

# Unit 5: *The Antebellum Years*

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## Lecture 5.1 • *The Second Great Awakening*

A “Great Awakening” is a period of spiritual and intellectual revival and reform. A time when new ways of thinking prosper, and new religions emerge. America’s Second Great Awakening lasted from the 1820s to the 1840s.

### ***Religious Revivalism***

- Up until the 1820s, the most popular Christian denominations in American cities were the Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Quakers, all of which taught that God had a destiny planned for every man and woman.
- In rural America though, where people had to be self-sufficient, a new type of faith arose which taught that man has free will, and must be active in living a godly way of life.
- As advocates of this new kind of faith were shunned from the main stream, they moved into the wilderness and started conducting outdoor revival meetings.
- This led to a rise in missionary work and evangelism, which was a big part of manifest destiny.
- It also led to the founding of the Baptist, Methodist, and Mormon churches.

### ***A New Philosophy***

- As religious revival spread through the Midwest & South, a new philosophical belief called transcendentalism was spreading across New England.
- The basic idea of transcendentalism is that “truth” transcends (goes beyond), or is bigger than, the organizations and institutions in our society.
- This new philosophy suggested that man’s ideal state of moral existence is based not upon religious rules and government laws, but upon each person’s own natural sense of right and wrong.
- The two most prominent transcendentalist writers were ...  
**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (*Nature*, 1836) and  
**Henry David Thoreau** (*Walden*, 1854).
- Developing a distrust for religious faith and law, Thoreau further suggested that if a law is unjust, people not only have the right to disobey it, they should feel obligated to disobey it ... non-violently.



**Who is this?**

### **Personal Reflection:**

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**evangelism:**  
actively spreading the Christian faith

## Lecture 5.2 • Antebellum America

The intellectual rebirth of the Second Great Awakening led to a wave of social activism and artistic expression that spread across the country during the antebellum (before the war) years.

### *Reform Movements*

- During the mid-1800s, **Horace Mann** fought to reform public education by pushing for increased spending, opening special schools for the deaf and blind, and making education through 8th grade free for everyone.
- At the same time, **Dorothea Dix** fought for prisons reform by releasing debtors (people who owe money) from prison, and by having the mentally ill placed in special institutions.

### *Equal Rights for Women*

- For hundreds of years, women in England and America had lived under a system called **coverture**, which denied them rights based on the idea that they were protected under the authority of their husbands.
- To try and change this system, in 1848, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the first large women's rights meeting ... the **Seneca Falls Convention**.
- They drafted a list of demands which included fair wages, social equality, protection from domestic abuse, and the rights to hold public office, and vote.

### *The Romantic Movement*

- Over the first half of the 1800s, many artists and authors embraced the **Romantic Movement**, and turned away from wars and royalty as their subjects, and turned toward the splendor and mystery of nature.
- In art, the painters of the Hudson River School — **George Caleb Bingham**, **Thomas Cole**, and **Albert Bierstadt** — focussed on painting landscapes which depicted the beauty of the American West.
- The Romantic Movement also influenced many writers:
  - Washington Irving** - *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (1820)
  - James Fenimore Cooper** - *Last of the Mohicans* (1826)
  - Nathaniel Hawthorne** - *The Scarlet Letter* (1850)
  - Walt Whitman** - *Leaves of Grass* (1855, poetry)
  - Herman Melville** - *Moby Dick* (1851)
  - Edgar Allen Poe** - *The Raven* (1845)



**Who was featured on America's first dollar coin?**

### Personal Reflection:

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#### **antebellum:**

the period before a war; esp. the U.S. Civil War



