America in the 1850s

- The period just before the Civil War was a time of soul searching.

- The political debates in Congress were reflections of the impending catastrophe brewing in the “United” States.

Founding of the United States demonstrates contradictory founding moments:

- 1. American Independence: Individual liberty, radical and libertarian. Subordination of personal freedom to the government was dangerous. Belief in loose construction - fear of tyranny of a central power. - **Arguments used by the South**

- 2. Constitution: Collectivist rather than individual. Surrender the personal, state and sectional interests for the larger purpose of nationhood and the growth of the country. - **Arguments used by the North**
THE HURLY-BURLY POT.
Foundation of social reform

- During the 1820s social reform movements began to attract people who were unwilling to compromise with evil and were impatient with the slow pace of progress.

- America could be “an example for the rest of the world.”

- Belief that the American people had a divine mission to eradicate social injustice in the world.

  1. Women’s Suffrage Movement

  2. Anti-Slavery Movement

- Religious revival coincides with discussions over the inequality of the US. Women play a major role in speaking out on behalf of themselves and the Afr. American community

- 19th c. reformers believed that the church was the proper vehicle of developing moral reforms and not political entities or large revolutionary movements.
Key Sources for Antebellum Reform

1. Second Great Awakening – Finney and other religious revivals

2. Social changes due to the rise of the market economy (anxiety over changing relationships between men and women, masters and workers, social classes)

3. Social changes resulting from immigration

4. Puritan and revolutionary traditions of America to remake the world

5. Republican and Enlightenment ideology of virtue and good citizenship

6. Transcendentalism and other Romantic literary influences
The Second Great Awakening: Remaking Society

1790s to 1830s

Evangelical Protestantism

Shift in society away from Calvinist beliefs of a God of Wrath in favor of God of Love.

New branches of Christianity form

Focus is more on repentance of sins than pre-destination.

Romantic Optimism

Literature and societal experiments: Oneida, Walden, The Scarlet Letter
Decline of Calvinism

• “there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America” - Tocqueville

• Shift in theology from God of wrath to God of love.

• Orthodox Calvinism declines in early 19c. due to:
  1. Enlightenment influence
  2. Revolutionary optimism
  3. belief in progress as a good thing
Decline of Calvinism

- Influence of the American Revolution and Enlightenment thought dominated religious trends.

- Many revolutionary leaders were not overly religious and instead opted for Deism.

- Deism - rejection of Trinity, Christ as divine and the Bible as revelation. Deism placed beliefs in the universe and natural laws that govern it.

  - Did still believe in God, but that the universe was understandable through thought and science.
Unitarianism

- Influential liberal Christian sect
  - Credo switches from salvation of a pre-destined few, to free will and salvation to all to accept God.

- Unitarian beliefs
  - God was a benevolent being
  - Jesus was mortal
  - Christians should seek rewards for virtue on earth (to entice further acts of kindness); differs from the Quakers.

- Head of the Church - William Ellery Channing (1780-1842)
  - Often fought for membership and client referrals.
Shakers or United Society of Believers in Christ’s Second Appearing

• Small but influential. Related to the Quaker branch.

• Started in 1774 by (Mother) Ann Lee in NY

• Fully recognized as a Christian sect in 1787

• Felt closely related to American national growth due to early events (Rev. War and Constitution)

• They danced or ‘shook’ while praying.

• Believed in a personal connection to God (Inner Light). No central church figure.

• Also believed God to be both man and woman, therefore, equality of the sexes.

• Famous for their industry or craftsmanship. “Beauty rests on utility” was their motto.

’Tis the gift to be simple, ’Tis the gift to be free,
’Tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
’Twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we shan’t be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
’Till by turning, turning we come round right.
Transcendentalists

- Unitarianism was seen by some as cold, formal and void of passion.

- Transcendentalists were of the romantic mindset - relying on intuition rather than pure reason.
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson - “Self Reliance”
  - Henry David Thoreau - “Walden” and Civil Disobedience

- “Transcend” the limits of intellect, reason, and society and allow the emotions and soul, to create a relationship with the Universe/Nature to achieve perfection

- Rejected former Calvinist dogma of pre-destination and God of wrath in favor of God of love and divinity of nature.
Transcendentalists

- Believed in the good of mankind and people - optimists

- However felt that social constraints and societal restrictions were bad. They sought to create environments that brought them closer to nature and with fewer constraints/conforming ideals.

