

Lecture 11: *Antebellum Reform Part I*

Examining the Era of Antebellum Reform seeking to reform individuals and society

Antebellum (Before the War – aka the Civil War)

1830's 1840's and 1850's

The Reform Impulse

- “In the history of the world, the doctrine of reform has never such hope as at the present hour” – Ralph W. Emerson, 1841
- Industrialization, Urbanization
- Looking backward, looking forward

Summary

Ralph W. Emerson is a key figure in American society and culture during this period

➔ Known for Transcendentalism

Industrialization created discontent against injustices of that era

➔ Brought reform

Abolition movement was part of Antebellum Reform

Industrialization

1. Created problems and grievances
 - a. People living in filth and squalor in big cities
2. Through technological changes inspired people
 - a. Inspires reform movements and ideas to influence people in ways not possible before
3. Radically ideas such as abolition and feminism could spread because of urbanization

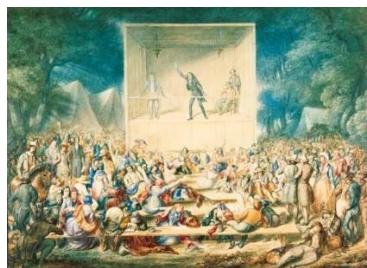
Some wanted to go backwards and live a simpler life

- a. Saw market revolution it as corrosive and obnoxious

Others embraced the market revolution

- a. Embraced greater possibilities with railroads and an America where more freedom was possible for different people

The Reform Impulse



Second Great Awakening (1820-1840)

Summary

Individualism is valued by Americans

You are in charge of your life

Period of Economic change, Technological change, Politics (party system) change, Excitement for politics, and Awakening of Religion

Second Great Awakening itself is a reform and part of the Antebellum Reforms

This reform focused on the individual life and was an influence on Antebellum Reform

1. God is knowable to all (black, white, women, men)
2. Free will (it is up to you to do the moral thing)
 - a. Moral vs. Immoral
 - b. Salvation vs. Damnation

Second Great Awakening

- Swept across nation in 1820's and 1830's
- Strongest in urban areas, migrant magnets
- Contagious, infectious passionate experience
- Mass, democratic expression
- Emphasis on self-improvement, self-reliance, self-determination

Summary

Influential in urban areas and spoke to Americans who felt uneasy in the new way of the Market Revolution. This reform through religion spoke to many of the people in these big cities because it gave them control over their lives.

People are clustered in filth and this also allowed the Second Great Awakening to spread like wildfire.

Big Cities were magnets for several people

1. Magnets for immigrants
2. Magnets for people being pushed off their land in wake of new industrialized society

American religious tradition of emotional and passionate that paralleled the American government at this time with the Jacksonian Era

Second Great Awakening is more of a mass democratic expression than politics that was still severely limited to white men (upgraded from white LANDOWNING MEN)

- Caught on
- Appealing messages of the individual to know God when individuals thought they had no control over their life.
- People could be agents of change in their own individual lives

Charles Finney

- Travelling preacher
- National celebrity
- Vivid Imagery, passionate style
- Use of music, "altar call"
- Appealing message of free will

Summary

Key figure in the Second Great Awakening movement is Charles Finney who tapped into the yearning for meaning and direction

He was charismatic personality that could excite others

Used his personality and opportunity in cities to put himself on the fore front as a national celebrity

Erie Canal links Great Lakes region to New York and opens commerce and activity to the United States

“Burned Over” district in upstate New York because it was as if a religious wildfire had spread across the region

Used music to draw and attract the citizens to him

Later he would give his sermon

Recorded music was uncommon and rare so for people to hear it was a spectacle and people were drawn to it.

Finney argued that you are more likely to receive God and have that experience when your moving and dancing

Dancing = Feeling (emotional) and ready to receive God

Altar Call means that people would come to receive and Finney would translate this “call from God”

Second Great Awakening and Reform

- Perfectionism:
 - Free of sin and morally enabled to improve society
- Wipe out societal ills:
 - Alcohol, prostitution, war, slavery
- Empowering message of salvation and societal improvement

Summary

The Second Great Awakening marks a change in American Christianity with the adoption of the ***Doctrine of Perfectionism***

Doctrine of Original Sin vs. Doctrine of Perfectionism

Original Sin – We are born sinners and die as sinners and we pray for the mercy of God when we die

Perfectionism – That you can be cleansed of sin since you can know God and have free will

- Conceivable to become morally perfect since you are agents of change with free will
- Once they have rid themselves of Sin they could rid the world of Sin through their actions such as wiping out the evils of society

Utopian Success

- 100 reform communities before Civil War
- Charismatic leaders:
 - Communal orientation
- Spurred by democratizing of religion and emphasis on the individual
- Counter effects of Market Revolution

Summary

Utopian societies in the Antebellum era prior to the Civil War

Utopian Society – “perfect world”, Americans were so confident that they knew God that they thought they could reform and create perfect worlds on Earth

These societies were often founded by charismatic individuals who could convince others to join with them

These are similar to cults but we should be careful when using the term as it has a negative connotation associated with it in today’s society

Followers are not mindless sheep and do not kill other people

Often lived in communal way and lived in unorthodox ways (very simpler way of life) as opposed to a life valued in objects, money, and alcohol.

Rejected materialist America, speaks to influence of Second Great Awakening

The Shakers

- Mother Ann Lee
- 5,000 in 1840's
- Equality of sexes Rejected private property, traditional family life
- Austere, abstinent
- Mandatory celibacy
- Converts, adoption

Summary

The Shakers were one of the Utopian Societies

Founded by a woman Mother Ann Lee, who had a vision and awakening to create a new society

- Became convinced she knew God and was charismatic

5,000 people followed her into this society in modern day Iowa

Controversial and Persecuted because of their belief that men and women were equal in their pursuit of God.

- Rejected private property
- Reject the "family"

Idea was that property and family takes away ones time from God and this is fixed by focusing solely and only on God.

- Property makes them displaced from God
- Family takes away their time from God
- Married couples were separated and all members abstained from sex as it is a distraction from God
- Converted and adopted children to continue their community
- Shakers accepted African Americans as well since "we are equal to God"

Oneida

- John Humphrey Noyes
- Converted by Finney
- Putney, Vermont
- Perfectionists, ready for millennium
- Complex marriage
- Monogamy banned
- Initiation rite
- 1848 Noyes arrested
- Moved to Oneida, NY
- Becomes a joint-stock company

Summary

Claimed in his awakening that he was instructed to create a new society

Believed in Doctrine of Perfectionism

He believed his society represented the “perfect” way to live according to God

Noyes anticipated “Millennium Day” the day that marks the end of the world

Complex Marriage – Everyone’s married to everyone else in the community (group marriage)

Sex according to Noyes was an expression your devotion to God and “sharing is caring”

The ultimate act of sharing is to share your body

Charged on moral charges and after his release goes to Oneida, NY and continues this society