
Lesson 20

Purifying the Nation

Objective

- To understand the role of early reformers in removing evils in American society

Notes to the Teacher

The impulse of Americans since the days of the Puritans has been to serve as a model for improving the world in which we live. The reform movement of the period 1820-1860 had many roots. The Romantic Movement, beginning in the late eighteenth century, stressed the basic goodness of man. Early Quakers had pointed out the inconsistency between the ideal of equality in the Declaration of Independence and the reality of slavery in the United States. Unitarians, who rejected the Puritan concept of an angry God and visualized instead a God of love, believed one could show love for God by helping others. As a result, they developed a social conscience and a concern for improving the quality of life for all. Transcendentalists of the period, particularly Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, questioned the value of material progress in an age of industrialization if it were not accompanied by progress in solving the important human problems of their time. Thus, at least in the North, several forces combined to create a climate for reform in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Crusaders sought to purify the nation by removing the sins of slavery, intemperance, male domination and cruelty to the insane. A few attempted to remove themselves from society to create Utopian communities based on collective ownership. Others saw public schools, lyceums and daily newspapers as necessities in order to achieve an educated and informed public capable of maintaining democratic government. The variety of crusades and crusaders made it appear that nearly everyone had joined the campaign to improve society and man. Southerners, however, feared abolition and thus resisted all reforms in the ante-bellum period.

In this lesson, each student researches one or more of the prominent reformers of the early nineteenth century in preparation for a very short classroom presentation. Students then assess the successes and failures of these crusades at the time and the value some had for pointing the way to future reform.

Procedure

1. Introduce the topic using material in the Notes to the Teacher.
2. Assign each student to research one or more of the reformers suggested in part A of **Handout 20** as homework.
3. In class, allow approximately two minutes for the class presentations on assigned reformers.

Suggested Answers

Lyman Beecher

1. Drinking was a moral evil.
2. He organized the Society for the Reformation of Morals and the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance.
3. Maine passed an anti-liquor law in 1846; much later, in 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment enacted Prohibition.
4. Answers will vary.
5. The means were not fanatical, but the public as a whole proved unwilling to accept the sinfulness of liquor.
6. The Twenty-first Amendment repealed Prohibition in 1933, but even today there is a feeling that alcohol is a moral evil and a threat to health, especially when carried to excess.

Father Theobald Mathew

1. Drinking was a moral evil.
2. He encouraged people to take the pledge of abstinence promoted by the Teetotal Abstinence Society.
3. He administered the pledge to an estimated half million people.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He was not a fanatic but had unrealistic hopes for American society.
6. See number 6 under Lyman Beecher.

Neal Dow

1. Drinking was a moral evil.
2. He preached an ongoing crusade, particularly in Maine.
3. He was called "The Napoleon of Temperance" for his role in passing the Maine anti-liquor law.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He achieved a victory of sorts although enforcement was negligible; his means must have aroused opposition because he took up boxing to protect himself.
6. See number 6 under Lyman Beecher.

Dorothea Dix

1. The insane were treated as criminals.
2. She detailed the abuses in every prison and almshouse in Massachusetts and later in other states and countries for presentation to legislative bodies.
3. She succeeded in getting increased appropriations for the care of the insane and in separating the insane from criminals, and she prompted Congress to appropriate money for the care of the indigent insane, but President Pierce vetoed it.
4. Answers will vary.
5. She used investigative reporting and writing to achieve considerable reform.
6. She highlighted the need for reform; almshouses were abolished; criminals were separated from the insane.

William Lloyd Garrison

1. Slavery was an evil requiring immediate abolition.
2. He published the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, founded the American Anti-Slavery Society, and lectured impassionately against the heinous crime of slavery.
3. His efforts helped bring about the adoption of the 13th amendment to the Constitution in 1865.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Although a fanatic, Garrison helped to create a climate for the eventual abolition of slavery.
6. Slavery was abolished in 1865 with passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

Wendell Phillips

1. Slavery was an evil practice.
2. He lectured in the lyceums around the country in isolated areas against slavery with such persons as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Horace Greeley.
3. His presentations swayed logical thinkers.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He surrendered his legal practice because the Constitution condoned slavery; he was not an emotional fanatic as much as a man of reason.
6. See the answer to number 6 under William Lloyd Garrison.

