

The second great
awakening gravely
impacted the social
structure of the
american ...

[History](#)



The reform movements of the 19th century sought to expand the democratic ideal of equal opportunity because the Second Great Awakening empowered many individuals to take control of their own lives. The belief that a person could affect his or her destiny led many Americans to reform certain unjust or unfair aspects of American life. Disadvantaged groups like women and African-Americans sought greater equality. Other social reform movements, like the temperance movement, had only a limited impact on the overall social structure of the young American nation.

The Second Great Awakening was not entirely consistent. Its universal message was that the doctrine of predestination was obsolete and that people can improve and control their destiny. This awakening stemmed from the European Enlightenment, which was a movement to spread knowledge and reason.

At the time of the Enlightenment, when America was being established, a certain number of democratic ideals were put forward in the Constitution. As time progressed it became apparent that the reality of the nation was quite different than its established ideals. Since affluent landowners held all of the power many citizens were marginalized from society and politics. The religious belief of predestination justified this inequality as God's plan. When predestination became challenged as a reigning religious belief during the Second Awakening, these unjust social and political structures became open to challenges. In short, it was believed that the reformation and salvation of sinners was to follow and God's grace was attainable through faith and good works, emphasizing a sense of equality among followers and encouraging them to take control of one's life (Document B). Those members of society <https://assignbuster.com/the-second-great-awakening-gravely-impacted-the-social-structure-of-the-american-nation/>

that were oppressed and treated unjustly felt they mattered and could effect change.

Members of the women's movement and abolitionists were both empowered by the Second Great Awakening and fought for basic human rights of equality. Under patriarchy, both groups - women and African Americans - were treated as less than men. Women, with their newfound confidence, mobilized to respond to the doctrine of "separate spheres" and traditional restrictions imposed on them. This doctrine not only reinforced the lack of opportunity for women but also reemphasized the role that they were simply housekeepers. The women of this time specifically challenged the line "all men are created equal" and in fact Sarah - an advocate of women's rights - exclaimed that "men AND women were CREATED EQUAL" in a letter responding to the pastoral letter. Many women gathered at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 to support the idea that women are equal to men and have certain inalienable rights, including the right to property and suffrage. Women challenged the existing order of the government under the constitution that they never consented to nor approved of (Document I). They attempted to ground women's rights as part and parcel of the democratic principles of the United States.

Similar to the women's movement, abolitionists put forward the basic notion that slaves are not animals and deserve to be emancipated. That is, this movement attempted to end the captivity of slavery in a nation that valued freedom and held the belief that "all men are created equal". Many citizens were inspired by the Second Great Awakening on a spiritual and emotional

level to expand democratic ideals. Men and particularly women took a stand to end sinful practices upholding God's will. Slavery was a brutal reality of the life of African-Americans (document C). Both the women's movement and abolition movement fought for inclusion and equality in the country they had been oppressed by ever since the beginning.

Although the temperance movement was a social reform that did not seek to expand democratic ideals explicitly, it is an exception rather than rule to the role of reform movements purposed. This movement was motivated primarily by the negative affects of the consumption of alcoholic beverages on family life. Husbands would often drink all of their earnings and beat their wives and children. The movement to sober society was encouraged because it was becoming a prominent issue in family life throughout cities and other areas of the North. It was exclusively a male problem that was escalating and threatened social order (doc H). Although this movement clearly targeted an improvement in family life on a social level, it had underlying connections to the women's movement. Not only did this movement seek to protect women and their children, but also advocates of temperance advocated the right to divorce and laws to prevent abusive husbands. Furthermore, temperance was not initially sought to expand democratic ideals but was an effect of the women's movement.

From the period of 1825-1850, reformers were enlightened by the Second Great Awakening to instill change and expand the democratic ideals the country was centered upon. Women's movements and abolitionists fought for political equality, and although the temperance movement was initially

began for safety, it had roots to improving the ideals of the country as well. Despite these continuous efforts to reform the nation, full equality for women and African-Americans has yet to be achieved in today's society.