Countsless nineteenth-century Americans participated in movements for social reform. What made it possible for ordinary people to believe that they should and could change their world? What were the boundaries of their reformist visions? How did reformers balance radical and conservative impulses within their movements? This course considers these questions with reference to temperance, abolitionism, women’s rights, health reform, and other reform agendas. In contextualizing these movements, we will consider the transnational dimensions of American reform, as well as connections between social reform and the rise of market capitalism, evangelical Christianity, and democratic politics in the early republic.

By the end of the semester, you should be able to explain:

- the emergence of humanitarianism in the late eighteenth-century Atlantic world;
- the transformation of major reform movements (especially abolitionism and women’s rights) over the course of the nineteenth century;
- the connections and tensions among different activists, ideologies, and movements for American social reform;
- the role of social reformers in responding to and shaping major historical developments of the period (including the political revolutions of the Atlantic world, industrialization and urbanization, religious revivalism, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and American expansionism);
- the cultural and intellectual undercurrents of social reform.

Course structure

This course is divided (very roughly) into three segments, each corresponding to a major assignment. More detailed descriptions of the assignments will be distributed in class well in advance of the due dates.

The first third of the course (Weeks 1 through 4) focuses on the emergence of humanitarianism and organized social reform in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Atlantic world. We will study a few primary sources, but we will focus on reading historiography (secondary sources) so that you will gain some grounding in the relevant scholarship. By the end of this section of the course, you should have a growing sense of what sorts of questions historians have asked about social reform, what evidence they have relied upon to address those questions, and how they have interpreted that evidence. This section of the course culminates in a short paper, in which you will
interpret a primary source in light of the secondary sources we will have read up to that point.

The second portion of the course (Weeks 5 through 9) focuses on one of the most vibrant periods of social reform in American history (1820s-1850s). After a brief discussion of some of the underlying political, religious, economic, and social transformations that motivated social reform in this period, we will turn our attention to primary sources (and occasional secondary sources) concerning some of the major reform impulses of this era: temperance, poor reform, prison reform, abolitionism, and women’s rights. During this portion of the course, your major assignment will be to lead one class discussion (together with one or two colleagues). You will meet with me in advance of your assigned day in order to discuss your plans for leading conference, and after the conference you will write an interpretive summary of one of the documents that formed the core of that day’s discussion.

The final portion of the course (Weeks 10 through 14) explores the radicalization of reform in the 1840s-1860s, the transformation of social reform during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and the legacies of antebellum reform movements beyond the nineteenth century. Your major assignment in this part of the semester is a final paper based on a primary source (or sources) of your own choosing. You will develop your topic in consultation with me, prepare a draft of your paper to workshop in class, and then submit a final draft during exam week.

**Expectations and assignments**

**Honor principle**
Reed’s honor principle governs our conduct in this course in two ways:

- **Respect for others.** If you don’t agree with what someone else has to say, you are welcome (and encouraged) to express your point of view, but you must do so respectfully, and you must support your claims with textual evidence.

- **Intellectual honesty.** I expect all work you do for this course to be your own. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, don’t hesitate to ask. In your written work, please follow the Chicago Manual of Style for footnotes, not in-text citations. There is an abbreviated guide to Chicago style here: [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

**Attendance and participation**
Because much of what you learn in this course will come out of the discussions you have with each other in conference, I pay careful attention to attendance. Missing more than three conferences will put you at risk of failing the course. I expect you to come to conference on time and prepared to participate in discussion of the assigned readings. Participation includes both expressing your own thoughts and questions and listening carefully to those of others. If you have concerns about speaking in conference, please
come see me so that we can discuss ways to make participating in the discussion easier and more enjoyable for you.

**Assignments**

You will receive detailed descriptions of all written assignments ahead of their due dates. Failure to complete all assignments will put you at risk of failing the course.

- **Discussion questions.** Once every two weeks or so (a total of five times during the semester) you will be expected to submit a question highlighting a theme, passage, or problem relating to that day’s reading that you would like to discuss in conference. Developing these questions will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on the readings prior to conference, and they will help to set the agenda for each day’s discussion. Your questions should be posted to Moodle by 8 a.m. on the day of the conference at which the readings will be discussed.

- **One short paper.** 4-6 pages analyzing an assigned primary source in light of secondary readings. Due by 5 p.m. on Friday, September 27, either by email or in hard copy to my office.

- **Discussion leading and interpretive summary.** Together with a partner, you will lead one of the discussions during the second segment of the course (between October 2 and November 4). This assignment includes meeting with me in advance to talk about your plans for the day, planning how you want to get the discussion started, and developing a list of questions and topics for discussion with the class. After you have led the discussion, you will individually write a 2-3 page interpretive summary of a passage of one of the primary sources from that day’s discussion. This paper is due one week after the conference you led.

- **Preparatory assignments for final paper.** After fall break, I will meet with each student individually to discuss plans for the final paper, which should make a historical argument about a primary source (or set of primary sources) of your own choosing. You should then email me a brief proposal for your final paper by 8 p.m. on Friday, November 15. In addition, a 5-6 page draft of your paper is due by email or hard copy at the beginning of class on Monday, December 2.

- **Final paper.** This paper should be a substantial revision and augmentation of your draft, not simply an edited version of it. You will meet with me between the first draft deadline and the final deadline to discuss your revisions. 10-12 pages; due by email or in my office by 5 p.m. on Monday, December 16.