Theodore Weld

1. Slavery was an evil.
2. He served as an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society.
3. He converted a large number of opinion-makers, including Arthur and Lewis Tappan and James G. Birney, to the cause of abolition.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He used a reasoned approach to gain converts.
6. See the answer to number 6 under William Lloyd Garrison.

Sarah and Angelina Grimke

1. Slavery was an evil.
2. Both women presented anti-slavery lectures in numerous places.
3. Both created enough controversy to warrant a rebuke by the Congregationalist clergy in a pastoral letter in Massachusetts.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Many considered public participation by women in the abolitionist movement to be a violation of "women's proper place."
6. See the answer to number 6 under William Lloyd Garrison.

Frederick Douglass

1. As a runaway slave, Douglass abhorred the evil of slavery.
2. He wrote an abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, and lectured with William Lloyd Garrison until they parted company on issues of prejudice in the North, secession of the South, and whether or not he should use his real name in his autobiography.
3. Many, including Abraham Lincoln, listened to his arguments and found his personal appeal persuasive.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He recounted his own experiences under slavery to persuade others of the evil of the institution.
6. See the answer to number 6 under William Lloyd Garrison.

Harriet Tubman

1. As an escaped slave, she knew well the evils of slavery.
2. She worked through the Underground Railroad.
3. She made nineteen trips into slave territory to lead fellow blacks to freedom.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Her success caused her to be referred to as "the Moses of her people."
6. See the answer to number 6 under William Lloyd Garrison.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

1. She condemned slavery.
2. She immersed herself in anti-slavery tracts while she lived in Maine; she wrote her famous novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, when her family lived in Cincinnati on the border between slavery and freedom.
3. President Lincoln once referred to her as "the little lady who started the great war."
4. Answers will vary.
5. Her book sold over 300,000 copies, but Southerners criticized Stowe's distorted view of slavery gained from accounts of runaway slaves and very little personal contact with slavery in the South.
6. See answer to number 6 under William Lloyd Garrison.

Elijah Lovejoy

1. He, too, condemned slavery.
2. He used the press in Alton, Illinois to publish fiery articles calling for an immediate end to slavery; he also announced the organization of a state branch of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Opponents repeatedly destroyed his printing press, and every time that it was destroyed, he bought a new one.
3. He became a martyr to the abolitionist cause when an armed mob stormed the warehouse where the press was stored.
4. Answers will vary.
5. His fiery speeches and articles made him a fanatic in the eyes of his community.
6. See the answer to number 6 under William Lloyd Garrison.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

1. She spoke out against the inequality of women.
2. She was a primary organizer of the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848, and that convention of 300 issued a "Declaration of the Rights of Women" modeled after the Declaration of Independence.
3. Some states granted women limited voting rights and control over their property in the decades after the convention, and some states made divorce laws less stringent.
4. Answers will vary.
5. She was a determined activist whose methods many considered extreme at the time.
6. Although many considered her proposals radical at the time, this country has taken steps to remove political and legal inequalities; however, many economic and social inequalities remain.

Lucretia Mott

1. She criticized slavery, male domination, war and drinking.
2. She lectured on all of these evils and helped Elizabeth Cady Stanton to organize the now-famous Seneca Falls Convention in 1848.
3. She called attention to many injustices, particularly women's inequality, and actively participated in the Underground Railroad.
4. Answers will vary.
5. She used practical means to promote reforms.
6. Slavery was abolished in 1865, and women achieved many rights she promoted in the decades after 1848.

Robert Owen

1. He opposed private property, organized religion and the institution of marriage.
2. He organized a Utopian community at New Harmony, Indiana in 1825.
3. Robert Owen nearly exhausted his personal fortune in the first two years of the community, and the experiment failed because of dissension among leaders, laziness, and dishonesty.
4. Answers will vary.
5. The community was too extreme for the time and place and attracted persons who were not committed to Owen's goals.
6. Although the community failed, many groups have attempted similar communitarian experiments since that time.

