LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Catalysts for Change:

The Sacralizing Impulse of the Second Great Awakening and Its Transformative Impact on

American Higher Education

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Blake Stephen Hart

Lynchburg, VA

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Doctoral Dissertation Committee:
      Director: Dr. Sean Turchin
      Reader: Dr. Christopher Sneeringer
      Reader: Dr. Mark Feld

Abstract

This dissertation delves into the profound impact of the Second Great Awakening on American higher education and its enduring social consequences. Examining the period from the late eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, the research uncovers the core belief that drove the Awakening—that America and its citizens were chosen for a divine purpose, endeavoring to manifest the kingdom of heaven on Earth. It explores how Protestant-led revivalism and social reform movements fueled by this core belief influenced the establishment and evolution of American higher education. Through in-depth case studies of Andover Theological Seminary, Lane Seminary, and Oberlin College, the research unveils the profound influence of the Awakening on these institutions' missions, pedagogy, and student life. Drawing from a wide array of primary and secondary sources, this dissertation demonstrates how the sacralizing impulse of this religious movement fundamentally reshaped the objectives of these institutes of higher education and the experiences of their students and faculty. This study makes a substantial contribution to the ongoing historiographical discussion on the Second Great Awakening. It underscores its enduring significance in shaping American society, culture, and ideology while highlighting its lasting influence on the dynamic terrain of higher education. A meticulous examination underscores how this awakening was pivotal in transforming American higher education into a powerful force capable of instigating substantial social change and molding the nation's intellectual and moral development.

Contents

Acknowledgements

"But by the grace of God, I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Perhaps few words of Scripture resonate with me more than these upon the completion of this project. The grace of God has been my continual lot, and it is only fitting that my acknowledgments begin with my immense gratitude towards the God of Heaven. I pray that whatever He chooses to do with this project or with me in the future will all be for His glory.

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the finalization of this project that there are no limits to what you can achieve if you set your mind to it. Trust the Lord's guidance, put in the effort, and see it through. Remember, this doctoral journey is not a testament to being exceptionally smart but to being steadfast. I do not doubt that you three will surpass me in intelligence and potential. Utilize it for good, for God's glory, honor your commitments, and always be faithful to finish what you start. I eagerly await the opportunity to spend more time with you three. My love for you three knows no bounds!

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academic standards, reflecting the quality of scholarship and integrity befitting Christian academics.

Soli Deo Gloria

Chapter 1

Introduction to Research

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, a remarkable era known as the Second Great Awakening swept across the young nation of America. With fervent revival meetings, dynamic sermons, and spiritual awakenings, this period ignited a flame of religious enthusiasm that spread like wildfire, reshaping the spiritual landscape and sparking a wave of societal reform. However, beyond the excitement of the religious movement lies a hidden story that weaves the tapestry of faith, education, and societal transformation.

Imagine the newly established halls of American universities and colleges during this dynamic era. Amidst the timeless pursuit of knowledge, something profound was unfolding, transcending traditional academia's boundaries. It was a time when the corridors of education echoed not only with scholarly discourse but also with the resounding call for change, progress, and a desire to create a better world. As an awakened religious fervor swirled around churches and communities, it found its way into the very heart of these educational institutions, forging a connection that would forever alter the course of higher education in America. Guided by the Second Great Awakening's sacralized vision and its social reforming ethos, American colleges and graduate schools became catalysts for change, nurturing scholars and visionaries, not just academics but advocates for a more perfect society.

The tale that unfolds within these pages is one of intertwined destinies. It reveals how deep religious convictions, invigorated by revivalism and the desire to create a better world, converged to reshape the spiritual fabric of the American nation and the mission of American higher education. It is a story that sheds light on how educators, students, visionaries, and

reformers were all bound by a common thread of sacred aspirations. This dissertation argues that the confluence of religious fervor and visionary social reform in the American Second Great Awakening catalyzed a profound transformation within American universities and colleges. This transformation positioned these institutions as dynamic agents of progressive social change, aiming to cultivate, equip, and mobilize students to create a better world.

Much of American history has reflected how Christianity impacted and shaped America's founding, growth, and ideology. Religion has been at the heart of the American experience since its beginning. Historians Perry Miller and George McKenna have both detailed how the Puritan colonists that first entered the "new world" believed that they were under a national covenant with God to fulfill a divine mandate, an "errand into the wilderness" bringing forth the promised Kingdom of God, casting a long shadow over American history.[1]

A burgeoning civil religion and public Christianity undergirded early American society. Though not nearly as dogmatic on specific aspects of Christianity as the Puritans, the American founders maintained a strong belief in America's unique place in history as a divine agent for good and a beacon of hope established by an extraordinary Providence. In his book *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism,* George McKenna outlined five specific aspects of the preaching of the Puritans that maintained a significant influence on the American Revolution. These five aspects were: 1) America as the New Israel; 2) an activist Christianity; 3) the need for covenantal faithfulness among the colonists; 4) the battle against the Antichrist; and 5) an anxious

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[1] Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956); George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

introspection.[2] These proponents of an American civil religion thundered from its pulpits and were disseminated widely through revolutionary pamphlets.

This civil religion filled the hearts of revolutionary soldiers, permeated the messages of their chaplains, and fueled the speeches of revolutionary political and military leaders. It provided the transcendent framework that helped define, justify, and launch an armed revolution against the most significant military power of the period with the vision of establishing an American nation. This form of public religion became a central, yet evolving, staple of the early Republic. Jonathan Sassi's *A Republic of Righteousness* (2001) demonstrated how this civil religion thoroughly informed the infant nation's ideology, culture, and policies. Focusing primarily on New England Congregationalism, Sassi explained how the civil religion of the early Republic combined the heritage of a national covenant with elements of republicanism, nationalism, millennialism, and social organicism that remained committed to establishing a righteous community while continually assessing the cosmic meaning of the American engagement.[3]

With the ratification of the Constitution, the newfound religious liberty embraced by Americans led to increased religious proliferation, greatly aided by a new string of revivalism that launched America's Second Great Awakening. This spiritual awakening peaked in the 1830s and 1840s but burned intermittently throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. In the Second Great Awakening, the churches that grew the fastest were those who, as they moved

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[2] George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism,* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 49.

[3] Other major works like Harry Stout's *The New England Soul* (1986)*,* and Mark Hanley's *Beyond a Christian Commonwealth* (1989) all demonstrate the way that this American civil religion undergirded the ideology, culture, and policies of the early republic.

west, abandoned many of their traditional confessions of faith and proved themselves more

willing to adopt whatever tactics were necessary to bring about both the conversions of men and

the essential changes to society that they deemed "sacred causes." As the religion of this new

Great Awakening moved westward, it created a leveling theocracy among the frontier

communities built upon a staunch biblicism while embracing men and women of all colors and

status.[4] Historian Roger Finke described the religion of the nineteenth century in terms of a

religious marketplace. He wrote, "The religion of the unregulated market is of the people, by the

people, and for the people."[5]

Several historians have sought to provide comprehensive interpretations of the Second

Great Awakening's origins and its unique character. The Frontier Thesis of Frederick Jackson

Turner profoundly influenced the earliest scholarship of the movement. Turner proposed that as

Americans moved westward into the undeveloped lands of the frontier, they left behind much of

the existing culture and developed heightened democratic, egalitarian, and individualistic

sentiments that were key in shaping several cultural distinctions that would radically transform

the American Republic.[6] For Turner, the frontier produced a solid and resilient spirit, which grew

to become America's defining character. Many historians of the Second Great Awakening saw

Turner's thesis as a fitting explanation for the unique religious developments the movement

created. In her work *The Great Revival in the West* (1916), Catherine Cleveland described the

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[4] Sam Haselby, "Sovereignty and Salvation on the Frontier of the Early American Republic," *The Past and Present Society,* no. 215 (May 2012): 169.

[5] Roger Finke, "Religious Deregulation: Origins and Consequence," Journal *of Church and State* 32 (Summer 1990): 625.

[6] Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," (A paper read at the meeting of the American Historical Association, Chicago, IL, July 12, 1893).

frontier leaders and developments that drove spiritual transformations and revivals in the Ohio and Cumberland valleys, which bridged the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The impact of the frontier on American Christianity was further echoed a few years later by historian Peter G. Mode, who wrote, "The Christianity of the frontier was to take on the characteristics of its new environment gradually… As the frontier stages begin to pass, American Christianity has vastly changed from what it was before our fathers began to move West."[7] William Warner Sweet, in his work *Revivalism in America* (1944), sought to integrate both the findings of Cleveland and Mode into what he believed provided the precise basis for what led to the extensive revivalism in the West. He noted how the distinctive nature of the West deeply imprinted itself on Western religion, shaping it into a profoundly egalitarian and individualistic movement. He agreed with Cleveland that preachers who characterized this unique brand of Christianity were deeply committed to bringing order to what had been reported back East as a society full of immorality, in desperate need of religious conversion.[8]

Over the next few decades, the Frontier Thesis began to fade as a primary interpretive framework for the developing scholarship of the movement. In his 1964 work, *Protestants and Pioneers,* M. Scott Miyakawa argued against the idea that religious transformations in the West were the product of frontier individualism but rather that of communal organization.[9] Miyakawa's work not only revised the interpretation that the Second Great Awakening was the product of Western individualism but also challenged another thesis that developed in the 1950s

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[7] Peter G. Mode, *The Frontier Spirit in American Christianity,* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), 14.

[8] William Warner Sweet, *Revivalism in America,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 4.

[9] M. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

and became a significant interpretation of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s known as the "Social Control" thesis. Examining both the Eastern and Western movements of the Second Great Awakening, religious historians adopting the Social Control Thesis argued that manipulative ministers with profound political and cultural influence sought to transform America into a benevolent empire.

One of the first major proponents of this view was John Bodo, who, in his 1954 work *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues,* argued that the northern clergy in the Second Great Awakening saw themselves as being tasked as covenant keepers between the civil government and God and as such sought various means to establish their desired views of a theocratic society to bring about the necessary reforms to protect the "American Covenant."[10] Another historian, Charles Foster, argued that what made these reforming ministers different from those who sought social reform in the First Great Awakening was that when their efforts for social reform failed through spiritual means, they had no issue utilizing secular means to advance their sacred causes.[11]

Foster failed to consider that these ministers did not see these other means as "secular." Several key Second Great Awakening ministers like Asa Mahan, Lyman Beecher, Theodore Weld, James B. Finley, and Charles Finney believed all institutions were ultimately derived from God and should be used to advance his sacred purposes. These men had "no issue" using secular

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[10] John Bodo, *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848,* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1954), 5. This argument is carried further in the nature of the reforms found in the Second Great Awakening in Charles Cole, *The Social Ideas of Northern Evangelists, 1826-1860,* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966).

[11] Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1797-1837,* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960). For the inverse of this argument, see J. Thomas Jable, "Aspects of Moral Reform in Early 19th Century Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no. 3 (July, 1978): 344-363.

means because there were no such things as "secular" to them. Based upon their interpretation of passages like Matthew 28:18-20 and Revelation 20:1-6, Christ had received authority over all creation and was recreating it towards millennial glory. Several ministers of the Second Great Awakening saw spiritual revival and social reform as the fundamental principles to promote righteousness in the world, intending to usher in the glorious realities of the millennium and the second coming (*parousia*) of Christ. Politics, environmental stewardship, social benevolence, and education were redefined as sacred causes to establish Christ's Kingdom on earth. In a letter written to her brother, Catherine Beecher described the impact her father's teaching was having on the young men in their community. She wrote:

> The afternoon sermon perfectly electrified me. I wish all young men in the country could hear it… We saw a small specimen of its effect this afternoon when, in playful obedience to some exhortations to a laudable public spirit, a party of our young townsmen turned out to transplant forest trees wherever they are needed through our streets. Father hopes a young men's library will also grow out of it.[12]

Despite the issue of semantics between sacred and secular, social control theorists could look at examples like this and argue that this was a clear-cut case of ministers seeking to regain control of American society to secure its place as a redeemer nation.[13] However, as this dissertation will demonstrate, the evidence points to the conclusion that the ideas of these ministers were less about a desire for "social control" and more about biblical convictions and eschatological expectations.

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[12] "Catherine Beecher to Edward Beecher," July 18, 1824, in *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher,* vol. 2, (Miami, FL: Hardpress, 2017), 94.

[13] Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 25.

Much of the evidence against social control was developed by those who argued that such an interpretive approach did not harmonize with the histories of Southern and Western Protestantism in the Second Great Awakening and that it failed to truly consider the real spiritual goals held by its leading ministers. The first of these significant challenges came from historian Donald G. Mathews, who challenged the social control thesis by arguing that it was best to understand the Second Great Awakening as an "organizing process." In two of his most prominent works, Mathews argued that social and political organizing was the distinguishing mark of the Second Great Awakening. According to Mathews, it is helpful to think of revival "in its social aspects as an organizing process that helped to give meaning and direction to people suffering in various degrees from the social strains of a nation on the move."[14]

One of the critical developments of the Second Great Awakening was the rise and organization of voluntary associations that did not have the traditional restraints of the established church, which became a primary tool used to help offset perceived social injustices and instability. Lois Banner carried this interpretation forward in her article "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation" (1973), which demonstrated that most evangelical ministers had no interest in connecting the church with political authorities but sought to gather people together based on true spiritual motivations.[15] Though Banner makes several key arguments in her article, one weakness is that it fails to consider several vital evangelical leaders who sought to influence and use public policy as one of the significant

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[14] Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 23-43; and also *Religion in the Old South,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

[15] Lois W. Banner "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60, no.1 (June 1973): 27.

factors behind reforming a society. Ironically, proponents of the organizing process thesis find

their view undercut by the same critique they regularly level against the social control thesis.

Both of these interpretive approaches vary based on the regional context under

examination. In the North, revivalism in the Second Great Awakening inaugurated a dominant

voluntaristic social order because, as D.G. Hart states, "the self-discipline of evangelical piety

was more congenial with the emergent industrialism occurring there."[16] This experience differed

in many ways for evangelical Protestants in the South. One particular historical work

demonstrated that in the American South, contrary to both the arguments made by Social Control

and Organizing Process theories, the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening only resulted in

small-scale transformations of individuals and families whose zealous faith often put them at

odds with those around them as they began to reject the standard ways of traditional southern

society.[17]

Despite historical interpretations persistently portraying the Second Great Awakening as a

tool for social control or intentional organization, these views have dominated historical studies

for much of the twentieth century and still shape how historians understand this complex

movement in today's academic research.[18] The challenge with these viewpoints lies not solely in

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[16] D.G. Hart, *The Lost Soul American Protestantism,* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC., 2002), 16.

[17] Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt,* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 26.

[18] For other works that promote the social control theory see: Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War,* 2nd ed., (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980); "The Ohio Valley: Testing Ground for America's Experiment in Religious Pluralism," *Church History* 60, no. 4 (1991): 461-479; and most recently Ryan K. Masters and Michael P. Young, "The Power of Religious Activism in Tocqueville's America: The Second Great Awakening and the Rise of Temperance and Abolitionism in New York State," *Social Science History* 46, no. 3 (2022): 473-504. For works which oppose social control theory and maintain the Second Great Awakening as an organization process see: Mark Noll, "Protestant Theology and Social Order in Antebellum in America," *Religious Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (April, 1982): 133-142; Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement, (*Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

their arguments but in their limitations stemming from the heterogeneous nature of the Second

Great Awakening. The movement exhibited significant regional and denominational variations,

inadequate for any singular, homogenized interpretation. Given these interpretive challenges,

recent historiography has opted for a more nuanced approach, eschewing attempts to encompass

the movement. Instead, scholars have focused on conducting specialized research, examining

specific trends, regions, denominations, ideological developments, and the social repercussions

of the Second Great Awakening.

Numerous studies have emerged, particularly in the history of various American

denominations, shedding significant light on the impact of the Second Great Awakening on

individual religious groups.[19] Additionally, scholarship has ventured into exploring the non-

protestant facets of the movement. A notable example is R. Laurence Moore's *Religious*

Outsiders and the Making of Americans (1986). Moore counters interpretations that perceive the

religion of the Second Great Awakening as a religious consensus, arguing that diversity and

pluralism were not only integral components of the movement but also positive aspects of

American religious development.

In light of Moore's thesis, it is interesting to note that at the height of the Second Great

Awakening, the notions of pluralism and diversity were often at odds with the goals of

evangelical ministers. For instance, Asahel Nettleton, a prominent theologian and evangelist

during the Second Great Awakening, vehemently criticized the practices championed by Charles

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[19] See Keith Harper, ed., *American Denominational History: Perspectives on the Past, Prospects for the Future, (*Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008); Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War,* 2nd ed., (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980); and Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism,* (Grand Rapids, Mi: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989).

Finney and the zealous young ministers who followed him, condemning them as "rash in their

proceedings" and accusing them of slandering faithful ministers as "stupid, dead, and enemies of

revival."[20] Nettleton viewed these non-traditional Christian proponents with lamentation,

believing their emphasis on an experientially-driven religion would lead to long-term religious

disenchantment. Conversely, revivalists held strong opposing views against Nettleton and those

who opposed their "new measures" of revival. This dissertation will demonstrate that it was

educational institutions like Oberlin College, whose non-sectarian forms of revivalism were

significant proponents in promoting pluralism and the gradual development of ecumenism in

American culture.

Further explorations of the Second Great Awakening have argued that it was a product of

the nineteenth-century Market Revolution. An exemplary work in this realm, Paul Johnson's *A

Shopkeeper's Millennium* (1978), contends that the revivals in New York during the 1820s and

1830s were intrinsically connected to the growth of the manufacturing economy. This work is

crucial within the historiography of religion in antebellum America, as it vividly demonstrates

the deep intertwining of economics and politics with religious beliefs and practices.

Another significant contribution is Ernest Lee Tuveson's *Redeemer Nation* (1980), which

explores the enduring impact of millenarianism on the development of American ideology. This

research project further underscores millennialism's central role in motivating nineteenth-century

America's sacralizing and socially reforming impulses. Several other recent historical works have

utilized cultural and social approaches in their methodology for researching the religious history

of antebellum America by examining the lived religion of the nineteenth-century American laity.

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[20] Andrew Bonar and Tyler Bennett, *Asahel Nettleton: Life and Labours,* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), Kindle, Location 3652.

Many of these works detail the overall impact and influence of religious transformation on the day-to-day lives of the American people.[21]

This research project also draws valuable insights from a collection of significant biographical works that illuminate the lives of key figures central to our examination. Among these biographies, several stand out as crucial references for our analysis. Stuart C. Henry's comprehensive biography, *Unvanquished Puritan* (1973), offers a profound exploration of Lyman Beecher's life, shedding light on numerous instances that exemplify the antebellum reformer's unwavering commitment to realizing the union of heaven and earth. John Glitner's singular biography of Moses Stuart represents a vital resource, although further research remains necessary to comprehensively delve into the life and influence of this pivotal figure at Andover.[22] *Passionate Liberator* (1980) by Robert Abzug delves into the life and ideas of Theodore Weld, a central leader in the realm of social reform at both Lane Seminary and Oberlin College. This biography provides invaluable insights into Weld's activism and contributions to shaping the course of American society, particularly in the context of the abolitionist movement. Charles Chester Cole's *Lion of the Forest* (2010) explored one of the key reformers of the Ohio Valley, James B. Finley, his activist impulse, and his "religious war" against alcohol, which would pave the way for the prohibition movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Finally, Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe's work, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American*

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[21] For excellent examples of this see Hadley Kruczek-Aaron, *Everyday Religion: An Archaeology of Protestant Belief and Practice in the Nineteenth Century,* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015); Andrew R.L. Clayton, *The Frontier Republic: Ideology and Politics in the Ohio Country, 1780-1825,* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1986); Steven J. Keillor, *This Rebellious House: American History and the Truth of Christianity,* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996); and Kabria Baumgartner, "Building the Future: White Women, Black Education, and Civic Inclusion in Antebellum Ohio," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 1 (2017): 117-145.

[22] John H. Glitner, *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science in America,,* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1988).

Evangelicalism (1996), not only offers a significant biography of Finney but also delves into the multifaceted ways in which Finney left an indelible mark on the future course of American Christianity. Collectively, these biographical studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the individuals who played pivotal roles in the transformative currents of antebellum America.

Among the remarkable scholarship in religious history in antebellum America, one work stands out as a quintessential synthesis of multiple approaches—Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989). Hatch's opus remains the seminal study of religious history during this era. His primary thesis posits that grassroots populism among American laity represents a pivotal element in comprehending the evolving landscape of American Christianity.[23] By dismantling established church hierarchies and endowing the laity with ecclesiastical authority, Hatch contends that the Second Great Awakening emerged as the most democratic movement in the post-revolutionary period. This democratization spawned several consequential ideological developments in Antebellum America, unleashing seismic shifts across the maturing nation's social, political, and religious realms.

In concert with Hatch's groundbreaking work, two other seminal studies have advanced the narrative of Christianity's "democratization" and its profound impact on nineteenth-century American society. Daniel Walker Howe's *What God Hath Wrought* (2007) and Carl H. Esbeck and Jonathan J. Den Hartog's *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent: Church-State Relations in the New American States, 1776-1833* (2019) meticulously explored how egalitarian and individualistic sentiments, driven by an anti-confessional, anti-traditional, and anti-Calvinist

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[23] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

ethos, wrought a profound transformation in American Christianity, molding it in the image of the people. These seminal works collectively underscore the enduring significance of the democratization of Christianity in shaping the religious landscape of antebellum America.

Other various works in American higher education history have contributed significantly to the academic understanding of this complex field. In the early twentieth century, a pivotal shift occurred in the historiography of American higher education as progressive historians embarked on a journey to broaden the scope of inquiry. Frederick Rudolph's *The American College and University: A History* (1962) is a landmark achievement in this transformation.[24] Rudolph's meticulous scholarship offered an all-encompassing exploration of higher education's evolution as a societal institution. His work transcended the confines of individual colleges and delved into broader themes, such as curricular reform, diversity, and the evolving role of higher education within American society. Simultaneously, Laurence Veysey's *The Emergence of the American University* (1965) and Ellen Lagemann's *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (1989) ushered in a new era of historiographical inquiry.[25] These scholarly contributions focus on the democratization of higher education and the pivotal role these egalitarian shifts have had.

Despite the richness of the historiography of American higher education, the direct exploration of the Second Great Awakening's profound impact on this sphere remains limited. Nevertheless, noteworthy scholars have laid the foundation for understanding the intricate

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[24] Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).

[25] Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Ellen Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

relationship between religious fervor and educational institutions. For instance, Sydney E.

Ahlstrom and Harry S. Stout have underscored this connection, illuminating how the Second

Great Awakening played a pivotal role in shaping these institutions. Their scholarship establishes

a crucial framework for comprehending the intersection of faith and knowledge.[26] Furthermore,

the transformative journey of American universities, as George Marsden elucidates in *The Soul

of the American University*, must be considered.[27] Marsden's work uncovers the evolution of

universities from theological training centers into multifaceted educational institutions with

broader societal objectives, fostering a holistic approach to student development.

A handful of historical studies have explored the role of extra-church institutions in

integrating moral education and civic responsibility within American society. Historians like

Burton J. Bledstein have delved into how universities incorporate moral education into their

curricula, emphasizing the preparation of students for active civic engagement and societal

transformation.[28] Bledstein's research resonates profoundly with the central focus of this

dissertation, which scrutinizes the convergence of faith-based values and educational missions.

Further detailing the complex relationship between religion and education within the nineteenth-

century American context, historians Steven Green and David Komline have produced key

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[26] See Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 132-150; Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); P.C. Kemeny, ed., *Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education,* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013); and James Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop: The Rise of the Modern University,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[27] George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[28] Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1976).

historiographical pieces demonstrating how the notion of public education and common schools were also transformed and developed during this crucial era.[29]

The research problem this dissertation sets out to answer is: How did the fusion of the Second Great Awakening's sacred vision and emphasis on social reform influence the establishment and evolution of higher education institutions in America? In answering this research question, this study aims to contribute to the historiography of the Second Great Awakening and American higher education. It seeks to explore how these institutions evolved from their traditional roles to become catalysts of social change, preparing and sending graduates forth with academic knowledge and a sense of moral responsibility and purpose. This work will demonstrate how the ideals of the awakening transformed American higher education, turning it from mere institutes of intellectual and theological conservation into progressive training areas. On these grounds, educators equipped students intellectually and morally, preparing them to enter all areas of society as agents of change. Examining the impact of the Second Great Awakening's religious fervor on educational institutions enriches the understanding of how faith, social reform, and collegiate education converged during this transformative period in American history.

Before discussing methodology, an explanation of key terms and definitions used throughout this work is appropriate. When using the term "religious," this work adopts the definitions provided by theologian Paul Tillich and sociologist Clifford Geertz. Tillich defined *religion* as one's "ultimate concern," or the complex ideas and beliefs by which one lives

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[29] Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and David Komline, *The Common School Awakening: Religion and the Transatlantic Roots of American Public Schools,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

and cannot surrender easily.[30] In his classic article "Religion as a Cultural System," Geertz calls religion "a system of symbols which act to produce powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations."[31] In the Second Great Awakening, higher education institutions in America took up much of that "ultimate concern," motivating themselves to train up a generation of pupils. These pupils would go forth with the sacred aspiration of transforming the world into a kingdom of righteousness. This project defines that ultimate concern as the "sacralized vision." When the writer refers to "sacralizing," this means the impulse to imbue a person, place, idea, or any other thing with a religious or sacred significance. It involves elevating something to a higher, spiritual plane, often by ascribing divine or moral value to it, to reinforce its importance and foster a sense of reverence or sanctity. Basically put, it refers to the enveloping of anything into the sacred vision or ultimate concern of a person or society.

Renowned sociologist Emile Durkheim is well known for attributing terms like sacred and profane in anthropological and sociological studies. Durkheim argued that these terms categorized social religion, with the sacred representing a society's interests. He contended that anything displaying individuality or rebellion against its norms should be considered profane.[32] While Durkheim's definitions hold value, this study aligns more with traditionally defined categories of historical Christianity when using these terms and categories. This alignment is

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[30] Martin Marty, "Religion," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History,* edited by Joan Shelley Rubin and Scott E. Casper, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[31] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures,* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90.

