

4 A Spirit of Reform

Section Focus

Key Terms lyceum ■ utopia ■ abolitionist

Main Idea In the 1830s and 1840s a broad range of reform movements reflected the interest of the American people in improving society.

Objectives As you read, look for answers to these questions:

1. What were the interests of the early labor movement?
2. Who were some leaders of the antislavery movement in the 1830s?
3. What was the origin of the movement for women's rights?

The 1830s and 1840s was one of the most energetic eras of our history. Social, technological, and economic changes were rapidly altering the face of America. The nation, full of confidence in itself, had come to believe that democracy was its destiny and its strength. An important part of the energy of Jacksonian democracy was directed toward making society better.

Much of the impulse toward reform, particularly among women, was rooted in the revivals of the Second Great Awakening. First organized in church groups, women then reached out to try to reform society. Reform movements sprouted throughout the country, but especially in New England and the Ohio Valley.

A FORUM FOR REFORM

Reform movements need communication and the opportunity to inform and to convince. These opportunities abounded in the Age of Jackson. Newspapers had once been expensive and therefore available only to the few. By the 1830s "penny papers" were on the streets—papers like the *New York Herald* that sold for a penny. Better printing presses also turned out many more papers in less time. With these changes, the average American could buy more news for a penny than kings of former centuries had been able to secure.

Hundreds of new magazines also appeared. Literary magazines printed the first works of some of the greatest writers of the time—Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Fenimore Cooper, Henry Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

One of the many new magazines was *Godey's*

Lady's Book. Edited by Sarah Hale, *Godey's Lady's Book* set standards of conduct, manners, and dress for American women. The magazine also promoted the new notion that there was a woman's sphere and a man's sphere, equally important but different. A woman's sphere was the home and the world of "human ties." A man's sphere was politics and the business of earning a living.

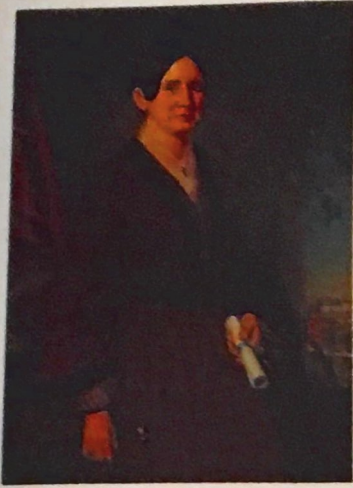
The age also stressed another kind of "internal improvement"—that of the mind. Organizations called **lyceums** brought interested adults to hear celebrities and reformers lecture on topics of the day. Without the lyceums, none of the reform movements could have gathered the momentum they did.

EARLY REFORMERS

Most of the reform movements were spurred in one way or another by changes accompanying the Industrial Revolution. Before the factory system, an apprentice could work with the hope of becoming a master artisan—in other words, his own boss. In the factory system, the workers became divided from those who owned the factory. Workers had little contact with the owners, and little hope of ever becoming owners themselves.

In addition, the boredom and the relentless pace of factory work were far different from the farm work many laborers had once known. Workers also realized that their children were not getting schooling. Without schooling, they knew, their children would be denied social and economic opportunities.

By the 1830s workers had begun to organize. In Massachusetts Sarah Bagley, one of the Lowell



BIOGRAPHY

DOROTHEA DIX (1802–1887) was a Massachusetts teacher. While visiting a Cambridge jail to teach a Sunday school class, Dix was shocked to see the conditions in which mentally ill prisoners were kept. She began a lifelong crusade for better care for the mentally ill. Her work helped found or improve 32 hospitals in 15 states. One of these, Harrisburg State Hospital in Pennsylvania, appears in the background of her portrait.

textile workers, became a leader of the movement for a 10-hour work day. Other workers began to strike for higher wages. Workers had also become voters, and so set up the Workingman's Party to win their goals. The party called for free schools, an end to the jailing of debtors, and the repeal of government-sponsored monopolies.

Then the Panic of 1837 hit. The Panic was the first economic downturn to significantly affect the cities. It caused so much unemployment that the young labor movement crumbled. It would not reappear for another generation.

Nevertheless, the early labor movement had achieved some of its stated goals. In 1840 President Martin Van Buren endorsed a 10-hour day for all public workers. By the 1850s private employers were following the government's example. Imprisonment for debt was abolished in most states, and some health-and-safety laws passed. By the 1850s free elementary schools were common throughout the northern states.

A leader in the school reform movement was Horace Mann of Boston. He pointed out that a democracy needed educated citizens. "The only sphere . . . left open for our patriotism," Mann wrote, "is the improvement of our children,—not the few, but the many; not a part of them but all."

