

Reviewing the First Great Awakening

This ferment or **revival** that emerged in the colonies occurred mainly between 1739 and 1742. It was part of a larger movement that swept Western Europe. Among Protestants on the Continent and in England the movement was known as **Pietism** or **Evangelicalism**; among Roman Catholics it was known as **Quietism**. Those who experienced the revival often described it as a **conversion** and expressed it by emotional manifestations such as weeping, fainting, and physical gyrations. In America as in Europe, the Great Awakening had multiple causes. From the theological point of view it was a reaction against the attempt in the Age of Reason to reduce Christian doctrine to rationalistic explanations. The Awakening moved in the direction of an **Evangelical Calvinism**. It also had roots in reactions against clergymen who neglected their pastoral duties and made the liturgy unduly formal.

Leaders of the First Revival in America

While there had been seasons of spiritual renewal before the time of the Awakening, the first signs are usually traced to the preaching of the Dutch Reformed immigrant **Theodorus Frelinghuysen** in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey. Frelinghuysen preached warnings against the Dutch merchants who took their religion for granted, using it primarily to preserve their traditions in an English environment. His reputation spread, and his fervor was emulated by **Gilbert Tennent**, who led the Presbyterian Awakening in the Middle Colonies. In New England, **Jonathan Edwards** became the most brilliant spokesman for the movement, while in the Southern colonies it was begun by laymen and then organized by the eloquent Presbyterian minister Samuel Davies. The symbol of the Great Awakening was the English preacher **George Whitefield** (pictured above), who traveled throughout colonies- 1739-1740; religious fervor had an inter-colonial character.

Effects of the First Great Awakening

This inter-colonial character illustrated by Whitefield and his travels/messages signified the beginning of a more united "American" culture. The Awakening preachers worked for a "New Birth." In doing so, they succeeded in shaking the established religious and political patterns of the colonies. The Awakening led to ecclesiastical divisions (for example, **Old Side and New Side Presbyterians**, **Old Light and New Light Congregationalists**) and to a sharpening of the differences between those who defined religion rationally and those who defined it in terms of religious experiences. With the growth of dissenting groups came a wider toleration of religious differences. The spirit of rebellion illustrated by the Awakening and its challenges to local clergy also helped to fuel the "American" spirit of rebellion and reform (or even revolution) as it was a democratic movement in the sense that it democratized the Christian experience (it insisted that all should have the religious experience) ...and of course in that it stirred impulses for independence among the colonists. It also tended to lessen somewhat strong denominational adherence. The Great Awakening ended, according to participants, in the 1740s. In another sense, it never stopped among the **Baptists and the Methodists**. These two churches continued to spread their message and within 100 years had become two very strong forces in the United States. **John Wesley**, for example, founded the **Methodist movement** which began when he took to open-air preaching in a similar manner to George Whitefield. In contrast to Whitefield's Calvinism, Wesley embraced the Arminian doctrines that were dominant in the 18th-century Church of England which focused on the role of faith in salvation... and which also influenced the **Baptist Church**.

Reviewing the Second Great Awakening

In the 1820s and 1830s this movement of revival grew partly out of evangelical opposition to the **deism** associated with the French Revolution.

Leaders of the Second Revival in America

This revival movement gathered strength in 1826, when **Charles Grandison Finney** (pictured at right), a charismatic lawyer-turned-itinerant preacher, conducted a revival in Utica, New York. Finney argued against the belief that a Calvinist God controlled the destiny of human beings. He said individuals were "moral free agents" who could obtain salvation through their own efforts—but, he admonished, they must hurry because time was short. More and more people began to expect the second coming of Christ to occur in the near future. Finney achieved his greatest success in New York State's "**burned-over district**," especially in the winter of 1830-1831 in Rochester, where prayer meetings were crowded almost every night, and **conversions** and confessions of sin were frequent. Finney and other preachers, such as **Theodore Weld**, tried to be entertaining and to appeal to the average citizen.

Effects of the Second Great Awakening

The approach of preachers such as Finney and Weld utilized new techniques of **evangelizing**—protracted meetings, community wide campaigns, the "anxious bench" for those wrestling with the decision to convert, testimony meetings for the converted—and it worked: in 1831, for example, church membership grew nationally by 100,000. The Second Great Awakening also inspired budding capitalists to instill ethical discipline in workers... The burned over district (New York) in particular is where several new denominations were sparked such as the **Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ**; and is also where **Joseph Smith** became interested in finding the "truth" and then founded the **Mormon Church (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)**.

On the American Frontier, missionaries supported the growth of membership among **Methodists and Baptists**. Revivalists' techniques were based on the **camp meeting**, with its Scottish Presbyterian roots. Baptists and Methodist revivals were successful in some parts of the Tidewater in the South, where an increasing number of farmers and commoners as well as slaves were converted. These two denominations benefited the most from the Second Great Awakening in terms of membership and growth, although the Presbyterians were also successful in growing. Older Churches like the **Congregational Church** and **Anglican Church** declined.

This movement also inspired or contributed to many secular reform movements, including **sabbatarianism** (keeping Sunday sacred as the "holy day" of the week... aka honoring the Sabbath), **temperance** (reducing or eliminating use of alcohol), **abolition** of slavery, **antidueling** (outlawing and ending the practice of dueling), **moral reform** (Christian values), **public education** (educating all, not just children of elite), **philanthropic endeavors** (charities... making the world a better place by serving those in need such a juvenile delinquents, mentally ill, and the poor), and **utopian socialism** (creating societies/groups that work together to alleviate the sinful nature of life... such as social strata; utopias were also influenced by **transcendentalism** movement occurring at the same time which was essentially a protest against the general state of culture and society, and in particular, the state of **intellectualism** at Harvard University...as well as the general **Age of Reason** movement which challenged tradition and superstition and instead encouraged the **scientific method**... and also protested the doctrine of the **Unitarian church** taught at Harvard Divinity School which rejected the trinity and saw Jesus more as a prophet than the incarnation of God. Among the transcendentalists' core beliefs was the inherent goodness of both people and nature). The Second Great Awakening especially appealed to women, many of who were encouraged to become missionaries and lay preachers. Women joined Churches at a higher rate than men and became leaders in many of the reform movements that followed. **Women's rights** movement began and was closely tied with the abolition movement.

Support or refute the assertion that the **Second Great Awakening had a greater impact on American identity and culture than the First.**