[32] Mark Anthony G. Moyano, "The Sacred and the Profane in Fr. Andrew M. Greeley's Passover Trilogy," *Journal of Humanistic and Social Studies* 13, no. 1 (2022): 68.

fitting, as it most accurately mirrors the worldview of most Americans during the Second Great Awakening.

This project defines *sacred* as things considered righteous and ascribed with eternal significance. Conversely, *profane* refers to what is considered detrimental and damnable to a person and society. Lastly, *common* pertains to what is traditionally shared by all individuals, irrespective of their religious or non-religious convictions. By the early nineteenth century, much of the common had progressively collapsed into the sacred. This shift is why many universities sought to establish curricula addressing all spheres of American society, far beyond the traditional categories of classical education.

There are numerous underlying questions that this research project will seek to answer. How did the sacralizing ideas of religious fervor during the Second Great Awakening impact the overall mission of American universities and colleges? What changes occurred within the curriculum, pedagogy, and extracurricular activities reflecting the awakening's vision and social reforming influences? How did American universities and colleges align their goals with the broader societal aspirations of achieving a better world during the Second Great Awakening? Which key figures and institutions were pivotal in reshaping the educational landscape to integrate sacralizing and social reforming ideals? How did the transformation of higher education institutes during this era impact the outlook and preparedness of students for their roles in shaping societal progress? What were the challenges and criticisms faced by universities and colleges that embraced the convergence of sacralization and social reform? To what extent did the transformed higher education institutions contribute to the broader goals of achieving a more

equitable and improved society? What enduring legacy of this transformative period in American education remains in contemporary university missions and the broader educational landscape?

Answers to these questions will significantly contribute to the available scholarship on the Second Great Awakening and American higher education. Traditionally serving as centers of intellectual training, these institutions underwent a metamorphosis. Instead of solely imparting knowledge, they began molding students as agents of societal transformation. This study reveals that this evolution marked a seismic shift in the mission of higher education in America. Drawing inspiration from an ever-developing American mythos and other religious ideals rooted in America's earliest history, these institutions introduced curricular reforms that integrated religious and moral education to train students to be missionaries of a sacred cause in all spheres of society. This study's significance becomes even more pronounced when considering the broader societal implications. Graduates of these institutions went on to play pivotal roles in shaping the fabric of American society. Their combined efforts, influenced by the values instilled during the Second Great Awakening, left a lasting imprint on the birth of student-led social justice movements. Perhaps the most significant aspect of this study is that its findings extend beyond historical analysis and provide contemporary reflection as they uncover pedagogical and ideological threads that continue to weave throughout America's religious and educational landscape.

Exploring the transformative interplay between the Second Great Awakening and American higher education demands a qualitative methodological framework that combines meticulous historical research with a nuanced analytical approach. This research will employ a multidisciplinary approach, combining historical analysis, religious studies, sociological

perspectives, and archival research. Through an extensive examination of journals, letters, sermons, institutional records, and educational literature, this research strives to resurrect the voices of revivalists, social reformers, educators, and students who shaped the landscape of American higher education during the Second Great Awakening. This immersion into primary sources enables a deep understanding of the prevailing attitudes, aspirations, and actions integral to the era. A cornerstone of this methodology is the contextual analysis that bridges the domains of faith and education and necessitates a holistic perspective that situates the educational developments within the broader religious and social context of the Second Great Awakening. By tracing the ideological undercurrents that guided religious revivalism and educational transformation, this study seeks to uncover the resonance between spiritual fervor and the evolution of pedagogical missions.

The early nineteenth century saw the proliferation of religious movements and sects during the Second Great Awakening. However, it also witnessed one of the most significant proliferation of American colleges and universities in American history. In his essential work on the history of the American college and university, Rudolph Frederick notes that the American people went into the American Revolution with nine colleges and the Civil War with approximately 250, of which 182 still survive.[33] Though several factors led to the creation of each of these colleges, the visionary and social reforming tendencies of the period led to the fact that each of these colleges embraced the goal of being an agent of social transformation.

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[33] Frederick Rudolph, *American College and University: A History,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 47.

Frederick writes, "All other colleges of the early nineteenth-century America were committed to social needs rather than individual preference and self-indulgence."[34]

This evidence supports just how profound the impact of the sacralizing and reformist tendencies of the Second Great Awakening was on institutions of higher education. Nevertheless, to provide specific examples and demonstrations of how this happened and how these institutions' mission, curricula, and pedagogy were changed, this project will focus the scope of its research on three particular universities created during the Second Great Awakening. Conducting a historical analysis of Andover Theological Seminary, Lane Theological Seminary, and Oberlin College enables one to better and more comprehensively understand the ideals of the Second Great Awakening that impacted differing educational settings. This comparative analysis offers insights into the extent to which these institutions embraced the role of catalysts for change. It will demonstrate how these three colleges, like many others during this period, developed educational philosophies to train generations of students to establish a more perfect society.[35]

This dissertation intends to unveil the intricate connections between religious fervor and the evolution of American higher education. Each chapter weaves together a unique narrative

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[34] Rudolph, *American College and University: A History, 59.*

[35] A number of great works have been written on these three institutions. For major works on Andover Seminary see William H. Sheiler, *A History of the Theological Seminary in Andover*, (Houghton, Mifflin, and Company), 1885; William Adams Brown, *To the Ends of the Earth: A History of the Missions of the Andover-Harvard Theological Library*, (Andover-Harvard Theological Library, 1969); and most recently Sarah E. Drummond, *Faith and Learning: A History of Andover Newton Theological School*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013). For major works on Oberlin College see Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College From its Foundation to then Civil War*, (Oberlin College, 1943); John Barnard, *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism at Oberlin College, 1866-1917*, (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1969); and Geoffrey Blodgett, *Oberlin College: Essays and Impressions*, (Oberlin College, 2006). For seminal works on the history of Lane Seminary see John Vant Stephens, T*he Founding of Lane Seminary*, (Lane Seminary, 1941); Lawrence Thomas Lesick, *The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America*, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980); and Jeff Aupperle, *The Light of Knowledge: How James Bradley and the Lane Rebels Forever Changed American Higher Education,* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021).

while contributing to the comprehensive examination of this project. Chapter two will explore

the origins of the American sacred mythos, tracing its roots from the colonial era until the advent

of the Second Great Awakening. This exploration will provide a foundational understanding of

the historical context and ideological underpinnings that propelled the nation's sacred aspirations

and created its idealistic institutions in the Second Great Awakening. In chapter three, the focus

turns to the Second Great Awakening, a pivotal period that ushered in significant transformations

within the young republic. This movement, characterized by profound spiritual revival and

societal reform, extended its influence to higher education. The chapter reveals how the

sacralized vision and reforming impulse of the Second Great Awakening envisioned universities

as idealistic institutions of social transformation to help catalyze America's sacred destiny.

Institutes of higher education emerged as crucibles of ideological fervor, nurturing a generation

that sought to bring about the millennial kingdom through their commitment to social change.

Subsequent chapters will provide three case studies demonstrating how the Second Great

Awakening profoundly sacralized and reformed higher education institutes, transforming them

into agents of social progress. Chapter four peers into the creation and mission of Andover

Theological Seminary, revealing how the sacralizing and social reforming ideas of the Second

Great Awakening merged to influence the institution's core purpose. The research will

demonstrate how these forces propelled Andover to embrace a mission beyond theological

education. In chapter five, the focus shifts toward Lane Theological Seminary, exploring its birth

and mission within the crucible of religious revivalism. This narrative will underscore how the

ethos of the Second Great Awakening infused Lane with a commitment to nurture graduates who

would not only shape theological discourse but also drive social transformation. An examination

of the Lane Rebels will also demonstrate the growing division that would develop in American society through the ever-increasing expansion of the sacred and the loss of the common. The third and final case study sheds light on Oberlin College, a trailblazing institution that exemplified the synthesis of social reform and education. Here, the study will demonstrate how Oberlin's creation and mission were deeply interwoven with the sacralized ideals of the Second Great Awakening, propelling it to nurture graduates equipped to lead social progress and advocate for universal equality—a mission that still very much underlines the present goals of the majority of America's progressive and liberal institutes of higher education.

In the concluding chapter, the dissertation will weave together the threads of this project, synthesizing the key findings, contributions, and limitations of the study and concluding with a reflection on potential avenues for future research and a final summary of the enduring resonance of the Second Great Awakening's influence on American higher education. This journey will culminate in an understanding of how these historical narratives shape not only our past but also our present and future. With this roadmap in hand, chapter two beckons, ready to illuminate the forging of the American sacred mythos and its role in setting the stage for the transformative power of the Second Great Awakening.

Chapter 2

The Forging of America's Sacred Mythos

Embedded within the fabric of the Second Great Awakening was a profound fusion of religious conviction and national identity, epitomized by the belief in America as a righteous republic, a new Israel,' destined by divine providence to dispense blessings to the world. This sentiment found eloquent expression in the words of Lyman Beecher, a renowned nineteenth-century American pastor and theologian, who proclaimed, "God has favored our nation with prosperity and success because we have been faithful to our divine calling to establish a righteous republic."[1] Beecher and other visionary leaders of the awakening passionately embraced the idea of America as a vessel for divine purpose, ushering in an era of reform and pursuing the establishment of a sacred nation. But the genesis of this vision beckons inquiry.

No historical phenomenon emerges in isolation; hence, it is imperative to recognize that the sacred mythos interwoven into America's identity originated earlier than the nineteenth century.[2] This chapter embarks on an odyssey to uncover the inception of the American mythos, tracing its origins back to the Puritan colonies and following its trajectory until the beginning of the Second Great Awakening. This exploration will not only shed light on the foundational years that gave rise to the American sacred narrative but also provide the context for better understanding the next chapter, which will delve into how the Second Great Awakening, driven by its aspiration to realize the utopian vision inherent in the American mythos, acted as the

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[1] Lyman Beecher, "Sermon on the Duties of Christian Citizens," (New York: American Tract Society, 1835).

[2] For two works that significantly detail the "sacred mythos" intertwined with the birth and establishment of the early American republic see: Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial,* 2nd ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Eran Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War,* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

catalyst for the transformation of American higher education into idealistic institutions of social change.

A Covenantal People

When men and women came to America on the Mayflower in the 1630s, they did not merely seek to escape religious persecution and establish a pure model of Christian community. They would be a "city set upon a hill," which would either be of great blessing or great embarrassment depending on whether or not these "poor exiles of Christ" remained faithful to their Lord.[3] In much of their theocratic governance, the colonial Puritans saw New England's relationship with God as a covenantal one. They thus framed themselves as a New Israel, whose "holy land was entitled to God's special protection."[4] The earliest colonial documents, like Connecticut's Fundamental Orders, were all structured in terms that stressed the belief in this covenantal relationship. Like the Mosaic Covenant given to Israel, these Puritans saw their covenantal duty as one of faith, submission, and obedience to obtain God's blessings. *The Mayflower Compact,* one of their earliest documents, reveals this covenantal language. It reads:

> Having undertaken, *for the Glory of God, and advancements of the Christian faith*, and the honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do by these presents, solemnly and mutually, i*n the presence of God, and one another; covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic*; for our better ordering, and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid; and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame, such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions, and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and

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[3] Steven J. Keillor, *This Rebellious House: American History and the Truth of Christianity,* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 61.

[4] George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism,* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2007), 32.

convenient for the general good of the colony; u*nto which we promise all due submission and obedience.*[5]

Several Puritan documents emphasized this covenantal mandate for these "poor exiles," but their preaching was the most significant promoter of it. John Winthrop first articulated this covenantal framing of their mission in the New World in his sermon "A Model of Christian Charity." In it, Winthrop exhorts his listener,

> Thus stands the cause between God and us: we are entered into a covenant with Him for this work. We have taken out a commission. Now, if the Lord shall please to hear us and bring us in peace to the place we desire, then has He ratified this covenant and sealed our commission, [and] will expect a strict performance of the articles contained in it.[6]

In 1670, the minister Samuel Danforth exemplified this form of covenantal preaching in his sermon "A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness." In this sermon, he proclaimed, "Now let us sadly consider whether our ancient and primitive affections to the Lord Jesus, his glorious Gospel, his pure and Spiritual Worship and the Order of his House, remain, abide and continue firm, constant, entire and inviolate…Wherefore let us call to remembrance the former days and consider whether it was not then better with us than it is now."[7]

For Danforth and so many other New England ministers, it was vital that the covenant people not forget their great "errand in the wilderness." Like the Old Testament Prophet Jeremiah, Puritan leaders believed it was their duty to call the people to hold fast in covenant faithfulness lest they lose their place as God's chosen people the same way, many argued, Old Testament Israel had. These "prophetic" messages took the fitting title of "Jeremiads." They

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[5] *The Mayflower Compact, (*November 11, 1620), https://www.history.com/topics/colonial-america/mayflower-compact, (Emphasis mine).

[6] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," (1630), accessed August 8, 2023. http://www.john-uebersax.com/pdf/John%20Winthrop%20-%20Model%20of%20Christian%20Charity%20v1.01.pdf

[7] Samuel Danforth, *A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness,* Cambridge, Massachusetts, (1670), accessed February 27, 2020. http://greatawakeningdocumentary.com/items/show/9

would remain a significant rhetorical method American preachers and politicians used throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The covenantal framework and the analogy of New England being a New Israel persisted across subsequent generations. These preachers continued to build upon the sacralizing traditions of their predecessors, elevating them to the status of spiritual heroes akin to figures from the Old Testament or early Christianity. For instance, consider Cotton Mather's portrayal of John Winthrop in his biography, titled "The American Nehemiah." Mather writes of Winthrop, "When the Noble Design of carrying a Colony of Chosen People into an American Wilderness, was by some Eminent Persons undertaken, this Eminent Person was, by the Consent of all, Chosen for the Moses, who must be the Leader of so great an Undertaking."[8] Many colonial founders reimagined numerous other colonial founders through the prism of biblical luminaries such as Moses, Aaron, and Joshua. These leaders served as timeless exemplars of covenant faithfulness, guiding future generations with their examples.

Many Americans also reinterpreted significant events and calamities in sacred and primitivist terms, seeing them as outcomes of God's covenantal blessing or judgment. Echoing the covenants of the Old Testament, the logical conviction prevailed that covenantal obedience was most fervent during its inception but would gradually erode across successive generations, necessitating eventual renewal. Consequently, when seasons of perceived spiritual decline or natural disaster swept through the colonies, many ministers directed their accusations toward the younger generation, attributing their perceived lack of covenant faithfulness and purity.

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[8] Cotton Mather, *Nehemias Americanus: The Life of John Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts Colony,* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, 1698), 3, http://matherproject.org/sites/default/files/Nehemias_Americanus.pdf

Regardless of whether or not these young people had ever converted or joined the church, it became the prominent belief that being born into the New England community made them "a part of its promises and conditions."[9] Being a New Englander was equated to being part of the covenant people of God during this era. This worldview laid the foundation for a unique concept known as the "halfway covenant," which quickly surfaced as a contentious issue. Promoting this idea marked one of the initial instances where the expansion of the sacred gave rise to social division and conflict.

Passed by a Congregationalist synod in 1662, the 'Halfway Covenant" emerged as a pragmatic response to the evolving landscape of religious affiliation and participation within New England society, particularly concerning subsequent generations of colonists. As successive generations unfolded, the ardor and zeal of the initial settlers began to wane. The foundational principles of a closely knit, spiritually committed community encountered challenges due to shifts in demographics, a rise in secular influences, and changing societal dynamics. The prevailing notion of inheriting covenantal membership from birth, integral to the American sacred mythos, prompted deliberation about the status of individuals who had not experienced a personal religious conversion or a "conversion experience."[10]

The halfway covenant emerged as a middle-ground solution to address this predicament. It permitted individuals baptized as infants but not yet converted to attain partial church membership. While the church barred them from participating in the Lord's Supper or engaging in church governance, they could still have their children baptized and participate to a limited

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[9] Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism,* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 316.

[10] Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 95.

extent in the religious community.[11] This compromise aimed to stave off the erosion of the spiritual community while acknowledging the realities posed by a growing population whose adherence to the passionate religious beliefs of their forefathers had begun to wane.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the halfway covenant engendered a profound schism within New England society. It instigated a divide between those advocating for a more inclusive approach to preserving the societal piety of the early Puritans and those asserting that full church membership should be exclusive to the "visible saints" who had undergone a genuine conversion.[12] This division extended beyond theological debates, penetrating the social fabric with more profound ramifications. It epitomized a broader social cleavage between those steadfast in upholding stringent spiritual traditions and those acknowledging the necessity to adapt to the transforming religious and social milieu.

These tensions culminated in the fragmentation of New England's unity, fostering the emergence of discrete religious and social factions. Tensions over this issue led even the great Jonathan Edwards to be removed from his pastorate after he sought to abandon the halfway covenant and return to a model of regenerate membership and closed communion.[13] This schism significantly departed from the initial cohesion fostered by the fervent ideals of the American sacred mythos, foreshadowing future divisions resulting from efforts to protect, redefine, or expand it.

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[11] Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America, 96.*

[12] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 245.

[13] Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,1969), 13-20.

As the eighteenth century progressed forward, the covenantal framework of the American colonies began to blend various concepts of Revivalist, Republican, Biblicist, and Millenarian ideologies. This unique blend of ideologies gave a language to reconcile the profound establishment of a modern republican experiment supported by a biblically articulated justification for its existence. As one leading historian argues, America was to be more than just a "city upon a hill." It was to become a "redeemer nation."[14] However, before its war for independence and founding, two significant events in the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century expanded the American mythos even further—the First Great Awakening and the French and Indian War.

A Millennial Harbinger

The First Great Awakening was a transatlantic movement that swept through the British Isles and American colonies, reaching its peak in the 1740s. This profound revival movement wrought profound changes in religious practices, fostering fervent personal piety among individuals. Before the awakening, religious adherence often leaned towards formalism and routine, focusing on outward displays of faith. However, this spiritual awakening prioritized a more emotional and personal connection to spirituality. Evangelists like George Whitefield and Jonathan Wesley ignited a passion for individual salvation and direct communion with God.

This transformative emphasis on the individual radically reoriented the notion of sacred space, taking it from the sanctuary and placing it in the self. It was in this movement, historian Douglas A. Sweeney argues, that the American Evangelical was born.[15] The title Evangelical

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[14] Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

[15] Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 27.

comes from the Greek *euangelion,* translated as "good news" or "the gospel." Perhaps the best-known description of these "gospel people" was put forth by historian David Bebbington, who argued that evangelicals share four key tenants despite their diversity. The four tenants of evangelicalism, Bebbington argues, are:

1. Conversionism - that saving faith is accompanied by a changed life.
2. Activism - that genuinely changed lives desire to better the lives of others.
3. Biblicism - that the Christian life must be built on the authority of the Bible.
4. Crucicentrism - that the Christian life must emphasize, above all else, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for sinners.[16]

These key characteristics were front and center in the new revivalistic preaching that drove the First Great Awakening.

Unlike its nineteenth-century successor, the revival movement was strongly Calvinistic, emphasizing God's sovereignty over human affairs. The notable exception to this was the Wesleys, who held to a more Arminian theology that favorably embraced the autonomy and free will of the individual. The doctrine of original sin was vital to the revivalist concept of the New Birth.[17] This doctrine posits that the entire human race stood condemned and depraved because of Adam's fall. Ministers of the Great Awakening directed their rhetoric towards each listener with messages that almost univocally declared the threat of damnation for sin, with the only hope of salvation being that of a new life given by God's grace through saving faith in Christ alone.

No longer was one's salvation based upon having believing parents or being a part of the "covenantal people"; one had to be "born again." Moreover, this preaching of the New Birth found its ultimate champion in George Whitefield. Whitefield preached that "many have been

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[16] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s,* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2-3.

[17] Lisa Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial Newspapers: A Shifting Story*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2021), 27.

quickened and awakened to see that religion does not consist in outward things but in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.[18] He joined the Wesley brothers and numerous other itinerant ministers who preached up and down the American colonies.

These preachers of the First Great Awakening conveyed salvation and new birth throughout the British-American colonies. Reporting on the movement, Benjamin Franklin noted in his *Pennsylvania Gazette*:

> The alteration in the face of religion here is altogether surprising. Never did people show so great a willingness to attend sermons, nor did the preachers have greater zeal and diligence in performing the duties of their function. Religion has become the subject of most conversations. No books are in request but those of piety and devotion, and instead of idle songs and ballads, the people are everywhere entertaining themselves with Psalms, hymns, and Spiritual songs.[19]

During the Great Awakening, preachers addressed large crowds, often in open settings, without concerning themselves with denomination or ethnicity in most cases. This egalitarian approach to preaching laid the foundation for burgeoning notions of equality for all. Each individual confronted the potential torments of hell, necessitating hearing the salvation message, thus arguing for the equality of all men (at least in a spiritual sense) before God. Beyond promoting profound egalitarian individualism, the First Great Awakening eroded traditional hierarchical and authoritative structures while also initiating the process of uniting colonialists under a shared civil religion.

Before the emergence of the First Great Awakening, the American colonies were a diverse amalgamation of religious convictions. The New England Colonies upheld a resolute

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[18] George Whitefield, *The Journals of George Whitefield*, (Carlisle, PA: Tuxedo Press, 1960), 344-45.

[19] Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin,* vol. 2, edited by Leonard W. Labaree, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 287-288.

Calvinist-Puritan heritage that birthed the American Covenantal mythos. In contrast, Rhode

Island and Pennsylvania embodied a more pluralistic ethos, with their legal provisions for

religious liberty and pluralism foreshadowing the future fabric of America. Nevertheless, even

within these pluralistic and often quietistic colonies, numerous religious leaders embraced a

belief in the sacred destiny of the American colonies. William Penn, for instance, articulated

America's sacred destiny as an integral facet of God's grand design, a chapter in the unfolding of

the "5th Kingdom or glorious Day of Christ."[20]

In the Southern colonies, many Christians maintained ties to the Church of England,

except for growing evangelical groups like Baptists and Methodists. Despite these distinct

traditions and cultural landscapes, the First Great Awakening began to stir sentiments that

transcended regional boundaries, stirring a conviction that these colonies held a unique and

divine purpose. The awakening's fervor ignited throughout the colonies, kindling the belief that

God's unique design was manifesting through the revival's fiery spread. No one championed

these sentiments more ardently than Jonathan Edwards in this context.

Multiple historians regard Jonathan Edwards as the preeminent American theologian and

a leading apologist for the Great Awakening. He emerged from a lineage of illustrious New

England ministers, including his grandfather Solomon Stoddard and his father Timothy Edwards.

Edwards showcased his intellectual prowess early in life, displaying an insatiable thirst for

knowledge.[21] Following a distinguished academic journey at Yale, Edwards assumed the role of

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[20] William Penn to Thomas Janney, August 21, 1681, in *The Papers of William Penn,* vol. 2, edited by Richard S. Dunn and Mary Maples Dunn, (Philadelphia, 1982), 106.

[21] See for Instance Mark A. Noll, *The History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 95; Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story,* ((Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 47-48; Edwin Guastad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America,* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002), 58.

assistant pastor in his grandfather's Northampton church. At a mere twenty-five years of age, upon his grandfather's passing, he stepped into the mantle of lead pastor. Edwards's significance as a transitional figure in the eighteenth-century American colonies was palpable, expertly harmonizing traditional Calvinist-Puritan theology with Evangelical piety and practice.

Edwards managed to strike a delicate balance—defending the revivals as a "surprising work of God" while simultaneously critiquing the excesses within the movement.[22] He contended that authentic revival gave rise to genuine religious affections, which, in turn, materialized through acts of godliness. His acute ability to discern the nuances within the Great Awakening gave him a role both as a proponent and a critical observer. However, Edwards's excitement over the unfolding events was not solely rooted in the revival's resurgent impact on Christianity. Beyond the burgeoning spiritual enthusiasm, he perceived America as a harbinger of the forthcoming Christian millennium in the Great Awakening. This conviction went beyond the immediate excitement, encapsulating a profound eschatological underpinning.

In Christian theology, eschatology refers to "the study of the last things" and is often connected with the "end times" or the "last days." The doctrine of the millennium refers to the belief in an era of profound peace, prosperity, and spiritual renewal associated with the rule and reign of Christ, often connected with the expectation of his second coming or *parousia* and the subsequent creation of a new heaven and earth. Based on various interpretations of Revelation 20:4, this rule and reign are said to last a thousand years, hence the title "millennium."

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[22] Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada,* 95-96.

The three primary interpretations of the millennium are premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism.[23] Premillennialism suggests that Christ's second coming will occur before the literal thousand-year reign. It foresees a period of continual tribulation for believers, followed by the return of Christ to establish his millennial kingdom on earth. A number of the apostolic fathers (second-century AD) espoused this view as they endured immense persecution, fervently anticipating the imminent return of Christ. As the return of the Lord tarried, and trials and tribulations persisted, the amillennial perspective—most notably expounded by Augustine in the fifth century AD—ascended to prominence, serving as the prevailing interpretive framework within the church for the subsequent twelve centuries. Diverging from a literal interpretation of the thousand years described in Revelation 20, the Amillennial viewpoint regards the millennium as a symbolic representation of the entire expanse between Christ's first and second comings. According to this view, Christ's kingdom is already spiritually present within the hearts of believers and the church community, with its ultimate consummation awaiting his return.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, however, a new interpretation developed through the studies of one of the great Church of England scholars of the period, Joseph Mede. Departing from traditional Augustinian presuppositions, Mede, in his examinations of the Old Testament prophets, argued that these prophets presented a kingdom fulfilled in an actual historical kingdom—a city of God where the entire human race would ultimately dwell, ensuing within this present age.[24] All of human history, Mede argued, was a story of God's redemption in Christ progressively overcoming evil until righteousness would inevitably cover the earth

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[23] The writer fully understands the intricacies and nuances that are often necessary when discussing theological interpretation, however, these three interpretations of the millennium establish the overarching umbrellas by which most other eschatological interpretive approaches fall.

