UNITD STATES HISTORY
DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION
(Suggested reading time – 15 minutes; Suggested writing time – 45 minutes)

RUSH: 296-297
HUSH: 328-331

Directions:

The following question requires you to construct an essay that integrates your interpretation of Documents 1-11 and your knowledge of the period referred to in the question. In the essay you should strive to support your assertions both by citing key pieces of evidence from the documents and by drawing on your knowledge of the period.

Historical Background:

During the period from 1800 to 1830, Americans drank more alcohol than at any other time in United States history. In response to the rise of public drunkenness and Dr. Benjamin Rush’s *An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits Upon the Human Body and Mind (1784)*, temperance societies began to appear during the beginning of the 19th century. However, these early temperance societies were sponsored by Federalist elites who used temperance as a means of social control over America’s growing middle class. These early societies, such as the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance (MSSI) (1813), sought to only curb the middle/lower class’ distilled liquors (whisky, rum, etc.), while keeping “elite” fermented drinks (wine, beer) completely legal. Even Dr. Benjamin Rush’s *Inquiry* advocated for a ban of distilled liquors but sanctioned fermented ones. As a result, it became popular opinion, especially among elites, that wine and beer did not contain alcohol and therefore did not need to be curbed. However, the elites struggled to keep their control of the Temperance movement. By 1818 the elite-controlled MSSI faded out, and new, national societies such as the American Temperance Society (ATS) rose to prominence.

The rise of these new societies can be attributed to Christianity and the Second Great Awakening during the 1820s. In his *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville noted how Christianity restrained Americans “away from the pleasures of this earth” and Protestantism did just that by funneling many new people into the Temperance movement. These new recruits replaced the conventional headship of elites in

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6 Ibid, 47.
8 Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics*, 47.
Temperance societies with leaders from much lower social classes, which allowed Temperance to gain rapid popularity. The ATS exploded in growth, and soon Lawrenceville students joined the Temperance movement— even starting a Temperance Society in 1832. However, most importantly, these new Temperance societies also brought a new vision. While the elite-controlled temperance societies permitted wine and beer, the new societies advocated for “teetotalism”— the total abstinence from both distilled and fermented alcohol. Teetotalism divided the Temperance movement, as some reformers were hesitant about the new leap to also ban wine and beer. And as Headmaster of Lawrenceville at the time, Samuel Hamill was caught in the middle of this national debate— Hamill was an active participant in the Temperance movement, and supported “teetotalism”, even though others around him disagreed.

**Question:** Analyze the origins and different attitudes towards the antebellum Temperance movement in the context of Lawrenceville and America as a whole.

**Document 1**
Source: Experiments to the Ascertain the State in which Spirit Exists in Fermented Liquors (published in Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London), by chemist Thomas Brande, on whether fermented drinks contain alcohol, 1811.

“It has been a commonly received opinion that alcohol does not exist in wine, but that [alcohol] is principally a product of the [distillation] process... [However], I have ascertained that alcohol does exist in wine.”

**Document 2**
Source: The Lawrenceville High School Temperance Society Constitution, 1832.

“Article 2: The members of this Society believe that the use of Spirituous Liquors is not only useless, but very prejudicial to the health and happiness of man; do deliberately, and of our own free will and consent, pledge ourselves to the abstain from the use of all kinds of ardent sprits, and by all possible means, to discourage the use of them by others.”

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9 Ibid.
10 “The Lawrenceville High School Temperance Society Constitution,” 1832, Hamill Family Papers, Box 11, Folder 1, Stephan Archives, The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ.
12 Samuel H. Hamill, "Diary of Samuel H. Hamill," 1836, Hamill Family Papers, Box 8, Folder 7, Stephan Archives, The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ.
Document 3
Source: Alexis de Tocqueville, a French observer of America’s democracy, in his book *Democracy in America*, 1835.

“On my arrival to the United States, it was the religious atmosphere which first struck me... In America, religion is possibly less powerful than it has been at certain times and among certain nations, but its influence is more lasting. It operates within a unique sphere which it occupies entirely and rules effortlessly.”

Document 4
Source: Lawrenceville Headmaster Reverend Samuel Hamill’s diary entry, October 18th, 1836.

“Oct. 18th– Attended a Temperance meeting in the Pres. Church of Morristown. There was an animated discussion in relation to the alteration of the Pledge... In a speech of from 25 to 30 minutes I supported the following proposition... the use of wine & other intoxicating drinks not generally understood as included under the term “Spirituous Liquors” is a great impediment in the way of the Temperance Reformation and must be removed before [Temperance] can finally triumph.

