During the nineteenth century, America was in the middle of an economic depression resulting from bank failures and Panics at the beginning of the century. Because of the resulting hardships, people across the country searched for a stronghold. Many found this hope in religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening. They began to believe that the biblically prophesied coming of the Messiah would happen sooner with the abolition of all evil in the world. Thus, min-nineteenth century religious and intellectual movements, from social reforms to Utopian societies, were caused by a nationwide hope for salvation from economic suffering and resulted in the mission for a better America.

Because people believed that erasing all evil from their world would bring their saving grace, many across the country quickly took on the responsibilities of various social reforms. One example is the anti-slavery society. People began to more forcefully petition for the abolition of slavery as it deprived African Americans of their natural God-given rights eventually leading to the Civil War. Another reform development of this time was the temperance movement. Because they were often excluded from anti-slavery conventions and because they suffered the blows of drunkenness, women were the prominent leaders of this movement. This led to the emergence of women into society and politics. Because of the religious fire engendered by the Second Great Awakening, Americans pushed for reform against practices that were considered religiously immoral.
Many intellectual reforms were running rampant as well. As Dorothea Dix and Horace Mann traveled around the country conducting research, they petitioned to the U.S. government to reform institutions throughout America. Dix succeeded in bettering the inhumane conditions of asylums and prisons, and Mann is responsible for the current state-funded, secular school system in the U.S.

In the form of Utopian Societies, the religious and intellectual realms overlapped. The Mormons and Shakers created communal communities in which they lived ideally perfect lives based on biblical principles and Brook Farm, based on the transcendentalist movement, gave rise to many classic American Authors. These authors, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote on a variety of topics with plots based in America, and the latter was the ringleader of the American Renaissance.

The American Renaissance led to great nationalism among Americans as they now had a “common history” and had their own literature. This development as well as movements in social, institutional, and religious reforms resulted in today’s United States: the land of the free and the home of the brave.