[24] Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation,* 29.

through the influence of the gospel and the spread of Christianity. When Christ returns, he will return to an already established millennial kingdom, hence the title "postmillennial" given to Mede's position.

This postmillennial view led Edwards and many of his fellow eighteenth-century American theologians to embrace it fully. Writing on the gradual nature of the eventual victory of Christ within history, Edwards declared, "The prophets have assured us that God by every step advances [Christ's Kingdom] still higher and higher till at length it is fully set up, and Satan perfectly and eternally vanquished."[25] The First Great Awakening, marked by its transformative spiritual and social impacts, kindled the belief among Edwards and his contemporaries that America might serve as the harbinger of this millennial kingdom's inception. With its vibrant religious revival and renewed devotion to faith, the awakening appeared to be "preparing the way for the future glorious times of the church," aligning harmoniously with the anticipated era of spiritual triumph.[26] Historian Ruth Bloch has noted how widespread these eschatological expectations permeated throughout the colonies in the 1740s and remained until the end of the century. In her work, *Visionary Republic,* she writes:

> The religious enthusiasm of the 1740s had spread millennial hopes throughout the colonies and had drawn attention to a general perspective on history that did not necessarily depend for its appeal on participation in the evangelical movement. Many moderate Calvinist or liberal clergymen who in the 1740s had not partaken in the millennial euphoria of the New Lights nevertheless felt more free, even eager, to express their own millennial ideas after the revivals subsided than they had been before the revivals began.[27]

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[25] Jonathan Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, vol. 3 (New York, 1830), 168.

[26] Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, 376.

[27] Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800,* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 23.

The ardent currents of the First Great Awakening, characterized by its resounding proclamation of America's potential role as a harbinger of the millennial kingdom, exerted a profound influence on the social ethos and beliefs regarding civic responsibility within the American colonies. Respected historians like Mark Noll, Nathan Hatch, and George Marsden suggest that the New Lights, represented by figures such as Whitefield, Edwards, and Wesley, started by promoting a Puritan message focused on personal salvation. However, their intense focus on evangelical efforts inadvertently weakened the Puritan sociopolitical structure aimed at creating a united community.[28]

While the First Great Awakening undoubtedly ushered in various social transformations, the historical evidence suggests that the emphasis on personal salvation and individual conversion did not ultimately undermine the revivalists' overarching objectives of uniting the American colonies into a pure covenantal commonwealth. Instead, they perceived the revivals as a necessary catalyst for effecting the spiritual and social changes essential to establishing such a community. As hearts were transformed, lives would follow suit, and the tangible fruits of these transformed lives would be visibly manifested through concerted social action.

As the First Awakening swept through communities, it instilled a renewed sense of personal accountability and collective duty. The religious voluntarism and social reform efforts of the First, though paling in comparison to the Second Great Awakening, very much broke the ground for social activism and reform, particularly regarding the treatment of enslaved African Americans and Native Americans. Unfortunately, these progressive movements would lose much of their steam because of the two major wars of the eighteenth century until they were rekindled

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[28] Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, George M. Marsden, *The Search for a Christian America,* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 60.

and amplified in the nineteenth century. Particular American religious groups like the Quakers and Methodists had begun to lead the charge for a transatlantic advocacy movement that would eventually lead to the abolition of slavery in Britain. Many historians have argued that the push for British abolitionism owes much of its origin to Christian leaders of the Great Awakening who witnessed the horrific practices of slavery in the American South.[29]

Along with these social movements, the Great Awakening also produced a greater interest in education, which led to the creation of several noteworthy colleges during the period— Princeton by the Presbyterians (1746), Brown by the Baptists (1760), Rutgers (formerly Queens College) by the Dutch Reformed (1764), and Dartmouth by the Congregationalists (1769).[30] Christian social activists regularly manifest their commitment through establishing educational institutes, and these colleges and universities purposefully aligned their mission with the goals of the movements that brought them into existence. The subsequent chapters of this dissertation will demonstrate this correlation.

The emerging social ethos of spiritual awakening found a poignant crucible in the French and Indian War (1754-1763). The French and Indian War was the most extensive and costly of the British imperial wars waged intermittently with France throughout the eighteenth century. The conflict, borne of imperial ambitions and fierce territorial disputes, thrust the American colonies into a harrowing struggle for survival. However, the seeds sown by the Great Awakening were now bearing fruit as individuals and communities grappled with questions of moral obligation, civic duty, and national purpose. The awakening's influence on civic

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[29] Huw T. David, "Transnational Advocacy in the Eighteenth Century: Transatlantic Activism and the Anti-Slavery Movement," *Global Networks* 7, no. 3, (July, 2007): 381.

[30] Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, George M. Marsden, *The Search for a Christian America,* 52.

responsibility manifested in various ways during the war. Communities engaged in fervent

prayer and collective fasting and sought divine intervention and guidance in the face of adversity.

The emphasis on personal transformation and communal unity spurred individuals to contribute

actively to the war effort, whether through volunteering for military service, supporting soldiers

and their families, or aiding in logistics and supplies. They were motivated not solely by national

interest but by a profound conviction that intricately linked their endeavors to God's overarching

plan for the British Colonies.[31]

In his *Observations on the Province of Georgia*, Whitefield underscored the spiritual

significance of the conflict. He identified the ongoing hostilities as a divinely ordained struggle,

proclaiming, "God Himself is now fighting for the British subjects," emphasizing the colonists as

participants in a divine mission.[32] Following the Edwardsian tradition, New Light minister

Samuel Davies framed the conflict between the Protestant British empire and the Catholic

French in terms that only describe a holy war. He referred to the war as "the commencement of

the grand decisive conflict between the Lamb and the beast" and stated that it would produce

nothing less than "a new heaven and a new earth."[33] Anti-Catholic sentiment remained

prominent, as most Protestants still revered the Pope as "anti-Christ."

The early years of the conflict did not bode well for the British, but with the fall of

Quebec in 1759, the appeals of eschatological hope loomed large once again. Such a shift in

eschatological conviction among the American populace has remained common throughout its

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[31] Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism,* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 268.

[32] George Whitefield, "Observations on the Province of Georgia," quoted in Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 266.

[33] Samuel Davies*, The Crisis, in Sermons on Important Subjects, vol.5, (Philadelphia, 1818), 257-258.*

history, as current events often provoke novel interpretations of the "end of days" more than does

the practice of biblical exegesis. In 1760, the British expelled the French from Canada, and by

1763, Prussia had either negotiated separate peace agreements with or defeated all of France's

European allies. In February of 1763, the Treaty of Paris was signed, officially ending the war

and confirming the British victory. Many American colonists saw the victory as another

guarantee of God's sacred destiny for the English nation. Anglican minister East Apthorp

interpreted the British victory as evidence that God had appointed the English nation to use its

"influence and example" to spread "the blessings of humanity, freedom, and religion"

worldwide.[34] The Protestant colonies saw this as a victory, not simply over France, but of light

over "popish darkness" and the "Beast of Revelation."

<div align="center">A Righteous Republic</div>

Great expectations were on the horizon; many believed that with the defeat of Catholic

France, several glorious realities would soon begin unfolding—an increase in virtue,

responsibility, and morality throughout the colonies. There were great hopes that missions to the

Native Americans would thrive with Catholic influence removed. In the 1760s, American

publishers proliferated several prophetic pamphlets with one great theme: "The Kingdom of God

is at hand."[35] Nevertheless, rather than seeing this tremendous increase in virtue and morality,

many colonial clerics began to call out what they saw as a tragic increase in immorality.

Many of these men, who served as chaplains in the war effort, argued that the British

"Regulars," assigned to the colonies, displayed the most egregious behaviors. John Cleveland,

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[34] East Apthorp, *The Felicity of the Times,* (Boston, 1763), 29.

[35] Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800, 46.*

who had been a chaplain to Massachusetts' Third Regiment, argued that the "naturalized language" of these Regulars was the "most profane of swearing" and listed their most common activities as "gaming, robbery, thievery, whoring, and bad company-keeping."[36] This indictment may seem like simply the words of an uptight minister quarreling against the activities of young men, but this was the beginning of much more.

In the mid-1760s, Britain attempted to exert tighter political and economic control over America by increasing taxes to repay the substantial debt incurred during the war effort. The British government saw this as a fair trade-off for the protection they provided for the colonists, but the colonists did not see it this way. They soon began to argue that the immoral behavior demonstrated by these British regulars merely reflected the progressive degeneration of British society. If the colonial people were to fulfill their sacred destiny truly, it would mean liberating themselves from their mother country, which they argued was growing more corrupt and tyrannical in its actions.

On the fourteenth day of February in 1766, a group of men gathered in Boston as an act of defiance against the Stamp Act. This act was the first internal tax levied directly on American colonists by taxing all printed materials. These men gathered under the motto '*pro-patria*' (for the country) and took the name Sons of Liberty for themselves. As they gathered around a speaker, the speech was not one of political strategy or English common law; instead, it was much more sermonic. The orator lambasted two specific royal ministers of the British Parliament who were vital in passing the new legislation as the two beasts of Revelation. Carrying this apocalyptic rhetoric throughout the message, the speaker urged his audience, "I beseech you then

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[36] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 201.

to beware as good Christians and lovers of your country, lest by touching any paper with this impression, you receive the mark of the beast and become infamous in your country throughout all generations."[37] Tensions grew between American colonists and the British government over the next nine years.

Since its inception, people referred to the colonies as "British Israel." However, on the eve of the Revolution, the colonists believed the British monarchy had aligned itself more closely with the biblical Antichrist, becoming an idol and necessitating destruction. As early as 1687, the Rev. John Wise of Massachusetts was already teaching that "taxation without representation is tyranny," that the "consent of the governed" was the foundation of government, and that "every man must be acknowledged as equal to every man."[38] Many great themes began to develop out of the messages of patriot preachers.

For many of these clergy, the struggle for independence represented a necessary stride toward America's millennial destiny. In his 1776 sermon on "The Church's Flight into the Wilderness," Samuel Sherwood examined the prophecies in the Book of Revelation. He concluded that American Christians were the "church in the wilderness," nurtured in a faraway hiding place and raised to battle and defeat Antichrist.[39] He went on to liken how England's monarch, King George III, had assumed many of the beast's characteristics from Revelation 13. He was not alone in this kind of rhetoric; one contributor to the New York Journal in 1775 warned George III, if he refused to give America its independence, that "an arbitrary, cruel spirit

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[37] *A Discourse, Addressed to the Sons of Liberty, Ata Solemn Assembly, near Liberty-Tree, in Boston, February 14, 1766,* (Providence, 1766), 5-6.

[38] Franklin Cole, *They Preached Liberty,* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1941), 41.

[39] Quoted in Franklin Cole, *They Preached Liberty,* 17.

of tyranny" makes "kings like unto 'the great dragon, which is the devil and Satan,' the grand

tyrant of hell."[40]

Pastor Abraham Keteltas carried the theme of America as God's new Israel in his 1777

sermon, "God Arising and Pleading his People's Cause." In this sermon, Keteltas argues that the

cause of God is the liberty of his people and that he actively works, promotes, and defends any

nations that work to champion the cause of liberty.[41] God had birthed America for the particular

purpose of establishing liberty and freedom for the world. Freedom was a necessary prerequisite

for the age of glory to come.

During the American Revolution, the process of sacralizing American identity, its

leaders, and its destiny underwent a significant expansion. This transformation drew inspiration

from the archetype of latter-day Israel, as ideological leaders during the Revolutionary War

frequently turned to the language and promises of the Old Testament to underscore their message

to the American people. When writing of the importance of the selection of George Washington

as leader of the Continental Army, the renowned pastor Ezra Stiles said of him, "He is the

American Joshua, of whom the eyes of all Israel are placed."[42] This redefinition of the American

colonies' purpose and destiny became a consistent theme, resonating through various forms of

rhetoric to rally support for the cause of independence.

No sacred narrative was more important to the revolutionary cause than the Exodus

account. Moses led the Israelites, who had risen from the shackles of Egyptian bondage, to

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[40] Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800,* 60.

[41] Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*, vol. 1, (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Incorporated, 1998) , 299.

[42] Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor,* (New Haven, 1783), 37.

escape Pharaoh and his army. For revolutionary leaders, the Exodus demonstrated that God was a Republican god of liberty who crushed the rule of tyrants.[43] Numerous references to the tyrannical English "Pharaoh" and his Israelite-American subjects-turned-enemies during the Revolution attest how Americans so profoundly resonated with the belief that they were the latter-day Israel and God had a sacred destiny for them. No literary work manifested this better than Timothy Dwight's epic and metaphoric poem *The Conquest of Canaan* (1785), which he dedicated to the American Moses: George Washington. Dwight, seeking to arouse the American cause, wrote:

> Stand still, ye chosen sons, admiring stand!
> Behold, what awful sense in heaven arise!
> Adore the power that brightens the skies!
> Now God's tremendous arm asserts his laws;
> Now bids his thunder aid the righteous cause;
> Unfolds how Virtue saves her chosen bands,
> And points the vengeance doom'd for guilty lands.[44]

This manner of sacralizing the American cause using religious rhetoric was adopted by American politicians and pro-revolutionary ideologues, as evidenced by revolutionary pamphlets. Through public fast-day proclamations, the Continental Congress "utilized the language of American providentialism" to make the defeat of Britain "synonymous with the moral redemption of mankind."[45] Even the more enlightened revolutionaries, like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, imagined the revolution as an Exodus-like deliverance from slavery, as evident in their proposals for the American Great Seal in 1776. This sacred rhetoric,

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[43] Shalev, *American Zion: The Old Testament as a Political Text from the Revolution to the Civil War,* 20.

[44] Timothy Dwight, *The Conquest of Canaan,* (1785), Book V, ll. 1019-1024.

[45] Roberto Oscar Flores De Apodaca, "Praying Soldiers: How Continental Soldiers Experienced Religion During the Revolutionary War, 1775-1783," *Early American Studies* 20, no. 3 (Summer, 2002), 445.

adopted and embraced by several revolutionary leaders, was influenced by much of their Whiggish ideology. These leaders believed that failure in the war would result in tyranny driving liberty from the earth, and the citizens who lacked sufficient virtue to arise in defense of their rights would find themselves enslaved and reduced to the most abject moral and physical condition.

The convergence of diverse strains of biblical literalism, millennial vision, and republican ideology melded into a distinctive facet of American revolutionary consciousness. In this convergence, the sacred was seamlessly intertwined with the secular, as demonstrated by the declarations of the newly formed Continental Congress, which often alluded to biblical prophecy in their visions of bringing about "the golden period, when liberty, with all the gentle arts of peace and humanity, shall establish her mild dominion… that latest period, when the streams of time shall be absorbed in the abyss of eternity."[46] Similarly, several other American ideological leaders adeptly harnessed religious rhetoric like that reverberating within American pulpits to convey their messages with heightened resonance. Two notable examples of sacred rhetoric in secular works include Tom Paine's *Common Sense* and Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech.

Common Sense is one of the most notable publications in American history. Paine, though a critic of the Bible himself, heavily relied on biblical allusions and direct quotations from the Bible to appeal to the predominant worldview of the period. Historian Robert Middlekauff refers to Paine's pamphlet as "a sermon disguised as a political tract."[47] One of the main points in

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[46] Continental Congress, *The Suffolk Resolves,* (September 9, 1774), https://corpora.tika.apache.org/base/docs/govdocs1/184/184231.pdf

[47] Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3.

"Common Sense" was Paine's assertion that hereditary monarchies were inherently flawed and that a republic was a more just and equitable form of government. To provide evidence for this claim, Paine appeals to the biblical character Gideon and his words that he would not be a king to Israel because "The Lord shall rule over you" (Judges 8:23). Paine comments on this passage, "Words need not be more explicit; Gideon doth not decline the honor but denieth their right to give it; neither doth he compliment them with invented declarations of his thanks, but in the positive style of a prophet, he charges them with disaffection to their proper sovereign, the King of Heaven."[48]

Paine denounced the monarchy's arbitrary rule and highlighted people's will as the proper force of government. Paine's argument resonated deeply with the colonists, who were growing increasingly disillusioned with British rule and eager to embrace a new vision of self-governance. The American nation could only have one king: God. Patrick Henry, a much more avowed Christian, used less direct Biblical quotations in his speech than Paine did. Nevertheless, the great orator of the Revolution still drove home the belief that God was on the side of the Americans. In his grand speech, Henry declared, "There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations and will raise friends to fight our battles for us."[49]

The supporters of the Revolution believed that the significance of the American Revolution extended beyond its impact on America alone; it held the promise of positively influencing the entire human race. The argument asserted that the American nation would catalyze the advancement of its sacred ideals of freedom and righteousness worldwide. This

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[48] Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, (1776), 54, https://www.sjsu.edu/people/ruma.chopra/courses/H174_MW_F12/s1/Wk7_A.pdf

[49] Patrick Henry, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death, (1775), 2, https://liberalarts.utexas.edu/coretexts/_files/resources/texts/1775%20Patrick%20Henry%20Liberty%20or%20Death.pdf

sentiment brought together elements of both nationalism and universalism, creating a unique

blend that resembled a form of passive political messianism. This perspective suggested that

American principles, rather than brute power, would ultimately triumph globally.[50] White

Colonial Protestants were not alone in this hope; many African Americans also believed that an

American victory in the Revolution, with its message of freedom and equality, would also extend

to embrace them.

Jupiter Hammon, an erudite former slave, absorbed the politically charged Christian

discourse of the Revolutionary era. He skillfully utilized it to evangelize his fellow African

Americans and enlighten them about what he perceived as God's divine role in shaping a "new

and glorious nation."[51] Hammon's extraordinary oratory skills shone through his evangelical

writings, blending colonial Puritans' covenantal rhetoric, the Great Awakening's evangelical

foundation, and the zealous patriotism and nationalism evident in other Revolutionary sermons.

Two of his pivotal letters, "A Winter's Piece" and "An Evening Improvement," encapsulated all

three concepts.

In these written works, Hammon implored his fellow African Americans to transcend

their dire circumstances. He advocated that through moral and spiritual rejuvenation, they could,

alongside white Americans, claim their rightful place as self-governing and vital members of the

nascent American society.[52] Hammon envisioned that the advent of the American nation,

alongside its hallowed principles, would dissolve the divides that once separated colonial

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[50] Bloch, *A Visionary Republic, 86.*

[51] Phillip M. Richards, "Nationalist Themes in the Preaching of Jupiter Hammon," *Early American Literature* 25, no. 2 (September 1990): 124.

[52] Richards, "Nationalist Themes in the Preaching of Jupiter Hammon,"124.

inhabitants—be it based on race, economics, religion, or other factors—ushering in a unified national identity. However, realizing these aspirations remained elusive for nearly two centuries after the Revolutionary War.

The equitable treatment that Hammon foresaw, woven into revolutionary rhetoric and writings, would only come to fruition much later. Two centuries later, another African American preacher, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose path echoed that of Hammon, would rekindle this momentous vision. Dr. King's clarion call summoned Americans to embrace the sacred duty of aligning their actions with the foundational proclamation: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that their Creator endows them with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[53] The nation that very much embodied the soul of a church found itself struggling with the same indictment often railed against it—its actions did not match its words. While the Revolution emerged victorious, the ongoing struggle shifted towards pursuing moral integrity and righteousness. For America to genuinely become the epicenter of New Jerusalem's ideals, the battle to embody virtue would be its new imperative.

Starting in the late 1770s and extending through the 1780s, a sense of uncertainty was steadily creeping into the minds of Americans regarding the significance and future trajectory of the burgeoning nation. Despite attaining independence, the young republic saw a shift from wartime inflation to postwar overconsumption and subsequent depression. The national credit faced a precarious situation, while American ships and settlements remained exposed to threats

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[53] *The Declaration of Independence,* (July 4, 1776), https://declaration.fas.harvard.edu/resources/text.

from North African pirates.[54] The presence of British forces persisted on the frontier, casting

shadows on the success of the Revolution. Lastly, after the French Revolution, the rise of

rationalism, atheism, skepticism, deism, and francophilic sentiments among American elites

produced grave concerns for many Protestant leaders. They worried that the nation was quickly

abandoning its sacred identity. As key American leaders like Franklin, Jefferson, Madison, and

Washington, among others, began to embrace the European Enlightenment's discourse, including

notions of irreligion, many religious leaders started to fret over the future of the new republic.[55]

 The release of Thomas Paine's "Age of Reason" in 1794 marked a stark departure from

his prior utilization of biblical language to advance revolutionary ideals. Paine's turn towards

attacking conventional orthodox Christianity posed a paradox, as he had initially harnessed

religious rhetoric to mobilize the populace for political and military causes. Paine was neither the

first nor the last political thinker to use the religious beliefs of their audience to galvanize them

for political or military action. Numerous religious leaders swiftly emerged to rebuke Paine's

propositions.

 One such figure, Jedidiah Morse, underscored the peril posed by the worldview that

Paine and fellow Enlightenment proponents propagated. He vehemently challenged Paine's

writings, arguing that "The existence of God is boldly denied. Atheism and materialism are

systematically professed. Reason and nature are deified and adored. The Christian religion and

its divine and blessed Author are not only disbelieved, rejected, and condemned, but even

abhorred."[56] Despite the emergence of Unitarianism, Deism, and Skepticism—all offspring of

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[54] Bloch, *A Visionary Republic, 110.*

[55] Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 218.

[56] Jedidiah Morse quoted in Jon Butler's, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 219.

Enlightenment thought—these views, surprisingly, did not undermine the developing mythos of America but served to expand within a more secularized lens.

As the multifaceted ideologies of the emerging American nation unfolded, a unique development occurred in the 1790s, marking a pivotal turning point. Amidst the resurgence of premillennial and postmillennial expectations among American Christians, a parallel secular utopian vision began to take shape. This vision lacked the biblical elements of the former and shared common ground with Enlightenment principles, envisioning a world of peace, freedom, morality, and truth rising from the ashes of political tyranny and biblical superstition."[57] These divergent perspectives coexisted within America's sacred destiny, revealing the intricate tapestry of beliefs woven into the fabric of the young nation's identity. The primary divergence between the two lay in the means by which they sought to achieve their utopian aspirations.

For biblical millenarians, the foundation lay in a Christian kingdom founded upon God's authority, where the joys of Christ's presence, provision, and peace would reign. In contrast, proponents of the enlightened utopian mindset looked toward reason and republicanism to shape a virtuous world, embracing liberty, peace, prosperity, and the rights of humanity. This combination of "religious friendly" and "coercion averse" defined the course of the new nation, especially as politicians struggled to fend off impiety and promote virtue and goodness without the machinery of Christendom.[58] Amid all these dialogues, an intriguing blend of religious fervor and enlightened ideals was established, envisioning America as the global missionary of liberty.

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[57] Bloch, *Visionary Republic,* 187.

[58] Mark Noll, *America's Book: The Rise and Decline of a Bible Civilization, 1794-1911,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 21.

A Republican commentator reflecting this in an article in the *New York Journal* from 1794 wrote, "The tree of liberty first planted here and moistened with the blood of our brave allies, is now taking root in France… may it grow up and spread, until the whole world is covered with its branches."[59] For many of these enlightened thinkers, the Republicanism of America was not merely an end state that man was striving towards but an ideal that reflected man's original and Edenic condition—a condition lost to the tyranny of man's lust for power. This view was held a hundred years earlier by the Enlightenment thinker and "father of liberalism," John Locke. He once wrote, "In the beginning, all the world was America."[60] American thinkers, embracing Locke's ideals in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, would seek to recover that Edenic condition. Little did the biblical millenarian and enlightened liberal thinkers of this period realize how the American people would, in the first two-quarters of the nineteenth century, blend aspects of their two distinct teleological visions into one uniquely American civil religion.

As the nineteenth century dawned upon the American republic, profound shifts were underway. Westward expansion, economic growth, and widespread migration produced an onslaught of social and cultural changes confronting the American landscape. It also embraced new ideals of democracy and egalitarianism championed by Jeffersonian Republicanism. In this context, individual agency and social mobility flourished, particularly in religious belief. However, in this context, various departures from traditional Protestantism, accompanying these

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[59] *Greenleaf's New York Journal*, May 28, 1794, 2.

[60] John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government,* (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, 1980), Sect. 49, https://resources.saylor.org/wwwresources/archived/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/POLSC2012.3.pdf

cultural and ideological shifts, began to expose the vulnerabilities of the belief in the nation's sacred destiny.

In the envisioned role of America as the site for the fullest realization of the Kingdom of God's millennial splendor, a comprehensive societal revival and transformation were essential. The imperative encompassed the reformation or establishment of institutions, safeguarding future generations from straying while cultivating them as agents of change to manifest a utopian vision. This deep-seated aspiration for spiritual renewal and societal metamorphosis culminated in the emergence of the Second Great Awakening. This pivotal episode within American history carried transformative seeds that extended beyond individuals, suffusing all dimensions of early American life. To conclude this exploration of the profound impact of America's sacred mythos on the early republic, the upcoming chapter will delve into the intricate connection between the Second Great Awakening's expansion of that mythos and the creation of idealistic institutions aimed at educating and transforming society in alignment with its sacred vision.

Chapter 3

The Second Great Awakening and its Impact on American Higher Education

During the transformative crosscurrents of the early nineteenth century, American society experienced a critical juncture characterized by societal upheaval, shifting ideological paradigms, and enthusiastic religious aspirations. As the nascent republic continued to grapple with the echoes of revolutionary fervor and navigate the intricacies of nation-building, a profound spiritual awakening emerged that would significantly shape the nation's trajectory. By situating the Second Great Awakening within its historical milieu and exploring its symbiotic relationship with American higher education, this chapter seeks to unravel the complex tapestry of spiritual fervor and societal change that converged to shape the destiny of the young American republic and its institutions of learning.

The democratic ethos and yearnings for liberty that permeated the revolutionary struggle left an indelible mark on the collective consciousness of the young nation.[1] The impassioned calls for individual rights, self-governance, and egalitarianism resounded, creating an atmosphere ripe for spiritual and ideological transformation. As this nascent republic grappled with defining itself, the tension between religious ideals and an increasingly secularizing society grew more pronounced. The close of the Revolution gradually gave way to an era characterized by the ascent of rationalism, Enlightenment philosophy, and the burgeoning frontiers of science and industry.[2] These shifts marked the dawn of a period when the burgeoning forces of individualism

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[1] Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750–1804,* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 432.