Objections [I faced while after supporting a ban wine and other fermented drinks]:
1st Public opinion is not prepared to go so far.
2nd We shall sometimes be placed in the delicate circumstances of weddings etc. 3rd If you banish wine you destroy the ordinance of the Supper and condemn the conduct of our Lord.”

Document 5
Source: Letter from the Chancellor of New Jersey to Lawrenceville Headmaster Samuel Hamill, 1843.

“Dear Sir, I noticed a few days ago to my very great astonishment my name announced in the papers as one of the officers of the Mercer County Temperance Society, [which] I believe is organized on the premise of total abstinence. Now upon what ground or by what authority I was made an officer of such a society I am at a loss [for words]. I have never professed or practiced the doctrine of total abstinence. On the contrary I both drink wine and offer it to others. I make no concealment of my views or my practices on the subject...May I rely that you will have the correction made.”
Source: Scene from *The Drunkard*, an American play by William Smith. In this excerpt, protagonist Edward Middleton, who has just attempted to strangle a tavern owner, experiences withdrawal pains from alcohol and attempts suicide—only to be rescued by his benefactor Mr. Rencelaw, 1844.

RENCELAW. I am one of those whose life and labors are passed in rescuing their fellow men from the abyss into which you have fallen. I administer the pledge of sobriety to those who would once more become an ornament to society, and a blessing to themselves and to those around them.

EDWARD. That picture is too bright, it cannot be.

RENCELAW. You see before you one who for twenty years was a prey to this dreadful folly.

EDWARD. Indeed! no, no; it is too late.

RENCELAW. You mistake; it is not too late. Come with me, we will restore you to society. Reject not my prayers; strength will be given you, the Father of purity smiles upon honest endeavors. Come, my brother, enroll your name among the free, the disenthralled, and be a man again. (Takes his hand.)

EDWARD. Merciful heaven! Grant the prayer of a poor wretch be heard. (Exeunt, R.)

Source: A letter from J.C. How (Delaware) to Lawrenceville Headmaster Samuel Hamill (New Jersey), on J.C.’s attempt to pass a temperance law in Delaware, 1847.

“Dear Brother… our law was a county law that was passed in Newcastle county. [However], the court met and an appeal was taken to by [the law’s] constitutionality, and it was declared unconstitutional, so the friend of the law [had] no opportunity of enforcing it on the wine seller… The arguments against its constitutionality were:

1. The Legislature alone could make laws; but in this temperance law, they had delegated the law making power to the people, which they had no right to do.
2. It would be a dangerous precedent to set for if it succeeded, then another set of people might demand the right of voting on [other important matters], and in time, under the operation of this system, our republican and representative form of government would slide into a pure democracy.”
Document 8
Source: *Religion and Temperance Guarding Youth from Evil*, cartoonist George Cruikshank, 1850.

"The conclusion is that the use, the moderate use of ardent spirits is unnecessary and absolutely injurious. That it promotes immortality and is therefore sinful... it promotes poverty and vice and immortality of every kind."

Document 9
Source: The Lawrenceville student notebook of James Davis from Blairsville, NJ, undated, but placed between 1846-1862.

"The conclusion is that the use, the moderate use of ardent spirits is unnecessary and absolutely injurious. That it promotes immortality and is therefore sinful... it promotes poverty and vice and immortality of every kind."
Document 10

Source: In response to a proposed “teetotal” Temperance Law by New York, citizens of the state submitted a document called “Reasons of Remonstrance” to the state legislature, 1852.

“We believe it to be our natural, primary, and irrevocable right to use the fruits of the earth, whether naturally produced, or artificially prepared, both for meat and for drink, at our own personal discretion and responsibility.... We regard the proposed law as the audacious and fanatical project of certain conventional associations, known as temperance or total abstinence societies. We believe that these societies... as the instigators and abettors of a despotic usurpation, [are] more degrading to the dignity of a free people, and more atrocious in its political character than any which history records.”

