

LESSON 2: ANTEBELLUM REFORMS

Student Handout 3: Outcomes

Decision 1—WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN?

Options B, D, E, G, I, J, K, and L were explicitly stated in the Declaration of Sentiments adopted at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. In this document, women insisted on rights to: property within marriage (Option B), custody (Option D), sue and testify in court (Option E), be leaders in the church (Option G), vote (Option I), hold office (Option J), attend college (Option K), and enter professions (Option L).

Outside of the Seneca Falls Convention, some women demanded an end to the word “obey” in marriage vows (Option C). Women also worked to end prostitution, or at least rescue women from it (Option H). The women’s rights movement was closely aligned with the abolitionist movement, so white women were interested in freeing slaves. However, abolition was kept separate from women’s rights most of the time. The split between the two issues became quite dramatic after the Civil War with the adoption of the 14th Amendment.

Women did not demand an end to marriage (Option A), the right to join the army or navy (Option F), or comparable pay for similar work (Option M). The latter two proposals were adopted in the late 20th century.

Women correctly identified one underlying problem as lack of political power. Without the right to vote, most of the other problems couldn’t be corrected, since they required the passing of new laws. Consequently, women’s rights advocates focused on getting the right to vote for women (Option I). They figured if women could vote, they could gradually attain equal rights on all these other issues. This was the most controversial demand in the Declaration of Sentiments. Unfortunately, the campaign for female suffrage was not successful until 1920.

Decision 2—WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT HIGH ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION?

The effort to reduce or prohibit alcohol consumption was called “temperance.” The temperance movement was supported by factory owners, the clergy (religious leaders), farmers who sold their crops in commercial markets (as opposed to growing crops just for their own use), and many workers. It was led by men, but women were involved in significant numbers. As more women became involved, temperance became more of an issue of gender. Reformers focused more on male drinkers and on protecting female victims of abuse by drunken males (Option E).

THE FIRST CONVENTION

Addressed to the

Civil and Political Rights of Women

Seneca Falls, N.Y., August 27, 1848

RESOLUTIONS

Resolved, that women of this country are entitled to the same rights and privileges as men, and that the laws of this country should be so amended as to secure to them the same rights and privileges as men. The rights of women are equal to those of men, and the laws of this country should be so amended as to secure to them the same rights and privileges as men.

A newspaper ad for the Seneca Falls Convention

At first, the temperance reformers tried to reduce drinking (Option A). They stressed that if people were going to drink alcohol, they should drink in moderation. However, the movement changed in the 1820s to complete abstinence after the religious revival called the “Second Great Awakening.” Evangelical leaders believed society could improve itself spiritually and morally—and could be perfected. The emphasis was on individuals taking personal responsibility for their own actions. Reformers felt that drinking alcohol, even in moderate amounts, removed self-control and therefore led to immoral behavior. Moderate drinking also made drinking alcohol more acceptable, leading to alcohol *abuse*. Drunkards could not be expected to stop drinking with alcohol all around them. These religious reformers criticized people in their own churches who drank alcohol. The crusade against moderate drinking (Option B) led to opposition within churches, splitting religious communities.



“The Drunkard’s Progress,” a pro-temperance cartoon from the 1840s

standing in the way of the triumph of “Capital—Enterprise—Industry—Morals—and Religion.” The temperance movement used songs, books, speakers, and pamphlets to spread the word (Option F). One temperance novel, *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, sold 400,000 copies. By the 1830s, there were a million members of the temperance movement who pledged total abstinence. Temperance reformers also used reformed drinkers to show how bad their lives had become while drinking (Option C).

In the 1850s, temperance reformers turned to pressuring states to pass laws preventing the manufacture or sale of distilled alcohol (Option D). Prohibition laws were passed in 13 states, but a backlash reduced prohibition to five states by 1865. Courts ruled that the search-and-seizure clauses of prohibition laws violated property rights, constituting “unreasonable searches and seizures.” The public also turned against the laws when their drinks were taken away.

Temperance had some success up to 1840, when average alcohol consumption per person was reduced to less than three gallons per year, down from seven in previous years. Four

The religious reformers were supported by some leaders in the medical profession, who publicized the negative medical effects of alcohol consumption. Factory owners were overwhelmingly in favor of temperance. Modern factories required self-disciplined workers, not workers who were tipsy or hung over. Jesse Goodrich, a temperance reformer, said that drinking was

thousand distilleries were forced out of business. However, the temperance ideal faded in the mid-1850s. Alcohol consumption rose back to its pre-temperance level. The temperance movement revived in the 1870s with the start of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. It continued to expand until 1920, when national prohibition was passed.

Decision 3—WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT CRIME?