[2] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 206.

and skepticism challenged traditional religious norms and ecclesiastical authority. How could

Protestant Christianity endure without the state's backing and the concept of Christendom?

A New Awakening

Amid the backdrop of societal flux and ideological tension, the Second Great Awakening

emerged as a vibrant spiritual movement that profoundly impacted American society. This

awakening bore witness to religious revivals, fervent conversions, and a renewed emphasis on

the new birth.[3] The movement encompassed many revivals, spiritual expressions, and doctrinal

debates, and its central themes revolved around the salvation of souls, the urgency of personal

conversion, and the call for moral and social reform. During this transformative period, the

nineteenth century would defy expectations and demonstrate not merely the survival of American

Protestantism but its thriving in the antebellum era. Reflecting on the remarkable success of

Protestant Christianity following the disestablishment clause in the Bill of Rights, Michael

McConnell, a distinguished constitutional scholar and U.S. Circuit Judge, remarked, "The

America that they [the Founders] created was far more religious and much less rational and

genteel than figures as Jefferson had envisioned. Religion had the freedom to 'flourish according

to the zeal of its adherents and the appeal of its dogma,' and flourish it did."[4]

In the Second Great Awakening, a distinct paradigm of religious freedom, the separation

of church and state, and the erosion of established religious authority coalesced, ushering an

unprecedented landscape within the early American republic. This confluence birthed a

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[3] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Awakening in America: An Adventure in Vision,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 17.

[4] Michael W. McConnell, "Reclaiming the Secular and the Religious: The Primacy of Religious Autonomy," *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (Winter, 2009): 1342.

transformative environment that set the stage for a remarkable departure from traditional Western experiences.[5] Within this crucible, the enthusiasm of millennial anticipation and the sacred aura enveloping American society reached their zenith, fostering the propagation of novel spiritual and philosophical ideologies.

These novel ideologies sought to redeem individual souls. They carried the potent aspiration to mold America into the ultimate expression of her long-awaited providential destiny as a sacred nation and benevolent empire. In his preeminent work, *The Democratization of American Christianity,* historian Nathan Hatch demonstrated how "the wave of popular religious movements that broke upon the United States in the half-century after independence did more to Christianize American society than anything before or since."[6] Agreeing with Hatch, another scholar writes, "The largest and most enduring cultural accompaniment to the rise of democracy and the market was a national revival of religion."[7]

The Second Great Awakening emerged as a pivotal wellspring of national unity and optimism, guiding Americans through the tumultuous phases of their early growth and maturation as a nation. Within its embrace, a democratized faith emerged, exalting the ordinary citizen and providing fertile ground for the ascent of Jacksonian democracy. This spiritual awakening ignited a mystical fervor within the American populace, seamlessly intertwining with the nation's burgeoning sacred narrative. It birthed uniquely American manifestations of

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[5] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 31.

[6] Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3.

[7] Paul E. Johnson, *The Early American Republic, 1789-1829,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 112.

Christianity, spiritual practices, and religious sects and fostered a cultural renaissance, giving rise

to distinctive forms of literature, art, and architecture. This profound cultural identity attracted

individuals from across the globe. Many of whom embraced the American ethos as their own.

Thomas Jefferson and others had envisioned the American Republic thriving through enlightened

reason. However, the Second Great Awakening catalyzed a burgeoning nation fueled more by

passionate hearts, but passions can prove quite fickle. They can produce the most heavenly

movements, but they can also create the most hellish wars. The immense desires of the Second

Great Awakening gave birth to both.

Any examination of the Second Great Awakening presents a challenge in pinpointing its

exact chronology due to its diverse and sporadic nature. The revivalist phenomena of this era

exhibited remarkable regional variations and unfolded intermittently rather than in a continuous

surge. From 1790 to 1860, the religious awakening manifested differently across various

locations, periods, and durations. Some scholars extend its scope to encompass the revivals

witnessed among Civil War soldiers. However, this writer believes that the impetus behind the

revivals of the Civil War was distinct from those that defined the Antebellum period.[8] The

constant presence of death and imminent danger on the battlefield primarily influenced the

revivals in the Civil War. In contrast, those of the Second Great Awakening were fueled more by

an eschatological and socially transformative vision.

Much like its precursor, the Second Great Awakening originated in New England,

providing fertile soil for the emergence of influential leaders, transformative movements, and

foundational ideologies. In the aftermath of the Revolution, New England's post-Revolutionary

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[8] See for example Drew Gilpin Faust, "Christian Soldiers: The Meaning of Revivalism in the Confederate Army," *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 1 (Feb., 1987): 63-90.

generation largely embraced the promise of the new Republic. For many, this meant adapting to

pluralism, reshaping their church life to fit into a burgeoning middle-class existence, and seizing

opportunities in the rapidly evolving economy.[9] However, a troubling decline in civil morality,

perceived as a crucial prerequisite for the imminent Millennial Kingdom, troubled many

ministers. As the early 1790s unfolded, Timothy Dwight, a prominent New England minister,

cast his gaze upon the moral landscape with deepening concern. He recognized that the social

consequences of the American Revolution had engendered an unsettling level of tolerance, where

actions not subject to legal repercussions were often deemed morally acceptable.[10] As the turn of

the century dawned, a fog of uncertainty lay over the republic's future. One scholar sums up the

prevailing mood at the beginning of the nineteenth century well:

> The norms of the old life were changing; its stimuli were gone, its manners inapplicable,
> and its conventions often incapable of being reinforced… The Revolution had created
> great anticipation for the future, but the kind of future people wanted was not easily
> realized, and the result was a vague uneasiness.[11]

A truly hallowed nation would need to be fully awakened and refocused upon the benevolent

purposes that the Divine had destined for it. Spiritual revival and social reform, both regular and

integral characters in the annals of American history, were tools utilized for such a purpose.

Revival and Reform

In Connecticut, New Divinity ministers, seeing themselves as torchbearers of the legacy

established by Edwards and the other theologians and preachers of the First Great Awakening,

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[9] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 6.

[10] Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England,* vol. 4 (London: W. Baynes and Son, 1823), 346.

[11] Donald Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis." *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 33.

quietly initiated the new revival movements. Notable figures like Timothy Dwight and Samuel

Hopkins, representing the New Divinity movement, rekindled the post-millennial aspirations of

their predecessors and were vital in preparing the next generation of ministers that would carry

the Second Great Awakening to its furthest heights. They emphasized America's pivotal role in

advancing the realization of the Kingdom of God on Earth. Two of Dwight's most famous pupils,

Nathaniel Taylor and Lyman Beecher, carried their mentor's vision forward.

Taylor, with his remarkable intelligence, and Beecher, with his organizational energy,

worked diligently with the goal of, as Beecher put it, "saving Connecticut."[12] These two men

built upon the ideological foundations laid by Edwards, Hopkins, and Dwight but carried them

further, especially in holding a much higher estimate of natural human capacity than earlier

Calvinists had admitted. Taylor argued that in moral actions, people always possessed "the power

to the contrary," that sin, rather than totally rendering men unable to act morally, produced a

strong disinclination away from morality in men, and that this is what grace helped men to

overcome.[13] The belief in human agency held great significance for both Taylor and Beecher, as

it aligned with their conviction that genuine piety encompassed personal holiness and a sense of

responsibility for public morality. These two ministers were determined to encourage individuals

to acknowledge their sins and actively, fervently, and immediately seek conversion to Christ.

They believed such a transformation would shatter the prevalent moral passivity observed among

the people of New England. A historian aptly summarizes the convictions of these ministers,

stating, "If people failed to undergo conversion, if they did not become active members of

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[12] Barbara Cross, ed., *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher,* vol. 1, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 219.

[13] Nathaniel William Taylor, "Man, a Free Agent without the Aids of Divine Grace," in *Tracts Designed to Illustrate and Enforce the Most Important Doctrines of the Gospel,* (New Haven, 1818), 12-13.

churches, and if the churches did not exert a positive influence on society, America's fate was sealed."[14]

As with the First Great Awakening, the revivals and reforms championed by ministers like Taylor and Beecher stirred controversy. Like Edwards before them, Taylor and Beecher grappled with various controversies during this new awakening. In fact, during the height of the Second Great Awakening, Beecher established a pro-revival journal titled "The Spirit of the Pilgrims." Through this publication, he crafted a pietistic interpretation of New England and American religious history, drawing connections between the mid-eighteenth-century pioneers of American revivalism and the spiritual ideals of the founders of Plymouth Colony.[15] New Divinity ministers employed these revivalist movements from America's past as a compelling defense mechanism against anti-revivalists who sought to undermine their efforts. Additionally, they contended with the perceived encroachment and heterodox practices of other denominations and sects, which they believed were eroding the traditional tenets and practices of Christianity. These men thought that the best way to protect society from these things and to produce a genuinely sacred commonwealth would be to ensure that spiritual revival gave birth to social activism.

An excerpt from a sermon delivered in a New York City church in 1825 reflects this intertwining of religious fervor and social concerns: "As we seek salvation, let us also seek to alleviate the suffering of our fellow citizens, for it is in acts of compassion that we demonstrate

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[14] Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 281.

[15] Joseph Conforti,"The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795-1842," *Early American Literature* 26, no. 2 (1991), 101.

the love of Christ."[16] Building upon Edward's teaching in his work, *The Nature of True*

Virtue, Samuel Hopkins argued that "love to God, and love to our fellow creatures, is of the same

nature and kind" and that "benevolence is pleased with the public interest—the greatest good and

happiness of the whole."[17] Looking at the state of New England society in the early nineteenth

century, Lyman Beecher saw anything but this expression of true virtue. In one description of the

period's moral condition, Beecher wrote:

> The name of God is blasphemed; the Bible is denounced; the Sabbath is profaned; the
> public worship of God is neglected; intemperance hath destroyed its thousands and is
> preparing the destruction of thousands more; while luxury, with its diversified evils, with
> a rapidity unparalleled, is spreading in every direction and through every class.[18]

These crucial sins, Beecher believed, were destroying the American people's sacred sensibility

and were a defiance of godly order. If these sins remained, the sacred gift of liberty would be

lost. Beecher interpreted community in a cosmic setting, stating that each local community could

serve to either bring glory through social reform or destruction to the nation through sinful

neglect.[19]

Beecher became the driving force behind the birth of extra-church voluntary societies for

missions, benevolence, and social transformation. Among the more important of these

associations were the Home and Foreign Mission Society (1812), the American Bible Society

(1816), the African Colonization Society (1817), the American Tract Society (1825), and the

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[16] Excerpt from "A Sermon Delivered by Reverend Thomas Wilson," 1825, *New York City Historical Society Archives*, Box 23, Folder 5.

[17] Samuel Hopkins, *System of Doctrines,* vol. 1, (New York: Printed and published by Lincoln & Edmands, 1811), 379.

[18] Lyman Beecher, *The Practicability of Suppressing Vice, by Means of Societies Instituted for that Purpose,* (New London, 1804), 19.

[19] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 41.

American Temperance Society (1826). Most of these societies were founded to transform the

American Republic and aimed to build a benevolent and righteous empire on the foundation of

Protestant Christianity.

Each of these societies was absolutely integral in advancing social reform across the

young republic. Yet, as it pertains to promoting broader access to higher education, none of these

were more important than the American Education Society (AES), which was organized in

Boston in 1815 and officially incorporated the following year. It was initially established as the

American Society for Educating Pious Youth for the Gospel Ministry to assist young men with

limited finances in getting an education and joining the gospel ministry. Before the creation of

this society, many local education societies had been formed along denominational and

geographical lines; some of these societies focused their attention on students at particular

institutions. Usually, these societies were small and were founded and managed by women: two

examples of this are the Corban Society and the Graham Society, two Boston female benevolent

societies that supported students at Andover Theological Seminary.[20] Unlike these smaller

societies, the American Education Society's vision involved broad principles not limited to a

specific region or denomination.

By the early 1820s, the organization aided approximately 200 students annually,

primarily in New England. Under Secretary Elias Cornelius, the organization recruited students,

established loan policies, raised scholarship money, and established connections with other

societies. By the end of the 1830s, the AES assisted over a thousand students a year for college

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[20] "Summary," in the American Education Society Records, 1815-1921, RG0750, The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

and seminary.[21] Training ministers of any denomination were eligible for assistance; however, most aid recipients were Congregational and Presbyterian.

In 1874, the American Education Society and the Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education united under the name of the American College and Education Society. Under Congregational support, the new organization provided financial support to colleges and individual students in need. By 1894, the American Education Society absorbed the New West Education Commission and changed its name to the Congregational Education Society; the new organization continued the work of the previous organizations, providing financial support for theological students, private elementary and secondary schools in Utah and New Mexico, and for pastors at state-supported universities and colleges.[22]

This goal of creating several educational institutes to produce ministers for the expanding nation marked the fulfillment of a goal established by numerous Protestant ministers over half a century earlier. In a sermon to raise funds for the education of more ministers for the West, Beecher proclaimed:

> The integrity of the union demands special exertions to produce a more homogenous character in the nation and bind us together in firmer bonds… The prevalence of pious, intelligent, enterprising ministers throughout the nation at the ratio of one to one thousand would produce a sameness of views, feelings, and interests which would lay the foundation of our empire upon a rock.[23]

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[21] "Summary," in the American Education Society Records, 1815-1921, RG0750, The Congregational Library & Archives, Boston, MA.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Quoted in William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 112.

Like the American Education Society, the many voluntary societies produced out of the Second

Great Awakening thrived in the young republic, promoting the ideals of a virtuous citizenry

sacrificing its time, talents, and treasure for the greater good of the community. These voluntary

societies birthed several social revolution movements: labor, women's rights, anti-slavery, and

prohibition.[24] Furthermore, as demonstrated later in this chapter, these societies served as

prototypes for the aspirations of institutions of higher learning during the Second Great

Awakening, embodying the transformative potential they hoped to manifest.

Historical records from the period show that religious fervor and social reform permeated

entire communities in the New England landscape. One scholar astutely observed that these

social reforms "nearly led to the complete cessation of other regular activities to focus

specifically on religious matters."[25] This statement serves as a poignant analysis of one of the

most notable developments of the Second Great Awakening: transforming everyday activities

into distinct religious categories, blurring the boundaries between the sacred and the profane. An

eyewitness account from this era vividly illustrates the shift in religious dynamics from the pre-

nineteenth century to the peak of the Second Great Awakening. In his own words:

> It is also worth noticing the freedom with sacred things of those days, approaching the
> old fetes and mysteries in the church. We are apt to think of the Puritan times as all rigor
> and strictness. However, nearly sixty years ago, a play was played in the meeting house:
> the church turned into a theatre. Moreover, I remember my mother telling me that when
> she was a girl, her father carried her on a pillion to the raising of a church in Pittsfield,
> and the occasion was celebrated by a ball in the evening. Now, all dancing is restricted by
> the church there as a sinful amusement.[26]

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[24] McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening, and Reform,* 113.

[25] Richard D. Birdsall, "The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order," *Church History* 39, no. 3 (Sep 01, 1970): 355.

[26] Orville Dewey, *Autobiography*, (Boston: Roberts, 1883), 12.

This continuous dissolution of the common into the sacred throughout the antebellum period emerged as a significant factor contributing to the polarization of American society. This division would ultimately play a pivotal role in the events leading up to the Civil War.

New People, New Places, New Measures

People from all walks of life came to these gatherings, where they experienced intense religious emotions and conversions. The rise of evangelicalism and the proliferation of new religious denominations, such as the Baptists and Methodists, were direct consequences of the new awakening. Christine Heyrman notes that "the Methodist Church saw explosive growth during the Second Great Awakening, with circuit-riding preachers spreading their message across the New England states."[27] Not just there, but soon, the revivals and reforms of the Second Great Awakening were permeating every corner of the burgeoning Republic.

This expansive spiritual movement found one of its most prominent figures in Charles Grandison Finney, whose influence propelled the Second Great Awakening into a nationwide phenomenon. On August 29, 1792, Finney was born in Warren, Connecticut. Skepticism and agnosticism marked his early life, but a profound religious experience in Adams, New York, in 1821 led to his conversion and a dramatic shift in his life's trajectory.[28] This personal transformation would become the driving force behind his ministry. Finney, ordained by the Presbyterians as an itinerant missionary, took a very different approach to revivalism from that of the more conservative Beecher. Innovative methods and a strong emphasis on human agency in

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[27] Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 142.

[28] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism,* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1996), 22.

salvation characterized Finney's revivalism. His "new measures" included protracted meetings, the "anxious bench" for seekers, and emotional appeals aimed at stirring the hearts of his audience.[29] He believed in man's spiritual capacity to engineer revival through careful planning and persuasive preaching, and his techniques often generated strong emotional responses.

Finney specialized in urban revivals, and in great contrast to many of his peers and most of his predecessors, the revivalist argued that revivals were ultimately the work of man putting to use the tools of awakening that God had given them.[30] The fact that society had not yet ushered in the Millennial Kingdom of Christ was due not to God's plan but to Christian passivity. He wrote in his renowned *Lectures on Revival:*

> If the whole Church, as a body, had gone to work ten years ago and continued it as a few individuals whom I could name have done, there might not now have been an unrepentant sinner in the land. The millennium would have fully come into the United States before this day. Instead of standing still or writing letters, let ministers who think we are going wrong buckle on the harness, go forward, and show us a more excellent way… If the Church did all her duty, the millennium would come to this country in three years. But if it is to be always so, in the time of revival, two-thirds of the Church will hang back and do nothing but still find fault. The curse of God will be on this nation, and that before long.[31]

Finney believed that the genuinely regenerated man was committed to sacrificing his pleasure to advance God's kingdom on earth. He called for several social reforms to bring about the long-awaited, complete, and final overthrow of evil. The primary area in which Finney differed from several of his counterparts regarding social reform was that he did not support laws (like Sabbath

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[29] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism,* 61.

[30] Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revival,* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 2016), 6, http://www.charlesfinney.com/finney/pdf/Lectures_on_Revival_by_Charles_Finney.pdf

[31] Finney, *Lectures on Revival,* 327-28.

laws) that compelled men to adopt Christian practices. He believed that the Holy Spirit was the only agent of compulsion that should act upon the hearts of men, not external laws.[32]

Despite his profound commitment to revivalism and reform, Charles Finney encountered resistance from several fellow ministers in New England. While Taylor and Beecher were staunch proponents of revival, they viewed the experiences associated with Finney-led revivals as excessively extreme and troubling. Their concerns stemmed from the fear of losing individuals teetering on the edge of skepticism to more rationalist groups like the Unitarians. The rise of heterodox sects like the Mormons and Oneidans added to their unease.

Key leaders of the New England Awakening, including Taylor, Beecher, and Asahel Nettleton, convened a meeting with Finney and his associates in New York in 1827. During this encounter, they urged Finney to adopt a more "conservative" approach and to abandon specific "new measures" he had implemented. However, Finney countered by pointing to the remarkable numerical success of his methods and challenging them to deny the tangible results.[33] This pragmatic emphasis on statistical outcomes not only characterized Finney's revisionist perspective on revival but also became the prevailing metric for success in American evangelicalism up to the present day. While Finney introduced novel revival practices, it is necessary to acknowledge that he also drew inspiration from the revivals on the Trans-Appalachian frontier.

Commenting on Trans-Appalachian and Southern revivals, historian Paul Johnson observes that this area, "with its deeply religious population, proved fertile ground for the

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[32] McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakening and Reform, 129.*

[33] Ibid., 123.

Second Great Awakening. Camp meetings and revivals became common occurrences across the region."[34] These camp meetings under the trees with ministers proclaiming vigorously on portable platforms would become the preeminent symbol of the religious movement. However, they would also provide American politicians from the nineteenth century with a model for their political rallies. Women were especially drawn to these camp meetings, as they offered a place of expression and sociability outside the home to gather, express their fears and hopes, and join in song and prayer with other women.[35]

The first full-blown camp meeting turned revival occurred at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801. The celebration of an annual "Holy Feast," a three-day communion service by Presbyterians, soon transformed into a massive interdenominational revival. According to most estimates, between 10,000 and 20,000 people descended upon the site during the meeting, a remarkable turnout considering the area's sparse population.[36] Several distinctive features marked the Cane Ridge Revival. Attendees experienced powerful emotional and physical manifestations, often called "the jerks" or "the falling exercises." These phenomena included shouting, fainting, trembling, and uncontrolled bodily movements. There were even reports of attendants barking like dogs.[37] Interestingly, the most crucial aspect of this phenomenon is not how the Holy Spirit supposedly manifested but upon whom He manifested.

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[34] Johnson, *A Religious History of the American People,* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), 277.

[35] Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 139

[36] Richard M. Shuping, "Western Kentucky's Great Revival," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1965): 148.

[37] Johnson, *The Early American Republic,* 121.

Women, men, blacks, whites, rich, and poor were present at the revival, and all fell under this profound and public experience of religious ecstasy. This revivalistic ecstasy and egalitarian impulse would continue to mark several of the revivals in the antebellum South through the preaching of significant figures like Peter Cartwright and James McGready. However, unlike the transformations it birthed in the North, the movement could never breach specific cultural forces in the South that proved themselves almost impenetrable to the movement's social reforming tendencies. Evangelical Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians in the South never stopped railing against the dangers of greed and pride. However, they found they had little welcome if they did not learn to comfortably live within a system of fixed social hierarchy, slavery, and patriarchalism.[38]

The reforming tendency of the Second Great Awakening movements threatened many Southern elites. It often proved to be a pathway to abolition, egalitarian sentiments, and the profaning of practices that were once mundane staples of the community. "The thrill of the hunt, the sociability of the tavern, and the lure of the fiddle" were excoriated by ministers of the era as unmistakable signs of infidelity, and communities that tolerated such lapses were guilty of leading souls astray.[39] Though revivalism remained abundant within this region until and through the Civil War, the reformist tendencies could not break through in the South as effectively as they did in New England and other parts of America.

The primary mode of reform embraced in the South revolved around individual moral transformation. It aimed to instill order within communities by curbing violence, promoting self-

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[38] Johnson, 122.

[39] D.G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism,* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002)*,* 51.

discipline, and encouraging values centered on family and neighborly accountability. This distinctive approach explains why universities and colleges established in the South during the Second Great Awakening did not adopt the same progressive mission as their counterparts in the North and West. It also contributed to the significant schisms within major denominations, leading to the emergence of Northern and Southern factions among Methodists (1844), Baptists (1845), and Presbyterians (1861). Even before the Civil War erupted, the fault lines exposed during the Second Great Awakening had already set the stage for the impending conflict, and with revivalism and reform making inroads in various parts of the North and South, ministers shared a common goal of extending the kingdom's influence westward as they looked to the expanding frontier.

As the War of 1812 drew to a close, the Western Frontier diverged significantly from New England's religiously inspired settlements and the genteel Southern models, embodying the core tenets of Jacksonian democracy: universal male suffrage, individualism, and self-determination. The westward-bound pioneers often left behind many of their conventional religious beliefs and practices, resulting in a social landscape marked by a sense of lawlessness. A historian aptly observes, "The Age of Jackson and Common Men witnessed some of America's most violent times, with mob violence and vigilantism frequently employed by Jacksonian men to assert popular sovereignty."[40]

Reports from the frontier were rife with accounts of excessive drinking, dueling, and moral decay, painting a picture far removed from the idealized West. Furthermore, the American West emerged as a refuge for various heterodox religious groups. With the westward migration

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[40] Steven J. Keillor, *This Rebellious House: American History & the Truth of Christianity,* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 119.

of individuals came a shifting theological landscape, straying from traditional Protestantism. The

Ohio Valley and beyond became destinations for Mormons, Millerites, Shakers, and even secular

communities, each seeking to establish their utopian visions in this evolving frontier.[41] The West

became quite the project in religious tolerance and pluralism, but it needed reform for many

Great Awakening ministers.

Nineteenth-century ministers believed that the moral regeneration of the frontier was

essential for the nation's spiritual awakening and the realization of millennial glory. They saw the

West as an opportunity to bring Christian values to untamed territories. President of Yale

College, Timothy Dwight, wrote of the West, "This region, like the pruned vine, sends out more

vigorous shoots, buds, blossoms, and clusters than it ever did in its state of unpruned

luxuriance."[42] Through their efforts, these ministers believed they could transform the wilderness

into a flourishing garden of piety. They often portrayed the Western frontier as a new Promised

Land, drawing parallels to the Exodus as they had so many times before.

In one notable sermon titled "The Great Migration," Lyman Beecher boldly declared that

the people's pilgrimage and settlement in this new land mirrored a grand migration from the

eastern world to "establish a new Zion in the West."[43] Beecher's actions aligned with his words

as he ventured west to Cincinnati and established an institute to train the next generation of

Christian social reformers. Their mission would extend the sacred republic's influence across the

continent. Notable figures of the Second Great Awakening, such as Finney and Theodore Weld,

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[41] Catherine M. Rokicky, *Creating a Perfect World: Religious and Secular Utopias in Nineteenth-Century Ohio,* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002), 5.

[42] Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1821), 266.

[43] Lyman Beecher, "The Great Migration," in *The Papers of Lyman Beecher*, ed. Barbara M. Cross and Elizabeth H. Thomson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 3:84

also carried their reformist ideals westward. In the eyes of these ministers, for the Kingdom of

God to manifest in America, righteousness needed to prevail from 'sea to shining sea.'

The Creation of Idealistic Institutions

As the Second Great Awakening spread over the entire republic, ministers and laypersons

began to agitate questions and hasten goals concerning the social and educational order from the

perspective of an almost militant evangelicalism. Temperance, Sabbatarianism, abolitionism,

labor, women's rights, and even one's diet and body became sacred objects at the center of

various social reform movements. As notions of the sacred expanded, much of what was deemed

"common" collapsed in the worldview of many of these Second Great Awakening evangelicals.

In many ways, these reformers adopted a Manichaean vision of society characterized by a

dualistic worldview emphasizing the stark contrast between good and evil, light and darkness,

and salvation and damnation.[44] The distinction became profoundly divided along sacred and

profane lines. Though this vision was not universal to evangelical leaders, it birthed significant

reforms in the Second Great Awakening.