  - Brook Farm, MA 1841
  - New Harmony, IN 1825
  - Oneida Community 1848
  - LDS Church - Joseph Smith 1830 and Brigham Young 1847
**Transcendentalists**

• Man must acknowledge a body of moral truths that were intuitive and must TRANSCEND more sensational proof:

1. The infinite benevolence of God.
2. The infinite benevolence of nature.
3. The divinity of man.

• They instinctively rejected all secular authority and the authority of organized churches and the Scriptures, of law, or of conventions.
Beliefs on slavery:

• Therefore, if man was divine, it would be wicked that he should be held in slavery, or his soul corrupted by superstition, or his mind clouded by ignorance.

• Thus, the role of the reformer was to restore man to that divinity which God had endowed them.

• Naturally, abolitionism emerges from the growth of the transcendental movement.
Transcendentalist Intellectuals/Writers
Concord, MA

Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Nature (1832)
- Self-Reliance (1841)
- “The American Scholar” (1837)

Henry David Thoreau
- Walden (1854)
- Resistance to Civil Disobedience (1849)
Denominational Growth, 1780–1860

As this bar graph makes clear, the early nineteenth century was a time of explosive religious growth. What were the decades that saw the greatest growth? Which denominations expanded most quickly and which most slowly?
Temperance Movement

- American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (American Temperance Society) forms 1826
  - 1770s Avg. Male 2-3 gallons of pure 200 proof hard liquor
  - 1820s Avg. Male 6-7 gallons per year (but close to 2 1.7 liter bottles per week)
- Alcohol abuse was seen as a major cause of public health problems and violence (esp. among immigrants)
The Drunkard's progress
THE TIMES
Per Capita Consumption of Alcohol, 1800–1860
Health Reforms cont.

- Epidemics were not uncommon in urban centers: New Orleans, 1833

- Health trends that became popular with the wealthy included: phrenology, health spas and vegetarianism (Sylvester Graham)

- Oliver Wendell Holmes - “contagion theory” - led to improved sanitation practices by doctors, 1843.

- American Medical Assoc. founded 1847
**Education Reforms**

- **Horace Mann** - education is essential to a productive democracy. The voting public must be literate and the urban poor need protection from the upper classes.

  - Begins professional training for teachers; public funding and adapts to a longer academic year (100+ days based around harvest season)

  - System based on the Prussian Model

  - Massachusetts forefront of public ed. reform

    - 1st state to est. tax support for public schools

- By 1860 every state offered free public education to whites

- American literacy rate was 80% - currently 97%
STATUS OF AMERICAN WOMEN IN ANTEBELLUM ERA

- Unable to vote.

- Legal status of a minor

Married Women

- Had no legal control over property or her children. (Femme covert)

- Could not initiate divorce

- Could not make wills, sign a contract, or bring a suit in court without husband’s permission.

Key reformers were: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth and Lucy Stone

Anti-slavery convention 1840 in London led to Seneca Falls, 1848
**Role of Women in Reform Movements**

- Women played a pivotal role in the various reform movements and used their new found place in society to argue for more equal rights for themselves.

- **Dorothea Dix** - asylum and rehabilitation for the mentally ill. "Benevolent empire"

- **Cult of Domesticity** - served to tie women to the household and limit their actions outside the home.

- Women noted the parallel struggle between themselves and slaves.

- **Seneca Falls Convention, 1848** - led by Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony.
  - Adopted the "Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions" modeled on the Dec. of Ind
When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing
Distribution of the Slave Population, 1830
Distribution of Slave population, 1860
RESISTANCE TO SLAVERY

* With the entire power structure of government; federal, state and local, committed to preserving the institution of slavery, slaves could only rarely express their desire for freedom by outright rebellion.

* Therefore, slaves resorted to other forms of resistance, less obvious to the masters.
FORMS OF RESISTANCE

* The most widespread expression of hostility to slavery was “day-to-day resistance” or “silent sabotage” - doing poor work, breaking tools, abusing animals, and in other ways disrupting the plantation routine.

* Many slaves made believe that they were too ill to work – although almost no slaves reported themselves sick on Sunday, their only day of rest.

