

“American reform movements of the 1830s – 1840s reflected both optimistic and pessimistic views of human nature and society.”

Assess the validity of this statement to reform movements in 3 of the following areas:

Education
Temperance
Mental institutions
Utopian Experiments

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THESIS

“American reform movements of the 1830s - 1840s reflected both optimistic and pessimistic views of human nature and society.”

This is a valid statement. In the area of temperance, reform reflected pessimistic views. Reformers saw the human nature to be "men spend all their money on alcoholic beverages". But education reform and mental institution reform had optimistic opinions on human nature and society. Education reformers thought that all people could become educated, and mental institution reformers thought that the mental ill aren't evil in the same way as other criminals.



Temperance Reform

No Alcohol

- Americans such as Lyman Beecher, who was a Connecticut minister, had started to lecture his fellow citizens against all use of liquor in 1825.
- The American Temperance Society was formed in 1826 and benefited from a renewed interest in religion and morality. Within 12 years it claimed more than 8,000 local groups and over 1,500,000 members.
- By 1839, 18 temperance journals were being published. Simultaneously, some Protestant and Catholic church leaders were beginning to promote temperance.

- The movement split along two lines in the late 1830s: between moderates allowing some drinking and radicals demanding total abstinence, and between voluntarists relying on moral suasion alone and prohibitionists promoting laws to restrict or ban alcohol.
- Radicals and prohibitionists dominated many of the largest temperance organizations after the 1830s, and temperance eventually became synonymous with prohibition.



Education Reform

Public Schooling

- Public school reform began in rural areas. These schools were typically one room school-houses that offered a poor education.
- The goal of education reform was to improve education so that children would become responsible citizens sharing common cultural values.
- At the time, all free males recently got the right to vote. This possibly pushed reform because most politicians didn't want uneducated, illiterate voters!

- In 1837, Horace Mann of Massachusetts became secretary of Massachusetts' board of education. He reformed the school system by increasing state spending on schools, lengthening the school year, dividing the students into grades, and introducing standardized textbooks.
- Much of the North followed Mann's lead.
- The South didn't make much progress in public schooling; this is most likely because of low population density and indifference toward reforms of all kinds



Mental Institution Reform

Rehabilitation

- Dorothea Dix helped support the reform of how prisoners were treated if they were mentally ill
- Coming out of depression herself, she wanted to help others
- In 1841 she revealed insane people were confined “in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience.”

- By 1860 she had persuaded twenty states to heed her advice; this transformed social attitudes toward mental illness.
- Prisons were reformed. Northeastern jails housed both criminals and the mentally ill in the same facilities.
- Dorothea Dix's memorandum to the Massachusetts state legislature in 1842 led to the establishment of state hospitals for the insane.

CONCLUSION

- Reformers of all kinds had different views on human nature and society. However, they all had a common goal - to better the country.