

# Democratic ideals dbq essay



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Between 1825 and 1850 many reform movements gained momentum and began to transform the laws and institutions of the United States. These reform movements were spurred largely by the Second Great Awakening which, because religion was moving into a more liberal light, spread a contagious desire of reform nationwide and allowed for the bettering of American lives. Among the reform movements driven by the Great Awakening was a rise in anti-slavery supporters, vast women's rights movements, and reform of school, prison and institutional systems.

All of the reform movements that began in the early 19th century enabled the expansion of the most important Democratic ideal, the inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It is a core belief in Democratic idealism that all humans are endowed with the right to life and the reform movements of the early-mid 1800's expanded that ideal. A large role in the expansion of the right to life during this time is the anti-slavery movement.

The Second Great Awakening persuaded many to see slavery as a sin and in an engraving by Patrick Reason from 1835, the words " Am I not a woman and a sister? " arc above the depiction of a slave woman (Doc. C). The engraving supports the concept that anti-slavery was popular at that time, enough so that Reason wanted to express his desires. The artwork clearly supports the idea of anti-slavery as well as the fight against oppression of women.

Also supporting the expansion of the right to life is the Women's rights movement, led mainly by Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott who began campaigning for women's rights after being banned from campaigning at an

anti-slavery convention. Stanton argued for the right of women to be “ as free as man is free”, for women representatives in government and the right to vote, at the Seneca Falls Convention (Doc. I). The fact that a large feminist convention was held with many supporters illustrates that the rights of women were of much interest during this time of reform.

Because of these movements, it is apparent that the right to life is an ideal that was popular and its expansion was successfully fought for. During the reform of women’s right and abolitionist movements of the early 19th century the cornerstone right to liberty, one of the most crucial Democratic ideals, was also popularized. In the early 1800’s the right to liberty was exercised in the form of experimental communities.

An example of this is Brook Farm Massachusetts, set up in 1841 by George Ripley it was a community based on transcendentalist ideas and was intended to allow a union between intellectual and manual labor. The end of The Constitution of the Brook Farm Association announces the uniting of “ a voluntary Association” (Doc. F). Although some may argue the Brook Farm Association did not promote democratic ideals because of its members ideals, it was clearly a voluntary community and promoted and utilized the idea of a right to liberty for all.

Orestes Brownson delivered his opinion of this reform movement, such as the Brook Farm community, in an address at Wesleyan College (Doc. G). He criticizes the attempts of reformers “ to cut loose” and create a new social order or community. Brownson argues that the reformers are refuting their country. However, the reformers have the Democratic right to liberty and are

certainly, simply exercising that right, and therefore expanding Democratic ideals.

As Democratic ideals spread with the Second Great Awakening and the country became more liberal, many opportunities opened for Americans to further pursue their happiness. A large role in the advancement of these opportunities was the reformation of the juvenile criminal system. In a report by the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents, it is explained that to put children in jails with adults will do nothing but put them on a path where they will only be able to learn the criminal ways and will eventually commit more crimes (Doc. A).

By establishing the House of Refuge it was made possible for young adults to learn the error of their ways and continue on a healthy pursuit of happiness promoting this ideal. Churches were reformed with a similar motive, as they became more liberal they became more accepting aimed to help. Charles Finney, a Presbyterian minister from New York played a particularly large role in the Second Great Awakening as he spread a message of salvation through faith and hard work throughout the middle class.

He explains that the reformation and salvation of sinners will follow that of the churches (Doc. B). Because of the Second Great Awakening and the following church reforms, more people were able to attain a second chance at life. The reforms of American institutions allowed for the expansion of Democratic ideals, notably the right to the pursuit of happiness. The reform movements that began in the early 1800's facilitated the expansion of the

most important Democratic ideal, the rights of the American people to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The slavery abolition movement expanded the right to life by popularizing the idea of limiting and removing slavery, the experimental communities such as Brook Farm broadened the ideal of a right to liberty by exercising that right and the reform of the juvenile criminal system allowed young adults a second chance to life to pursue their individual happiness. These reform movements, although not nearly as drastic can still be felt in the present day United States government. Notably in “ Obama-Care” where these same ideals are expanded to all Americans, through the establishment of a national healthcare system.