# *Unit 4: Ante-bellum U.S., Civil War and Reconstruction*

**Unit Overview:**
This is a lengthy unit that requires students to remember a large amount of material over several topics. This memorization is a skill that will benefit students if they take the United States History AP® exam. This unit tackles how Americans responded to the dramatic changes that took place during the first half of the nineteenth century. Immigration, industrialization, and urbanization transformed the North while the South remained an agricultural society based on slave labor. The differences between the two regions finally became so severe that a murderous civil war broke out to resolve the issue. The Northern victory in the war freed the slaves, but did not bring blacks into the mainstream of U.S. society.

**Lesson 4:1 *ante-bellum* reform**

**Objectives:**
- Understand that Transcendentalism helped raise the social conscious of some Americans and these reformers attempted to improve what they perceived as weaknesses in American society. *Ante-bellum* reform movements helped set the foundation for future successes and they raised many people's awareness of societal ills.
- Understand that "reform" is always a double-edged sword. What is perceived as reform for one person may be viewed as oppression by another—immigration restrictions and prohibition are obvious examples. Less obvious may be abolition; the abolitionists believed they were fighting to free people from an inhumane system, while slaveholders viewed the abolitionists as crazed radicals who were attacking their constitutional property rights.
- The 2002 AP® DBQ asks the students to evaluate the objectives of reformers during the years 1825-1850. When you reach the Progressive Movement, a DBQ constructed especially for this book asks the same reform question about the years 1900-1925. You might want to look at the Progressive DBQ, located in Unit 6, Tab 6, and decide if you want to have your students do the 2002 AP® DBQ and the Progressive DBQ in the same format (either as a test or homework).

**Topic:**

- Ante-*Bellum Reform*:
  - √ Transcendentalism.
  - √ Social reform.
  - √ Prohibition and immigration.
  - √ The Know-Nothings.
  - √ The Second Great Awakening.
  - √ The Abolitionist Movement.

**Content Background:**

*Transcendentalism*

All *ante-bellum* reformers believed in trying to perfect the society in which they lived. The philosophy of transcendentalism put forth by Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson proclaimed that God was in everyone, and therefore everyone had the ability of becoming "Christ- like." A person could transcend [rise above] his human weakness and achieve perfection. This perfection would be achieved through education which would raise a person's consciousness about society's imperfections. The transcendentalists believed that once people were educated about society's evils these problems would disappear. In his essay *Civil Disobedience* Thoreau declared that above man's law was a higher law—God's Law—and that if man's laws were unjust and violated the higher law, a citizen had a duty to disobey these laws. Thoreau's ideas were first played-out in a major way during the Mexican War (1846-1848). Most transcendentalists thought that the Mexican War was immoral for two reasons. First, they saw it as a war of aggression, and second, they believed it was a war to spread slavery. Since slavery was sanctioned in the Constitution, Thoreau's theory allowed a person to protest slavery and the Mexican War in good conscience. Thoreau emphasized that people should not use violence in their disobedience, but through their actions raised the consciousness of people who by following man's law violated the "higher law." This philosophy would later have a great influence on Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Social reform*

Reformers tried to improve American society by improving conditions and treatment for those less privileged than others—women, the blind, deaf, prisoners, and the insane. Dorothea Dix publicized the plight of the insane and prisoners in Massachusetts. Women like Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton tried to improve the legal status of women. Women could not vote nor hold public office. Most colleges and professions were closed to them. Married women could not control their own property, and in divorce the husband received the children. The New York Seneca Falls Conference and Declaration in l848 was an unsuccessful attempt to correct these faults.

*Prohibition and immigration*

Americans had always been heavy drinkers. Nevertheless, drunkenness was universally regarded as sinful and socially unacceptable. In the moral improvement campaigns of the *ante-bellum* period, reformers published statistics that illustrated that a considerable number of crimes were committed by people who were drunk. They also drew a connection between poverty and drinking. Drunkenness, the reformers claimed, led to poverty. Once evangelical preachers took up the subject of temperance, the movement spread rapidly. By 1835 over one million Americans belonged to temperance societies, and several states passed prohibition laws. In the 1830s and 1840s the crusade against alcohol took on a new energy because of the huge influx of immigrants who had different customs than native Americans, among which was supposedly drinking to excess. Only 8,400 Europeans came to the U.S. in 1820. More than 23,000 arrived in 1830 and 84,000 immigrated in 1840. In 1850 at least 370,000 people immigrated into the U.S. Not only were the numbers larger than before, most of the new immigrants were Catholics and many did not speak English. In 1820 3,600 Irish came to the US and most of them were Protestant. Primarily because of the Irish Potato Famine, 164,000 Irish arrived in 1850, and the vast majority were Catholic. In 1820, 968 Germans entered the U.S.; in 1850, hard economic times caused 79,000 to immigrate to the U.S. and many of them were from Catholic southern Germany. Between 1830 and 1860 the Catholic population of the U.S. increased from 300,000 to more than three million or from three percent of the total population to thirteen percent. In the view of the prohibitionists, restricting alcohol consumption would reduce child and spousal abuse and ensure that immigrant factory workers came to work sober and not hung-over. In addition, much of the immigrants' political and union activities took place in local bars, and although not often publicly stated, nativists realized that without those meeting places, the political and union activity of the immigrants would be restricted.