These reformers viewed themselves as champions of virtue in a world they perceived as

steeped in moral darkness. Their unwavering dedication stemmed from a significant theological

doctrine that had infiltrated various branches of evangelical Protestantism, manifesting in

varying degrees: Christian perfectionism. This doctrine espoused the belief that individuals could

attain complete sanctification, a perfection of the will towards righteousness.[45] Over time, this

concept expanded beyond individual spiritual growth to encompass the transformation of society

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[44] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 79.

[45] Ibid.*,* 79.

itself. While perfectionism occasionally led to self-righteousness and theological deviations, it was a powerful catalyst for social reform. It nurtured an "ultraist" mentality that characterized many antebellum reformers. This mindset cultivated an intense desire to sanctify the nation, leaving no room for compromise actions that fell short of millennial ideals.

There was no better example of this than the temperance movement. In the earliest parts of the campaign, the primary goal of these reformers was to push for the limited use of alcohol to prevent the dangers of drunkenness. However, by the 1830s, the goal had become complete abolition. Beecher stood out as the chief spokesperson in most of these reform movements. He wrote that "intemperance is the sin of our land… and if anything shall defeat the hopes of the world, which hang upon this experiment of civil liberty, it is that a river of fire…"[46] By the 1830s, New School Presbyterians, following in the footsteps of Beecher, launched the movement that would have congregations use juice instead of wine for the Lord's Supper.

As the first half of the nineteenth century progressed, voluntary societies proliferated, serving as what one scholar aptly described as a "disciplined moral militia." Their mission was to both support and exert pressure on civil authorities, ensuring the enforcement of laws related to blasphemy, temperance, Sabbath observance, and any other "moral crimes."[47] In a sermon before the American Board of Missions, Beecher declared that "the realities of the Millennium are nigh…the righteous can no longer remain on the defensive, their watchword must be 'March.'"[48] Like American denominations, the early national and antebellum religious and reform societies

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[46] Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasion, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance,* 6th ed., (Boston, 1828), 7.

[47] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 45, 48.

[48] Lyman Beecher, "Resources of the Adversary and Means of their Destruction," in *Sermons Delivered on Various Occasions,* (Boston, 1828), 280.

were coercive institutions. They were cross-denominational, not non-denominational, with

membership coming consistently from all the major mainstream Protestant groups to promote

Christianity and Christian social causes without denominational agendas.[49] These reform

societies also began radically shifting the experiences of two minority groups within the early

American Republic: African Americans and women.

During this period, numerous free African Americans played a pivotal role in shaping

distinctive forms of Christian worship by establishing denominational institutions and societies.

They organized abolitionist movements, distributed literature, and engaged in public speaking to

raise awareness about the atrocities of slavery. Under the leadership of critical figures like

Richard Allen, the African Methodist Episcopal Church saw remarkable growth, expanding from

just five congregations in 1816 to well over a hundred by the 1850s. Similarly, black Baptists in

the Midwest established multiple Baptist associations and two significant black Baptist

conventions.[50]

Despite these opportunities, black Americans faced substantial racial prejudice and

discrimination within reform movements. Many white reformers held paternalistic views and

were hesitant to grant full equality.[51] Because of this, many developments within free black

communities emphasized and required self-sufficiency and social cohesion. Churches became

not only places of worship but also hubs for discussions on civil rights and abolition, as they

were often the only safe space many African-American communities had to engage in such

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[49] Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 280.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night: A History of African American Christianity,* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 102.

discourse. It is why, even today, politicians are still frequently invited to address and outline their policies in historically black churches.[52] These communities fostered a strong sense of solidarity and collective action, and the efforts of free African Americans during the Second Great Awakening laid the foundation for future civil rights movements, inspiring leaders like Frederick Douglas and Sojourner Truth.

Simultaneously, American Protestant women gained increased visibility and opportunities thanks to the rise of reform societies. Nineteenth-century tracts and pamphlets began to promote teachings aimed at women, emphasizing their inherent duty to exhibit greater humility and self-sacrifice than men. Women were seen as protectors of the home, guarding it against the spiritual challenges of the outside world while nurturing the moral virtues of their children.[53] The concept of natural female piety became the rationale and means by which women could reform society. Religion became integral to women's responsibilities, as ministers and writers encouraged them to disseminate Christian values and counteract the materialism and greed associated with nineteenth-century men.

In her book *Sisters in the Faith*, historian Jacqueline Anne Rouse delves into how women's active involvement in religious and reform activities challenged traditional gender roles and expectations.[54] One prominent example of this challenge was the emergence of female preachers like Phoebe Palmer, Nancy Towle, Harriett Livermore, Salome Lincoln, Fanny Newell,

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[52] After the rise of the Moral Majority movement in the 1980s and its unique blending of American conservative politics with evangelical christianity, more predominantly white churches have engaged in the exercise of providing the floor for politicians to come and speak at their churches.

[53] Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women in Antebellum Reform,* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2000), 9.

[54] Jacqueline Anne Rouse, *Sisters in the Faith: Shaker Women and Equality of the Sexes*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 45.

and Clarissa Richmond. Even African-American women like Antoinette Brown and Jarena Lee became prominent preachers within their communities. In her autobiography, Jarena Lee described her call to preach: "The Lord opened my understanding to the scriptures and enabled me to speak intelligibly of the things of God. Many would say that I was called to preach the gospel."[55]

These women were among the first and most influential female preachers who began traveling on independent circuits, undermining traditional patriarchal and complementarian practices in Protestant Christianity. Their involvement in reform activities gave them a voice in the public arena and heightened their sensitivity to social justice issues.[56] The Second Great Awakening reform movements also paved the way for the early women's rights movement. Activists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony emerged as prominent figures in the fight for women's suffrage. Alongside free African Americans, women during the Second Great Awakening seized the opportunity to be included in the nation's vision and shape it actively. However, access to knowledge was crucial to achieve this, and the Second Great Awakening also played a pivotal role in opening that door.

Education: The Path to Glory

For righteousness to uplift the American nation, it was clear that a focused investment in equipping the present to better the future was imperative. Education emerged as the paramount means to achieve this goal. Ministers across denominations shared the conviction that education

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[55] Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee,* (Philadelphia: Published for the author, 1836), 66.

[56] Anne C. Rose, *Victorian America and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 120.

was the key to constructing a righteous society and nurturing individuals who would spearhead

revival and reform within America and throughout the world. If man's reason were God-given,

then the education of that reason would enable men and women to comprehend God's ways and

act in accord with them, thus advancing the millennium by increasing knowledge of God's will

and laws.

Protestant Christianity, as a religion centered on the Bible, has consistently emphasized

the importance of literacy, especially in ensuring that the laity has access to the Scriptures.

However, educational opportunities, particularly in literacy, were limited for a significant portion

of its history. In the early nineteenth century, American reformers recognized the need to expand

literacy and provide comprehensive religious education, including moral and ethical

development, to American citizens, particularly children. This recognition gave rise to the

Sunday School movement. The Sunday School movement traces back to late eighteenth-century

Great Britain. Most historians of the movement affirm Robert Raikes as its original pioneer.

Raikes's groundbreaking efforts to offer primary education to underprivileged children on

Sundays served as an inspiring model for American reformers.[57]

Demonstrating just how important the Sunday school was for advancing the goals of the

Second Great Awakening, an 1832 report from the Sunday School Union of Philadelphia reads,

"It [the Sunday school] is the morning star of the millennium. It is an institution that recognizes

every human being as immortal and assumes that he will live forever. It is the firmest of

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[57] Ronald A. Horton, "Sunday School Movement," in *The Encyclopedia of Christian Education,* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2015), 690.

bulwarks to the church; it is the foundation stone of all moral and social reform."[58] Sunday

schools primarily sought to convey religious knowledge, offering a structured environment for

studying the Bible, theology, and religious history. In addition to fulfilling their religious

mission, these schools played a significant role in advancing literacy in the United States. By the

mid-nineteenth century, America could proudly claim one of the world's highest literacy rates,

primarily due to the educational efforts of Sunday schools.[59] These schools aligned perfectly

with the ideals of early American statements, such as the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

    In this historic document, leaders in the Confederation Congress emphasized the vital

role of "religion, morality, and knowledge" in maintaining good government and the happiness of

humanity. They recognized the necessity of establishing "schools and the means of education" to

uphold these core values and principles.[60] Over time, Sunday schools in the North and parts of

the West grew more inclusive and open to individuals from various social backgrounds,

including African Americans. The inclusivity of Sunday schools would vastly contribute to the

democratization of religious education and religious participation within American society.[61]

However, there were other places where the Sunday school movement would influence the future

of American education, most notably in the development of common or primary schools.

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[58] Sunday School Union of Philadelphia, *A Report of the Sunday School Union of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: John C. Clark, 1832), 7.

[59] Douglas Sloan, *Faith and Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 41.

[60] Quoted in Daniel L. Dreisbach and Mark David Hall.,*The Sacred Rights of Conscience: Selected Readings on Religious Liberty and Church-State Relations in the American Founding,* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2009), 238.

[61] Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War,* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1957), 111.

By the end of the eighteenth century, key American leaders like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Rush were already calling for a comprehensive education system to be implemented within the states. Rush, unlike Jefferson, believed in the importance of education being deeply intertwined with Christianity. In a tract arguing for the need for primary education as a means of creating a moral republic, Rush writes:

> The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in RELIGION. Without this, there can be no virtue, and without virtue, there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments. . . . The religion I mean to recommend in this place is the religion of JESUS CHRIST. . . . My only business is to declare that all its doctrines and precepts are calculated to promote the happiness of society and the safety and well-being of civil government. A Christian cannot fail to be a republican.[62]

In 1786, Rush suggested creating a systemized education plan for the state of Pennsylvania that advocated a pyramid of institutions: one state university, four colleges located in different regions of the state, and free primary schools for every township.[63] The goal was to have the state tied together by one system of education.

As the nineteenth century dawned and the Second Great Awakening swept through the Northeast, the ideas of educational reformers like Benjamin Rush began to materialize, notably in New York. In 1805, Thomas Eddy, a prosperous New York Quaker, and his colleagues recognized the need to offer education to the city's impoverished children. Their efforts culminated in the establishment of the Free School Society. Despite reservations from his Quaker peers, Eddy championed the Society's operation on an interdenominational basis. The founding

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[62] Quoted in Mark A. Noll, *America's Book: The Rise and Decline of a Bible Civilization, 1794-1911* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 287, emphasis added.

[63] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 22. Rush would eventually expand this idea and called for the creation of a federal university which would be a source of common culture and concerted republican effort.

board comprised thirteen trustees, including six Quakers, but also featured Episcopalians, Presbyterians, a Baptist, and even the mayor of New York City, DeWitt Clinton.[64]

To shape these free schools, Eddy drew inspiration from Joseph Lancaster, an eighteenth-century pioneer who had founded a primary school for underprivileged children in London. Lancaster's approach was grounded in teaching respect for God and the Scriptures without promoting the specific doctrines of any single denomination.[65] His vision of non-sectarian Christian education aligned with the ideals of early nineteenth-century reformers like Eddy. Although the concept of the Common School, akin to Sunday Schools, originated in Britain, it found fertile ground and rapid expansion in America. Remarkably, by the mid-1810s, a mere decade after their introduction, the United States had established more Lancastrian schools than Britain.[66]

Primary School reform in America manifested differently across various regions. In New York, it represented an expansion of existing initiatives; in Massachusetts, it was a strategic shift to achieve longstanding goals; and in Ohio, it marked the introduction of novel approaches. Despite these variations, educators across the country shared a common goal: to improve and expand primary education to a broader segment of young Americans.[67] This endeavor was driven by multiple societal needs: the moral imperatives of Republican principles, the orderly conduct demanded by economic self-interest, the need for immigrants to be assimilated into the civic

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[64] Noll, *America's Book, 288.*

[65] David Komline, *The Common School Awakening: Religion and the Transatlantic Roots of American Public Education*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2020), 14.

[66] Komline, *The Common School Awakening,* 13.

[67] Noll, *America's Book,* 293.

fabric, and the importance of widespread knowledge for political engagement. For a nation predominantly Protestant then, an education system grounded in Christian principles and Bible study seemed to address these diverse requirements.

By the 1840s, however, it became evident that promoting a non-sectarian Christian ethos in primary schools was untenable, mainly as public funding for education grew and the challenge of accommodating students from different religious backgrounds, notably Catholics, became apparent. This realization prompted a shift in focus for primary education towards preparing children for their roles in the burgeoning economy rather than religious instruction.[68] Nonetheless, the foundational goal of instilling civil religion and moral values remained intact. Today, this legacy continues to fuel debates over the content and priorities of American public education, mirroring similar controversies in higher education. These discussions reflect deep-seated divisions on implementing various topics, books, and agendas within primary education, underscoring the ongoing challenge of balancing educational objectives with diverse societal values.

The Sunday school and Common school movement provided universal access to religious and academic instruction while establishing a crucible of innovative teaching methods, curriculum development, and student engagement.[69] This pedagogical focus left an indelible mark on educational practices that would be adopted into American higher education. Moreover, it served as a pioneering force in teacher training programs, equipping instructors with the skills to impart religious and moral values effectively and develop engaging curricula. This early foray

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[68] Komline, *The Common School Awakening,* 225.

[69] Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform,* 113.

into teacher preparation laid the essential groundwork for establishing formal teacher education programs in American colleges and universities, a critical development while expanding access to education.[70]

The Sunday schools and common schools profoundly influenced American society's reform and education. By the 1840s, their societal impact was palpable, with millions of Americans actively participating in these endeavors. However, higher education institutions emerged as the most consequential and enduring vehicle for realizing the present and future objectives of transforming American society. The formation and subsequent transformation of colleges and universities marked the pinnacle of creating American idealistic institutions during the Second Great Awakening.

The Forging of American Higher Education

The evolution of higher education in the United States is a complex narrative deeply influenced by a myriad of historical forces. This story begins with the rich traditions of European higher education rooted in the Medieval Age.[71] These traditions, characterized by rigorous academic pursuits and the pursuit of knowledge, were brought across the Atlantic and implanted in the fertile soil of the New World. However, the unique conditions of America—its vast landscapes, diverse cultures, and the spirit of innovation—played a crucial role in molding and adapting these academic institutions into something distinctly American.

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[70] David Stow, *Training System of Education,* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Sons, 1837), 10.

[71] To examine the emergence of higher education in Medieval Europe, two works are especially helpful: James Hannam, *God's Philosophers: How the Medieval World Laid the Foundations of Modern Science,* (London: Icon Books, 2009); and Mark W. Graham, "The Opening of the Western Mind: The Emergence of Higher Education in the 'Dark Ages'," in *Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education,* edited by P.C. Kemeny, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

A pivotal moment in the history of American higher education occurred with the establishment of Harvard College in 1636. Founded just a decade after the Puritans landed in Massachusetts, Harvard represents the transplanting of European academic traditions into American soil. Yet, it also marks the beginning of a transformation, where these imported ideas began to evolve in response to the challenges and opportunities of the New World. This event was not merely the founding of an institution; it was the symbolic birth of higher education in America, setting a precedent for the development of colleges and universities that would not only emulate but also innovate beyond their European predecessors.

For the Puritans, the establishment and advancement of higher education was far more than a mere luxury; it was deemed an essential cornerstone of their new society. They pursued education with a dual purpose in mind: to advance civilization and to preserve and propagate English Puritanism. This dual mission underscored the Puritan commitment to creating a learned community to sustain and spread their religious and cultural values. Historians like Perry Miller have delved deep into the lasting impact of New England Puritanism on the fabric of American history, highlighting its profound influence on the country's educational ethos. Similarly, George Marsden illuminated the depth of the Puritans' commitment to education, noting that the region boasted one of the highest concentrations of university-educated individuals globally in the early years of New England's settlement.[72]

The Puritan commitment to higher education was deeply intertwined with their broader societal goals. They envisioned an educated elite who could lead the community in religious, civic, and academic affairs, ensuring that Puritan values were upheld across all aspects of life.

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[72] George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University Revisited: From Protestant to Postsecular*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2021), 29.

This vision of a learned society influenced the development of an educational system that valued critical thinking, moral integrity, and academic rigor. Over the centuries, this foundational commitment has evolved, affecting the ethos of American higher education and maintaining New England's reputation as a bastion of academic excellence and innovation. The legacy of the Puritans' profound commitment to education continues to resonate, underpinning the values and aspirations of institutions that have since emerged and flourished across the United States.[73]

Before the American Revolution, nine colleges were founded in the American colonies, mirroring Harvard's dedication to preserving and disseminating intellectual culture from the Old World to the New. The colonial college was an instrument created for preserving, not reconstructing, the established society. These institutions included William and Mary (1693), Yale (1701), New Jersey (1746), King's (1754), Philadelphia (1740), Rhode Island (1764), Queen's (1766), and Dartmouth (1769). A writer of this period succinctly encapsulated the collective mission of these schools when he articulated their goal as "the advancement of learning and the ability to perpetuate it to posterity."[74] Their mission encompassed two primary objectives: educating a learned clergy and cultivating a literate populace. However, underlying these goals was an overarching aim—preserving Christian truth. The earliest printed rules of

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[73] The profound influence of this Puritan commitment upon American Higher Education has been thoroughly documented by several key historical works. See, for instance, Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History,* (New York: Vintage, 1962); Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965; Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1983); William C. Ringenberg, *The Christian College: A History of Protestant Higher Education in America,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984); and J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

[74] *New Englands First Fruits,* (London, 1643), 12.

Harvard announced as the chief aim of that institution that "everyone shall consider the Main End of his life & studies, to know God & Jesus Christ, which is Eternal life."[75]

In colonial colleges, these institutions of higher learning played a pivotal role in the structure of social authority. They not only segregated men from women but, more importantly, identified those men whose spiritual and intellectual qualifications destined them to be the sacred interpreters of Scripture, responsible for upholding the fundamental principles upon which their communities operated.[76] All these colonial colleges, except for the College of Philadelphia (due to Quakers not having trained clergy), had written the goal of preparing students for clerical ministry in their charges. Nevertheless, the curriculum of these schools covered much more than just theological education.

In its early stages of development, this colonial curriculum represented the transplanting of the contemporary English university course and the traditions of medieval higher learning. Colonial colleges followed the trivium and quadrivium frameworks, encompassing the seven liberal arts. The trivium consisted of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, while the quadrivium comprised arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.[77] These subjects formed the core of the curriculum and provided students with a well-rounded education.

As the eighteenth century began, the initial three American colleges continued to adhere to this educational model while embracing the new enlightened ideals, especially those promoted by thinkers like John Locke and Rene Descartes. One of the primary impacts of Enlightenment

[75] Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Collections*, Vol. 15, Harvard College Records, I, 24.

[76] Marsden, *The Soul of the American University,* 38.

[77] John S. Brubacher and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities,* Fourth edition, (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 14.

ideas on American colleges was the elevation of reason and rationalism as fundamental sources

of knowledge. Enlightenment thinkers advocated using critical thinking, logic, and empirical

observation as the primary tools for understanding the world.[78] These new ideals also led to the

gradual loss of Aristotelian philosophy's grip on higher education. Enlightenment values of free

inquiry and open debate soon entered American colleges. Professors and students were

increasingly engaged in critical thinking, questioning established ideas, and exploring alternative

perspectives.

Intellectual autonomy and the freedom to pursue inquiry without dogmatic constraints

gained increasing importance within the academic environment. However, it also led to many

concerns that this undermined the original goal of preserving the established Puritan culture,

primarily at Harvard.[79] Leaders like Cotton Mather and John Leveret wanted to fully embrace the

ideals of Enlightenment, specifically its emphasis on natural philosophy. For instance, Leveret

declared in the 1711 commencement of the college, "In philosophical [scientific] matters,

Harvardians philosophize in a sane and liberal manner, according to the manner of the century."

However, he added one critical note: "The same license is not permissible to theologians."[80]

Though there was a more "liberal" shift in truth-seeking, the new learning, like the old, was still

surrounded by Christian liturgical, behavioral, and theological dictates. Theology was still the

queen of the sciences and the crucial component believed necessary to protect the orthodoxy of

the school's curriculum.

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[78] Brubacher and Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition: A History of American Colleges and Universities,* 14.

[79] Mary Johnson, "Critical Thinking in Early American Higher Education," *Journal of Intellectual History* 36, no. 4 (2014): 91.

[80] Quoted in Marsden, *The Soul of the American University, 44.*

The onset of the First Great Awakening in the 1730s instigated changes within the existing college campuses and significantly influenced the establishment of six other pre-revolutionary universities. Historians have afforded the awakening an influential role in shaping colonial colleges. The movement's radical revivalism presented some of the first significant schisms in the colleges and churches, as they divided among New Light and Old Light Factions. Nowhere was this schism more apparent than at Yale College.

At Yale, student preaching and proselytizing had wholly disrupted the college order. The university's rector, Thomas Clap, first expelled one of the New Light leaders, David Brainerd, for allegedly saying that a tutor had "no more grace than a chair."[81] By 1742, the disruptive effects of revivalism forced Clap to close the college temporarily. When Yale reopened, most of the New Lights had moved on to other institutions. Consequently, Yale maintained its status as a dominant Old Light college until the 1760s, when the New Light's influence finally gained control.[82]

The intensity of the mid-eighteenth-century controversies surrounding the awakening sheds light on the religious dimension of the founding of other colonial colleges. Princeton, Brown, Queen's (Rutgers), and Dartmouth—founded by New Light clergy among Presbyterians, Baptists, Dutch Reformed, and Congregationalists, respectively—exemplify this trend. King's College (Columbia) in New York City and the College of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) were some exceptions. These colleges garnered broader support from non-New Light coalitions, with

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[81] Quoted in Robert L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 35.

[82] Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education, 37.*

Anglican leadership and Presbyterian backing. Nonetheless, interdenominational rivalry soon emerged among these institutions.

Despite these rivalries, many collegiate leaders aimed to preserve the Protestant Christian worldview of the colonies in education without being undermined by theological disputes. Samuel Johnson, the first president of King's College (Columbia), drafted a creed for the school that most Protestant colleges of the period would adopt. The creed declared: "As to religion, there is no intention to impose on the scholars the peculiar tenets of any particular sect of Christians, but to inculcate upon their tender minds the great principles of Christianity and morality in which true Christians of each denomination are generally agreed."[83] Despite evolving circumstances, the primary objective for Protestant leaders remained the preservation of a Christian commonwealth and the promotion of moral virtue.

Before the Revolutionary War, most colonists in pre-Revolutionary America had no concern for or access to higher education. Thus, the nine small colonial colleges more than sufficed to meet educational demands. However, those demands would significantly increase with its newfound independence from Great Britain, increasing opportunities and expanding territories. The most conservative estimates show that during the years between the ratification of the Constitution and the Civil War, educational leaders formed some 200–250 colleges.[84]

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[83] "Samuel Johnson Advertises the Opening of King's College (Columbia), 1754," quoted in Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 110.

[84] James Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop: The Rise of the Modern University,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 160. The main issue when determining antebellum colleges is the difficult in determining what constituted a college, as opposed to an "academy" during this period.

Absalom Peters was unquestionably correct when he remarked in 1851: "Our country is to be a land of colleges."[85]

As the colonial economy grew, middling strata—country gentry and urban bourgeoisie—prospered. College became affordable for their sons and promised increased social mobility. The Founding Fathers were predominately first-generation college graduates—John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Adams, James Madison, Benjamin Rush, James Wilson, and many more.[86] Educated leaders could ensure that America protected its sacred destiny as a "Republic of Virtue," but the virtue of the republic soon came into question.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, American institutes of higher education experienced two significant transformations. First, secular philosophy emerged, influenced by events like the French Revolution and the writings of thinkers such as Tom Paine and David Hume. Concurrently, a growing democratic spirit gave rise to several student-led rebellions.[87] The conditions of American colleges were in a state of decline, and what had once been the key agent for preserving a sacred society was now giving way to a rapidly encroaching secular one. If America would become a holy nation and harbinger of the millennial kingdom that so many had believed it to be, a change needed to happen. These institutes of higher education could no longer be mere repositories of traditional knowledge; they needed to become agents of transformation in the present, with the ultimate goal of shaping a more glorious future. The Second Great Awakening would catalyze this change.

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[85] Quoted in Frederick Rudolph, *American College and University: A History,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 47.

[86] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution,* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 197.

[87] Brubacher and Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition, 132.*

The Transformation of American Higher Education

The Second Great Awakening's transformation of American higher education was not merely a byproduct of its revivalism but an intentional and visionary response to the changing social and spiritual landscape. Religious leaders and educators of the era recognized the critical role that institutions of higher learning could play in shaping the nation's destiny and fulfilling its sacred mission. The democratization of American Christianity caused the vision of higher education to become increasingly idealized. As a wave of colleges, seminaries, and academies emerged and expanded, they became centers of revivalist activity, nurturing a generation of academically equipped, spiritually vibrant, and morally committed students. Historian Frederick Rudolph notes, "All were touched by the American faith in tomorrow, in the unquestionable capacity of Americans to achieve a better world."[88]

No amount of reason could combat the Awakening's belief in endless progress. The impact of this transformation would extend far beyond the walls of these educational institutions, as these graduates went on to play influential roles in various spheres of American society, from the pulpit to politics. The sacred mythos, painstakingly nurtured over generations, intersected with the ambitions of a burgeoning nation as institutions of higher education emerged as crucibles for the creation of a distinctive American identity—one firmly grounded in religious faith, moral mission, and an unwavering dedication to the glorious destiny ahead. This mythos was not content to remain a mere belief; instead, the Second Great Awakening produced religious and educational leaders who worked to reshape higher education into the driving force behind the realization of this profound objective.

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[88] Rudolph, *American College and University*, 49.

In the initial stages of the Spiritual awakening, several established colleges experienced a pronounced denominational shift. For instance, the Baptists, whom self-taught lay preachers had primarily led during the early republic, began to establish at least fourteen colleges and eight theological seminaries by the mid-1840s.[89] Between 1818 and 1860, Congregationalists founded fifty-one colleges, Methodists sponsored thirty-four, and the comparatively smaller Disciples of Christ established six higher education institutions during the same period.[90] Notably, religious groups such as the Baptists, Methodists, and others, often associated with "low-church" traditions, initially displayed hesitance toward higher education.