Some idealists responded to the growing divisions in industrial society by trying to establish **utopias**. In these ideal communities, people shared property, land, and work. Two of the most famous efforts were Brook Farm in Massachusetts and New Harmony in Indiana. Most utopias lasted no more than a few years.

Some reform movements focused on prisoners, the mentally ill, and paupers. In the past, these people had been taken care of in one way or another by their community. As cities grew, the numbers of criminals, the insane, and paupers increased. At first reformers thought they could change such people by putting them in prisons, asylums, and poorhouses. Soon, however, the bleak conditions in these institutions called out for more reform. Beginning in 1838 Dorothea Dix led a movement that achieved more humane treatment for both prisoners and the insane.

ABOLITIONISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Of all the reformers, none were so dedicated as the **abolitionists**—those seeking to abolish slavery. William Lloyd Garrison was perhaps the best known. Son of a New England sea captain, Garrison was working as a writer and printer in Boston when he met Benjamin Lundy. For years Lundy had preached the abolition of slavery, but with the idea that the free slaves should be shipped off to Africa to set up their own colony. Lundy invited Garrison to work on his newspaper in Baltimore.

Once in Baltimore, Garrison concluded that colonization was not the solution. The only right thing to do, he said, was to free the slaves now. Garrison and Lundy split up, and Garrison returned to Boston to found his own paper. On January 1, 1831, he published the first issue of *The Liberator*. In it he thundered, "I am in earnest—I will not retreat a single inch—and will be heard." The abolitionist movement had begun.

For the next three decades Garrison's paper was a bugle call for freedom. With Garrison's aid former slaves Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman would tell their stories in an effort to stir the conscience of the country.

Among those who agreed with Garrison were Sarah and Angelina Grimké. Raised on a South Carolina plantation, the Grimké sisters soon saw the contradictions between slavery and the Christianity they were taught. Moving north, they joined the Quakers, and then became active members in Garrison's Anti-Slavery Society. They wrote appeals to southern women to act against slavery. They spoke against slavery at lyceums and thus became the first "respectable" women to

speaking in public. They won over thousands of converts to the abolitionist cause.

Women, however, were not welcome to the cause—they were believed to be intruding into the male sphere. In Massachusetts ministers spoke out against the women reformers. When abolitionists Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton tried to attend an Anti-Slavery Convention in London, they were denied recognition. Mott, Stanton, and the Grimké sisters all came to the same conclusion: to be effective reformers they would have to achieve a broader role for women in society. In Sarah Grimké's words, "All I ask our brethren is that they will take their heels from our necks and permit us to stand upright on that ground which God designed us to occupy."

In 1848 the women's rights movement formally began when Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton called for a meeting at Seneca Falls, New York. The gathering of some 100 men and women endorsed a Declaration of Women's Rights. Among the rights they called for was the right to vote. It would be a long time in coming.

★ Historical Documents

For an excerpt from the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments, see page R19 of this book.

SECTION REVIEW

- 1. KEY TERMS** lyceum, utopia, abolitionist
- 2. PEOPLE** Sarah Hale, William Lloyd Garrison, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton
- 3. COMPREHENSION** By what means did reformers seek to influence public opinion?
- 4. COMPREHENSION** What was the relationship between the abolitionist movement and the women's rights movement?
- 5. CRITICAL THINKING** How were the calls for reform a response to problems created by the Industrial Revolution?

5 Heading West

★ Section Focus

★ **Key Terms** Oregon Trail ■ Santa Fe Trail
★ ■ manifest destiny ■ Mexican War
★ ■ Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

★ **Main Idea** As a result of both diplomacy and a war with Mexico, the borders of the United States expanded south to the Rio Grande and west to the Pacific Ocean.
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★ **Objectives** As you read, look for answers to these questions:

- ★ **1.** What was the role of traders in the expansion of the frontier?
- ★ **2.** Why did the United States go to war with Mexico?
- ★ **3.** What caused massive migrations to the Great Salt Lake basin? To California?

Westward-moving Americans had always been a step ahead of their government. Restless, eager, adventurous, and greedy, the Americans of the Jacksonian era pushed beyond the borders of the United States. This westward thrust was three-pronged: into New Mexico, into Texas, and into California and Oregon. With the exception of Oregon, it was a thrust into Mexican territory.

★ OREGON COUNTRY

Since the 1790s both Britain and the United States had claimed the Oregon Country (map, page 219). In 1811 John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company set up a trading post at Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River. The British soon took it over, however, in the War of 1812. After the war, the British and the Americans agreed