

## LESSON 2: ANTEBELLUM REFORMS

### Student Handout 2: Options

#### WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN?

##### Decision 1—Women’s rights:

Possible options (you can choose as many as you would like):

- A. Call for an end to marriage, to be replaced by something else (perhaps called domestic partnership or civil union) that puts women as equals before the law
- B. Keep marriage, but strengthen women’s property rights within marriage. Women should get to keep their own property during the marriage and upon the deaths of their husbands. Women should be able to get insurance and conduct business on their own.
- C. Take out the word “obey” in marriage vows
- D. Change the laws so women would be able to get custody of children in the case of divorce
- E. Allow married women to sue in court and testify in trials (single women already could)
- F. Allow women to serve in the military
- G. Give women the opportunity to become pastors and other religious leaders. Quote the Bible to show that women should be equal in the church.
- H. Eliminate prostitution. Men caught hiring a prostitute (not the prostitute herself) should be punished. Give prostitutes financial help so they can change their lives.
- I. Give women the right to vote
- J. Let women hold political office
- K. Allow women to go to college
- L. Give women the opportunity to become doctors, lawyers, or other professionals
- M. Pay women the same rate as men for comparable work. For example, a woman in a job that is similar to a man’s job (having the same educational requirements and the same responsibilities) should get the same pay.
- N. Ensure African American women have all the above rights
- O. Free all slaves; half of them are women

#### WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT HIGH ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION?

##### Decision 2—Alcohol:

Possible options (you can choose as many as you would like):

- A. Try to reduce drinking to a moderate level. It is alcohol *abuse* that causes problems, not alcohol use. There is no harm in drinking alcohol in moderation.
- B. Focus on stopping the moderate drinkers. They are the ones who make drinking alcohol acceptable. Get them to recognize the errors of their ways and they’ll take a pledge to stop drinking completely (called “teetotaling”). As drinking becomes less acceptable, some problem drinkers will also stop drinking. It’s true that most drunkards will not stop drinking or will backslide into drinking again, but they will die off eventually, moving society closer toward a teetotaling nation.

- C. Focus on those who drink the most by having reformed drinkers give speeches about how bad their lives were before they reformed. Also, provide substitute entertainment for drinking, such as no-alcohol fairs, reading rooms, and picnics.
- D. Concentrate on state laws prohibiting drinking throughout the whole state. That's the only way to enforce the law. When there are laws against selling alcohol in towns or cities, people just start buying it in neighboring towns. But with alcohol illegal throughout entire states, drinking rates will really drop.
- E. Focus on the women who are victims of alcohol-induced abuse (almost all abuse is by males). If we can't stop people from drinking, we can at least help the victims of drinking.
- F. Send pamphlets and speakers around the country warning about the effects of drinking alcohol

### WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT CRIME?

#### Decision 3—Crime:

Possible options (you can choose as many as you would like):

- A. Set up penitentiaries. Loss of freedom is the punishment many criminals fear most, so prisons would deter crime. These prisons would isolate criminals from the rest of society, and they could think about their crimes and how to reform. They would be alone at night (to reflect on their actions), except when the Bible is read to them. Prisoners would be given work to do during the day and taught skills and self-discipline in order to lead better lives when they get out of prison.
- B. Set up professional police forces, which would be organized like armies, have promotions based on merit, and have academies for training cadets
- C. Try to reduce or eliminate alcohol consumption, which is a big cause of crime
- D. Pass bankruptcy laws to allow those who can't pay their debts to pay part of what they owe, rather than go to prison. Keeping debtors in prison is illogical, since it prevents the debtor from making money to pay off the debt.

### WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT EDUCATION?

**Decision 4—Funding for schools:** One area that reformers emphasize is funding for schools. They want every child to be able to attend school for free at the expense of the taxpayers in the community. Which of the following would you support? (Choose one.)

- A. Free public (non-religious) education up to the eighth grade, paid for by the taxpayers in each town or city or from state taxes. There would be state boards of education, which would set consistent systems for education, including a lengthened school year, required attendance for children, higher teacher wages, and professional standards for teachers.
- B. Free public (non-religious) education up to eighth grade, but paid for only by parents of school-age children, not by the property owners of the whole community (why should people without children have to pay?).
- C. Don't alter the current methods of educating children. It works well enough now; any new system would likely be worse.
- D. Free public education up to eighth grade, paid for by property owners, but the money would go to religious and non-religious schools alike.

**Decision 5—Curriculum and instruction:** At this point, curriculum (what is taught), methods of instruction (how it is taught), and the quality of teachers are left up to the local schools, so there is no uniformity. Which of the following would you support in terms of the curriculum and instruction? You may pick as many as you like.

- A. Leave the curriculum up to local schools. It is better to have the local community determine what is taught.
- B. Set up state boards of education to establish common standards of what is taught in local schools. While local schools would have control of much of what they teach, all schools would have to teach, for example, multiplication and U.S. history.
- C. Set up a grading system. Students would have to show they could do the work in one grade before they pass to the next grade; no more one-room schoolhouses where younger and older children are lumped together. The grading system could also be based partly on competitions, such as spelling bees and comparisons between students' grades.
- D. Emphasize moral education, where students learn self-discipline and hard work. Stories read to them should have morals—for example the importance of being honest, thrifty, and prompt (on time). Self-control, self-sacrifice, and restraint are important values to be taught.
- E. Students should learn to be proud of their country and admire the accomplishments of the republic. Students must be taught to respect the laws and government.
- F. Students should be taught that the American democratic system is the best government in the world, that it is divinely guided, and that, despite its mistakes, it is getting better over time. America is the guiding country in the progress of civilization.
- G. All students should be taught the same language to overcome regional differences in language and provide national unity. Using Webster's dictionary, students will learn common words and spelling. Immigrants will learn the common language also.
- H. Students will have daily Bible readings. This country was founded on Christian principles, so children should learn those principles.
- I. Students should be confronted with controversial issues or complex problems and taught how to think. In other words, the focus should be more on how to think, not what to think.
- J. The curriculum should focus on practical skills for the working world of factories, trading (banking, finance, business), or farming
- K. Stick to the basics of the "three Rs"—reading, (w)riting, and (a)rithmetic
- L. Set up schools of education to train teachers in professional standards of instruction, along with professional conferences for sharing new teaching ideas
- M. Hire more women as teachers (in the early 1800s most teachers were men). This practice will save money because women can be paid less than men. Moreover, women are ideally suited to be teachers, since they are already involved in moral teaching in their roles as wives and mothers at home. Schools will still need male overseers as principals in order to maintain discipline in schools, however.