

UNIT 2 Expressing a National Spirit
American Renaissance 1800 to 1850

A STEIN SCHOOL
FROEBEL
BILINGUAL SCHOOL
Home of the Space Generation



Historical Introduction

AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

1800 - 1850

with **Jim Soto**

SPEAK YOUR MIND

Have you or somebody you know ever been so overwhelmed by the “daily grind” and our artificial surroundings, that a need to escape from it all became an imperative need? What form did the “escape” take?

Take a minute to consider and answer the question.



Many view interacting with nature as a very healthy and therapeutic.

AMERICAN RENAISSANCE



Like other categorizations, literary movements allow for comparing and discussing literary works. The American Renaissance, also called New England Renaissance, was a period from the 1830s roughly around the American Civil War has been synonymous with Romanticism and also Transcendentalism.

THE RENAISSANCE'S CONTEXT

To have a better understanding of the Renaissance of American literature it is necessary to consider the important domestic and international milestones marking the first half of the nineteenth century.

Included are:

- The Territorial Expansion of the United States
 - The Industrial Revolution
- A Shift to Greater Democratization In America
 - The Entrenchment of White Male Rule

1. TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

After purchase of the Louisiana Territory from France, the U. S. doubled its size. Congress authorized the **Corps of Discovery** to explore the lands west of the Mississippi. Their expeditions inspired a westward movement. However, as settlers moved west, the country became embroiled in a series of wars. New territories were added to the nation's boundaries by often questionable means.

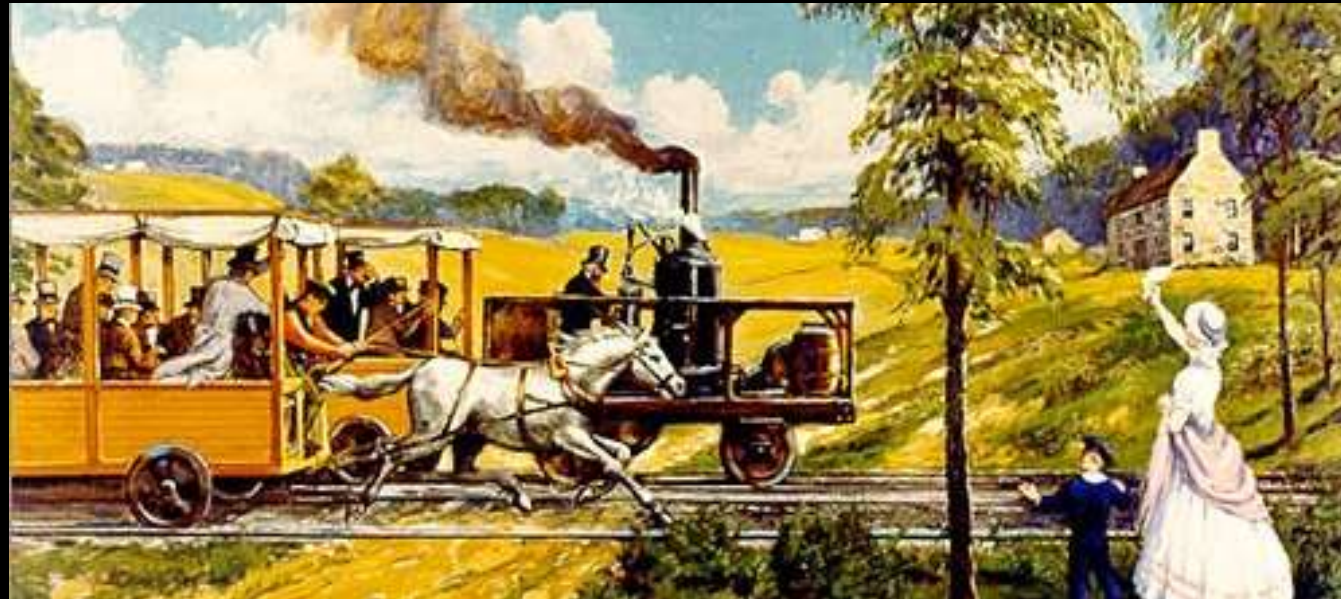


With the adoption of the idea of **Manifest Destiny**, or the cultural idea that the United States is destined—by God, as many believed—to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent, the United States eventually expanded all the way to the Pacific coast... and beyond. Manifest destiny touched on issues of religion, money, race, patriotism, and morality as efforts to eradicate Native Americans and to push Hispanics out of the South West were rationalized by White supremacist elites.



2. THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Two important technologies helped to make U.S. expansion across the continent possible. The invention of the **telegraph** in 1838 made it possible to communicate across distances instantly, and the **steam locomotive** in 1825 enabled the development of a railway system to connect populations across vast areas. By the 1850s, rails connected the East Coast to the western side of the Mississippi River.



3. GREATER DEMOCRATIZATION

With the election of Andrew Jackson as president in 1828, a shift toward recognizing the importance of common people was under way. Many states granted voting rights to all free men, whereas previously voting had been restricted to wealthy property owners, like those who had framed the U.S. Constitution. For the first time, factory workers and sharecroppers could vote.

The political system also was made more democratic, replacing a system in which members of Congress chose major political candidates with one in which nominating conventions composed of states' delegates did so.

Jackson also initiated the so-called spoils system, replacing federal workers with his own political supporters. Many states, beginning with Massachusetts, started to offer free public education at the primary and secondary levels; by 1850, free education was widespread in the North.

