

## Unit 4: Jackson, Reform, and Expansion

### DBQ 8: Antebellum Reforms

#### **Historical Context:**

No time in America's history has seen greater efforts to reform society than the four decades preceding the Civil War. During those years, a variety of social problems came under attack. Many thousands of Americans worked tirelessly to establish public schooling, reform the criminal justice system, improve care of the infirm and mentally ill, promote women's rights, and battle poverty and drunkenness. By the 1840's and 1850's, abolitionism, the attempt to end slavery, had become the greatest of these antebellum reform movements. (*Antebellum* literally means "before the war." In America's history it marks the decades before the Civil War.) There was, it seemed, an almost frantic effort during the antebellum years to perfect America and its people, to right wrongs and eradicate evils. Mark Hopkins, the president of Williams College, confidently predicted that this huge effort to reform society would soon result in the destruction of "wars, and intemperance, and licentiousness, and fraud, and slavery, and all oppression through the transforming influence of Christianity."

◆ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1–6). As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

**Question:** *What forces or ideas motivated and inspired this effort to remake and reform American society during the antebellum years?*

◆ **Part A:** Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

(continued)



## DBQ 8: Antebellum Reforms (continued)

### Document 1

This excerpt is from a statement made by President-elect Andrew Jackson in 1828. (Quoted from *Freedom's Ferment*, by Alice Felt Tyler, Harper & Row, 1961, p. 22.)

I believe man can be elevated; man can become more and more endowed with divinity; and as he does he becomes more God-like in his character and capable of governing himself. Let us go on elevating our people, perfecting our institutions, until democracy shall reach such a point of perfection that we can acclaim with truth that the voice of the people is the voice of God.

According to this statement by Jackson, what was the ultimate purpose of "elevating our people, [and] perfecting our institutions"? \_\_\_\_\_

Why was this so important in the 1820's and 1830's? \_\_\_\_\_

### Document 2

William Lloyd Garrison began publishing *The Liberator* in 1831, only two years before founding the American Anti-Slavery Society. Garrison quickly became the most prominent and uncompromising abolitionist in America. The following excerpts come from the first issue of *The Liberator*, in which he publicly vowed to oppose slavery until slavery's "chains are burst . . . SO HELP ME GOD!" He begins by explaining why he decided to establish his abolitionist newspaper in Boston.

I determined . . . to lift up the standard of emancipation in the eyes of the nation, *within sight of Bunker Hill and in the birthplace of liberty.*

Assenting to the "self evident truth" maintained in the American Declaration of Independence, "that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights—among which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," I shall strenuously contend for the immediate enfranchisement [right to vote] of the slave population.

What factors were primary motivations for Garrison in establishing *The Liberator* in Boston?

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**DBQ 8: Antebellum Reforms (continued)**

**Document 3**

Francis Grund was a German nobleman who traveled in the United States during the 1830's. Here he describes what he saw as the origin of the antebellum reform spirit.

Religion has been the basis of the most important American settlements; religion kept their little community together—religion assisted them in their revolutionary struggle; it was religion to which they appealed in defending their liberties. It is with the solemnities of religion that the declaration of independence is yet annually read to the people from the pulpit . . . and it is religion which assists them in all their national undertakings. The Americans look upon religion as a promoter of civil and political liberty.

What, according to Grund, was the inspiration behind Americans' "civil and political" reforms?

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**Document 4**

The most prominent educational reformer of the antebellum years was Horace Mann of Massachusetts. During the years 1837 to 1848 Mann directed the Massachusetts Board of Education; in this role he became a tireless promoter of public education. The following excerpt comes from his Eighth Annual Report to the State Board of Education, issued in 1844.

If we do not prepare children to become good citizens—if we do not develop their capacities, if we do not enrich their minds with knowledge, imbue their hearts with the love of truth and duty, and a reverence for all things sacred and holy, then our republic must go down to destruction, as others have gone before it.

According to Mann, what was the purpose for public schooling reforms? \_\_\_\_\_

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How does this document compare with Document 1? \_\_\_\_\_

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**DBQ 8: Antebellum Reforms** *(continued)*

**Document 5**

Theodore Parker, a Massachusetts Unitarian minister, was a leading abolitionist. He was also active in a number of other antebellum reforms, including the peace movement. This is an excerpt from a sermon given in 1847 during America’s war with Mexico. (Quoted from *Theodore Parker, Yankee Crusader*, by Henry Steele Commager, The Beacon Press, 1960, p. 192.)

War is an utter violation of Christianity. . . . If war be right, then Christianity is wrong, false, a lie. Every man who understands Christianity knows that war is wrong.

What, according to this document, inspired Parker’s opposition to the Mexican War and his wider involvement in world peace efforts? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Document 6**

The “Declaration of Sentiments” was issued by the women’s rights conventions at Seneca Falls, New York, in July 1848. A number of abolitionists and women’s rights advocates, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Frederick Douglass, met in the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, a small upstate town. Their goal was to “discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights” of American women. Here is an excerpt from the “Declaration of Sentiments,” a statement of grievances.

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government.

What ideas are suggested here as motives behind the women’s rights movement of the antebellum period? \_\_\_\_\_

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**◆ Part B—Essay**

*What forces or ideas motivated and inspired this effort to remake and reform American society during the antebellum years?*