Throughout the eighteenth century, these religious bodies thrived on their ability to connect with lower-class Americans. There was a prevailing concern that establishing schools to educate clergy and laity might alienate them from the very people they had effectively reached.[91] However, as the middle class began to emerge, driven by the changing societal landscape, Baptists and Methodists, among others, realized that they could ascend to a prominent position within the middle strata of society. This realization underscored the need to establish colleges, which not only fulfilled some of the requirements of middle-class life but also enhanced the reputation and respectability of these denominations as they transitioned from poverty to prosperity.[92] Interestingly, denominational colleges of the Second Great Awakening were often only loosely tied to their religious sponsors. Sectarianism was a significant obstacle to

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[89] Noll, *America's God, 183.*

[90] Curtis D. Johnson: *Redeeming America: Evangelicals and the Road to Civl War,* (Chicago, 1993), 39.

[91] Rudolph, *American College and University, 57.*

[92] Ibid.

sacralizing a society, so many of these schools were often far more interdenominational,

intending to promote and advance a broadly Protestant Christian worldview.[93]

This development prompted a renewed emphasis on the significance of theological

education. Several collegiate leaders believed in understanding all studies adequately through the

prism of theology. For instance, Charles Finney, a professor of theology at Oberlin College, was

asked if a minister should study science, to which he replied, "I would answer: Yes; the more, the

better. I would hope that ministers might understand all science. However, it should all be in

connection with theology."[94] Finney, detailing what he saw as a danger between separating

classical and theological education, wrote:

> The very distinction between classical and theological study is a curse to the Church, and
> a curse to the world. The student spends four years in college at classical studies, with no
> God in them; and then three years in the seminary, at theological studies; and what then?
> Poor young man! Set him to work, and you will find that he is not educated for the
> ministry at all.[95]

From this perspective, a student's educational journey, starting from their undergraduate years,

was to be deeply infused with a sense of the Divine if they were to effectively contribute to

establishing God's kingdom on earth. This connection between intellectual transformation and

the colleges' obligations to the American public was intrinsic. Institutions of higher learning had

a twofold duty: serving their immediate communities or regions while remaining responsive to

prevalent American ideologies and practical societal needs.[96] Furthermore, they operated within

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[93] Axtell, *The Rise of the Modern University,* 166.

[94] Finney, *Lectures on Revival,* 235.

[95] Ibid., 235-36.

[96] Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education,* 184.

the competitive framework of a free-market economy, where the struggle for survival among colleges was intense by the mid-nineteenth century.

The role of educational leaders assumed paramount significance during this period. Virtually every prominent evangelist dedicated time and effort to raise funds for a college with the aspiration of training young ministers to follow in their footsteps. In this regard, Oberlin stood as a testament to this commitment, though it was not unique in its endeavors. Amherst, Rensselaer, Rochester, Wittenberg, Connecticut Wesleyan, Ohio Wesleyan, Gettysburg, Western Reserve, Lane, Yale, Andover, and Union theological seminaries, among others, shared this mission. These institutions, helmed by individuals characterized by both piety and scholarship, played a pivotal role in tempering the more strange behavior regularly expressed in nineteenth-century American revivals, removing elements of fanaticism, grounding them in either liberalized Calvinist or Arminian doctrines and steering them towards socially responsible courses of action.[97]

Now conceived as a social investment, the Second Great Awakening transformed American higher education, as they adopted a more socially active model than the earliest colonial colleges. This evolution became a means to transform society, marrying social activism with national destiny. A commitment to the republic emerged as a guiding obligation of the American college. As Professor Andrew White would declare to students at Cornell, "You are here to begin a man's work in the greatest time and land the world has yet known."[98]

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[97] Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 141.

[98] Rudolph, *American College and University,* 63.

Fueled by romantic idealism and millennial hope, a glorious vision of the republic coursed through the faculty and students at several of these collegiate institutes during the Second Great Awakening. Most higher education leaders concerned with its religious character did not make much of a distinction between the notion of a Protestant and that of an ideal American. During this period, the notion of "manifest destiny" justifying America's territorial expansion and its removal of indigenous Americans became prominent.[99] One of the great contradictions of this period was that attempts to Christianize the continent often produced some of the least Christian actions.

The Second Great Awakening's emphasis on morality, ethics, and social responsibility reshaped the landscape of professional education in America. Legal, medical, and theological education underwent significant transformations, reflecting the moral imperatives of the revival movement. Professional schools emerged as vital institutions that imparted knowledge and instilled a sense of moral duty and social consciousness in their graduates.[100] Interestingly, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, men choosing to become lawyers outnumbered men choosing to go into ministry three to two. However, during the years of the Second Great Awakening, this trend reversed itself.[101]

In the sphere of medical colleges, one area where the spiritual awakening greatly impacted the studies of the university was the promotion of novel body and diet reforms. Based on available scientific research and theories, these reformers created sacralized sets of codes that

[99] Marsden. *The Soul of the American University, 89.*

[100] Birdsall, "The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order," 350.

[101] Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education, 145.*

promised physical and spiritual well-being.[102] Regarding dietary reforms, no name was more

prolific than Sylvester Graham. Graham, by whom the Graham Cracker takes its name, argued

that reducing irritation to the body would lead to both health and virtue. He argued that the two

primary sources of irritation were overstimulating foods and sexual desire. A proper and

disciplined approach to physical health would be necessary to create a righteous society. So

Graham prescribed a vegetarian diet, bread made with graham flour, abstinence from strong

drinks (tea, coffee, and alcohol), and a minimal and structured sex life.[103] Some American

religious groups, including Mormons and Seventh-Day Adventists, still maintain many of these

practices.

Another significant development of this reform movement was the novel practice of

phrenology, which Orson Scott Fowler developed to its fullest. Phrenology developed from the

belief that the shape and contours of the skull, specifically its bumps and depressions, revealed

information about an individual's personality, character, and mental abilities. Though it

eventually would be debunked by the medical sciences, this practice played a massive part in

nineteenth-century reform. Several other physiological reformers developed during this period,

many of whom began to study the connection between bodily manipulation and the alignment of

the human spirit. This study would eventually lead an Iowa man named Daniel David Palmer to

develop a new alternative medical practice called chiropractics at the end of the nineteenth

century, a title he received from his friend, Reverend Samuel Weed.[104]

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[102] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 163.

[103] Ibid., 166.

[104] Edzard Ernst, *Chiropractic: Not All That It's Cracked up to Be,* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 5.

Another educational innovation of the era was integrating manual labor into college curricula. This concept, originally from Europe and popularized by the radical Oneida Institute, found favor among American evangelicals. It appealed to them by promising several advantages, including physical fitness (with games being strictly discouraged), fostering an egalitarian spirit, and providing a means for aspiring ministers, in particular, to finance their education.[105] In 1826, a group of enthusiasts at Andover Seminary established a mechanical association and a corresponding mechanical workshop. In 1829, Elias Cornelius of the American Education Society delivered an extensive address to this group, lauding the health benefits of manual labor and citing numerous successful examples of its implementation.

Most American institutes of higher education operated without government support in the early republic. These early colleges were funded through a combination of tuition fees, private donations, land grants, and the creation of manual labor programs. Blessed with the endorsement of the benevolent empire, manual labor programs proliferated wherever financially disadvantaged scholars sought a college education. In the eastern colleges, newer institutions established dedicated shops for students interested in working, while western colleges tended to implement more comprehensive arrangements, primarily based on farms. Oberlin, heavily influenced by the Oneida Institute, took manual labor to the next level by making it a mandatory and integral component of the college experience.[106]

As the United States expanded westward in the nineteenth century, the need for an educated populace to fulfill civic and economic roles grew. The Morrill Land-Grant Acts of 1862

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[105] Marsden, *The Soul of the American University,* 205.

[106] Ibid.

and 1890 marked a significant shift toward public funding for higher education. These acts provided federal land to states to sell, with proceeds used to establish and fund public colleges and universities focusing on agricultural and mechanical arts.[107] These "A&M" colleges were significantly influenced by the manual labor programs of the period. Vermont Congress Justin S. Morrill, from whom the bill took its name, leaned heavily on the ideals of the Northwest Ordinance (1787) that it was the government's responsibility to ensure it developed an educated and virtuous public for the nation's preservation. Morrill was subsequently called the "Father of the Agricultural Colleges," many of which have become leading educational institutions.[108] This legislation laid the groundwork for a nationwide network of public universities and a gradual shift towards governmental subsidization to increase educational opportunities for less affluent and minority students, including creating seventeen predominantly African American colleges and thirty American Indian colleges.

Nevertheless, unlike the trajectory of primary education, which obtained public funding much quicker, private philanthropy would remain the single most important means of expanding opportunities for higher education throughout the progressive era until post-World War II and the creation of the GI Bill in 1944. This federal program provided tuition assistance and living stipends to millions of returning veterans, leading to a surge in enrollments. While the funding

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[107] "Morrill Land Grant College Acts," United States Senate, www. Senate.gov, accessed March 2, 2024, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/civil_war/MorrillLandGrantCollegeAct_FeaturedDoc.htm.

[108] "Justin S. Morrill," *Britannica*, www.britannica.com, accessed March 2, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Justin-S-Morrill.

was provided to individuals rather than institutions, it substantially impacted the expansion and democratization of higher education.[109]

Even with the rise of federal aid programs increasing access to higher education, including the Pell Grant (1972), student work programs have continued to play a significant role in providing access to American higher education. The Federal Work-Study program, established as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, formalized this approach by providing funds for part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need. Many institutions also developed their own work programs, providing financial aid and practical experience related to students' fields of study. According to the American Department of Education, "more than 3,400 institutions of higher learning participate in the Federal Work-Study Program, and about seven percent of all undergraduates participate in a Work-Study Program, receiving an average of $2,400 each year."[110]

Unlike these contemporary student work programs, the emphasis on manual labor in the Second Great Awakening served as more than a practical means for students to pay for school. Like so many other things, labor had collapsed into the sacred, and several Awakening ministers began to teach that manual labor was necessary to produce the kind of perseverant leaders who could carry the kingdom throughout the continent and ultimately into the whole world. Echoing this sentiment, John Frost of the Oneida Presbytery and pupil of Finney wrote, "We can get money and missionaries; but what we want for the triumphant prosecution of this work [are] men

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[109] "Servicemen's Readjustment Act (1944)," National Archives, www.archives.gov, accessed March 2, 2024, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/servicemens-readjustment-act#:~:text=Roosevelt on June 22, 1944, WWII and later military conflicts.

[110] "Federal Work Study Program," U.S. Department of Education, https://www2.ed.gov/programs/fws/index.html, accessed September 19, 2023.

of firm constitution who can endure hardship."[111] Many of these leaders began to argue that one of the great reasons that the kingdom had neither come nor advanced into the nations was that the singular emphasis on intellectual growth at institutes of higher education had left ministers as effeminate and weak.

The manual labor movement would permeate universities throughout antebellum America, especially at the institutes examined in the subsequent chapters—Andover, Lane, and Oberlin. Though the earliest manual labor programs faded by the end of the Civil War, they were influential in several ways. The awakening's emphasis on masculine Christianity would be critical to the ministries of men like Billy Sunday, and it has even experienced a renaissance among contemporary American Christians in recent movements like The Young, Restless, and Reformed Movement and the Christian Nationalist movement. The manual labor movement also led to several young men's associations promoting physical health, most notably the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). The labor movement also contributed to the growing proliferation of sports in college life.[112]

Among student life, the Second Great Awakening sparked a widespread revivalist movement that frequently took hold on college campuses. According to one historian, this religious awakening was the most influential force shaping student life in antebellum America. It was a remarkable amalgamation of confession, profession, joy, and tears, a blend that drew numerous young college men into the church and inspired them to pursue ministry.[113]

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[111] Quoted in *First Annual Report of the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions,* (New York, 1833), 115.

[112] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 120.

[113] Rudolph, *American College and University,* 77.

Furthermore, these students wholeheartedly embraced the reformist ideals instigated by the awakening. This enthusiastic commitment led to a network of religious societies with varying theological, devotional, and missionary orientations. The student members of the earliest theological society at Harvard, *Adelphoi Theologia*, clearly demonstrated such a commitment in their first mission statement. It reads:

> To enkindle the Sparks of Virtue and Religion in the youthful breast, to cause the Human mind to expand with Love and Adoration to the universal Parent of the World, and to diffuse the Knowledge and benign Influences of his divine Religion are duties highly worthy of every rational being, but more especially of those who are designed to fill the sacred desk, and to instruct mankind in those Principles which will secure their happiness in this world, and a glorious Immortality in the Mansion of Bliss.[114]

From 1797 to 1861, the Moral Society of Yale College required its members to live according to the Bible, to "suppress vice and promote the interests of morality," and to refrain from profanity, playing games for money or gain, playing cards, and consuming hard liquor.[115] Creating a moral and righteous society maintained a prominent vision for these student societies, but nothing fueled their dreams more than that of a global mission.

Students such as Samuel Mills deeply captivated themselves with the concept of "bringing enlightenment to heathen nations," although they initially lacked the practical means to realize this aspiration. They were, in essence, dreamers guided by the enthusiasm of the awakening, pushing them to transform their dreams into tangible realities. In response to this calling, Mills founded the "Society of Brethren" at Williams College. This humble initiative quickly gained momentum and found resonance at Andover, where it converged with another

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[114] Quoted in Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements: The Origin and Intercollegiate Life*, (New York: Association Press, 1934), 19.

[115] Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements*, 33.

significant society known as the "Society of Inquiry on the Subject of Missions."[116] These societies became the cradle of the modern missions movement, marking a pivotal moment that galvanized American Christians to participate in a global missionary endeavor. Through the efforts of these student-led societies, individuals were exposed to a remarkable capacity to enact profound change.

This shift in perspective catalyzed a transformation in students' priorities, propelling them beyond a narrow fixation on domestic matters and towards a broader, more global mindset. They transcended the confines of local concerns and assumed a profound responsibility for the world's welfare. This newfound sense of global responsibility ushered in a deep and unprecedented intercollegiate and interdenominational fellowship, fostering connections among previously unexplored colleges. Excerpts from some of the earliest correspondences underscore the significance of this need for intercollegiate fellowship.

In 1811, students from the Missionary Seminary at Gosport, England, expressed their gratitude, writing to the Society of Inquiry at Andover: "Thanks be to God for the grand union of believers in Christ. No distance of place, difference of color, or diversity of circumstances can hinder its manifestation. It is divine, stemming from a unity of heart focused on the moral character of God."[117] These students were not merely seeking advice from other colleges on managing their student organizations; they were extending their hands across denominational, national, and racial boundaries in pursuit of a shared sense of solidarity and a joint mission sanctified by Christ's commission—to make the world holy.

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[116] Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements*, 61.

[117] "Letter to Mr. John Nichols, student, Hanover. From Andover, March 22, 1814," Quoted in Shedd, *Student Christian Movements,* 75.

These student societies actively immersed themselves in their era's pressing intellectual and social concerns. Among these concerns, slavery and temperance emerged as the two paramount issues that student societies grappled with across university campuses. Nevertheless, students did not confine their engagements to these topics alone; they also delved into economics, politics, and the specter of war. Several societies were pivotal in driving significant social transformations, profoundly influencing the nation's future. These students' liberal and reformist inclinations often aligned with abolitionist and progressive sentiments, shedding light on why specific student societies found themselves unwelcome in many Southern colleges and universities impacted by the awakening's revivals, such as Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia.[118]

Antebellum college students, particularly those inspired by the ideals of the Second Great Awakening, maintained steadfast convictions. They viewed their causes as sacred and indispensable for shaping a better world. Consequently, debates over these critical issues frequently caused schisms within schools. Fueled by the entrepreneurial spirit ingrained in the American psyche, students departed in pursuit of educational environments more conducive to realizing their visionary aspirations. A noteworthy instance of this phenomenon is the story of the Lane Rebels, a narrative Chapter Five will expound upon in detail.

Revivalism left its indelible mark wherever it appeared, becoming a recurrent presence on most American college campuses before the Civil War. The year 1858 marked the culmination of this revivalist fervor—a period characterized by economic turmoil and profound uncertainty surrounding the trajectory of the slavery debate. Antebellum revivalism drew inspiration from

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[118] Shedd, *Student Christian Movements,* 89.

the instability of the American economy and the perceived threat of Roman Catholicism as the number of Catholic immigrants significantly increased. The revivalist spirit was palpable at institutions such as Williams, Wofford, Amherst, the University of North Carolina, Wake Forest, Trinity, Wabash, the University of Georgia, and Emory.[119]

Despite the waning influence of revivalism in subsequent years, the legacy of student-led societies and intercollegiate cooperation, forged through the zeal of the Second Great Awakening, continued to hold a significant place in the fabric of student life at institutions of higher learning. While the overtly Christian character of several of these societies may have evolved or been abandoned, the underlying goal of fostering a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood with a vision of reshaping their world towards an eschatological vision to address contemporary social issues continues to radiate.

The most significant development regarding academic institutions in the Second Great Awakening was that the movement opened the doors of higher education to those of whom it had long been closed. In the mid-1830s, many separate initiatives brought women into higher education. Three years later, in 1834, Mary Lyon embarked on a fundraising campaign to establish Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. In the subsequent year, an interdenominational revival in Macon, Georgia, led to a resolution establishing an educational institution for girls, later named Georgia Female College.[120] Each of these initiatives represented unique efforts to elevate the quality of education available to women, all spurred by the enduring spirit of the

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[119] Rudolph, *American College and University*, 83.

[120] Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education,* 205-206.

Second Great Awakening. Importantly, each was also profoundly influenced by the distinct cultural milieu of its respective region—the Northeast, the West, and the South.

The agitation for collegiate education for women shared the same inspiration as many of the social reform movements of the first half of the nineteenth century. In a world where everything and everyone was progressing, where the sacredness of the human personality and inherent rights of the individual in society were advanced as fundamental truths, higher education for women received the attention of Americans along with such causes as prison reform, education for the blind and deaf, the care of the mentally ill, the rights of children, and the emancipation of slaves.[121] In 1837, Oberlin College in Ohio enrolled its first four female students. It thus inaugurated the beginning of higher education for women, offering its young women a traditional B.A. course and a unique Ladies' Course. These women received a legitimate diploma for completion of the program.[122] A male student at Oberlin, commenting on the significance of its novel coeducation program, asserted, "Women are to be educated because we choose civilization rather than barbarism."[123]

At Mount Holyoke, Mary Lyon embraced the prevalent concept of separate spheres, envisioning the role of educated women as a complement to and an extension of the evangelical Christian mission. However, she disdained the norms of gentility cultivated in female academies and was a staunch opponent of ornamental subjects. She believed that the more comprehensive

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[121] Rudolph, *American College and University,* 311.

[122] Geoffrey Blodgett, *Oberlin History: Essays and Impressions,* (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 2006), 13.

[123] Quoted in Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College From its Foundation through the Civil War,* (Oberlin College, 1943), 383.

the academic education of women, the more effectively they could fulfill their domestic roles. Most of the earliest women's colleges adopted the pedagogical model that Lyon championed.[124]

Mount Holyoke and Oberlin managed to attract a self-selected minority of women to their institutions. In contrast, the female colleges in the South were more mainstream, catering to the daughters of planter and professional families. In pursuing longevity in a patriarchal society, these early Southern female schools straddled the undefined boundary between seminaries and colleges. They intentionally blurred their mission by adopting ambiguous names such as "institute," "academy," or "high school." Typically, the first two years of these institutions offered college preparatory coursework, while the last two years included college-level subjects.[125]

Despite notable advancements, some women remained dissatisfied with the quality of women's higher education. In 1851, Catherine Beecher, a staunch advocate for collegiate education for women, sounded the alarm, declaring, "Those female institutions in our country that are presumptuously adopting the esteemed title of colleges have, as of yet, failed to embody the essential characteristics that define the primary advantages of such institutions. They remain nothing more than high schools."[126] Prompted by Beecher's advocacy, female education reformers established the American Women's Education Association in 1852 to provide direction and standards for the women's college movement. This association was just one of several women's associations and societies that developed during this period. For example, to coincide with the creation of the YMCA, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was created

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[124] Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education,* 210.

[125] Ibid*.,* 212.

[126] Quoted in Rudolph, *American College and University*, 312.

in 1855. The YWCA quickly spread to other countries, becoming a significant organization dedicated to the empowerment and well-being of women.

Female colleges faced numerous challenges in the following years. Limited funding, gradual enrollment growth, and deeply entrenched societal beliefs that women's colleges would disrupt the household economy all posed formidable obstacles for these institutions.[127] However, certain schools, such as Oberlin College, would emerge as remarkable success stories in women's education. Chapter six will delve further into the impact of coeducation on women at Oberlin and how it evolved to serve as one of the earliest models of an egalitarian educational institution.

Another group long excluded from higher education was African Americans. As was the case with women, Oberlin College was the pioneering school in the inclusion of these outsiders. Interestingly, when asked to take up a professorate there, Charles Finney declared that he would only come and take professorships at Oberlin if African Americans were allowed to be enrolled.[128] Several of them would be. This sentiment arose from Finney's egalitarian belief, further stoked by his dealings with the Oneida community. At the Noyes' Academy, black and white students could study various literary and vocational subjects: bookkeeping, geometry, algebra, trigonometry, surveying, navigation, astronomy, grammar, logic, and philosophy.[129] Oberlin's inclusion of African Americans was a direct outworking of the awakening's abolitionist beliefs that had shaped the institution.

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[127] Rudolph, *American College and University*, 317.

[128] Blodgett, *Oberlin History,*

[129] Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 2.

Sadly, except for Oberlin and a few small and poorly funded black colleges developed after the Civil War, most African Americans remained self-taught until after the First World War. Nevertheless, despite the opposition, several prominent African-American thinkers would arise during this period—W.E.B. Dubois, Frederick Douglas, David Walker, Sojourner Truth, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. These intellectual leaders played pivotal roles in advocating for the rights and dignity of African Americans during the nineteenth century. They laid the foundation for future generations of black activists and thinkers.

The Second Great Awakening sparked a seismic shift in antebellum society. Its driving force was the aspiration to sacralize the American landscape and establish it as the Christian Republic necessary to manifest the Kingdom of God. In this transformative process, education emerged as a linchpin. Those involved envisioned an educated populace as the wellspring of a benevolent empire. This chapter has illuminated how the Second Great Awakening drove the proliferation of American higher education and fundamentally reshaped it.

These colleges, which had historically served as custodians of traditional intellectual culture, were now established as agents of social change. Rooted in the awakening's sacralizing vision, they expanded their curricula, fostered vibrant student life, adopted a more globally oriented perspective, and embarked on the path toward inclusivity. The ideals born of the Second Awakening planted seeds within these institutions that would eventually blossom into the modern American university. Importantly, this transformation was not isolated to one institution or denomination but significantly influenced colleges and seminaries nationwide.

This chapter has presented an overview of the significant ideas and movements highlighting the impact of the Second Great Awakening on American higher education. It

illustrates how institutions played a vital role in realizing the sacred mythos of the nation's

destiny. To explore this research further, this project will shift to three specific case studies:

Andover Seminary, Lane Seminary, and Oberlin College. The selection of these three schools as

case studies was developed out of the desire to provide a thorough understanding of the profound

changes brought about by the Second Great Awakening. Each institution represents distinct

geographical regions, religious traditions, and educational philosophies. This deliberate selection

offers a well-rounded perspective on the transformative era under consideration.

Andover Theological Seminary stands out for its pioneering approach to theological

education. It integrated theological studies into a broader academic curriculum and demonstrated

a commitment to fostering student activism. Additionally, Andover's eventual embrace of

theological liberalism marked a significant evolution within the institution. Lane Seminary is

notable for its vigorous engagement with social reform, ultimately leading to a period of

upheaval at the school. These aspects of Lane's history shed light on the intersection of religious

conviction and social activism and how hyper-sacralization ultimately led to significant division

within the seminary. Oberlin College's radical dedication to inclusion and equality is a distinctive

case study. It exemplifies how higher education institutions responded to the challenges and

opportunities presented by the era, particularly in promoting inclusivity and social equality.

These case studies will provide insights into the specific transformations of these

institutions and shed light on the broader evolution of colleges during this era. Andover signifies

the inaugural wave of educational change, while Lane epitomizes the second wave. Lastly,

Oberlin symbolizes the concluding wave, offering a collective glimpse into the fertile ground

from which the progressive American liberal arts college would ultimately emerge. Chapter Four

awaits, ready to delve into the exploration of Andover Theological Seminary.

Chapter 4

Youth Possessed by Dreams: Andover Theological Seminary

In the early years of the nineteenth century, as the United States was finding its footing as a young nation, a profound transformation was underway. This transformation was not solely political or economic but spiritual and educational. At the heart of this evolution stood Andover Theological Seminary, which would become a crucible for some of the most sweeping changes in American higher education. Within a mere generation after the founding of Andover Seminary in 1807, theological seminaries had become the prevailing model for training an educated and erudite ministry within American Protestantism. These institutions formalized, systematized, and expanded ministerial education, significantly enhancing the preparation of religious professionals.

Graduates from these seminaries and divinity schools were not only ambassadors of the gospel but also instrumental in propagating educational access throughout the nation. They took the initiative to establish and sustain various academic institutions and endeavors, encompassing colleges, seminaries, academies, common schools, churches, Sunday schools, libraries, religious publications, charitable organizations, and reform societies.[1] Their collective efforts left an indelible mark on the future trajectory of the United States. Andover Seminary served as the archetype for American seminaries and graduate schools nationwide.

Before the creation of Andover Seminary, denominations used various methods to prepare ministers for the church. In the seventeenth century, the path to ministerial licensure predominantly involved independent preparation, with varying degrees of support and guidance

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[1] Natalie A. Naylor, "The Theological Seminary in the Configuration of American Higher Education: The Ante-Bellum Years," *History of Education Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1977): 17.

from local parish ministers. This preparatory period could span from a few months to several

years, typically involving part-time study while prospective ministers sustained themselves by

tutoring or working as schoolteachers.[2] The Great Awakening of the eighteenth century

significantly bolstered the ranks of those seeking ministerial roles and amplified the renown of

individual revivalist preachers.