4. WHITE SUPREMACY vs. "OTHERS"

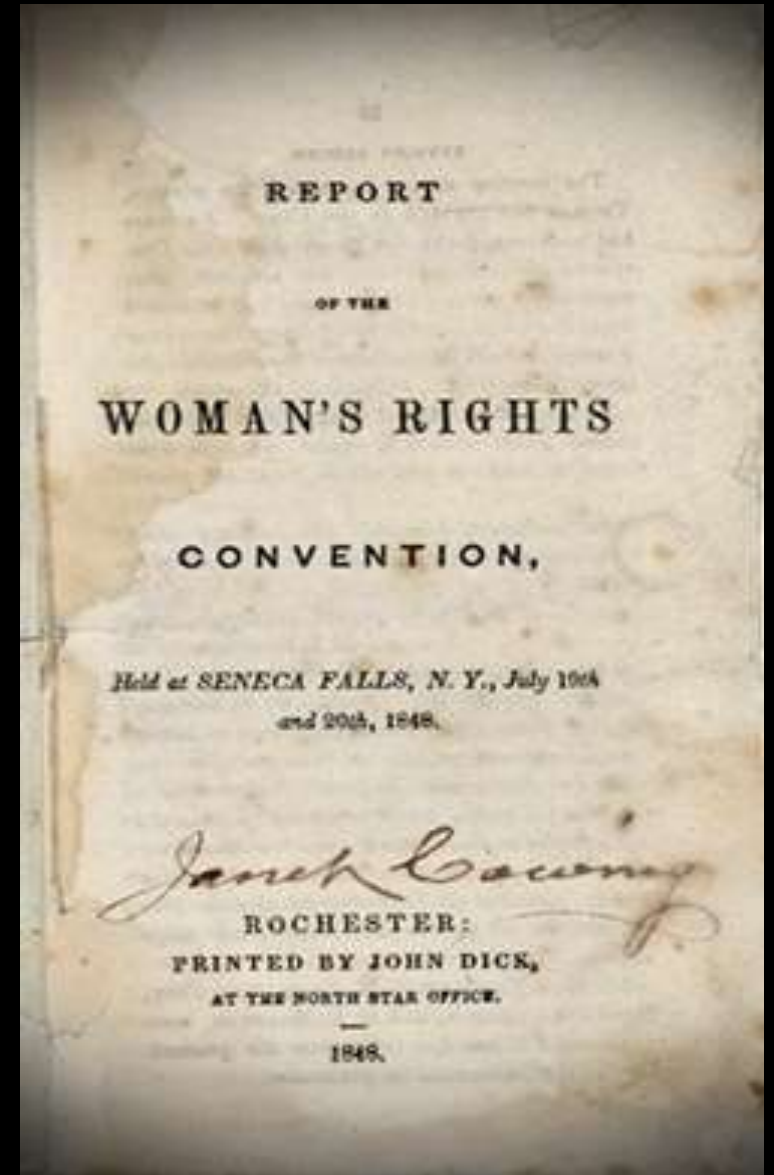


The concern for “ordinary people” did not extend beyond white males, however. In the early 1800s Congress passed legislations forcing **Native Americans** to move west of the Mississippi under desperate conditions in order to allow speculators to claim their lands. Those who resisted were slaughtered.

Meanwhile, **African Americans** rebelled against their enslavement in several states. Calls for emancipation were ever more frequent, as support for abolition grew stronger.

The first feminist movement emerged in the 1840s, demanding that **women** have a voice in public affairs and voting rights. Many women already had become effective orators and organizers. They were ready for reform demanding the support of voting rights for women.

These four milestones caused a significant cultural and political shift during the 1st half of the 19th century in the new United States of America.



ROMANTICISM RISES



In spite of the progressive ideas brought forward by **The Enlightenment** in the arts, sciences and politics, a great disillusionment came after the **French Revolution** got out of hand. In the aftermath of this event, people gave in to the worst aspects of their nature and justified it as just following the tenets of the Enlightenment. Because most people rejected this, the Enlightenment was superseded by a new philosophy: **Romanticism**. Whereas the Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century had stressed objectivity and the power of reason as the means to understand the laws of the universe, the Romantics praised the natural over the artificial, the emotional over the rational, and the individual will and conscience over external authority and control.

WHAT IS ROMANTICISM?

Romanticism is the 19th century movement that developed in Europe in response to the Industrial Revolution and disillusionments with the Enlightenment's legacy. The movement was characterized by the emphasis on emotion and imagination as well as the glorification of nature with its irrational forces.



The core beliefs is in both Romanticism and its strange offshoot - Transcendentalism were the inherent goodness of people and nature, and while society and its institutions had corrupted the purity of the individual, people were at their best when truly "self-reliant" and independent and in communion with Nature.



Another milestone was the emergence of the short story and Gothic fiction, which portrayed a decidedly darker view of the world. The selections in this unit reflect aspects of American independence and creativity.



ASSESSMENT

After reading pages 82-88 in your book, complete the following activities:

1. What important literary movement began in 1836?
2. Name the event and its date in American history that most affected the physical size of the United States.
3. In what way was Great Britain ahead of the United States around 1800?
4. What events indicate that writing and literature were becoming important to Americans in the first twenty years of the nineteenth century?

5. Complete the outline. Write two sentences summarizing information given in each section on pages 86–88.

Territorial Expansion

1. _____
2. _____

Industrialization

1. _____
2. _____

Democratization

1. _____
2. _____

Outsiders

1. _____

2. _____

Literary Renaissance

1. _____

2. _____

6. State the core belief of Romantics.

7. State the core belief of Transcendentalists.



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