

The antebellum period in america



The antebellum period in America was one of rapid change. With the ideals of Romanticism at hand, people were in the frame of mind to improve society in order to reach this state of perfection that according to the movement was indeed attainable. American reform movements between 1820 and 1860 reflected both optimistic and pessimistic views of human nature and society with regards to education, temperance, and women's rights. There were great efforts for education reform between 1820 and 1860. Horace Mann of Massachusetts was one such leader of education reform.

In Massachusetts, he restructured the educational system so that the school year was longer and educators were better paid. Moreover, by the 1850's there were tax funded elementary schools in existence in many states. However, only seventy-two percent of white children in the North were actually enrolled in school. In the South the figures were more dismal; about one-third of white children were enrolled in school and blacks had no opportunity to be. In addition, some teachers of this time period were barely literate.

Despite the great push for education reform by reformers such as Horace Mann, there were still flaws with the education provided, making education reform reflect both optimistic and pessimistic views. Temperance too was widely supported by reformers of the period but caused controversy and bitterness. During the antebellum, there was an overproduction and abundance of alcohol in America; so much so that the average male drank about three times as much as one would today. As alcohol was so readily

available in all areas of the nation and affecting so much of the population, there were many outspoken groups arguing for abstinence against liquor.

The Protestants, as a whole, were rather outspoken for they argued that it placed a great strain on the women as they their men could not support their families while in some sort of drunken stupor. As this movement went on, many joined and pledged their abstinence from liquor. However, as the movement went on to include other alcoholic items such as beer and wine issues arose. As many Catholic immigrants also used alcohol as a part of their social activity, the temperance movement's call for abstinence from all alcohol came to be a problem for Catholic-Protestant interactions. Therefore, temperance too reflected both

the optimistic and pessimistic views. Women's rights too had its high and low points. For as women's right did rally a great deal of support largely in the form of women, women 's rights were often viewed as a secondary cause once compared to abolition. In this time period, there were, however, advances in the cause of women's rights. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman physician, came to be in this period. Equalityof the sexes was also largely supported by the Quakers. The Women's Rights convention at Seneca Falls of 1848 was momentous for women's rights as well as it was there that the " Declaration of Sentiments" emerged.

This " Declaration of Sentiments" would call for the end of separate " spheres" for women and men. However, many of the demands made in this declaration would go unaddressed for quite some time; women only get the right to vote in the twentieth century. Many women reformers too were attacked for being so outspoken. Thus, for the advancements made, there

were still issues remaining and unaddressed. As with nearly all things, education, temperance, and women's rights between 1820 and 1860 reflected both optimistic and pessimistic views.

While Horace Mann called for longer running, better funded schools, there were still schools that employed individuals who were barely literate. Although temperance would aid women as they suffered when their men were drunk, it caused friction between Protestants and Catholics. Furthermore, though Quakers were supportive of equal rights for women, a large portion of men throughout the nation were not so open to the idea of equality between the sexes. Therefore, these movements exhibited both optimistic and pessimistic views of human nature and society.