**Policy on late work**

Because I have sequenced reading and writing assignments carefully, failure to complete them on time will be detrimental to your progress in the course. Requests for extensions must come in writing (i.e. via email) at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline. Your email should include an explanation of your request and a proposed alternative deadline. I reserve the right to refuse any request for an extension, as well as to refuse to accept any
work that comes in after the deadline. Please be aware that in most cases, I take the extra
time into account in determining the paper’s grade. *I will grant no extensions on reading
responses or drafts of the final paper, as these assignments will be circulated to others
prior to discussion in class.*

**Disability accommodation**
I am eager to talk with any student about how to make this course a productive and
enjoyable learning experience. I request that students with disabilities requiring
accommodation contact me and the director of disability support services (Theresa
Lowrie, disability-services@reed.edu) within the first two weeks of class in order to
make arrangements for suitable accommodation.

**Communication**
I will use email (often via Moodle) to post important announcements about the course.
Please be sure to check your Reed email once a day so that you will see these messages.
You can reach me via email for all sorts of questions, but I also encourage you to come
talk with me during office hours to discuss your work in this progress. If you can’t make
my posted office hours, just email me and suggest a few alternative times.

**Reading**
The books listed below are on order at the bookstore and on reserve at the library. Earlier
editions than the ones listed below are fine and may be less expensive.

a) Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a
   Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of


c) Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New

d) Seth Rockman, ed., *Welfare Reform in the Early Republic: A Brief History with
   Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002).

e) Kathryn Kish Sklar, ed., *Women’s Rights Emerges in the Antislavery Movement,
   1830-1870* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000).

f) John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the


h) David Walker, *David Walker’s Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter
   P. Hinks (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

Aside from a few items available only on library reserve, the remaining readings are
available electronically via the Moodle syllabus (log on to moodle.reed.edu and go to
History 363). *Because we will be analyzing texts closely in class, it is imperative that you
bring the readings (either digitally or in hard copy) to class.*
WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction

M 9/2 No class: Labor Day

W 9/4 Imagining a better world
a) Bring to class a short description of your utopia.

Week 2: Feeling like a reformer

M 9/9 The heart and mind of Benjamin Rush

W 9/11 Pain and sympathy
c) Susanna Rowson, excerpts from *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth* (1794).

Week 3: The birth of humanitarianism

M 9/16 The origins debate

W 9/18 Revolutionary autonomy and its limits
Week 4: After the Revolution

M 9/23 Getting organized


W 9/25 Mothering rights

b) Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), introduction (accessible under “Front Matter”) and chapters 2, 9, 10, and 12.

F 9/27 FIRST PAPER DUE by 5 p.m.

Week 5: Reform as market discipline

M 9/30 God and Mammon
a) Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*, 3-141.

W 10/2 Sobering up

b) Excerpts from *Confessions of a Female Inebriate* (1842) and *Narrative of Charles T. Woodman, a Reformed Inebriate* (1843), in *Drunkard’s Progress: Narratives of Addiction, Despair, and Recovery* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 69-96. [e-reserves]

c) George Cruikshank, “The Bottle” (1847).

Week 6: Pictures from some institutions

M 10/7 Reforming poverty or reforming the poor?

W 10/9 Behind locked doors


Week 7: Engendering abolitionism

M 10/14 The prophets of Boston
a) Walker, David Walker’s Appeal, 1-82.

W 10/16 From movement to movement
b) Sklar, ed., Women’s Rights Emerges, documents #6-17, 21-22, 24-28, 30-35 (pp. 84-112, 118-121, 122-134, 135-159).

Week of 10/21: Fall Break

Week 8: How does a novel change the world?

M 10/28 Representing slavery
a) Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, 1-189 (Volume 1).

W 10/30 Liberty and death
a) Stowe, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, 190-388 (Volume 2).

Week 9: Feminist origin stories

M 11/4 Insider history

W 11/6 Beyond Seneca Falls

Week 10: Abolitionist transformations

M 11/11 The making of a reform friendship
W 11/13 Politics, violence, and the crisis of the 1850s

F 11/15 BRIEF PROPOSAL for final paper due via email by 8 p.m.

Week 11: Making the world anew

M 11/18 Communism, Christianity, free love
a) Mintz, “Utopian Socialism,” in *Moralists and Modernizers*, 146-152. [e-reserves]

W 11/20 Assessing utopian “failure”
c) Louisa May Alcott, “Transcendental Wild Oats” (1873).
d) Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England” (1880).

Week 12: Civil War and Reconstruction

M 11/25 Taking reform South

W 11/27 No class. (Make-up 12/11.)

Week 13: Civil War and Reconstruction (continued)

M 12/2 Feminist transformations
c) Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Solitude of Self” (1892).

FINAL PAPER DRAFTS due at beginning of class.
W 12/4 Research roundtable
a) Read paper drafts as assigned.

Week 14: Assessments and legacies

M 12/9 The trouble with freedom
e) Browse “(Un)Reconstructing Uncle Tom’s Cabin” on the Uncle Tom’s Cabin and American Culture website.

W 12/11 Legacies
d) Please do at least one of the following online explorations:
   • Browse websites of contemporary anti-slavery organizations, including http://www.iabolish.org/, http://www.freetheslaves.net/, and http://www.antislavery.org/english/. How do the arguments and strategies of these groups compare to those of eighteenth and nineteenth-century abolitionists?
   • Do an internet search for “third wave feminism” and/or “fourth wave feminism” and explore the results, focusing on sites produced by feminist authors and organizations. How do the arguments and strategies of modern feminists—whether or not they accept the “third wave” label—compare to those of nineteenth-century women’s rights activists? How do divisions in modern feminism compare to those among nineteenth-century reformers?

M 12/16 FINAL PAPER DUE by 5 p.m.