5. Magazines flourished in the pre-Civil War years, but most of them withered after a short life; the *North American Review*, founded in 1815, was the long-lived leader of intellectuals; *Godey's Lad's Book*, (1830) attained enormous circulation of 150,000

## F. An Age of Reform

1. As the young Republic grew, reform campaigns of all types flourished in sometimes bewildering abundance; most reformers were intelligent, inspired idealists
  1. The optimistic promises of the Second Great Awakening inspired people to battle earthly evils and modern idealists dreamed anew the old Puritan vision of a perfected society: free from cruelty, war, intoxicating drink, discrimination, and slavery
  2. Women were particularly prominent in these reform crusades, especially in their own struggle for suffrage; for many middle-class women, the reform campaigns provided a unique opportunity to escape the confines of the home and enter public affairs
2. In part the practical, activist Christianity of reformers resulted from desire to reaffirm traditional values as they plunged in to a world transformed by the market economy
  1. Mainly middle-class descendants of pioneer farmers, they were unaware that were witnessing the dawn of the industrial era and either ignored the factory workers or blamed their problems on bad habits—naïve single-mindedness (virtue to order)

2. Imprisonment for debt continued as the poorer working classes were especially hard hit by this merciless practice—state legislatures gradually abolished debtors' prisons
3. Criminal codes in the states were softened, in accord with more enlightened European practices; the number of capital offenses was being reduced and brutal punishments were being slowly eliminated; new view that prisons should reform as well as punish
3. Sufferers from so-called insanity were still being treated with incredible cruelty; medievalists had believed that the insane were cursed with unclean spirits and the 19<sup>th</sup> century idea was that there were willfully perverse and depraved (many chained)
4. In this dismal picture stepped a New England teacher-author Dorothea Dix; she traveled and assembled reports on insanity and asylums and in her petition of 1843 to the Massachusetts legislature, turned legislative stomachs and hearts (foul conditions)
5. Agitation for peace also gained momentum in the pre-Civil War years
  1. In 1828 the American Peace Society was formed, with a ringing declaration of war on war; a leading spirit was William Ladd who advocated for collective security
  2. The American peace crusade, linked with a European counterpart, was making promising progress by mid-century, but it was set back by the bloodshed of the Crimean War in Europe and the Civil War that occurred in America

#### G. Demon Rum—The "Old Deluder"

1. The ever-present drink problem attracted dedicated reformers; custom led to excessive drinking of hard liquor, even among women, clergymen, and members of Congress
  1. Heavy drinking decreased the efficiency of labor, and poorly safeguarded machinery operated under the influence of alcohol increased the danger of accidents at work
  2. Drunkenness also fouled the sanctity of the family, threatening the spiritual welfare and physical safety of women and children; drinking hurt the entire family
2. The American Temperance Society was formed at Boston in 1826; within a few years, a thousand local groups sprang into existence and implored drinkers to sign the temperance pledge and organized children's clubs, known as the "Cold Water Army"
3. Temperance crusaders also made effective use of pictures, pamphlets, and lurid lectures
4. The most popular anti-alcohol tract was T.S. Arthur's melodramatic novel, *Ten Nights in a Barroom and What I Saw There* (1854—described a village destroyed by the tavern); the book was second only to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a bestseller in the 1850s
5. Early foes of Demon Drink adopted two major lines of attack
  1. One was to stiffen the individual's will to resist the wiles of the little brown jug; the moderate reformers thus stressed "temperance" rather than "teetotalism," or the

total elimination of intoxicants; zealots believed that temptation be removed by legislation

2. Prominent among this group was Neal S. Dow of Maine, a blue-nosed reformer who, as a mayor of Portland and employer of labor, had often witnessed effects of alcohol
3. Dow—the “Father of Prohibition”—sponsored the so-called Maine Law of 1851 which hailed as “the law of Heaven Americanized,” prohibited the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquor; other states in the North followed Maine’s example and by 1857 about a dozen had passed various prohibitory laws against alcohol
4. But still within a decade some of statutes were repealed or declared unconstitutional
6. It was clearly impossible to legislate thirst for alcohol out of existence yet on the eve of the Civil War, the prohibitionists had registered inspiring gains (less drinking among women and probably much less per capita consumption of hard liquor)

