

At the time of the Second Great Awakening, America was entering a period of radical change and asserting its own national identity. During the Age of Jackson, politics became popularized as property requirements were reduced and then largely eliminated. The War of 1812 against Great Britain affirmed America's place on the world stage, and following the War of 1812, relations with Great Britain would improve in the Great Rapprochement. The War of 1812 saw the emergence of a truly unique American culture, triggering an American renaissance with literature such as Walt Whitman's The Leaves of Grass and Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. Manifest Destiny, a term coined by John O'Sullivan, described American's belief that it was their fate to extend themselves westward. This westward extension would prove to become a tricky issue for the US, as compromises such as the Missouri Compromise and Compromise of 1850 would seek to please the north and south on the issue of slavery. It was in this context to a changing America that the Second Great Awakening emerged, inspiring reform movements such as the Temperance Movement and abolitionism through its message of human perfectibility.

In Doc 1, Lyman Beecher warns his audience that their vices are threatening their well-being. These vices to which Beecher refers alludes to the trend away from religion and towards more worldly matters, such as politics. This demonstrates that the Second Great Awakening was largely a reaction to the changing fabric of America. Beecher, known for his reform work, adhered to the Second Great Awakening position that humans could affect their destiny and eternal lives by their actions. In contrast to the Puritan's predestination theory, this meant that people had the ability to control their lives for the better and Beecher's message reflects this by arguing that people must change--they must reform.

This ability to change and this possibility of human perfectibility is also a central message in Charles Grandison Finney's sermon (Doc 4). Finney was an Evangelist from New York, an area so fervent with the Second Great Awakening spirit that it was nicknamed the "burned-over district." Finney, perhaps influenced by New York's Puritan roots (which emphasized the importance of community), orates that when Christians have their faith revived, they will "labor zealously" to revive the religious spirit in others as well. This group mentality of reviving a religious spirit lends itself well to reform movements, which seeks to improve the group condition.

Some, such as the Shakers and the Oneida community, took this message to the extreme, forming utopias. One such utopia, Brook Farm, is described in Doc 5. Founder George Ripley describes his utopia's goal (to find individual freedom and meaning as well as societal equality) and discusses his plans to create a farm to establish his community. Although utopias generally isolated themselves in an attempt to fulfill their goals and did not try to reform the general community, utopias still represent the epitome of the Second Great Awakening reform spirit--they strived for that human perfectibility.

Indeed, this notion of human perfectibility helped to inspire the temperance movement, which sought to eliminate the vice of drinking. Beecher, who spoke in Doc 1 about the danger of

human vice, is also well-known for his 6 Sermons on Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance. Beecher, a renowned Second Great Awakening figure, through these sermons, became a key figure in the temperance movement.

In Doc 2, a cartoon depicts a common argument of the temperance movement--in a drunken state, an alcoholic husband sinks into profanity, violence, and poverty, causing great suffering for his family. In the reform-minded, human perfectibility atmosphere created by the Second Great Awakening, the vices of drunkenness were something that had to be fixed. Powerful anti-saloon leagues formed across the country, and many states were turned dry (although these dry laws were later repealed as the zeal from the Second Great Awakening wore off). Many women even joined the cause under the leadership of Frances Willard's Women's Christian Temperance Union as they joined in the reform-era brought by the Second Great Awakening as moral housekeepers for the country.

Abolition also gained traction as Second Great Awakening zealots began to attack the moral injustice of slavery. Harriet Beecher Stowe, a Northerner from a prominent reform-minded family, wrote Uncle Tom's Cabin, a powerful narrative that focused on the emotional stress caused when families are ripped apart by the slave system. Her book humanized chattel slavery for many Northerners and so effectively highlighted the moral vice of slavery that many Southern states banned her book.

In Doc 3, another leader of the abolition movement, David Walker appeals to all "colored citizens of the world," imploring that it is their duty to resist slavery by any and all means possible. In one line, Walker writes to "let the Lord see you," reflecting the influence of the Second Great Awakening in reform movements. A black man himself, Walker writes from the perspective of these "colored citizens" he addresses. Moreover, his involvement as a black man demonstrates that the Second Great Awakening was not isolated to the middle class or another particular group within American society, but instead relevant to all Americans and affecting movements that attempted to reform the whole nation.

In many ways, the Second Great Awakening can be compared to the First Great Awakening. The First Great Awakening was a reaction to the general decline in religious zeal, just as the Second Great Awakening. And just as the First Great Awakening helped inspire political reform as well as religious reform (many did not stop at questioning their religious leaders and began questioning the royal authority as well, helping to spur the revolutionary spirit needed for the American Revolution), the Second Great Awakening extended past religion--reform movements inspired by its message of human perfectibility fought for both temperance and abolition.