REFORMING SOCIETY

- Reform during the antebellum era went through several stages
- At first, the leaders of reform hoped to improve people's behavior through moral persuasion
- After they tried sermons & pamphlets, reformers moved to political action & ideas for creating new institutions

Temperance

- It is easy to understand given the high rate of alcohol consumption (5 gallons or hard liquor per person in 1820), why reformers targeted alcohol as the cause of social ills, and why temperance became the most popular of the reform movements
- In 1826, Protestant ministers and others, concerned with the high rate of alcohol consumption and the effects of such excessive drinking, founded the American Temperance Society
- Using moral arguments, the society tried to persuade drinkers to moderate their drinking & take a pledge of total abstinence
- Another society, the Washingtonians, was begun by recovering alcoholics, who argued that alcoholism was a disease that needed practical, helpful treatment
- By the 1840s, the various temperance societies had more than a 1 million members
- Temperance had become a path to middle-class respectability
- German & Irish immigrants were largely opposed to the temperance reformers' campaign
- These immigrants did not have the political power to prevent state and city governments from siding with the reformers
- Factory owners and politicians joined with the reformers when it became clear that temperance measures could reduce crime and poverty & increase workers' output on the job
- In 1851, the state of Maine went beyond earlier measures that had simply placed taxes on the sale of liquor
- Maine became the first of 13 states to prohibit the manufacture and sale of liquors before the Civil War
- In the late 1850s, the issue of slavery came to overshadow the temperance movement
- However, the movement would gain strength again in the late 1870s with strong support from the Women's Christian Temperance Union and achieve national success with the passage of the 18th Amendment in 1919

Movement for Public Asylums

- Reformers of the 1820s & 1830s, pointed to increasing numbers of criminals, emotionally, disturbed persons & poor people
- Often these people were forced to live in poor conditions and were regularly either abused or neglected by their caretakers
- Reformers proposed setting up new public institutions like state-supported prisons, mental hospitals, and poorhouses
- They hoped that the inmates of these institutions would be cured of their antisocial behavior as a result of being withdrawn from filthy surroundings and treated to a disciplined pattern of life in some rural setting

1. Mental Hospitals
- Dorothea Dix, a former teacher, was horrified to find mentally ill persons locked up with convicted criminals in unsanitary cells
- She dedicated the rest of her adult life to improving conditions for emotionally disturbed persons
- In the 1840s, her travels across the country & reports of awful treatment caused many state legislatures to build new mental hospitals or improve existing institutions
- As a result of her crusade, mental patients began receiving professional treatment at state expense

2. Schools for blind and deaf persons
- Two other reformers founded special institutions to help people with physical disabilities
- Thomas Gallaudet founded a school for the deaf, and Dr. Samuel Howe founded a school for the blind
- By the 1850s, special schools modeled after the work of these reformers had been established in many states of the Union

3. Prisons
- Taken the place of crude jails and lock-ups were new prisons built in Pennsylvania
- These penitentiaries, as they were called, experimented with the technique of placing prisoners in solitary confinement to force them to reflect on what they had done
- The experiment was dropped because of the high rate of prisoner suicides
- These prison reforms reflected a major theme of the asylum movement: structure & discipline would bring moral reform
- One prison reform, (Auburn system in NY), enforced rigid rules of discipline while providing moral instruction & work program
Public Education

- Another reform movement started in the Jacksonian era focused on the need for establishing free public schools for children of all classes
- Middle-class reformers were motivated in party by their fears for the future of the republic posed by growing numbers of the uneducated poor—both immigrant and native-born
- Workers’ groups in the cities generally supported the reformers’ campaign for free (tax-supported) schools

1. Free common schools

- Horace Mann was the leading advocate of the common (public) school movement
- As secretary of the newly founded Massachusetts Board of Education, Mann worked for improved schools, compulsory attendance for all children, a longer school-year, and increased teacher preparation
- In the 1840s, the movement for tax-supported schools spread rapidly to other states

2. Moral education

- Besides the teaching of basic literacy, Mann and other educational reformers wanted children to be instructed in morality
- William McGuffey, a Pennsylvania teacher, created a series of elementary textbooks that became widely accepted as the basis of reading and moral instruction in hundreds of schools
- The McGuffey readers promoted virtues of hard work, punctuality, and sobriety—the behaviors needed in an industrial society
- Objecting to the Protestant tone of the public schools, Roman Catholic groups founded private schools for the instruction of Catholic & foreign-born children

3. Higher education

- The religious enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening helped fuel the growth of private colleges
- Beginning in the 1830s, various Protestant denominations founded small denominational colleges, especially in the newer western states like Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, & Iowa
- At the same time, several new colleges, including Mt. Holyoke College in Massachusetts (founded by Mary Lyon in 1837) and Oberlin College in Ohio, began to admit women
- Adult education was furthered by lecture societies, which provided speakers like Ralph Waldo Emerson to small-towns
THE CHANGING AMERICAN FAMILY AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

- American society was still overwhelmingly rural in the mid-19th century
- Even so, the growing part of society that was urban & industrial underwent changes that would be felt for decades to come
- As a result of office & factory jobs created by the Industrial Revolution, roles of men, women, husbands, wives were redefined
- Men left home to work for salaries or wages six days a week in the office or factory
- Middle-class women typically remained at home to take charge of the household & children
- Industrialization also had the effect of reducing the economic value of children
- In middle-class families, birth control was used to reduce family size which decline from 7 to 5 family members during this era
- More affluent women now had the leisure time to devote to religious and moral organizations
- The NY Female Moral Reform Society, for example, worked to prevent poor young women from being forced into prostitution