Reformers started prisons (Option A), doing so in order to accomplish several goals: First, prisons separated hardened criminals from society. Second, they offered the possibility of rehabilitating criminals. Some reformers were motivated by religious concerns; they wanted to convert prisoners into evangelicals, especially after the Second Great Awakening, which stressed individual and social salvation. Women prisoners were thought to be especially open to reform, since these “fallen women” were not in their natural state of moral purity. Third, juries might convict more often if they had an alternative to capital or physical punishment. Fourth, because prisons used forced labor, prisoners would learn self-discipline and the value of hard work.

Unfortunately, as prisons got larger, it was harder to maintain control over the inmates, and harsh punishments were again used. As states cut back on spending for prisons due to budget constraints, conditions got worse. Overcrowding prevented the isolation of prisoners and reduced the amount of supervision of each inmate. The ideal of reforming prisoners began to fade or disappeared entirely. Poor diets, harsh punishments, and overwork contributed to an annual death rate among prisoners of 5.8% in 1850. Prisons were more often used simply to hold inmates than to rehabilitate them. Female prisoners were not isolated or subject to work discipline. Rather, women were put into overcrowded rooms and neglected. They were also subject to harsh treatment and even sexual abuse.

In addition to prisons, cities also started professional police forces to reduce crime (Option B). Furthermore, reformers passed bankruptcy laws (Option D), which allowed people to pay back a portion of their debts rather than go to prison.

WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT EDUCATION?

Decision 4—Funding for schools:

The reformers chose Option A: public schools, called “common schools,” paid for by the property owners of local towns through taxes, with a longer school year and professional standards for teachers. Methods of improving the quality of instruction included using blackboards and outline maps. Some states bore more of the tax burden at the state level rather than letting the local property-tax payers bear the brunt of it, and some states continued



A 19th-century schoolroom

to have more control of curricula at the local level. Nevertheless, with the support of a large majority of Americans (including most working-class men), tax-supported public education and state boards of education very slowly became the standard throughout the country for the next 150 years. Both political parties supported common schools, a reflection of public support.

However, resistance to state rules did come from supporters of local control. For example, citizens in Beverly, Massachusetts, voted to abolish their high school in an effort to keep local, neighborhood control over money. States voted on several occasions to abolish the state boards of education. Parents who felt they needed their children to work to supplement the family's income opposed compulsory attendance laws. Opposition also came from those who wanted parents to pay more than non-parents for the services their children were getting in school (a combination of Options A and B).

Some Catholic leaders, especially in New York City, argued for public funding for religious schools (Option D), but these efforts failed.

Decision 5—Curriculum and instruction:

The country adopted Options B, C, D, E, F, G, H, J, K, L, and M for curriculum and instruction. People did not adopt Options A and I. Some groups resisted these changes, but they were unable to prevent them because of overwhelming support.

Option B: Most states in the North and Midwest set up state boards of education, but resistance proved effective in preventing enforcement of state requirements, especially in rural areas. Curriculum and instruction did become more uniform within states, but very slowly, as states moved away from local control of curricula (Option A).

- Option C: Although there were still many one-room schoolhouses up to and after the Civil War, the grade system of schools gradually spread. The change to a graded system had important effects on children. Instead of being around older and younger children, they were now with children their own age and often in competitive situations, based on test scores and other graded assignments.
- Option D: The curriculum in these antebellum public schools focused on moral training, not discussion of controversial topics. Students were read stories with a moral in order to foster moral and ethical development.
- Options E, F, and G: Students were taught to be proud of their country and of the superiority of the American democratic system. The emphasis was on national unity, so a common language was also stressed. The idea of fostering independent thinking (Option I) was not popular.
- Option H: Protestant churches pushed for Bible readings in school. This became a significant issue to Catholics, who wanted the Catholic version of the Bible read. In one extreme case in Philadelphia, a riot broke out over the request to allow the Catholic Bible in schools. The Bible issue, along with the emphasis on Americanizing immigrants (Options E, F, and G), was a factor spurring Catholic immigrants to establish more Catholic schools to preserve their values and ethnic identities. Each ethnic group tried to establish a school based around its culture (for example, Italian or Irish).

- Options J and K: The curriculum stuck to the basics, especially the three Rs, although moral education (Options D, E, and F) was more dominant than efforts to prepare children for work.
- Option L: Schools of education, called normal schools, were set up to train teachers, but many teachers around the country remained untrained.
- Option M: Reformers emphasized hiring women as teachers in order to save money on school budgets. Before the reform movement in education, almost all teachers were men; after the reforms most teachers were women. But principals and other leaders were still men, so clearly discrimination against women remained.