#### H. Women in Revolt

1. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was still a man’s world, both in America and in Europe; a wife was supposed to immerse herself in her home and subordinate herself to her lord and master (her husband); like black slaves, she could not vote and could be legally beaten and when she married, she could not retain title to her property (husband)
  1. Yet American women, fared better than their European cousins; in France, rape was punished only lightly whereas in America it was one of the few capital crimes
  2. Women were still “the submerged sex” in America in the early part of the century and in contrast to women in colonial times, many women now avoided marriage (10%)
2. Gender differences were strongly emphasized in 19<sup>th</sup> century America—largely because the market economy was separating women and men into sharply distinct economic roles
  1. Women were thought to be physically and emotionally weak, but also artistic and refine; endowed with finely tuned moral sensibilities, they were the keepers of society’s conscience, with special responsibility to teach the young how to be good
  2. Men were considered strong but crude, always in danger of slipping into some savage or beastly way of life if not guided by the gentle hands of their loving ladies
3. The home was a woman’s special sphere, the centerpiece of the “cult of domesticity” but some women more felt that the glorified sanctuary of the home was in fact a gilded cage
4. Clamorous female reformers began to gather strength as the century neared its halfway point; most were broad-gauge battlers, while demanding rights for women, they joined in the reform movement of the age, fighting for temperance and the abolition of slavery

1. The women's rights movement was mothered by a few women including Lucretia Mott, a sprightly Quaker whose ire had been aroused when she and her fellow female delegates to the London antislavery convention of 1840 were not recognized
2. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had insisted on leaving "obey" out of her marriage ceremony, shocked fellow feminists by going far as to advocate suffrage for women
3. Quaker-reared Susan B. Anthony, a militant lecturer for women's rights, became such a conspicuous advocate of female rights that progressive women were called "Suzy Bs"
5. Other feminists challenged the men such as Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female graduate of a medical college, precocious Margaret Fuller who edited a transcendentalist journal (*The Dial*) and took part to bring unity and republican government to Italy
6. The talented Grimke sisters, Sarah and Angelina, championed antislavery; Lucy Stone retained her maiden name after marriage and Amelia Bloomer revolted against current "street sweeping" female attire by donning a semi-masculine short skirt with "bloomers"
7. Fighting feminists met at Seneca Falls, New York, in a memorable Woman's Rights Convention; the defiant Stanton read a "Declaration of Sentiment," which in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence declared that "all men and women are created equal"
8. One resolution formally demanded the ballot for females; amid denunciation from press and pulpit, the Seneca Falls meeting launched the modern women's rights movement
9. In the decade before the Civil War, any white male over the age of 21 could vote; women were gradually being admitted to colleges and some states, beginning with Mississippi in 1839, were even permitting wives to own property after marriage

#### I. Wilderness Utopias

1. Bolstered by the utopian spirit of the age, various reformers set up more than forty communities of a cooperative, communistic, or "communitarian" nature
  1. Seeking human betterment, a wealthy and idealistic Scottish textile manufacturer, Robert Owen, founded in 1825 a communal society of about a thousand people at New Harmony, Indiana; little harmony prevailed in the colony, which attracted visionaries, radicals, theorists, and scoundrels, and the colony sank into confusion
  2. Brook Farm in Massachusetts, comprising two hundred acres of grudging soil, was started in 1841 with cooperation of about twenty intellectuals committed to the philosophy of transcendentalism; the venture collapsed in debt after a building burned
  3. A more radical experiment was the Oneida Community, founded in New York in 1848; it practiced free love ("complex marriage"), birth control (*coitus reservatus*) and the eugenic selection of parents to produce superior offspring—this enterprise flourished for about 30 years because they made superior steel traps and plates



2. Various communistic experiments, mostly small in scale, have been attempted since Jamestown but in competition with democratic free enterprise and free land, virtually all of them failed or changed their methods (among the longest lasting were the Shakers)
3. Led by Mother Ann Lee, they began in the 1770s to set up a religious communities; the Shakers attained a membership of about six thousand in 1840, but since their monastic customs prohibited both marriage and sexual relations they were extinct by 1940