Document 11

Source: An editorial article called “Crime in the City”, Worchester, MA, Daily Evening Journal, Friday, Dec. 8 1854

“Crime has nearly doubled, and where last year, we had but 583 cases before the Police Court, we have, in eleven months of the year, 971...Where is the remedy? It lays at the ballot box. For two years the people of this city have voted for rum, elected rum mayors, and been tools of the rum coalition party in this society... let the people elect a mayor true upon every question of morality... chose an executor that is friend of public virtue, and all those human monsters, that have for 2 years disgraced our city, will slink back into their infamous hiding places, and Worcester will become as noted for its virtue and morality, as it now is for its vices and iniquities. God speed the day.”
Bibliography for Background Information Paragraph


Hamill, Samuel H. "Diary of Samuel H. Hamill." 1836. Hamill Family Papers, Box 8, Folder 7. Stephan Archives. The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ.


Bibliography- Numbers Correlate with Documents Numbers in the DBQ


This document articulates anti-temperance sentiment during the early 1850s in New York State. Citizens believed total abstinence temperance societies (teetotalist) were encroaching on their freedoms. This contrasts from the other pro-temperance documents.


William Brande was a chemist who proved that fermented spirits (wine, beer) did have alcohol. While obvious now, at the time, the popular belief (especially among elites) was that only distilled liquors (such as whisky, rum, vodka, etc.) contained alcohol. Brande set the early grounds for “teetotalism” (abstinence from all alcoholic beverages- both fermented and distilled) that emerged later in the 19th century. Teetotalism brought up many debates, as some people were not ready to ban wine.


Cruikshank, a renowned British cartoonist, depicted his pro-temperance views in this picture. This cartoon speaks to the religious roots that drove the Temperance movements (woman has a cross on her shield, and alcohol is portrayed as a snake)


This newspaper article portrays a pro-temperance argument. The author blamed an increase in Worchester’s crime rate on pro-rum mayors. Furthermore, the author ends the article with “God speed the day [that a moral mayor is elected]”– another example of how religion drove the Temperance movement.

This journal, from a student at Lawrenceville, gives voice to the sentiments on campus. Davis advocated for temperance, and believed that arduous sprits were not only injurious to health, but also sinful. Davis combined medical and spiritual reasons to support temperance.


This letter from the Chancellor of New Jersey to Hamill is a prime example of the teetotalism debate. The Chancellor, who was mistakenly recorded as an officer of the Mercer Co. Temperance Society, told Hamill that he in no way did he support total abstinence. In fact, the Chancellor openly drank wine and gave it to others. It is expected that the Chancellor, part of the elite class, rejected the proposed ban on wine. When the earlier stage of the temperance movement only banned “lower class” distilled liquors (whisky), the elites were unaffected and supported the movement. However, when teetotalism arose, many elites rejected it because it curbed and restricted their source of alcohol, which was wine.


This diary entry also speaks to the teetotalism debate. Hamill, who clearly advocated for total abstinence (see the second paragraph of the document), met resistance from those who feared that banning wine would have repercussions in the church (Pres. Churches used wine for communion). In addition, the reader should notice the Morristown Pres. Church sponsored this meeting.


In this letter, J.C. How told Samuel Hamill about a Delaware temperance law. This excerpt shows another obstacle the temperance movement faced—courts at the time thought that legal “initiation” was unconstitutional. Initiation and other legal reforms (recall, referendum) were passed later in the Progressive era. The reader should also notice the greeting of “Dear Brother”, which heavily implies a Christian connection between How and Hamill.

This document gives light to the pro-temperance sentiment on Lawrenceville’s campus. Students, inspired by organizations like the American Temperance Society (ATU) adopted temperance.

6) Smith, William H. *The Drunkard*. Boston, MA.

This play excerpt is an example of pro-temperance in media and entertainment. The reader should notice the key details in the description of the document. Rencelaw also speaks of a Christian redemption.


In this excerpt from his book, Tocqueville comments on the nature of religion in the US. Temperance, a product of Christianity, is “ruled effortlessly” by it– in essence, temperance has deep roots in Christianity/the Second Great Awakening.

"The Lawrenceville High School Temperance Society Constitution," 1832, Hamill Family Papers, Box 11, Folder 1, Stephan Archives, The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ.


Samuel H. Hamill, "Diary of Samuel H. Hamill," Oct. 18th 1836, Hamill Family Papers, Box 8, Folder 7, Stephan Archives, The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ.

Henry W. Green, "Letter from The Chancellor of NJ to Samuel H. Hamill," 1843, Hamill Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 13, Stephan Archives, The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ.

William H. Smith, *The Drunkard*, Boston, MA.

J. C. How, "Letter from J.C. How to Samuel Hamill," 1847, Hamill Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 13, Stephan Archives, The Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, NJ.

George Cruikshank, *Religion and Temperance Guarding Youth from Evil*, 1850.

