In the early 18th century, when the Enlightenment dawned, rationalism quickly caught on in American society: the ideas of philosophers such as John Locke and Rousseau were in fact, driving factors behind American independence and democratic political theory. But within the drift towards rationalism, a countermovement was born: the First Great Awakening, an emotional Christian revival which reinvigorated religious faith and introduced ideas of Calvinism and predestination to the Protestant colonists. As the American Revolution was finalized and secularism was once again stressed among the founding fathers, the stage was set for a Second Great Awakening in the early 19th century, caused by a shift in mindset due to the ongoing industrialized market revolution and an increase in social and geographic mobility. As the Second Great Awakening dawned, it was clear that moral reform in the form of religious revivalism and social reform in the form of the temperance movement, abolitionism, and the rise of utopian societies would take the US by storm, eventually paving the way for later calls for change in the future.

Religious revival in the Second Great Awakening is synonymous with the work of Charles G. Finney, an evangelical minister known for his “fire and brimstone” sermons in New York, which terrorized listeners with vivid descriptions of eternity in hell. Finney was well-known for employing revival tactics of the First Great Awakening--i.e., appealing to the emotions of Christians through invigorated speech.

Finney would instill the fear of Satan in his listeners, but unlike the First Great Awakening, predestination was out of the question. Instead, Finney encouraged Christians to overcome “the power of sin” so that the “worst part of humanity are softened and reclaimed, and made to appear as lovely specimens of the beauty of holiness” (Doc 4). His perspective was that Christians who devoted themselves to religion and embraced purity would engage God’s glory.

Revival was also present in the sermons of Lyman Beecher, head of the American Temperance Society. Beecher, father of Harriett Beecher Stowe, was known for his sermons on temperance, effectively tying the ongoing movement to religion. According to him, alcohol was unholy and its consumption was a sin. In his particular sermon from Doc 1, Beecher warns against the “enormous consumption of ardent spirits” and condemns Christians that experience “amusement on the Sabbath”--a belief in line with Finney’s preachings. Beecher, like Finney, used revivalism to encourage a stricter adherence to religion while promising that God would reward Christians who did so.

Similarly, the Temperance Movement was also a significant part of the Second Great Awakening reforms. In the editorial cartoon from Doc 2, alcohol is depicted in a negative light through showing the descent of one man’s destruction due to alcoholism, while citing anti-alcohol bible verses. The cartoon features a strong religious condemnation of alcohol use, with its purpose being clearly to strike fear into the conscience of readers and inspire them to support the banning of alcohol (which would later arrive through the 18th Amendment, which was later repealed by the 21st).

Despite not having a lasting impact on our Bill of Rights, the Temperance Movement was unique in that it was spearheaded by many women, some of which are Frances Willard and Carrie Nation, who was known for literally breaking into taverns and wielding a hatchet to stop customers from drinking alcohol. In the Second Great Awakening, women were increasingly

finding a place in reform work, which gave them greater roles in the political sphere and allowed them to challenge gender stereotypes. Many women during this time were also supportive of the abolition movement.

David Walker was also a renowned abolitionist during this time period. In order to advocate for his fellow free African Americans, Walker recommended that they “go to work to enlighten [their brethren]...let the Lord see” and reminds them that they are truly not free as a whole--as slavery is rampant in the South (Doc 3). His support for abolition, along with the support many suffragettes gave towards the movement, would play a key role in the later Civil War and eventually become a reality, as all slaves would be free.

The final example of reform during the Second Great Awakening was the rise of planned Utopian settlements, as described in George Ripley’s letter in Doc 5. Utopian settlements are somewhat contradictory to the movements described above, as they had no real tangible effects--at least, that’s what it might seem at first glance. Although these communities were first erected for religious regions, they would become a breeding ground for new and revolutionary reform ideas, as well as “contribute to the expansion of thought,” as described by Ripley. Ideas of liberalism, “true equality,” and citizens sharing work and leisure (as advocated by Ripley’s Brook Farm system) have become recurring themes in our current political sphere, resurfacing in the forms of socialist/communist revolutions and social welfare programs in the 20th century.

The Second Great Awakening can also be compared to the Progressive Movement of the 1890s and early 1900s. Not only did it give birth to many movements that would be written into legislation during the Progressive Era--such as the Temperance Movement becoming the 18th Amendment and the further development of education (which was first started in the early 1800s by Horace Mann). The female-led work in settlement houses like the Hull House also has roots in female-led efforts at religious/societal reform in abolition and temperance, which were first normalized by the Second Great Awakening, with the role of women being instrumental in both movements. In addition to this, progressivism would also embody the spirit of reform coined by the Second Great Awakening: through muckrakers, who were exposing injustices and scandal--similar to revivalists exposing sin and wrongdoing within the Christian community. Both eras marked a massive wave of change for American citizens, leading to cultural upheavals that are still being felt today.