#### J. The Dawn of Scientific Achievement

1. Early Americans, confronted with pioneering problems, were more interested in practical gadgets than in pure science; Jefferson was a gifted amateur inventor and noteworthy were the writings of mathematician Nathaniel Bowditch on practical navigation and of oceanographer Matthew F. Maury on ocean winds and currents (safety, speed, economy)
2. But as far as basic science was concerned, Americans were best known for borrowing and adapting the findings of Europeans, yet the Republic was not without scientific talent
  1. The most influential American scientist of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Professor Benjamin Silliman, pioneer chemist and geologist who taught/wrote at Yale
  2. Professor Louis Agassiz, a distinguished French-Swiss immigrant, served for a quarter of a century at Harvard College as a path-breaking student of biology
  3. Professor Asa Gray of Harvard College published 350 books, monographs and papers
3. Lovers of American bird lore owed much to the French-descended naturalist John J. Audubon, who painted wild fowl in their natural habitat (*Birds of America*)
4. Medicine in America, despite a steady growth of medical schools, was still primitive by modern standards; bleeding remained a common cure, and a curse as well
  1. Smallpox plagues were still dreaded, and the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia took several thousand lives (daily cries of corpse-wagon drivers)
  2. People everywhere complained of ill health—malaria, the “rheumatics,” the “miserics,” and the chills; illness often resulted from improper diet, hurried eating, perspiring and cooling off too rapidly, and ignorance of germs and sanitation
  3. Life expectancy was still dismayingly short—about forty years for a white person born in 1850, and less for blacks; suffering from decayed teeth was enormous
5. Self-prescribed patent medicines were common, fad diets proved popular, among home remedies was the rubbing of tumors with dead toads, and the use of medicine by regular doctors was often harmful (victims of surgical operations were ordinarily tied down)
6. Medical progress came in the early 1840s, when several American doctors and dentists, working independently, successfully employed laughing gas and ether as anesthetics

#### K. Artistic Achievements

1. Architecturally, America contributed little of note in the first half of the century
  1. The rustic Republic continued to imitate European models; public buildings and other important structures followed Greek and Roman lines, which seemed out of place
  2. A remarkable Greek revival came between 1820 and 1850, partly stimulated by the heroic efforts of the Greeks in the 1820s to wrest independence from the “Turks”; about mid-century strong interest developed in a revival of Gothic forms
  3. Talented Thomas Jefferson, architect of revolution, was probably the ablest American architect of his generation (he brought a classical design to his Monticello home)
2. The art of painting continued to be handicapped; it suffered from the dollar-grabbing of a raw civilization, from the hustle, bustle, and absence of leisure; from the lack of a wealthy class to sit for portraits—and then pay for them; some of the earliest painters were forced to go to England, where they found both training and patrons
3. Painting, like the theater, also suffered from the Puritan prejudice that art was a sinful waste of time—and often obscene; competent painters nevertheless emerged
  1. Gilbert Stuart, a spendthrift Rhode Islander and one of the most gifted of the early group, wielded his brush in Britain in competition with the best artists
  2. Charles Willson Peale painted some sixty portraits of Washington and John Trumbull, recaptured its scenes and spirit on scores of striking canvases
4. During the nationalistic upsurge after the War of 1812, American painters of portraits turned increasingly from human landscapes to romantic mirrorings of local landscapes
  1. The Hudson River school excelled in this type of art
  2. At the same time, portrait painters gradually encountered some unwelcome competition from the invention of a crude photograph known as the *daguerreotype*
5. *Music was slowly shaking off the restraints of colonial days, when the prim Puritans had frowned upon nonreligious singing; rhythmic and nostalgic “darky” tunes, popularized by whites, were becoming immense hits by mid-century*
6. *The most famous black songs came from a white Pennsylvanian, Stephen C. Foster who made valuable contribution to American folk music by capturing plaintive spirit of slaves*

#### L. The Blossoming of a National Literature

1. The painful truth was that the nation’s rough-hewn, pioneering civilization gave little encouragement to “polite” literature; much of the reading matter was imported
2. Busy conquering a continent, the Americans poured most of their creative efforts into practical outlets; praiseworthy were political essays like *The Federalist* of Hamilton, Jay, and Madison; pamphlets, like Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*; and political orations, like masterpieces of Daniel Webster; Ben Franklin’s *Autobiography* was distinguished

