

The Second Great Awakening

The Enlightenment and the American Revolution were the source of a second wave of revivalism in American religion. In the early 1800s people reacted against the rationalism and belief in human reasoning that had created a more liberal and forgiving Protestant doctrine, such as those of the Unitarian church. Once again, the masses began to revert to the old Puritan (Calvinist) teachings of sinfulness and predestination.

One of the first to go back to the pulpit and proclaim a counterattack against liberal views was the **Reverend Timothy Dwight**, the president of Yale College. He started a series of campus revivals that motivated his college-educated young men into becoming evangelical preachers. His followers and converts allowed “free will” or “free agency” to play a role in salvation.

Charles G. Finney

In 1823, this Presbyterian minister started a more radical form of revivalism in upstate New York. Finney preached to the peoples’ emotions and their fear of damnation. He persuaded in public for thousands of people to publicly declare their revived faith. He claimed that everyone was free to be saved through faith and hard work, an idea that was quickly accepted by the emerging middle-class of the region. Because of Finney, the area of upstate Western New York became known as the “burned-over district” a term taken from his frequent sermons on hell-and-brimstone and a fiery demise.

Baptists and Methodists

Circuit preachers such as **Peter Cartwright** would travel throughout the South and along the Western Frontier converting many non-believers into respectable members of the community. By 1850 the Baptists and Methodists had become the largest Protestant denomination in the country.

What is more important is that many Southern plantation owners began converting their slaves to being Baptists or Methodists. This had a dramatic affect on the African America society for years to come. In far that teaching their slaves to read the bible would result in rebellion, the plantation owners allowed them to hold services by their slave quarters and memorize the bible in verse and later song. Later in American history, this would create Gospel music. After the Civil War another affect of these conversions would be that during the northern migrations these African Americans brought their Baptist and Methodists faiths northwards. Today, the majority of African American churches are still Baptist or Methodist.

Millennialism

A great deal of religious belief in the 1840s revolved around the belief that the world was about to end with the second coming of Christ. Once preacher, **William Miller**, gained tens of thousands of followers by predicting that on a specific date (October 21, 1844), this second coming was to take place. As we now know, many were disappointed but Miller continued to preach and founded a new religion, the **Seventy-Day Adventists**.

Mormons

The **Church of the Latter-Day Saints**, commonly known as the **Mormons**, was founded by **Joseph Smith** in 1830. The **Book of Mormon** was a Scripture written by Smith after claiming to have received a messenger from God. In his writings, he traced a connection between the Native Americans and a Lost Tribe of Israel.

Smith soon gathered a large following and began to cross the north and west in search of a “promised land.” He and his followers traveled across New York State, into Ohio, Missouri and then to Illinois. Smith was murdered by an angry mob in Illinois who strongly objected to their belief in polygamy. To escape further persecution, their new leader, **Brigham Young** led his followers across the Great Plains and started a settlement, the **New Zion**, on the banks of the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

The Mormons quickly became wealthy thanks to their cooperative farming techniques and corporate-like structure and the fact that in 1849, when the California Gold Rush began they were the last frontier post before the miners could cross the Rockies into California. The **Mormon Trail** became a major crossing of the Rockies and the money made from selling supplies and tools became highly profitable for the Mormons.

Their continued practice of polygamy would later be the focus of many U.S. Government investigations.

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Communal Experiments

During the mid 1800s, the ideas of a utopian society remerged in America. It could be inferred that the Mormons were a communal experiment but others emerged not just as religions but as humanistic or secular experiments. Most were short lived for one reason or another but they did reflect the diversity of reform ideas that emerged in America

The Shakers

They were one of the earliest religious communal movements. By the 1840s they had approximately 6,000 members in various communities in the north and west. They owe their origin to the North of England and their founder, **Mother Anne Lee**. The Shakers died out because of their segregation of men and women as they forbade sexual relationships between members. Their name was derived from a form of dance that was held after hours of worship causing them to “shake” from religious fervor.

By the mid-1900s all Shaker communities had died-out except for a settlement in Amana, Iowa that did allow marriage in order to ensure their survival.

New Harmony

This secular (non-religious) experiment began in Indiana and was founded by a Welsh industrialist and reformer called **Robert Owen**. He wanted to create a socialist utopian society that would alter the evils of society that grew from the Industrial Revolution. This experiment quickly folded due in part to financial problems and then to the members disagreeing with how the community was to run.

Oneida Community

The founder of this community, **John Humphrey Noyes**, first undertook a religious conversion. Then, in 1848, in Oneida, upstate New York, he founded a cooperative community that quickly became controversial. His ideal society was one of economic equality and shared property – even partners. Critics attacked his society and system of planned reproduction, communal child-rearing and free-love.

The Oneida society did prosper economically thanks to the communities selling of high-quality silverware.

Fourier Phalanxes

In the 1840s many American socialites became interested in the work of Frenchman **Charles Fourier**. To combat the fierce American society, Fourier proposed this community where people shared work and living arrangements. The movement died out as quickly as it appeared. Americans proved too individualistic to adapt to communal living.