* Development of ‘Sambo’ character in southern lore
Stanley Elkins and Sambo Stereotype

The name “Sambo” has become synonymous with “race stereotype…”

…The characteristics that have been claimed for the type come principally from Southern lore. Sambo, the typical plantation slave, was docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing; his behavior full of infantile silliness and his talk inflated with childish exaggeration. His relationship with his master was one of utter dependence and childlike attachment: indeed it was the very key to his being. Although the merest hint of Sambo’s “manhood” might fill the Southern breast with scorn, the child, “in his place,” could be both exasperating and lovable – Elkins, *Slavery*

Other stereotypes later mentioned: Jim Crow, Zip Coon, the Mammy, Jezebel, Mulatto, Uncle Tom, the Buck, the Pickanniny
Common Racist Black Stereotypes Usually in Minstrel Shows

**Zip Coon**
First performed by George Dixon in 1834, Zip Coon made a mockery of free blacks. An arrogant, ostentatious figure, he dressed in high style and spoke in a series of malaprops and puns that undermined his attempts to appear dignified.

**Jim Crow**
The term Jim Crow originated in 1830 when a White minstrel show performer, Thomas "Daddy" Rice, blackened his face with burnt cork and danced a jig while singing the lyrics to the song, "Jump Jim Crow."

**Uncle Tom**
Toms are typically good, gentle, religious and sober. Images of Uncle Toms were another favorite of advertisers and "Uncle Ben" is still being used to sell rice.

**Mammy**
Mammy is a source of earthy wisdom who is fiercely independent and brooks no backtalk. Although her image changed a little over the years, she was always a favorite of advertisers.

**Pickaninny**
Picaninnies have bulging eyes, unkempt hair, red lips and wide mouths into which they stuff huge slices of watermelon.

*Definitions courtesy of black-face.com*
FORMS OF RESISTANCE

- Then there was the **theft of food**, a form of resistance so common that one southern physician diagnosed it as a hereditary disease unique to blacks.

- Less frequent, but more dangerous, were **serious crimes** committed by slaves, including arson, poisoning, and armed assaults against individual whites.

- Running away was also an often utilized approach, however, it was difficult given the barriers
  - Slaves had little or no knowledge of geography, apart from understanding that the North Star led to freedom.
No one knows how many slaves succeeded in reaching the North or Canada – the most common rough estimate is around 1,000 per year.

The large majority of runaways were young men.

Most women were not willing to leave children behind, and to take them along on the arduous escape journey was nearly impossible.

In the Deep South, fugitives tended to head for cities like New Orleans or Charleston, where they hoped to lose themselves in the free black community.
THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

- The Underground Railroad was a loose organization of sympathetic abolitionists who hid fugitives in their homes and sent them to the next “station”

- A few courageous individuals made forays into the South to liberate slaves.

- The best known was Harriet Tubman.

- During the next decade, she risked her life by making some 20 trips back to Maryland to lead relatives and other slaves to freedom.
CODED MESSAGES IN SONGS

- **Heaven**—life after death meant freedom in the North
- **Canaan, the Promised Land, Home, Glory, to Jesus**—words that signified freedom or a place where one could be free
- **Drinking Gourd**—the Big Dipper, a group of stars that show which way is North
- **Chariot or Train**—the Underground Railroad, or a means to escape to freedom
- **Steal away**—sneak away secretly
- **Wade**—take the river to avoid detection by dogs
- **Moses**—freedom fighter, Underground Railroad conductor, or Harriet Tubman specifically
- **Jordan (river)**—the Ohio River or another significant body of water that needed to be crossed to get to freedom

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Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home,  
Swing low, sweet chariot,  
Coming for to carry me home.

I looked over Jordan and what did I see  
Coming for to carry me home,  
A band of angels coming after me,  
Coming for to carry me home.

Steal away, steal away!  
Steal away to Jesus!  
Steal away, steal away home!  
I ain't got long to stay here!

Wade in the Water, wade in the water children.  
Wade in the Water. God's gonna trouble the water.

Who are those children all dressed in Red?  
God's gonna trouble the water.  
Must be the ones that Moses led.  
God's gonna trouble the water.
THE AMISTAD

* In a few instances, large groups of slaves collectively seized their freedom.