3. A genuinely American literature received a strong boost from the wave of nationalism that followed the War of Independence and especially the War of 1812
4. Washington Irving was the first American to win international recognition as a literary figure; he published in 1809 his *Knickerbocker's History of New York*
  1. In 1819-1820 he published *The Sketch Book*, which brought him immediate fame at home and abroad; combining a pleasing style with delicate charm and quiet humor, he used English as well as American themes and included such immortal Dutch-American tales as "Rip Van Winkle" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"
  2. Europe was amazed at an American with a feather in his hand; turning to Spanish locales and biography, Irving interpreted America to Europe and Europe to America
5. James Fenimore Cooper was the first American novelist, as Washington Irving was the first general writer, to gain world fame and to make New World themes respectable
  1. Cooper launched out upon an illustrious career in 1821 with his second novel, *The Spy*—an absorbing tale of the American Revolution; his stories of the sea were meritorious and popular, but his fame rests mostly on the *Leatherstocking Tales*
  2. James Fenimore Cooper's novels had a wide sale among Europeans, some of whom came to think of all American people as born with tomahawk in hand
  3. Actually Cooper was exploring the viability and destiny of America's republican experiment, by contrasting the undefiled values of "natural men," children of the wooded wilderness, with the artificiality of modern civilization
6. A third member of the Knickerbocker group in New York was the belated Puritan William Cullen Bryant; at 16, he wrote the meditative and melancholy "Thanatopsis," which was one of the first high-quality poems produced in the United States

#### M. Trumpeters of Transcendentalism

1. A golden age in American literature dawned in the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when an amazing outburst shook New England; one of the mainsprings of this literary flowering was transcendentalism, especially around Boston ("the Athens of America")
2. The transcendentalist movement of the 1830s resulted in part from a liberalizing of the straight-jacket Puritan theology; it also owed much to foreign influences, including the German romantic philosophers and the religions of Asia
  1. The transcendentalists rejected the prevailing theory, derived from John Locke, that all knowledge comes to the mind through senses; truth, rather, "transcends" the sense: it cannot be found by observations alone—each person possesses an inner light that can illuminate highest truth and put him in direct touch with God, or the "Oversoul"
  2. These mystical doctrines of transcendentalism had underlying concrete beliefs

3. Foremost was a stiff-backed individualism in matters religious as well as social
  4. Closely associated was a commitment to self-reliance, self-culture, and self-discipline
  5. These traits naturally bred hostility to authority and to formal institutions of any kind, as well as to all conventional wisdom; finally came exaltation of the dignity of the individual—the mainspring of a whole array of humanitarian reforms
3. Best known of the transcendentalists Boston-born Ralph Waldo Emerson
    1. Trained as a Unitarian minister, he early forsook his pulpit and ultimately reached a wider audience by pen and platform (he was a favorite as a lyceum lecturer)
    2. His most thrilling public effort was a Phi Beta Kappa address, “The American Scholar,” which was an appeal that urged American writers to throw off European traditions and delve into the riches of their own backyards
    3. Hailed as both a poet and a philosopher, Emerson was more influential as a practical philosopher and though his essays enriched countless thousands of humdrum lives
    4. Catching the individualistic mood of the Republic, he stressed self-reliance, self-improvement, optimism, and freedom (ideals reflected expanding America)
  4. Henry David Thoreau was Emerson’s close associate—a poet, a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a nonconformist; condemning a government that supported slavery, he refused to pay his Massachusetts poll tax and was jailed for a night
    1. A gifted prose writer, he is well known for *Walden: On Life in the Woods*; the book is a record of Thoreau’s two years of simple existence in a hut that he built on the edge of Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts; he believed that he should reduce his bodily wants so as to gain time for a pursuit of truth through study and meditation
    2. Thoreau’s *Walden* and his essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* exercised a strong influence in furthering idealistic thought, both in America and abroad
  5. Bold, brassy, and swaggering was the open-collared figure of Brooklyn’s Walt Whitman; in his famous collection of poems *Leaves of Grass*, he gave free rein to his genius
  6. Highly romantic, emotional, and unconventional, he dispensed with titles, stanzas, rhymes, and at times even regular meter; he handled sex with shocking frankness, although he laundered his verses in later editions and his book was banned in Boston
  7. Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* was at first a financial failure; *Leaves of Grass* gained for Whitman the informal title “Poet Laureate of Democracy”; singing with transcendental abandon of his love for the masses, he caught the exuberant enthusiasm of an expanding America that had turned its back on the Old World