Some more accomplished evangelists began attracting students from beyond their

immediate parishes, establishing private "parsonage seminaries" or "log colleges" geared toward

ministerial training.[3] Additionally, academies, particularly favored among Presbyterians, offered

a comprehensive education encompassing classical liberal arts and divinity studies.

Consequently, in colonial America, aspiring ministers typically followed a path that involved

completing college or its equivalent, followed by pursuing divinity studies under the

apprenticeship of an experienced minister.

The widespread revivals of the Second Great Awakening sweeping across the nation

drove a significant surge in demand for theological education. The need for a native-trained

clergy, the conditions of voluntarism, the diversity of denominations, growing denominational

consciousness, theological schisms, the growth in population, and westward migration added to

the burgeoning religious marketplace generated by the awakening. Such a burgeoning

marketplace amplified the demand for ministers and the supply pool of individuals aspiring to

become one. With increasingly stringent licensing requirements, particularly within the

Congregationalist and Presbyterian denominations, the conventional colleges of the era were

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[2] Roland H. Bainton, *Yale and the Ministry,* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 49-61.

[3] Naylor, "The Theological Seminary in the Configuration of American Higher Education: The Ante-Bellum Years," 18.

deemed inadequate for producing qualified ministers without additional apprenticeships. Another critical challenge emerged as the number of ministerial candidates far exceeded the available mentors to provide them with pastoral training. This increasing demand for ministers, paired with a declining pool of trained clergy, led Ashbel Green, a pastor from Philadelphia, to implore the Presbyterian General Assembly, "Give us ministers!"[4] The assembly responded by encouraging presbyteries and synods to try to bolster licensed ministers' ranks.

The pressing question was how to accelerate and broaden the production of a consistent stream of proficient ministers without compromising the rigorous standards of ministerial training. This question gained urgency as an increasing number of heterodox sects emerged, Unitarianism had taken over Harvard, and the continual revivals of the Awakening underscored Jesus' words that "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2). The establishment of Andover Seminary was created as a response to these challenges.

Andover Seminary serves as a profound case study examining how the ideals of the Second Great Awakening catalyzed significant transformations in American higher education. The chapter will delve into the institution's establishment and pivotal advancements in the first half of the nineteenth century and its enduring influence on the subsequent creation and evolution of graduate studies in the United States. Finally, this chapter will unveil the initial wave of significant changes in the character and purpose of American higher education during this transformative era.

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[4] "Give us Ministers," *Minutes of the General Assembly,* (1805), quoted in D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country*, (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 106.

The Birth of the American Graduate School

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a crucial development unified traditional Protestant ministers in New England and propelled them into action: the emergence of Unitarianism. Rooted in its rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity and its affirmation of the unity of God, Unitarianism posed a significant challenge to established Christian orthodoxy, sparking debates that resonated deeply within American society.[5] During the eighteenth century, Enlightenment principles that championed reason, liberty, and religious tolerance spurred the rooting of Unitarian ideas in the American colonies. Influential figures such as Jonathan Mayhew, Charles Chauncy, John Adams, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, and Ralph Waldo Emerson played pivotal roles in shaping and advancing Unitarian theology.

Unitarianism became a significant presence in the diverse ideological landscape of the post-revolutionary era, finding a solid foothold at Harvard. The college's shift toward a Unitarian position unfolded gradually during the early nineteenth century. It is widely agreed upon that the official transition to a Unitarian stance occurred in 1805 when Henry Ware was elected as the Hollis Professor of Divinity, marking the final replacement of the Old Calvinist leadership.[6] This development posed a significant challenge to orthodox Calvinist ministers in New England, particularly among the Congregationalists. Harvard had long served as an essential training ground for Congregationalist ministers, and many were now adopting these Unitarian beliefs.

To underscore the extent of the Unitarian movement's influence within New England Congregationalism, it is noteworthy that between 1800 and 1830, up to half of the tax-supported

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[5] Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People,* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 220.

[6] Daniel Walker Howe, "The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy and the Second Great Awakening, (1805-1861)," (PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1966), 4.

Congregationalist churches in the region had embraced Unitarian principles.[7] To counter this "rising infidelity" and safeguard the success of the Awakening in New England, the more orthodox Congregationalist clergy recognized the need to establish a formidable alternative to Harvard. This institution would be instrumental in training the next generation of ministers to uphold "sound, orthodox, Calvinistic principles."[8] And not only keep them but spread them across the expanding republic.

Eliphalet Pearson, the former president of Harvard who had resigned over the "takeover," initiated the discussions to form a new theological school. Pearson had been the first principal of a ministerial prep school called Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. After he resigned from Harvard, he returned to the academy and began the early process of planning the new divinity school with the academy's trustees. One trustee, Samuel Abbot, a wealthy retired merchant in Andover, changed his plan to leave his estate of well over $100,000 to Harvard because of its now-Unitarian leanings. He directed that his money should go instead to Phillips Academy.[9] With the plans and funding in place in 1807, Pearson and the Trustees created Andover Theological Seminary. It would become America's prototype and premiere graduate professional school by the Civil War.

The triumph of Andover swiftly inspired others to emulate its model—a three-year program designed for college graduates. Notably, the Unitarians at Harvard organized a divinity school in 1811, while the Presbyterians founded Princeton Seminary in 1812 and Auburn in

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[7] Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith,* 220.

[8] Claude M. Fuess, *An Old New England School: A History of Phillips Academy, Andover,* (Boston, 1917), 146.

[9] Naylor, "The Theological Seminary…," 19.

upstate New York in 1818. The Episcopalians followed suit with the General Seminary in New York City in 1819, and the Baptists established Newton in 1825. Thirteen Protestant denominations and over fifty theological seminaries were established in seventeen states and the District of Columbia by 1840.[10] Most of these institutions emulated the Andover model. Thirty-three of the seminaries established in this formative era have survived to the present day, including six that later merged with other seminaries.[11]

The founders of Andover built the first lecture hall and chapel to accommodate sixty students, hoping for a dozen the first year. The faculty admitted thirty-six men by the end of the first year and an additional thirty-one by the second year.[12] Graduating classes averaged between twenty and twenty-five in the first decade. By the 1820s, total enrollment had exceeded one hundred, far more extensive than most colleges from that era.[13]

From the beginning, more students were enrolled at Andover than had studied divinity at any time in a college as resident graduates in a parsonage seminary or log college. The primary reason for this was the abundance of benevolence that ensured the success of the seminary. The Phillips family generously contributed both property and buildings to establish the institution. Displaying remarkable charity, Abbot allocated funds to cover the salaries and housing for three full-time professors.[14] These benevolent acts extended beyond the mere establishment of the school; they also aimed to ensure accessibility to education.

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[10] Leonard Woods, *History of Andover Theological Seminary*, ed. by George S. Baker (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1833), 137-138.

[11] Naylor, *"The Theological Seminary…,"* 20.

[12] Ibid., 19.

[13] Henry K. Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary, (*Newton, MA: Thomas Todd, 1933), 13.

[14] Naylor, *"The Theological Seminary…,"* 19.

A pivotal aspect of the Second Great Awakening was its advocacy for universal education. While the initial implementation of this concept was evident in Sunday schools and common schools, higher education in early nineteenth-century America remained largely inaccessible to the majority, primarily limited to affluent white men. However, one of the most transformative effects of the Second Great Awakening on American higher education, as exemplified throughout these case studies, was the emphasis on inclusion.

This inclusive approach commenced at Andover Seminary, which pioneered the creation of scholarships and grants, opening its doors to less affluent and impoverished individuals. Abbot allocated a portion of his initial donation, amounting to $20,000, specifically to support students with limited financial means.[15] Speakers noted several times at the school's semi-centennial celebration the profound benevolence of Andover towards its students. One speaker, Dr. Withington of Newbury, gave this tribute:

> It is impossible to regard this institution on this joyous day without looking back to those Founders who, without intending it, have here built a monument to general beneficence. They have left us their example; they show an influence that survives the sepulcher. They call upon affluence to cherish the vine that piety has planted. Even the admiration they inspire is connected with duty, and their noblest charities present us with a work that has only begun.[16]

Several other educational institutions emerging during the Second Great Awakening followed Andover's lead by establishing scholarships and financial aid programs. The goal was to facilitate the pursuit of higher education and vocational training for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As one scholar has noted, during the antebellum period, approximately half of all

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[15] Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary,* 13.

[16] *Memorial of the Semi-centennial Celebration of the Founding of the Theological Seminary at Andover,* (Andover: Published by Warren F. Draper, 1859), Kindle, location 323.

students in theological seminaries received financial support in the form of scholarships or grants from either institutions or societies.[17]

These financial provisions enabled thousands of young men to engage in comprehensive education through academies, colleges, and seminaries. The reformers of the Awakening, mindful of the need for faithful "harvest laborers," translated their convictions into action. In colloquial terms, they "put their money where their mouth was." This transformative movement paved the way for a more inclusive and accessible American higher education system.

Andover Seminary showcased its commitment to inclusivity by obtaining a charter as an interdenominational institution. This characteristic was a recurring theme in awakening movements in American history, where the ability to transcend denominational and sectarian boundaries was a hallmark. Yale College, strongly influenced by the sacralizing objectives of the Second Great Awakening, pioneered this interdenominational approach. Embracing this vision within theological education, Andover Seminary aimed to equip passionate ministers not for the triumph of any particular sect or denomination but to advance the Protestant Christian religion.

Admission to Andover Seminary hinged primarily on subscribing to a general, yet Calvinist-leaning, Protestant Orthodoxy. The predominant theological position of the professors of Andover was Hopkinsian, taking its name from the New Light minister, Samuel Hopkins. The Hopkinsian Creed differed somewhat from the Westminster Confession, omitting a few sections and modifying others. In substance, it affirmed belief in the authority of the Bible as superior to reason, the sovereignty of the divine will, the salvific election of some from the consequences of the fall of Adam, the atonement of Christ intended for all but genuinely efficacious to the elect,

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[17] David F. Allmendinger, Jr., *Paupers and Scholars: The Transformation of Student Life in Nineteenth Century New England,* (New York, 1975), 60.

and the assured salvation of these elect and the hopeless condemnation of the rest.[18] Though a strict requirement for professors, if students were in "general agreement" with the statement of faith, they were welcome to apply for admission. This novel creed was, in many ways, an attempt at creating a middle-ground position between the anti-credalism commonly birthed in the awakening and the strict-credalism still being promoted by "Old Lights."[19]

To achieve its interdenominational vision of protecting and promoting the advancement of the Christian religion, Andover's statement of faith needed to be protective of orthodoxy and inclusive of others. This fundamental criterion was echoed in Andover's inaugural constitution's initial regulation, emphasizing an inclusivity ethos. The regulation stated, "This institution shall be equally open to Protestants of every denomination for the admission of young men of requisite qualifications."[20] To further their consideration for admission, students were required to demonstrate a testimony of conversion, a regular byproduct of the awakening. Additionally, they needed to provide testimonials affirming their full communion with "some church of Christ."[21] While numerous antebellum colleges in America were initially denominationally affiliated, they eventually embraced the interdenominational approach modeled by Yale and then Andover.

Interdenominationalism profoundly influenced the academic sphere and student life, shaping an environment where students encountered diverse modes of thinking and practices through their educational curriculum and interactions with their peers. The lasting impact of student societies stems from their inherent inclusivity, which creates a welcoming space for

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[18] *The Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary in Andover,* (Andover: Printed by Flagg and Gould, 1817), Kindle, location 110.

[19] Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary,* 16.

[20] *The Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary in Andover,* Kindle, location 42.

[21] Ibid., location 64.

various perspectives. In the historical context of student YMCAs and YWCAs, though maintaining a predominantly Protestant character, they consistently embraced members from other major Christian denominations, exemplifying this inclusivity. The spirit of ecumenism prevalent in these early nineteenth-century societies mirrors the inclusive ethos that characterized the academic environment, enriching the educational experience with diverse perspectives.[22] These early forms of inclusivism would eventually evolve into the more pluralistic environment seen in contemporary American higher education.

This inclusive atmosphere nurtured a more liberal spirit, referring to an openness to different ideas among the faculty and students at Andover. A modern term capturing this mindset is "classic liberalism." Professor Moses Stuart, epitomizing this approach, maintained unquestionable orthodoxy while advocating for a more liberal approach to education. His influence profoundly transformed Andover and American scholarship as a whole. In a sermon preached at the dedication of Bartlet Chapel in 1818, Stuart demonstrated this more liberal approach to scholarship when he declared:

> We profess to shrink not from the most strenuous investigation. I am bold to say there is not a school of theology on earth where more free and unlimited investigation is indulged, nay inculcated and practiced. The shelves of our library are loaded with books of Latitudinarians and Skeptics, which are read and studied. We have no apprehension that the truths which we believe are to suffer by such an investigation.[23]

This liberalizing tendency was born from the awakening's renewed emphasis on human agency. Many ideological leaders of the period believed that individuals possessed the intrinsic capacity to align themselves with God's will and truth based on their interpretation of Scripture despite

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[22] Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements: Their Origin and Intercollegiate Life*, (New York; Association Press, 1934), 22.

[23] Quoted in Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary,* 18.

human sinfulness. In this theological framework, the conviction of conscience emerged as the central interpreter for knowing the truth. This conscience-centered sentiment of the awakening was ultimately the continual outgrowth of Protestantism, harking back to Luther's "Here I stand, I can do no other." The original statement of faith at Andover was rooted in this reality as those subscribing to the creed were encouraged to do so "according to the best light God shall give me."[24]

The renewed emphasis on man's intellectual capacities was very much promoted at Andover. It became the first institute of higher education in America to require completion of a "course of liberal education" for admission.[25] Hence, Andover Seminary was America's first official "graduate school." In the pre-Civil War years, well over ninety percent of Andover students were college graduates. Even non-graduates had attended an undergraduate institution for at least a year or two.

In the pre-Civil War era of the United States, theological seminaries emerged as pivotal centers for advanced and specialized education, laying the groundwork for the evolution of modern universities. As educational historians explore the origins of the university system, they rarely pay significant attention to institutions like Andover Seminary and similar seminaries or divinity schools. Their attention tends to gravitate towards unsuccessful proposals and endeavors that closely resemble the twentieth-century graduate school model, inadvertently downplaying the significant influence of theology and religion on early nineteenth-century American higher education. In this context, medical and law schools did not match their prestige or achievements,

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[24] *The Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary in Andover,* Kindle, location 480.

[25] Ibid., location 64.

preceding the prominence of institutions like Andover and Princeton Seminaries or Yale Divinity School. In his 1850 treatise, *University Education,* Henry Tappan recognized these differences among professional schools. He noted that "a thorough preparatory classical discipline is not required for law and medicine."[26] Tappan acknowledged that "the schools of theology approach more nearly to the university character than any other since a collegial discipline is generally required preparatory to an entrance."[27]

The propagation of Christianity worldwide necessitated ministers who were deeply rooted in academic knowledge and adhered to high professional standards. Despite some anti-intellectualist sentiments within the movements of the Second Great Awakening, they represented a minority viewpoint. Graduate institutions in the Protestant Christian tradition played a crucial role in establishing a strong emphasis on academic rigor within American universities. Historian George Marsden aptly observed this phenomenon, noting that "the most formidable intellectual strongholds of the day were theological seminaries. These schools were at the forefront of American professional education and offered about the only American opportunity for anything resembling graduate education."[28]

Andover's original constitution provided for a three-year course of theological studies, including public lectures on natural theology, sacred literature, ecclesiastical history, Christian theology, pulpit eloquence, and private instruction in Biblical studies in the original language. According to the 1817 student manual, it required students to:

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[26] Henry P. Tappan, *University Education,* (New York: Putnam, 1850), 50.

[27] Tappan, *University Education,* 51.

[28] George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 73.

Devote so much time to the study of the learned languages, as shall increase his knowledge of them, especially of the Greek and Hebrew languages; to pay due attention to Philology, Rhetoric, and Oratory; to read the best treatises on natural and revealed religion and on the fundamental doctrines of the gospel; to make himself master of the principal arguments and evidence of the truth of Christianity; to pay due attention to ecclesiastical history and the canons of biblical criticism. However, above all, it is required that he make the Bible the object of his most attentive, diligent, and prayerful study.[29]

Gratuitous instruction and accommodations would give students a better opportunity to pursue theological studies. With access to a comprehensive library, seminary professors could specialize in specific branches of theology, dedicating ample time to scholarly research and teaching.

Joseph Buckminster initially introduced Biblical criticism at Harvard, but after his untimely death in 1812, the center of Biblical scholarship shifted to Andover. Professor Moses Stuart became the leading Biblical scholar in New England and transmitted German theology, philology, and a more scientific approach to Biblical criticism to seminarians.[30] The significance of Stuart's inclusion of German scholarship in American higher education cannot be understated. Over the next century, the influence of German pedagogy and scholarship would continue readily transforming American higher education, as it would progressively transform into a more liberal arts model of education.[31]

The prerequisites for aspiring professors at Andover included holding a minimum of a Master of Arts in Religion and upholding a reputation for conscientiousness, knowledge, virtue,

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[29] Quoted in *Memorial of the Semi-centennial Celebration of the Founding of the Theological Seminary at Andover,* (Andover: Published by Warren F. Draper, 1859), Kindle, location 212.

[30] Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars*, (Middletown, CT, 1969), 76.

[31] James W. Fraser, "The Beginnings of Theological Education at Andover," Historical Journal of Massachusetts 13, no. 2 (Jun 01, 1985): 106.

and devoutness.[32] The seminaries served as the educational foundation for many individuals who later assumed roles as college presidents and professors. Notably, over eleven percent of Andover students in the inaugural decade (amounting to twenty-six men) eventually ascended to positions as college or seminary professors. In nearly forty years as the Professor of Biblical Studies at Andover (1809-1848), Moses Stuart taught seventy men who became college presidents and professors.

Most notably, biblical studies within the seminaries represented a pioneering domain for research and scholarly publications in American higher education. Stuart was a prolific scholar, contributing half a dozen commentaries, five Hebrew grammars, and many articles and translations. Moreover, the seminaries were crucial in disseminating knowledge beyond their immediate student body through esteemed scholarly journals, notably Andover's *Biblical Repository* and *Bibliotheca Sacra*.[33] During an era when religious Christian colleges held preeminence and moral philosophy stood as the crowning course within classical curricula, theological seminaries offered advanced training for prospective college professors in most academic fields, excluding science, mathematics, and modern foreign languages. Given the advanced education it furnished and the subsequent impact on its graduates, the seminary rightly merits acknowledgment as the "mother of colleges."[34]

Spiritual formation remained a vital part of student life at Andover. Revivals remained a prominent part of the school's life throughout the nineteenth century. The daily chapel was compulsory for both students and professors. This practice, however, was not unique to Andover.

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[32] *The Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary in Andover,* Kindle, location 107.

[33] Naylor, *"The Theological Seminary…,"* 25.

[34] Ibid.

Even state universities, like the University of Georgia, regularly maintained compulsory chapels

for their students well into the end of the nineteenth century.[35] At Andover, while professors

frequently delivered sermons in the Student Chapel, senior students were also obliged to prepare

sermons and often had the chance to preach. However, rules established that students first "shall

have obtained written permission for doing so, subscribed by the professors, or a majority of

them."[36] Despite this prohibition against spontaneous preaching, the culture of theological and

religious involvement among Andover students within this academic environment progressively

flourished in sync with the actively growing fervor of the Awakening. Eager students were

developing ways to contribute to the cause of Christ that would have global ramifications.

A Global Vision

In 1806, Samuel Mills Jr., recently converted during the awakening's revivals, led a

cohort of student volunteers at Williams College to gather and pray, seeking divine guidance

regarding their faith and calling. During their prayer, a rainstorm prompted Mills to direct the

group to seek shelter, suggesting, "Come, let us make it a subject of prayer under the

haystack."[37] In this makeshift sanctuary, as rain poured outside, they fervently prayed about

venturing into foreign missions. This pioneering group of student volunteers for foreign missions

was ready to devote their lives to service if God called them. They were youths possessed by

dreams of transforming the world for Christ. When they dispersed that day, they all believed that

God was unequivocally signaling them to "go."

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[35] Frederick Rudolph, *American College and University: A History,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 38.

[36] *The Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary in Andover,* Kindle, location 208.

[37] Gardiner Spring, *Memoir of Rev. Samuel John Mills,* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1820), 36.

This Haystack Prayer Meeting marked a pivotal moment in the inception of America's foreign missions movement. This group initiated a student missionary society at Williams College, a model that numerous other colleges soon adopted.[38] However, despite these societies generating great ideas, their missionary action slowly materialized. After graduating from Williams College, Samuel Mills and two others from the haystack gathering enrolled at Andover Seminary. At this institution, their ambitious vision for global missions would finally come to fruition. In 1810, these students at Andover established one of the most significant societies of the Second Great Awakening and American and global religious history—the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM).

While Andover's foundations rested on a compromise between Old Calvinist and New Divinity principles, the New Divinity Hopkinsians wielded the most significant theological influence over the institution. The faculty at the seminary, profoundly impacted by Edwardsian doctrines, included notable figures such as Edward D. Griffin, Moses Stuart, Ebenezer Porter, and Edwards A. Park. The adoption of the Hopkinsian Creed further solidified this influence, ensuring that subsequent faculty would adhere to these theological principles. The theology of Jonathan Edwards significantly influenced the Hopkinsians. In his most famous and reprinted work, *The Life of David Brainerd* (1749), Edwards promoted a theology of cosmic redemption tied to missionary endeavor.[39] Fully embracing this cosmic vision, Andover unequivocally positioned itself as the primary training center for missionaries associated with the ABCFM.

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[38] Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism,* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2002), 131.

[39] Ibid, 132.

With the creation of this missionary society, many students from other colleges, also possessed by missionary dreams, quickly sought to make their way to Andover to enter its graduate program and begin preparation and training for the global advancement of the kingdom. They sought preparation and training for the worldwide advancement of the kingdom. Among the notable students who enrolled at Andover to engage in this missionary movement were Samuel Newell from Harvard, Samuel Nott Jr. from Union College, and one of the most renowned, Adoniram Judson from Brown College. Two years later, in 1812, these three men and each of their wives, along with the addition of two other men, Luther Rice and Gordon Hall, left Andover and set sail for India. Speaking to the group before leaving, Mills established their resolve: "Though you and I are very little beings, we must not rest satisfied until our influence is felt to the remotest corner of this ruined world."[40]

The occurrence of this missionary initiative was another testament to the benevolence that characterized this era. The determination to proceed with the appointments despite financial challenges galvanized numerous supporters, prompting immediate action. By the time the second ship embarked for Calcutta, it had become feasible to cover their travel expenses, facilitate their wives' journey, and provide them with a year's salary upfront.[41] The ambitious vision of dispatching missionaries from America, sustained by the support of fellow Americans, had materialized into a tangible reality.

The Second Great Awakening ushered in a remarkable shift—the conviction that America's divine destiny was not simply to serve as a beacon of light for others to witness but to

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[40] Quoted in Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements,* 58.

[41] Kling, "The New Divinity and the Origins of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions," 795.

carry that light into the world's darker corners. The vision extended beyond mere Christian

nationalism; a spirit of Christian globalism, which held profound significance, characterized it.

The establishment of the ABCFM at Andover brought about a revolutionary expansion in the

purpose of higher education. Before the Second Great Awakening, education primarily served as

a custodian of knowledge and tradition, with a localized focus aimed at ensuring the continuity

of faithfulness within a specific society across generations. However, these students, driven by

missionary zeal, began to view education not only as a tool for preserving and advancing

Christian teachings within the American continent but also as a vehicle for carrying these

teachings to the furthest reaches of the globe. Perhaps there is no better summation of this spirit

than that which flowed from the pen of Anne Judson, Adoniram's wife. In an 1853 letter to the

renowned Baptist minister Francis Wayland, Anne wrote:

> [Christians] must do more than they have ever yet done. They must pray more, they must give more, and make greater efforts to prevent the Missionary flame from becoming extinct. Every Christian in the United States should feel as deeply impressed with the importance of making continual efforts for the salvation of the heathen, as though their conversion depended solely on himself. Every individual Christian should feel guilty if he has not done and does not continue to do all in his power for the spread of the gospel and the enlightening of the heathen world. But I need not write thus to you. You see, you feel the misery of the heathen world. Try to awaken Christians around you. Preach frequently on the subject of Missions.[42]

The fusion of this expanded sense of duty and the necessity of the New Birth became a potent

catalyst for the global mission. Embracing a perspective encompassing the entire world and an

individualized understanding of the Christian faith, the missionaries at Andover and other

missionary societies categorized the world into heathen and Christian, overlooking social

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[42] Letter from Ann Judson to Francis Wayland, 22 January 1823, quoted in James Knowles, *Memoir of Mrs. Ann H. Judson, Late Missionary to Burmah, Including a History of the American Baptist Mission in the Burman Empire*, 3rd ed. (Boston, MA: Lincoln & Edmands, 1829), 194–95.

standing or geographical location to delineate the circumstances. The new theological framework

drew from the language of enlightened science—as universal scientific principles govern the

cosmos, universal Christian principles govern humanity. "The laws of Christianity are suited to

govern mankind of every nation and climate," affirmed Leonard Wood in his 1812 ordination

sermon for the missionaries of the ABCFM.[43]

Wood's assertion implied that the diffusion of British-American ideals would be the

consequential outcome of the spread of Christianity. Disseminating Christianity was synonymous

with extending American civilization to the world.[44] Consequently, missionaries and their

supporters viewed the expansion of Anglo-American influence as a providential indication of

where to establish missions. In their perspective, introducing Western civilization to an

undeveloped people group primed the path for an explosion of the gospel. Often, this translated

into conducting missionary work in locations associated with the extension of Anglo-American

influence.