*The Know-Nothings*

The growth of Catholicism in the U.S. was difficult for many Protestant Americans to accept. Since the days of the Puritans they had been taught Catholicism was not just another Christian denomination but a source of evil. In addition, in the Italian Papal States the Pope was seen as the leader of a backward-looking and authoritarian state. The political principles of Catholicism seemed to be the exact opposite of the American traditions of democracy. Because many of the Irish immigrants were devote Catholics, many Protestant Americans feared their values and culture. Moreover, the vast majority of the Irish immigrants were impoverished. Once in the U.S., they were willing to work for low rates of pay. Native workingmen regarded them as a threat to their own standard of living. Economic fears combined with the evangelical campaign against the new immigrants' religious beliefs and their apparently heavy drinking caused a strong anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant movement to develop in the 1840s. Fights between Protestant and Irish Catholic workingmen regularly took place in northeastern cities. Anti-Catholicism took on political form with the founding of the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, a secret organization that was dedicated to restricting Catholic immigration. The order's members came to be known as "Know-Nothings" because

when asked by outsiders about the organization, they replied, "I know nothing." After 1850, the organization formed the American political party. At its zenith, the American Party elected 75 congressmen. By 1860 the American Party was incorporated into the Republican Party.

*The Second Great Awakening*

In the Second Great Awakening, as in the First in the mid-eighteenth century, persuasive preachers traveled across New England and New York with the message that human nature was contaminated with original sin. This was the same message that Puritan ministers had preached. Unlike the Puritans, however, these preachers stated that not just a few "Elect" were saved through God's grace; everyone who repented and prayed for deliverance from their sinful natures would be granted salvation. This vision of religion fit in with well with the American version of democracy—Heaven was not reserved for the elite, it was a democratic place. A high quality revivalist sermon began with an emotional description of the sinfulness of human beings. The second part of the sermon frighteningly detailed the sufferings of hell, for which all unrepentant sinners were destined. The preacher then concluded on a note of optimism. Any person could be saved if he repented and declared faith in Jesus Christ. While the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening spread through every state to some extent, it was strongest in New England and in upstate New York, regions that seemed left behind in America's economic growth, and on the frontier, where life was equally difficult and tenuous. The message was spread through camp revival meetings. People who lived remote, lonesome lives responded to the calls by the thousands—more than 20,000 in one instance—and came to the camp meeting from long distances. The atmosphere of the camp meeting was exhilarating. At the largest revivals 25 to 40 preachers simultaneously sermonized to the multitude. The meeting went on day and night for a week or more. Conversions were fervent. Some people fell to the ground, weeping uncontrollably. Others scurried around on their hands and knees, barking like dogs. A common symptom was the "jerks." Caught up in the mass frenzy, people staggered about, their limbs jerking uncontrollably. Many Americans went just for the entertainment and the opportunity to steal, pick pockets, jeer preachers, drink heavily, and meet members of the opposite sex. The excesses of the camp meeting eventually led to a negative reaction. In place of the revival the Methodists, and later other Protestant groups, developed the circuit rider parson. He was a minister who was assigned to visit ten or twenty settlements on regular bases that were too poor or too small to support a permanent preacher.

The revival movement also inspired or contributed to many secular reform movements, including sabbatarianism, temperance, abolition, antidueling, moral reform, public education, philanthropic endeavors, and utopian socialism.

*The Abolitionist Movement*

Because of widespread racial prejudice, early abolitionist efforts concentrated on moving blacks back to Africa. In 1822 the Republic of Liberia was established with former slaves. Some 15,000 freed blacks were transported there over the next forty years. By 1860 Southern slaves were no longer Africans, but native-born African-Americans, with their own distinctive history and culture and free blacks had no desire to immigrate to Africa. In 1833 Great Britain emancipated its slaves and America became one of the few "Europeanized" countries with slavery (by 1860 in the Western Hemisphere only the United States, Brazil and the Spanish colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico still had legalized slavery).

In 1831, the radical abolitionist movement began to be a major force in American politics when the twenty-six year old William Lloyd Garrison published his first issue of his newspaper *The Liberator*. On the masthead were these words: "I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. . . .I am in earnest—I will not equivocate—I will not excuse—I will not retreat a single inch—and I WILL BE HEARD!" In 1833 Garrison and other abolitionists formed the Anti-Slavery Society. Frederick Douglass was a prominent black member of the society. In 1845 he published his autobiography which depicted his origins as the son of a black slave woman and a white father, his struggle to learn to read and write, and his escape from slavery in 1838. Since the Constitution stated that escaped slaves must be returned to their masters, Douglass could be legally returned to slavery—at one point, fearing for his safety, he had to flee to London. Garrison often appeared to be more interested in his own virtue than in the immorality of slavery itself. He constantly demanded that the "virtuous" North secede from the "wicked" South. Garrison never explained how this action would end slavery. On July 4, 1854, Garrison burned a copy of the Constitution as "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell." Douglass, on the other hand, along with other moderate abolitionists, increasingly looked to politics to end slavery. These political abolitionists backed the Liberty party in 1840, the Free Soil Party in 1848, and beginning in 1854, the Republican Party. Abolitionists also began to help slaves escape from the South through an "Underground Railroad" that moved escaped slaves to free states in the North or to Canada. While the abolitionists did not end slavery, their agitation raised American consciences about the moral evils of slavery and their actions certainly helped lead to the Civil War.