#### N. Glowing Literary Lights

1. Professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was one of the most popular poets in America

1. Longfellow, who for many years taught modern languages at Harvard College, lived a generally serene life except for the tragic deaths of two wives (he saw the 2<sup>nd</sup> one die)
2. Writing for the genteel classes, he was adopted by the less cultured masses; his wide knowledge of European literature supplied him with many themes, but some of his most admired poems—"Evangeline," "The Song of Hiawatha" and "The Courtship of Miles Standish"—were based on American traditions
3. Immensely popular in Europe, Longfellow was the only American ever to be honored with a bust in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abby
2. A fighting Quaker, John Greenleaf Whittier was the uncrowned poet laureate of the antislavery crusade; he was vastly more important in influencing social action
  1. His poems cried aloud against inhumanity, injustice and intolerance against "the outworn rite, the old abuse, the pious fraud transparent grown"
  2. Undeterred by insults and the stoning of mobs, Whittier helped arouse a calloused America on the slavery issue; Whittier was one of the moving forces of his generation, whether moral, humanitarian, or spiritual (poet of human freedom)
3. Many-sided Professor James Russell Lowell, who succeeded Longfellow at Harvard, ranks as one of America's better poets; he was also a distinguished essayist, literary critic, editor, and diplomat—a diffusion of talents that hampered his poetical output
4. Lowell is remembered as a political satirist in his *Biglow Papers*, especially those of 1846 dealing with the Mexican War; the *Biglow Papers* condemned the terms of the alleged slavery-expansion designs of the Polk administration
5. The scholarly Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, who taught anatomy at Harvard Medical School, was a prominent poet, essayist, novelist, lecturer, and wit; a nonconformist and a conversationalist, he shone among a group of literary lights in Boston ("The Last Leaf")
6. Two women writers whose work remain popular today were New England literary world
  1. Louisa May Alcott grew up in Concord, Massachusetts, where transcendentalism existed, alongside neighbors Emerson, Thoreau, and Fuller; her philosopher father left her to write *Little Women* and other books to support her mother and sisters
  2. In Amherst, Massachusetts, poet Emily Dickinson lived as a recluse but created her own world through precious poetry; in deceptively spare language and simple rhyme schemes, she explored universal themes of nature, love, death, and immortality
  3. Although she refused during her lifetime to publish any of her poems, when she sided, nearly two thousand of them were found among her papers and printed
7. The most noteworthy literary figure produced by the South before the Civil War, unless Edgar Allan Poe is regarded as a southerner, was novelist William Gilmore Simms

8. Quantitatively, he was great and he produced eighty-two books winning for him the title “the Cooper of the South”; his themes dealt with the southern frontier in colonial days and with the south during the Revolutionary War (neglected by own section)

#### O. Literary Individualists and Dissenters

1. Not all writers in these years believed so keenly in human goodness and social progress
  1. Edgar Allen Poe, orphaned at an early age in Virginia, cursed with ill health, and married to a child-wife of thirteen who fell fatally ill of tuberculosis
  2. He suffered hunger, cold, poverty, and debt; failure at suicide, he took refuge in the bottle and dissipated his talent early; Poe was gifted lyric poet (“The Raven”)
  3. A master stylist, he also excelled in the short story, especially of the horror type
  4. Poe was fascinated by the ghostly and ghastly, as in “The Fall of the House of Usher” and other stories; he reflected a morbid sensibility distinctly at odds with optimistic tone of American culture—for this reason, Poe was more prized by Europeans
  5. His brilliant career was cut when he was found drunk in a Baltimore gutter and died
2. Two other writers in America reflected the continuing Calvinist obsession with original sin and with the never-ending struggle between good and evil
  1. In somber Salem, Massachusetts, writer Nathaniel Hawthorne grew up in an atmosphere heavy with the memories of his Puritan forebears and the tragedy of his father’s premature death on an ocean voyage; his masterpiece was *The Scarlet Letter*, which chronicles the psychological effects of sin on the guilty heroine and her secret lover, the father of her baby, a minister of the gospel in Puritan Boston
  2. In *The Marble Faun*, Hawthorne explored the concepts of the omnipresence of evil and the dead hand of the past weighing upon the present
3. Herman Melville went to sea as a youth and served eighteen months on a whaler and his fresh and charming tales of the South Seas were immediately popular, but his masterpiece, *Moby Dick*, was not—a complex allegory of good and evil, the book was ignored because people were accustomed to more straightforward and upbeat prose

#### P. Portrayers of the Past

1. A distinguished group of American historians was emerging at the same time that other writers were winning distinction; George Bancroft, who as secretary of the navy helped found the Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1845, has deservedly received the title “Father of American History”—he published a history of the United States to 1789 in 6 volumes
2. Two other historians are read with greater pleasure and profit today
  1. William H. Prescott published classic accounts of the conquest of Mexico and Peru

2. Francis Parkman, penned a brilliant series of volumes beginning in 1851; in epic style he chronicled the struggle between France and Britain for mastery of North America
3. Early American historians of prominence were almost without exception New Englanders, largely because the Boston area provided well-stocked libraries and a stimulating literary tradition (many abolitionists among them)