* The most celebrated instance involved 53 slaves who took control of the Amistad – a ship transporting them from one port in Cuba to another, and tried to force the navigator to steer it to Africa.

* The Amistad wended its way up the Atlantic coast, until an American vessel seized it off the coast of Long Island.

* The slaves were placed in jail.

* The fate of the slaves rested with the US court system.
THE AMISTAD

- The slaves were led by Cinque from the Mende tribe.

- The central issue was: were the captives freemen or slaves? If it was determined they were slaves, they would be returned to Cuba/Spain. If not they would be free.

- President Martin Van Buren favored returning them to Cuba.

- But abolitionists, such as Lewis Tappan, brought the case to the Supreme Court, where former President, now Congressman John Quincy Adams argued on behalf of the slaves.

- Adams argued that since the slaves had been recently brought from Africa in violation of international treaties banning the slave trade, the captives should be freed.

- The Court accepted Adams’ reasoning and most of the captives made their way back to Africa.
GABRIEL’S REBELLION

1800 – Virginia.

Organized in Richmond by Gabriel a blacksmith.

The plan was to march on the city, which had recently become the state capital, from surrounding plantations.

They would kill some white inhabitants and hold the rest, including Gov. James Monroe, hostage until their demand for abolition of slavery was met.

Gabriel hoped the “poor white people” would join the rebellion.

On the night when the slaves were to gather, a storm washed out the roads to Richmond.

The plot was soon discovered and the leaders arrested.

26 slaves, including Gabriel, were hanged and dozens more transported out of the state.
DENMARK VESEY REBELLION

- 1832 – Charleston, SC.
- Denmark Vesey was a slave carpenter who purchased his freedom after winning a local lottery.
- An outspoken, charismatic leader, Vesey rebuked blacks who stepped off the city sidewalks to allow whites to pass.
- He took a leading role in the local African Methodist Church.
- However the plot was discovered before it could reach fruition.
- In the end, 35 slaves and free blacks, including Vesey, and 3 slaves belonging to the Governor, were executed and a equal number banished from the state.
NAT TURNER’S REBELLION

- Turner was a slave preacher and a religious mystic in Southampton County, VA.

- He came to believe that God had chosen him to lead a black uprising.

- On August 22nd, he and a handful of followers marched from farm to farm assaulting the white inhabitants.

- Most of their victims were women and children, for many of the area’s men were attending a religious revival in North Carolina.

- By the time the militia put down the rebellion about 80 slaves had joined Turner’s band.

- Some 60 whites had been killed.

- Turner was captured, and with 17 other rebels, condemned to die.

- Asked before his execution whether he regretted what he had done, Turner responded, “Was not Christ crucified.”
SIGNIFICANCE OF TURNER’S REBELLION

- It was the last large scale rebellion in southern history.
- It took place outside the plantation south, where slavery was most rigidly policed.
- For one last time, VA’s leaders openly debated whether steps ought to be taken to do away with the “peculiar institution.”
- A proposal to commit the state to gradual emancipation and removal of the black population failed to win legislative approval.
- Instead, the VA legislature of 1832 decided to fasten even more tightly the chains of bondage.
- New laws prohibited blacks, free and slave, from acting as preachers, strengthened the militia and patrol system, banned free blacks from owning firearms, and prohibited teaching slaves to read.
- Other Southern states followed suit.
THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT

- The Abolitionist Movement began in the North.
- The goal was to end slavery.
- Some Abolitionists called for an immediate end to slavery.
- Others called for a gradual end and a designated colony for freed slaves outside of America.
- The Movement was influenced by the reform fervor of the Second Great Awakening.
- The earliest reform efforts were done largely by Quakers, free blacks and slaves.
# Varieties of Antislavery Reform Movements

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<th>Type</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gradualist</td>
<td>Accepts black inferiority and seeks to end slavery in a gradual way by freeing slaves and in some cases, then establishing colonies in Africa</td>
<td>American Colonization Society. Henry Clay, James Madison, and James Monroe were early leaders.</td>
<td>Colonization never succeeds, sending only 1400 freed slaves to Africa in the 1920s while the American slave population grew by 700,000 in the same decade.</td>
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<td>Political antislavery forces</td>
<td>Practices containment: recognize slavery where it exists in Southern states but prevent its spread to the territories</td>
<td>Conscience Whigs. Free Soil Party. In the mid-1850s the new Republican Party became the voice for free soil advocates.</td>
<td>Former Whigs rally to cries of “free soil, free speech, free labor, free men”</td>
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Before the 1830s, those white Americans willing to contemplate an end to bondage almost always coupled calls for abolition with the “colonization” of freed slaves – their deportation to Africa, the Caribbean or Central America.