Cult of domesticity
- The new definitions of men's & women's roles soon became an established norm in urban, middle-class households
- Men were expected to be responsible for economic & political affairs while women concentrated on the home & children
- The idealized view of women as moral leaders in the home & educators of children has been labeled the cult of domesticity

Origins of the women's rights movement
- Women reformers, especially those involved in the antislavery movement, resented the way men relegated them to secondary roles in the movement and prevented them from taking part fully in policy discussions
- Two sisters, Sarah & Angelina Grimke, objected to male opposition to their antislavery activities
- In protest, Sarah Grimke wrote her "Letter on the Condition of Women and the Equality of the Sexes" (1837)
- Another pair of reformers, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, began campaigning for women's rights after they had been barred from speaking at an antislavery convention

Seneca Falls Convention (1848)
- The leading feminists met at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848
- At the conclusion of their convention (the first women’s rights convention in American history) they issued a document closely modeled after the Declaration of Independence
- Their "Declaration of Sentiments" declared that "all men and women are created equal" and listed women's grievances against laws and customs that discriminated against them
- Following the Seneca Falls Convention, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony led the campaign for equal voting, legal, and property rights for women
- In the 1850s, however, the issue of women’s rights was overshadowed by the crisis over slavery

Antislavery Movement
- Opponents of slavery ranged from moderates who proposed gradual abolition to radicals who urged immediate abolition & freeing slaves without compensating their owners
- The Second Great Awakening encouraged many northerners to view slavery as a sin
- This view limited the possibilities for compromise and promoted radical abolitionism

American Colonization Society
- The idea of moving freed slaves to an African colony originated in 1817 with the founding of the American Colonization Society
- The idea appealed to antislavery reformers with moderate views & to politicians, in part because large numbers of whites with racist attitudes hoped to remove, or banish, free blacks from U.S. society
- In 1822, the American Colonization Society established an African-American settlement in Monrovia, Liberia
- Colonization never proved a practical option, since between 1820 & 1860 the slave population grew from 1.5 to 4 million, while only about 12,000 African Americans were settled in Africa during the same period
American Antislavery Society
- In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison began publication of an abolitionist newspaper, "The Liberator," an event that marks the beginning of the radical abolitionist movement
- Garrison advocated immediate abolition of slavery in every state & territory without compensating the slave-owners
- In 1833, Garrison and other abolitionists founded the American Antislavery Society
- Garrison stepped up his attacks by condemning & burning the Constitution as a proslavery document
- Garrison argued for "no Union with slaveholders" until they repented for their sins by freeing their slaves

Liberty Party
- Garrison's radicalism soon led to a split in the abolitionist movement
- Believing that political action was a more practical route to reform than Garrison's moral crusade, a group of northerners formed the Liberty Party in 1840
  - They ran James Birney as their candidate for president in 1840 and 1844
- The party's one campaign pledge was to bring about the end of slavery by political and legal means

Black abolitionists
- Escaped slaves & free blacks were among the most outspoken and convincing critics of slavery
- A former slave like Frederick Douglass could speak about the brutality and degradation of slavery from firsthand experience
- An early follower of Garrison, Douglass later advocated both political and direct action to end slavery and racial prejudice
- In 1847, Douglass started the antislavery journal "The North Star"
- Other black leaders, such as Harriet Tubman, David Ruggles, Sojourner Truth, and William Still, helped organize the effort to assist fugitive slaves escape to free territory in the North or to Canada, where slavery was prohibited

Violent abolitionism
- David Walker and Henry Garnet were two northern blacks who advocated the most radical solution to the slavery question
- They argued that slaves should take action themselves by rising up in revolt against their masters
- In 1831, a Virginia slave named Nat Turner led a revolt in which 55 whites were killed
- In retaliation, whites killed hundreds of blacks in brutal fashion and managed to put down the revolt
- Before this event, there had been some antislavery sentiment and discussion in the South
- After the revolt, fear of future uprisings as well as Garrison's inflamed rhetoric put an end to antislavery talk in the South

Southern Reaction to Reform
- The antebellum reform movement was largely a regional phenomenon
- It succeeded at the state level in the northern and western states but had little impact on many areas of the South
- While "modernizers" worked to perfect society in the North, southerners were more committed to tradition
- Southerners were slow to support public education & humanitarian reforms
- They were alarmed to see northern reformers join forces to support the antislavery movement
- Increasingly, southerners viewed social reform as a northern conspiracy against the southern way of life

OTHER REFORMS
- Efforts to reform individuals and society were not limited to movements for temperance, asylums, free public education, women's rights, and abolition of slavery
- Other reforms of the antebellum era included:
  1. The American Peace Society, founded in 1828 with the objective of abolishing war as it influenced some New England reformers to oppose the later Mexican War during the 1840s
  2. Dietary reforms (eating whole wheat bread & Sylvester Graham's crackers) to promote good digestion
  3. Dress reform for women (wearing Amelia Bloomer's pantalettes instead of long skirts)