George Ripley

1. He and other intellectuals objected to the evils of competitive economics, particularly after the Panic of 1837.
2. This group organized a joint stock company called Brook Farm near Boston.
3. The community lasted six years until it was abandoned a year after a fire. Numerous well-known intellectuals, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, Margaret Fuller, Charles A. Dana, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bronson Alcott, either lived there or visited frequently. The community's excellent school attracted students from the outside because of its emphasis on music and literature.
4. Answers will vary.
5. These persons were hardly fanatics, but they were not realistic in thinking many individuals could separate from the rest of society.
6. It was a short-lived experiment that ended with bankruptcy, smallpox and a fire.

John Humphrey Noyes

1. He opposed sin in society.
2. He created two short-lived Utopian experiments, including Putney, Vermont (1836) and the Oneida Community, New York (1848).

3. The Oneida Community lasted until 1879.
4. Answers will vary.
5. His controversial position on marriage had very limited acceptance among others. The community's economic ventures survived beyond the life of the Utopian experiment.
6. His community had little lasting social impact.

Horace Mann

1. He promoted the improvement of public schools and teacher training.
2. He served as secretary of the new Massachusetts State Board of Education, crusaded for better schools and started normal schools to provide training for teachers. His *Annual Reports* inspired educational reformers throughout the country and his *Common School Journal* brought knowledge of better methods to ordinary teachers.
3. He increased teachers' salaries, lengthened the school year, enforced attendance laws and graded and supervised schools. He also did much to improve training of public school teachers and, shortly before his death, took the presidency of Antioch College with a goal of improving college education as well.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He used practical means with considerable success.
6. His ideals and methods still shape public education today.

Elihu Burritt

1. He abhorred the consequences of modern war.
2. He organized the League of Universal Brotherhood whose members signed a pledge not to support wars in the future.
3. Over 30,000 Britons accepted the pledge, but he had far less support in the United States.
4. Answers will vary.
5. He used impractical means to achieve what is perhaps an unrealistic goal.
6. His reforms had little lasting impact.

Dr. Sylvester Graham

1. He condemned tobacco, coffee, tea, alcohol and a variety of foods.
 2. He proposed that people abstain from alcohol and eat coarse bread, fruits and vegetables, wear light clothes, sleep on hard mattresses, take daily exercise and bathe three times a week.
 3. He established boardinghouses where his principles were followed religiously.
 4. Answers will vary.
 5. A fanatic, Graham found relatively few followers of his proposals.
 6. Nutritionists might accept several of his beliefs. His coarse bread is marketed today as graham crackers.
4. Complete part B as a large-group activity.

Suggested Answers

1. Students might list slavery, war, intemperance, male domination, ignorance, cruelty to the insane, and the stress on individual competition.
2. Factors include the spirit of Romanticism, Transcendentalism and the teachings of religious groups such as the Quakers and Unitarians.
3. They hoped to promote a healthy, educated citizenry who treat others with justice, equality and sensitivity.
4. Answers will vary, depending upon which reformers are being considered.
5. Abolition was achieved in 1865; significant educational reforms were accomplished; the care of the insane improved; Maine, in particular, enacted a prohibition law.
6. The women's conference at Seneca Falls in 1848 set the agenda for reforms, many of which were realized later; Prohibition achieved a short-lived success in 1920; educational reforms continue today.

Name _____ Date _____

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Part A

The list below contains names of reformers of the early nineteenth century. Select one person and, for homework, research answers to the following questions in preparation for a short classroom presentation.

Questions

1. What criticisms of American society did the individual have?
2. What methods did the person use to improve American life?
3. What success did the individual have in promoting reform?
4. What detail(s) of the person's work made him or her an interesting historical figure?
5. To what extent was the reformer obsessed with achieving an impractical goal through fanatical or impractical means?
6. What lasting impact did the person's reforms have on American society?

Reformers

1. Lyman Beecher
2. Father Theobald Mathew
3. Neal Dow
4. Dorothea Dix
5. William Lloyd Garrison
6. Wendell Phillips
7. Theodore Weld
8. Sarah and Angelina Grimke
9. Frederick Douglass
10. Harriet Tubman
11. Harriet Beecher Stowe
12. Elijah Lovejoy
13. Elizabeth Cady Stanton
14. Lucretia Mott
15. Robert Owen
16. George Ripley

