**Chapter 12**

Antebellum Culture and Reform

*Reviewing Objectives*

**A thorough study of Chapter Twelve should enable the student to understand:**

1. The two basic impulses that were reflected in the reform movements, and examples of groups illustrating each impulse.
2. The contributions of a new group of literary figures (such as James Fenimore Cooper, Walt Whitman, and Edgar Allan Poe) to American cultural nationalism.
3. The transcendentalists and their place in American society.
4. The sources of American religious reform movements, why they originated where they did, their ultimate objectives, and what their leadership had in common.
5. The two distinct sources from which the philosophy of reform arose.
6. The American educational reform in the antebellum period, and the contribution of education to the growth of nationalism.
7. The role of women in American society, and the attempts to alter their relationships with men.
8. The origins of the antislavery movement, the philosophy behind it, and the sources of its leadership.
9. The role of the abolitionism in the antislavery moment, and the strengths and weaknesses of that part of the movement.
10. The role world opinion played in ending slavery.

**Chapter 12**

**Pertinent Questions**

**THE ROMANTIC IMPULSE**

1. How was the work of James Fenimore Cooper the culmination of an effort to produce a truly American literature? What did his work suggest about the nation and its people?

2. Why was Whitman called the “poet of American democracy”?

3. Who were the transcendentalists? What was their philosophy, and how did they express it in literature?

4. How were the transcendentalists among the first Americans to anticipate the environmental movement of the

twentieth-century?

5. How did the transcendentalists attempt to apply their beliefs to the problems of everyday life at Brook Farm? What was the result?

6. What other utopian schemes were put forth during this period, and how did they propose to reorder society to create a better way of life?

7. How did the utopian communities attempt to redefine the gender roles? Which communities were the most active in this effort, and what did they accomplish?

8. Who were the Mormons? What was their origins, what did they believe, and why did they end up in Utah?

**REMAKING SOCIETY**

9. The “philosophy of reform” that shaped this era rose from what two distinct sources?

10. What gave rise to the crusade against drunkenness? What successes and failures resulted from the movement’s efforts?

11. What was the biggest problem facing American medicine during this period? What impact did this problem have on health care in the United States?

12. How did efforts to produce a system of universal public education reflect the spirit of the age?

13. What were the problems facing public education, and what types of institutions were created to deal with them?

14. How did the rise in feminism reflect not only the participation of women in social crusades, but also a basic change in the nature of the family?

15. How did feminists benefit from their association with other reform movements, most notably abolitionists, and at the same time suffer as a result?

**THE CRUSADE AGAINST SLAVERY**

16. What was the anti-slavery philosophy of William Lloyd Garrison? How did he transform abolitionism into a new and “dramatically different phenomenon”?

17. What role did black abolitionists play in the movement? How did their philosophy compare with that of Garrison?

18. Why did many northern whites oppose the abolitionist movement? How did they show this opposition?

19. What divisions existed within the abolitionist movement itself? How did each faction express its position?

20. What efforts did abolitionists make to find political solutions to the question of slavery? How successful were they initially?

21. How did abolitionists attempt to arouse widespread public anger over slavery through the use of propaganda? What was the most significant work to emerge from this effort? Why did it have such an impact?

**PATTERNS OF POPULAR CULTURE**

22. Explain how sentimental novels of this era “gave voice to both female hopes and female anxieties.”

**AMERICA IN THE WORLD**

23. How did pressure of world opinion and Enlightenment ideals combine to end the slave trade and slavery in countries other than the United States?

24. How did world opinion and Enlightenment ideals influence the abolition movement in the United States and how, in turn, did American abolitionism help reinforce the movements abroad?

# Summary

By the 1820s, America was caught up in the spirit of a new age, and Americans, who had never been shy in proclaiming their nation's promise and potential, concluded that the time for action had come. Excited by the nation's technological advances and territorial expansions, many set as their goal the creation of a society worthy to be part of it all. What resulted was an outpouring of reform movements the like of which had not been seen before and have not been seen since. Unrestrained by entrenched conservative institutions and attitudes, these reformers attacked society's ills wherever they found them, producing in the process a list of evils so long that many were convinced that a complete reorganization of society was necessary. Most, however, were content to concentrate on their own particular cause, and thus, at least at first, the movements were many and varied. But in time, most reformers seemed to focus on one evil that stood out above the rest. The "peculiar institution," slavery, denied all they stood for--equality, opportunity, and, above all, freedom. Slavery became the supreme cause.