1816: Proponents of the idea founded the American Colonization Society.
- The ACS promoted the gradual abolition of slavery and the settlement of black Americans in Africa.
- It soon established Liberia, on the coast of West Africa, an outpost of American influence whose capital Monrovia, was named for President James Monroe.

Slavery and racism were so deeply embedded in American life, colonizationists believed, that blacks could never achieve equality if freed and allowed to remain in the country.

Like Indian removal and ‘reservations’ colonization rested on the premise that America is fundamentally a white society.
MILITANT ABOLITIONISM

- The abolitionist movement that arose in the 1830s differed profoundly from its genteel, conservative predecessor.
- The new movement believed that slavery was an unparalleled sin.
- It also believed that slavery contradicted the values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence.
- The new generation of reformers rejected the traditional approach of gradual emancipation and demanded immediate abolition.
- They directed their explosive language against slavery and slaveholders and insisted that blacks, once free, should be incorporated as equal citizens of the Republic rather than being deported.
- Perfecting American society, meant rooting out not just slavery, but racism in all its forms.
MILITANT ABOLITIONISM

- 1829: The first indication of the new spirit came with the publication of An Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, by David Walker.
- Walker was a free black who had been born in NC and now operated a used-clothing store in Boston.
- The Appeal called on black Americans to mobilize for abolition – by force if necessary – and warned whites that the nation faced divine punishment if it did not mend its sinful ways.
- Walker invoked the Bible and Declaration of Independence.
- Walker wrote, addressing white readers:
  “Tell us no more about colonization, for America is as much our country as it is yours.”
1831: With the appearance of The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison’s weekly abolitionist journal, the new breed of abolitionism found a permanent voice.

Garrison announced:

“I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or write, with moderation ... I will not equivocate – I will not excuse – I will not retreat a single inch – and I will be heard.”
Some of his ideas, such as his suggestion that the North abrogate the Constitution and dissolve the Union to end its complicity in the evil of slavery, were rejected by many abolitionists.

But his call for the immediate abolition of slavery echoed throughout antislavery circles.

His pamphlet, Thoughts on African Colonization, persuaded many foes of slavery that blacks must be recognized as part of American society, not viewed as aliens to be shipped overseas.

Other antislavery publications soon emerged, but the Liberator remained the preeminent abolitionist journal.

THE EMERGENCE OF WILLIAM LLOYD GARRISON
SPREADING THE ABOLITIONIST MESSAGE

- 1833: The American Anti-Slavery Society was founded.
- Between the founding of the Anti-Slavery Society and the end of the decade, some 100,000 northerners joined local groups devoted to abolition.
NORTH AND SOUTH REACTION TO ABOLITIONISM

- At first, abolitionism aroused violent hostility from northerners who feared the movement threatened to disrupt the Union, interfere with profits wrested from slave labor, and overturn white supremacy.
- Led by businessmen and local merchants, mobs disrupted abolitionist meetings in northern cities.
- In 1835, a Boston crowd led Garrison through the streets with a rope around his neck.
Fear in the North: What emancipation would lead to
NORTH AND SOUTH REACTION TO ABOLITIONISM

- 1837: Antislavery editor Elijah P. Lovejoy became the movement’s first martyr when he was killed by a mob in Alton, Ill., while defending his press.
- In his editorials Lovejoy repeatedly called slavery an evil and a sin.
- 1836: Abolitionists began to flood Congress with petitions calling for emancipation.
- Congress responded with the notorious “gag rule” which prohibited any talk of slavery and emancipation. The rule was reauthorized in 1840 but repealed in 1844.
- In reaction, abolitionists broadened their appeal to win the support of northerners who cared little about the rights of blacks, but could be convinced that slavery endangered their own cherished freedoms. The “gag rule” aroused considerable resentment in the North.