

Antebellum period of american history essay

Countries, United States



The Antebellum period was a decisive turning point in American history. Firstly, it included several events that changed the course of history dramatically. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, it was saturated with events and phenomena that were introduced almost two hundred years ago but stayed relatively unchanged as a definitive part of American society and culture.

The most often cited staple mark of the period is the rise of the abolitionist movement (Johnson 273). The war on slavery and the subsequent victory is, without a doubt, a great achievement. However, it was not limited to the Antebellum period. Meanwhile, industrialization can be named a true milestone. Within a relatively short period of time, several inventions shaped America's future. The most prominent ones include the cotton industry, with both the plantation boom in the South and the manufacturing in the North (Roark et al. 311).

This has led to the rapid growth of the economy and has prompted the development of transportation infrastructure, primarily the railroads. By 1856 the Eastern coast was reachable from Chicago by train (Stover 144). However, the most important and often downplayed achievement, also courtesy of industrialization, was the progress of the printing industry. This, in turn, has led to the newspaper boom, with the reduced cost and the rise of circulation from about 3000 in 1820 to roughly 1.5 million by 1860 (Boyer et al. 324).

The price drop boosted the popularity of print media tremendously, making it affordable not only to the upper class but the majority of the population as

well. In fact, the newspaper has become the first reliable and authoritative source of information. This arguably has led to raising social awareness and public involvement in the political life of the country, promoting the image of the conscious citizen.

The religious principles and philosophical paradigms were also challenged during this period. The two most notable examples of the former include the arrival of the first major wave of Roman Catholics from Ireland, soon to be followed by other European immigrants. This eventually led to changes in the social landscape and the transformations in the religion. Second, and more direct example is the Second Awakening, the religious revival movement that laid the foundations for deformatizing the Church and the emergence of American Christianity.

As for the reformation in the philosophical realm, several influential thinkers were working during the Antebellum period. Henry David Thoreau is among the most significant of these, as he laid the foundations of several groundbreaking concepts: the modern anarchism, in his essay *Resistance to Civil Government* (also known as *Civil Disobedience*), environmental studies and ecology in his book *Walden* and numerous essays, pacifism, and advocacy of abolitionism (Howe 623).

Unlike most of the activists of the era, Thoreau advocated passive protest, so he hardly faced any resistance from the authorities, except for his brief imprisonment in 1846. On the other side of the spectrum, far from the upper-class elite, another prominent character rose to his fame and established the trend that is still present in the American culture. P. T. Barnum, a showman,

and an entrepreneur, best known for his enormous popularity, promotional techniques, and the instrumentation of hoaxes.

Barnum has not left any heritage except quotes attributed to him and the impact on the entertainment industry. However, his approach, as well as his love and skill for pleasing the public and profiting from it is seen to this day in mass culture (Kunhardt and Kunhardt 12). These qualities, alongside the respect of human rights and phenomenal social involvement, should be recognized and adhered to as characteristic of American society, conceived and promoted in the Antebellum period.

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