

The Burnt Over District and the Second Great Awakening

Education Material

Background

The Second Great Awakening was a religious revival movement in the first half of the nineteenth century. Upstate New York--the Erie Canal corridor, in particular--was a hotbed of religious activity. Disrupted by rapid social and economic change before the Civil War, the area was fertile ground for the spread of evangelical Protestantism, reform movements, and attempts at utopian communities.

Review the sources below and answer the following questions.

NYS Social Studies Standards

7.7 REFORM MOVEMENTS: Social, political, and economic inequalities sparked various reform movements and resistance efforts. Influenced by the Second Great Awakening, New York State played a key role in major reform efforts.

(Standards: 1, 5; Themes: SOC, CIV, GOV)

7.7a The Second Great Awakening, which had a strong showing in New York State, inspired reform movements.

- Students will investigate examples of early 19th-century reform movements, such as education, prisons, temperance, and mental health care, and examine the circumstances that led to the need for reform.

Questions

- **Using the “Burned-Over District” map and A New York Minute in History podcast episode *The Burnt Over District and the Second Great Awakening***, what can you infer about the locations of these communities? On the map identify the Erie Canal corridor.
- **Using the *Methodist Camp Meeting engraving and camp chair***, how would you describe the crowd and location of a revival camp meeting?
- **Using the *Shaker photographs***, did the Shakers practice racial equality in New York? Based on the images and captions, how do you think the Shakers viewed slavery?
- **Using the *Charles Finney quote excerpt from the Oberlin Evangelist newspaper***, what social reform movements were associated with the Second Great Awakening and preaching of Charles Finney?

“Burned-Over District” Map



State University of New York Press. (2020). "Burned-Over District" Map. *Enterprising Waters: The History and Art of New York's Erie Canal*. map, Albany, New York.

A New York Minute in History Podcast- *The Burnt Over District and the Second Great Awakening*



Listen here: <https://wamcpodcasts.org/a-new-york-minute-in-history/>

The Burnt Over District and the Second Great Awakening. *A New York Minute in History*. podcast episode.

Methodist Camp Meeting



Methodist Camp Meeting, E.W. Clay and H.R. Robinson, engraving, 1836. New York State Museum, H-1976.26.13.

Camp chair, ca. 1860



Camp meetings were widely advertised and drew large crowds. Folding chairs were often used at these revivals since they occurred outdoors in large fields. Some meetings would take place over multiple days.

Camp chair, ca. 1860. New York State Museum, H-1982.145

The Shakers and Equality



The Shakers were revolutionary in their attitudes toward equality. To the Shakers, all are equal in the eyes of God, and therefore all are to be treated with respect. Though their duties were divided along traditional gender lines, sisters and brethren lived separate but equal lives. The Shakers accepted converts of any race or ethnicity to their communities as equal members. African Americans joined and held equal status with their white brethren inside the confines of the village. Credit: *Shaker Heritage Society*

The Shakers and Equality. (n.d.) Shaker Heritage Society. <https://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov/shakers/faith.html>

Shaker Sister Phoebe Lane, ca. 1870



Lane was born in Cornwall, Orange County, in 1785. Her father, Prime, joined the Shakers at Watervliet in 1802 accompanied by his daughters, Phoebe and Betty. When Prime rejected the Shakers, his daughters decided to remain. Because slavery was still legal in New York State, Prime sued the Society claiming his daughters as property. The New York State Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the women were free to act for themselves. Phoebe remained with the Watervliet Community for 74 years until her death in 1881. Credit: *Western Reserve Historical Society*

Shaker Sister Phoebe Lane (ca.1870.) Western Reserve Historical Society. <https://exhibitions.nysm.nysed.gov/shakers/faith.html>

Charles G. Finney

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) became one of the most influential evangelists in American history. A Presbyterian minister, he preached against traditional doctrine, which stated that only God would select who would follow the gospel and thus gain salvation. Finney believed that all men and women had the ability to choose to believe in the gospel. He led many revival meetings in western New York in the 1820's and 1830's , inspiring thousands to convert. Preaching with emotion and without prepared text, his energetic style and use of common language connected with thousands. Finney went on to teach and serve as president at Oberlin College in Ohio, and he was involved in the abolition movement.

State University of New York Press. (2020). *Enterprising Waters: The History and Art of New York's Erie Canal*. Albany, New York.

"IV. Why should men now repent and reform?"

Because as soon as we get light on any former practice which shows us that it is opposed to God's will, we cannot persist in it without greatly augmented guilt. For example, the case of intemperance. As soon as increasing light on this subject showed the extent of its mischiefs, and the absence of any and all redeeming good, the practice of using intoxicating drink as a beverage came to be seen at once as the murder of a man's own body and soul, and as a fatal temptation to his neighbor. Then, how could any man persist longer in its use without damning sin?

So of slavery. As soon as light prevails on this subject, men can no longer go on in the same course of sustaining the system, without the greatest guilt. It will not answer to substitute evasions, and dodging and side issues in place of real repentance and true reform. To evade the claims of truth thus serves not to acquit the soul before God or man, but only to strengthen depravity and harden the heart."

Finney, C. G. (1852, August 18). Guilt Modified by Ignorance- Anti-Slavery Duties. *The Oberlin Evangelist*, pp. 129-132. <https://lccn.loc.gov/03017163>.