The second awakening's pervasive missionary zeal and global outlook profoundly

influenced students and faculty at Andover. By 1870, the Society of Brethren at Andover had

generated approximately two hundred missionary candidates. These students, driven by a sense

of mission, collaborated with professors who shared a similar passion for the obligation of

American Christians to spread their faith globally. Historian Clarence P. Shedd affirms

Andover's pronounced impact upon other higher education institutions and intercollegiate

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[43] Leonard Woods, "A Sermon, delivered at the Tabernacle in Salem, Feb. 6, 1812, on Occasion of the Ordination of the Rev. Messrs. Samuel Newell, A.M.; Adoniram Judson, A.M.; Samuel Nott, A.M.; Gordon Hall, A.M.; and Luther Rice, A.B.; Missionaries to the Heathen in Asia," in R. Pierce Beaver, *Pioneers in Mission: The Early Missionary Ordination Sermons, Charges, and Instructions* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1966), 262.

[44] Emily Conroy-Krutz and Scott Levine, *Christian Imperialism: Converting the World in the Early American Republic,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 30.

development in cultivating missionary zeal.[45] It also established a global connection to different universities for missions. The Andover letters give evidence of correspondence between 1810 and 1830 with student societies in the missionary institutions of Islington and Gosport in England, the Theological Missionary Association at the University of Glasgow (1824), the student missionary society at Basle, Switzerland (1825), and with Dutch missionary students at Rotterdam (1827).[46]

The escalating need for missionaries created a corresponding demand for educational establishments. These institutions aimed to equip students with the capability to advance various aspects of Christian civilization worldwide. By the 1850s, medical missionaries and language teachers began accompanying ministers to illuminate the darkest corners of the globe.[47] Upon returning to the United States in 1813, Luther Rice ignited significant enthusiasm for missions during multiple trips across the South, establishing five colleges, one of which was George Washington University in the nation's capital. Like many educational institutions established during the Second Great Awakening, these higher education institutions embraced a globalized vision propagated through a network of student organizations.

The Second Great Awakening's missionary zeal and global vision imbued students and faculty at Andover, fostering a transformative spirit that transcended geographical boundaries. This zeal for spreading Christianity and advancing Christian civilization became a defining characteristic of Andover Seminary during this era. However, this global perspective was not the sole manifestation of the movement's impact on the institution. In tandem with its missionary

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[45] Shedd, *Two Centuries Of Student Christian Movements,* 66.

[46] Ibid., 71.

[47] Conroy-Krutz and Scott Levine, *Christian Imperialism,* 194.

endeavors, Andover also embraced a commitment to social reform, addressing its time's pressing issues and challenges.

<p align="center">*Preparing "Useful" Students*</p>

Transcendentalism emerged during the Second Great Awakening in New England as a philosophical and literary movement deeply influenced by European Romanticism and German Idealism. It left an indelible mark on American literature, philosophy, and spirituality. Prominent transcendentalist figures, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Walt Whitman, played pivotal roles in shaping this movement. At the core of transcendentalist beliefs was that each person carried a divinity within, a latent potential that could not be reasoned into existence but ignited. [48] This ignition, they argued, occurred through personal experience, particularly within the embrace of nature. Despite often finding themselves at odds with societal norms and organized religion, elements of transcendentalism melded with Christian orthodoxy during the ferment of ideas stemming from the awakening. This fusion created an experiential, individualistic, and reformist strain of evangelical Protestantism. One compelling example of this fusion is Austin Phelps, one of Andover's longest-serving professors. Occupying the position of Professor of Sacred Rhetoric from 1848 to 1879, Phelps embodied and propagated the blend of transcendentalist ideals with traditional Christian teachings, shaping a unique narrative within the broader religious landscape.

In his classes, Phelps lectured his students that it is not enough for the Christian preacher to know what others have said about God, nor is it beneficial to imitate how others have related to God. Because he believed that Christianity is not simply a storehouse of truths but an active

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[48] Lawrence Buell, *The American Transcendentalists: Essential Writings*, (New York: Random, 2006), 23.

relationship with a living God and other human beings, he argued that preachers should seek the

facts of the Christian faith through their lived experiences. He writes in his preeminent work,

Men and Books:

> Divine communications to the world have always been made through the medium of real
> life... Abstract knowledge is given in it only as interwoven with the wants and the
> experiences of once-living generations... So all the great truths which have moved the
> world have been lived. They have been struck out by a collision of thought with the
> living necessities of the world.[49]

Phelps's ideas regarding the role of lived experience in coming to know Christian truth reflect

the interesting ways American transcendentalist thought and Christian orthodoxy often blended

during this era.

Phelps and his peers at Andover believed that genuine spirituality was not merely rooted

in doctrinal adherence but instead tied to cultivating one's character through practical

application. Phelps's fundamental tenet posited that a minister's true purpose lay in effecting

social change through the spiritual regeneration of individuals.[50] This transformative pedagogical

approach, rooted in the ideologies of transcendentalism and the Awakening, introduced the

pivotal concept that education should be evaluated based on its societal impact, marking a

significant milestone in the trajectory of American higher education. This method of instruction

promoted at Andover would profoundly influence several ministers and educators, who carried

this focus on "social utility" into theological seminaries, churches, and political spheres in the

following decades. This influence would ultimately give rise to the Social Gospel and

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[49] Austin Phelps, *Men and Books or Studies in Homiletics: Lectures Introductory to the Theory of Preaching*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Son, 1883), 18-19.

[50] Michael-John Depalma, "Rhetorical Education for the Nineteenth-Century Pulpit: Austin Phelps and the Influence of Christian Transcendentalism at Andover Theological Seminary," *in Rhetoric Review* 31, no. 1 (2012): 5.

Progressive Era movements, significantly shaping the fabric of late nineteenth and early

twentieth-century America.[51]

Higher education institutes served as trustworthy fountains of religious revivalism and

social reform as the Second Great Awakening rolled on. Institutions were rapidly evolving into

agents of social change, shaping pedagogy and student activities within the broader goals of

social reform and transformation—a vision deeply ingrained in Andover's mission and the

actions of its students from the outset. Three areas of social reform led to several developments

at Andover Seminary in the first half of the nineteenth century: temperance, manual labor, and

abolitionism. Of all the reform movements birthed by the Second Great Awakening and

embraced in higher education during the antebellum era, the temperance movement was the most

accepted. The early nineteenth century gave birth to rising concern about the adverse effects of

alcohol consumption on individuals and society. Alcohol abuse led to various social issues,

including domestic violence, poverty, and societal deterioration.

The temperance movement gained traction as a response to these challenges, initiating

calls for limitations on one's drinking and evolving into a call for the complete prohibition of

alcohol. As home missionaries went west into the frontier, they noted that the abuse of alcohol

grew more and more rampant "like a plague throughout the country."[52] The beverages they drank

were mostly distilled liquors, commonly known as spirits—whiskey, rum, gin, and brandy. On

average, those liquors were 45 percent alcohol, or, in the language of distillers, 90 proof. The

unrestrained consumption of intoxicants of such potency amazed travelers and alarmed many

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[51] Depalma, "Rhetorical Education for the Nineteenth-Century Pulpit: Austin Phelps and the Influence of Christian Transcendentalism at Andover Theological Seminary," 8.

[52] W.J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 2.

Americans. Moreover, there was cause for alarm. During the first third of the nineteenth century, the typical American annually drank more distilled liquor than at any other time in our history.[53]

Around 1810, reform-minded ministers associated with Andover led a movement against alcohol, and it progressively gained momentum. This initiative originated during weekly gatherings, notably on Monday nights, where evangelical leaders like Justin Edwards, Moses Stuart, Leonard Woods, and Ebenezer Porter convened in Porter's study to discuss social matters. The early outcomes of these Andover gatherings included a series of vigorous articles against alcohol in Jeremiah Evarts' *Panoplist*, a Boston religious periodical closely connected to Andover. Subsequently, in 1814, Andover's New England Tract Society published a pivotal temperance pamphlet, gaining widespread usage among ministers to craft sermons against alcohol consumption.[54] The movement's founders soon realized the broad appeal of their cause. In 1812, with the establishment of the Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance, its leadership expanded to include influential figures like Abiel Abbot, Jedidiah Morse, and Samuel Worcester, alongside the original Andover advocates and several of its students. Over the following two decades, these clergymen and students propagated their message nationwide.

Graduates of Andover, deeply acquainted with temperance principles, emerged as ardent advocates for this cause throughout the United States. The seminary effectively served as a nurturing ground for individuals committed to temperance, significantly amplifying the movement's influence. Notably, Theodore Dwight Weld, a prominent social reformer and

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[53] Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 14.

[54] William A. Hallock, "*Light and Love." A Sketch of the Life and Labors of the Rev. Justin Edwards,* (New York,, Boston: The American tract society, 1855), 44.

minister, stood out, leaving a lasting impact on all three institutions highlighted in this research

project. In partnership with the Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher, Weld assumed the

mantle of chief clerical proponent of the Temperance movement in the New England region

during its initial two decades. However, their approaches to addressing the issue of intemperance

diverged.

Lyman Beecher contended that legislative measures were necessary to regulate the

problem of intemperance. In contrast, Weld, influenced by the tenets instilled at Andover, argued

that legislative action could only remedy intemperance. He asserted that individuals needed to

cultivate the will to cease drinking through faith and a profound comprehension of the

detrimental effects of alcohol on both society and the human body.[55] In essence, as individuals

surrendered themselves to faith, their lives would be dedicated to the cause of reform.

Weld's beliefs on temperance went beyond a mere moral or societal campaign; they

embodied a profound notion of physiological reform. He underscored that achieving true

temperance required a transformative change within an individual's physiology and psychology,

emphasizing a deep understanding of the physiological effects of alcohol on the human body.[56]

This emphasis on physiological transformation was not unique to Weld alone; it resonated with a

broader theme of physiological reform that characterized many reform movements during the

Second Great Awakening. Pursuing spiritual enlightenment and moral growth was intrinsically

linked to understanding and improving one's physical state and well-being. This paradigm gave

birth to the manual labor movement.

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[55] Robert H. Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 58.

[56] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform,* 59.

The manual labor movement emerged as an innovative pedagogical approach in response to concerns about the detrimental effects of excessive academic study on students' physical health. It also sought to address the growing chasm between American clergy and laity—a laity that now played a crucial role in helping to fund clerical education. As students pursuing seminary education aimed to embody the apostle Paul's counsel to "walk by faith, not by sight," they found themselves struggling, their eyes and legs suffering from the strain of overstudy, neglect, and atrophy.[57] Reports of this ill health and financial strain among nineteenth-century seminarians fueled a reactive desire for heightened emotions and unrestrained action. Consequently, some theological students sought to reform the seminary system from within, advocating for a holistic approach that integrated theological training with physical exercise. This approach also sought to bridge the gap between the seminary elite and the working class by inviting the latter to learn and labor alongside their academic counterparts. [58]

Andover was one of the first institutes of education to establish a student manual labor society in 1826, the Andover Mechanical Association. The society's vision was to allow "a few individuals in and out of the seminary to engage in light industry to invigorate and preserve health."[59] The success and enthusiasm surrounding this initiative led the trustees to expand the program, constructing a new workshop capable of accommodating up to seventy-five students. These students delved into various woodworking activities, creating benches and cabinets while engaging in other traditional forms of woodwork.

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[57] Christopher J. Stokum, "'An Oppressive Insensibility': Disestablishment, Clerical Infirmity, and the Origins of the Manual Labor Movement," *Church History* 91, no. 4 (2022): 804.

[58] Stokum, "'An Oppressive Insensibility': Disestablishment, Clerical Infirmity, and the Origins of the Manual Labor Movement," 805.

[59] E. Cornelius, "Union of Study with Useful Labor," in *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society* 2 (August, 1829), 65.

Participation in the program was voluntary, with students dedicating an average of about an hour and a half per day to communal labor. Over time, the influence of Andover's labor program extended to numerous seminaries and colleges, inspiring them to adopt similar labor initiatives. By 1830, more than thirty colleges had adopted the system in part or in full, and at least two hundred aspiring ministers were enrolled at institutions that required some form of manual labor from their students.[60] It is crucial to emphasize that the program's vision extended beyond pursuing healthier and more productive students. Theodore Weld aptly conveyed this vision in his report on the manual labor movement, asserting that for students to effect transformative change in the republic, the western frontier, and the world for the kingdom, they needed to possess strength and vigor. Moreover, if necessary, they should be capable of self-sustainment, akin to how Biblical historian Luke chronicled the Apostle Paul's ability to provide for himself through tent-making (Acts 18:3-5).[61] It was not long before the sacred and secular became categories in which "usefulness" found itself.

One of Andover's most renowned future theologians, Edwards Amasa Park, a former student of the institution, expressed the profound personal significance of this initiative. During his initial year at Andover, Park faced severe illness, compelling him to take a hiatus from his studies to recuperate. Upon partial recovery, he decided to join the Mechanical Association, encouraged by the possibility that it could help him overcome the lingering effects of his ailment. Writing to the American Education Society Quarterly, he recounted how, after dedicating six months to manual labor, "my natural strength and vigor of body are restored… All unusual

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[60] Paul Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 363.

[61] Theodore Weld, *First Annual Report of the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions, Including the Report of Their General Agent, Theodore D. Weld, January 28, 1833,* (New York, 1833), 111.

symptoms of disease are removed, and I have become habituated to a regular system of physical exercise."[62] Beyond the evident physical health benefits, the Mechanical Association also played a vital role in Park's financial support to sustain his college education. Hailing from a lower-class family, Park had depleted all his funds after graduating from Middlebury College. This student-work program provided a lifeline, offering Park and several other financially disadvantaged students the chance to attain an education that had once been entirely out of their financial reach.[63]

At Andover, Theodore Weld held a steadfast belief that manual labor could be a panacea for class strife. He saw manual labor colleges and student-work programs as a bridge between the more affluent and less privileged members of society. According to Weld, the widening gap between the wealthy and the impoverished was a profound concern. He emphasized that timely action was imperative to avert an insurmountable divide.[64] He contended that enabling access to education for the less fortunate through manual labor could uplift their circumstances, simultaneously fostering a willingness among the privileged to understand the toil of those laboring with their hands. Weld envisioned that this interaction would dissolve class hostility, cultivating a society where individuals of varying backgrounds approached one another with empathy and understanding, grounded in principles of republican equality and mutual respect.

Expanding on this vision in his report, Weld emphasized, "Instead of being driven asunder by jealousies and smother animosities, they approach each other with looks of kindness

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[62] Testimony of Edwards Amasa Park in "Thirteenth Report of the Board of Directors of the American Education Society," *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society* 2 (August, 1829), 20.

[63] Stokum, "'An Oppressive Insensibility': Disestablishment, Clerical Infirmity, and the Origins of the Manual Labor Movement," 814.

[64] Weld, *First Annual Report,* 41.

and form a compact, based upon republican equality and the interchange of mutual offices of courtesy and kindness."[65] In an era marked by escalating economic disparities within the burgeoning market of antebellum America, advocates of manual labor sought to mitigate economic conflicts through familiarity and respect. Theodore Weld carried this transformative vision to the western frontier, particularly Ohio, where he partnered with Lyman Beecher to establish the Beacon National Manual Labor Institution at Lane Seminary—the institution of focus in the following chapter.

This newfound ability to finance education through student-work programs has revolutionized higher education access and enhanced social mobility for numerous American students who previously could only dream of such opportunities. These programs have remained in use over the years in higher education institutions, providing students with the means to support their educational pursuits financially. As noted in the previous chapter, though federal subsidies for higher education have increased over the past two centuries, these work programs have remained a cornerstone of student financial aid.

The groundbreaking educational approach of the Andover Mechanic Association, which highlighted the amalgamation of manual labor, student welfare, financial inclusivity, and societal harmony, continues to influence American higher education's philosophy and methodologies. Andover's progressive stance on temperance reform exemplified the sacralizing vision of the Second Great Awakening. However, amid the various areas of progress, a matter that often sparked contention and difficulty within the institution, akin to many others of its time, was the fraught issue of abolition and slavery.

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[65] Weld, *First Annual Report,* 65.

Emerging from a burgeoning wave of Awakening revivalism in the 1820s, radical reformers emerged with an earnest desire to purge the profane from American society, envisioning a transformation into a holy nation. Among their concerns, none held greater gravity than the abolition of slavery. William Lloyd Garrison stood as the quintessential embodiment of this vision. As the founder and editor of *The Liberator*, Garrison passionately advocated for the immediate and unconditional emancipation of every enslaved individual within the United States. He reimagined America's sacred narrative, firmly entwining abolition and racial equality into its eschatology and assigning pivotal roles to African Americans and abolitionists.[66]

Garrison and his abolitionist counterparts allowed no room for ambiguity on this matter; it was a stark dichotomy, evoking ardent support from some and vehement outrage from others. As socio-political discourses became increasingly polarized into the sacred and the profane, divisiveness proliferated throughout the republic, and higher education institutions were not immune to its spread. The three institutions examined in this project—Andover, Lane, and Oberlin—each present unique approaches to illustrating how faculty and students grappled with the issue of slavery and abolition. Together, they exemplify the profound impact of contemporary social issues on shaping higher education institutions' orientation, purpose, and trajectory.

The slavery issue became an early subject of discussion and concern for the Andover Society of Inquiry, particularly in the context of missions. While the primary focus of both students and faculty within the society was on evangelical missionary work, particularly the desire to save the souls of enslaved African Americans, the emergence of Garrison's ideas in the

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[66] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 130.

1820s, circulating widely in New England, shifted the dynamics and urgency of the discourse.[67]

This change mirrored the broader societal shift during the Second Great Awakening, where the

impetus for reform catalyzed the formation of various societies dedicated to specific causes,

including addressing slavery.

Students and faculty at Andover created the American Colonization Society (ACS) to

address these issues. One of Andover's graduates, Samuel Mills Jr., was the society's co-founder

and most notable supporter. The society aimed to facilitate the gradual emancipation of enslaved

individuals by providing them with Christian education and repatriating them to Africa. The

envisioned African resettlement would result in the establishment of a Christian colony named

Liberia, aiming to evangelize the African continent.[68] Interestingly, this idea was not novel to the

Colonization Society or white Americans. The concept of providing opportunities to remove

formerly enslaved people back to Africa was proposed in 1787 by Prince Hall, a free black man

and founder of the first black Masonic Lodge.[69]

A significant faction of students at Andover, deeply influenced by the fervor of the

Second Great Awakening, embraced abolitionist sentiments against slavery. This goal of

abolition was not divorced from the school's tangible missional zeal. They believed the goal of

the gospel was liberation, physical and spiritual. This collective passion led many students to

rally behind and financially support the American Colonization Society (ACS) mission. An

illustrative instance occurred in June 1833, when, in response to a heartfelt appeal by Robert S.

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[67] J. Earl Thompson Jr., "Abolitionism and Theological Education at Andover," *New England Quarterly* 47, no. 2, (June 1, 1974): 242.

[68] Matthew Spooner, "'I Know this Scheme is from God:' Toward a Reconsideration of the Origins of the American Colonization Society," *Slavery & Abolition* 35, no. 4 (2014): 561.

[69] Spooner, "'I Know this Scheme is from God:' Toward a Reconsideration of the Origins of the American Colonization Society," 562

Finley of the ACS, Andover students pledged to raise $3,000 to emancipate and relocate one hundred enslaved individuals from Kentucky.[70]

The Colonization Society, embodying the gradualist approach to emancipation and repatriation, continued to garner substantial backing from students and faculty at Andover, largely unchallenged. However, this unwavering support faced a formidable challenge when a student-led antislavery society was established at Andover in 1833. Though constituting a minority opinion among the student body, this society ardently aligned itself with the views espoused by William Lloyd Garrison and other key abolitionists. They raised criticisms against the unquestioned assumptions of colonization. They also fervently advocated for the immediate emancipation of enslaved people, a stance known as immediatism, in stark contrast to the more gradualist position held by the majority at Andover.[71]

The crux of the abolitionist students' argument against colonization lay in its potential to stifle not only efforts to end slavery but also the prevailing prejudice and hatred against people of color. According to these abolitionists, the colonization society, despite its intentions, would inadvertently perpetuate racial biases. They conceded that the emancipated African Americans might require guidance initially until they could independently care for themselves; however, the fundamental principle emphasized was that they should be treated immediately "on an equal footing with the white man," with equal civil and religious rights.[72] In the eyes of these abolitionists at Andover, they were champions of a sacred cause whose denial could imperil the institution, inviting divine judgment.

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[70] *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* 9, (1833), 154.

[71] Thompson Jr., "Abolitionism and Theological Education at Andover," 243.

[72] Ibid., 244.

Before 1835, the professors at Andover, except for Ebenezer Porter, who staunchly opposed immediatism, remained distant from antislavery and abolitionist involvement and debates. However, as the abolitionist movement gained momentum among the student body, the institution's leadership found it necessary to take a stance. The faculty called a meeting with the students to address the escalating controversy between gradualism and immediatism. They passionately urged the students to dissolve the Committee on Colonization and the antislavery Society, seeing these groups represent the two opposing sides of the controversy. Their plea was a blend of authoritative direction and evangelical persuasion, cautioning students about the divisive impact of this dispute on the school, its potential threat to securing a pulpit, and the erosion of brotherly love among students.[73]

Remarkably, the students responded swiftly and surprisingly, voluntarily accepting their professors' appeals. Even the most fervent immediatist students committed themselves to abide by the resolution crafted by Andover's leadership. The resolution read as follows:

> That while connected with the seminary, our duties as Theological Students have the first claim upon our attention, and fearing that the agitation of the subject of slavery might interfere with the vigorous prosecution of our studies, and with that harmony that ought to prevail among us; We, therefore, disapprove for the present of all associated action on the subject, in this institution.[74]

The situation seemed to stabilize within the school, but it provoked the ire of numerous leading abolitionists in New England, including Theodore Weld, a prominent Andover alumnus. These abolitionists launched vigorous attacks against the seminary, many of which found space in Garrison's *The Liberator*. Garrison accused the faculty of employing oppressive tactics to deter

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[73] *The Liberator,* V, (1835), 50-51.

[74] *New York Observer,* XIII, (1835), 28.

students from embracing the abolitionist cause.[75] The fervent condemnations and accusations by abolitionists persisted and continued towards the school and its faculty. These impassioned criticisms led some abolitionist students to openly express their discontent with the college. In 1837, a student abolitionist, Leander Thompson, wrote a letter confiding in Theodore Weld that "the Bible, the only pure book on earth, is insulted here, and that by those who minister at the altar."[76] He laid the blame primarily on Moses Stuart, Andover's leading professor.

Moses Stuart, professor of sacred literature at Andover, staunchly opposed immediatism and emerged as a prominent figure in the slavery and abolition debates. He contended that while much of the existing chattel slavery was wicked in practice, the Bible did not inherently condemn the reality of slavery. Stuart argued that the Bible guided how masters and slaves should coexist in a manner that honored God and proved mutually beneficial.[77] He believed that slavery would eventually disappear through the conversion of individuals and the progressive sanctification of society, which would birth the Christian principles of "true liberty and equality throughout the world."[78] As an advocate for global missions, Stuart fully endorsed the Colonization Society's objective and saw making former slaves fellow missionaries as a rapid means to combat prevailing prejudices against them. Additionally, he argued that the immediate abolition of slavery could potentially worsen the situation for African Americans in society.

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[75] *The Liberator,* V, (1835), 150.

[76] "Leander Thompson to Theodore Dwight Weld, Aug. 25, 1836," in *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke 1822-1822*, ed. by Gilbert Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (New York, 1934), I, 334.

[77] Thompson Jr., "Abolitionism and Theological Education at Andover," 250.

[78] Moses Stuart, *A Sermon Delivered before His Excellency Levi Lincoln Esq. Governor,... May 30, 1827, Being the Day of General Election* (Boston, 1827), 9.

Stuart's position encapsulated the views of several moderate reformers during the Second Great Awakening regarding slavery and abolition.

Stuart and his colleagues at Andover were deeply committed to safeguarding the institution as a stronghold of "uncorrupted Christianity."[79] Drawing from the lessons of the student-led unrest and mass exodus of abolitionist students that had recently occurred at Lane Seminary (explored in the subsequent chapter), the faculty recognized the necessity of establishing a clear and firm stance to maintain Andover's stability. Many of Andover's faculty began to argue that abolitionism could disrupt the focused pursuit of theological education, diverting students' time and energy away from their primary task of assimilating the evangelical Protestant tradition. This perception dampened the once vibrant enthusiasm for revivalism and reform that had permeated the university. The faculty shifted the pedagogical focus, carefully regulating student activities to align with their vision of what students should primarily engage with at the institution.[80]

In this environment, the curriculum had limited space for critical reflection on contemporary ethical dilemmas like slavery. While temperance reform and manual labor remained ideal reforms actively supported by the faculty and various student associations, the scope of allowable discourse and engagement was constrained to adhere to the institutional vision. Andover became a prominent example illustrating that higher education institutes in antebellum America were interested in producing "useful" students; however, this "usefulness" aligned with whatever the institution deemed most societally beneficial. It was a place that

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[79] Ebenezer Porter, *A Sermon, Delivered Sept. 22, 1818, at the Dedication of the New Edifice, Erected for the Use of the Theological Seminary in Andover* (Andover, 1818), 15.

[80] Thompson Jr., "Abolitionism and Theological Education at Andover," 259.

longed to train a youth possessed by dreams, but those dreams could not threaten the institute's

mission. Andover wanted to be a catalyst for change, but it also wanted to determine what those

changes would be. As a result, pedagogical instruction, curriculum development, and student

activities were all shaped within the idealistic framework envisioned by the institution. The

students who challenged Andover's vision began to seek educational alternatives, and in the

burgeoning educational marketplace produced by the awakening, a growing number of options

were available.

A Lasting Impact

Despite the controversies that arose over the issue of abolition, Andover's emphasis on

social utility and training students as agents for social change had a lasting impact, especially as

one looks out from the school and sees its transformative effects locally and globally. Andover's

Society for the Reformation of Morals, formed in 1814, created the first Sabbath School to

educate children. Students led the neighborhood Bible classes, instructing men and women on

the Bible.[81] In 1820, students helped create a maternal organization to assist mothers with the

religious training of their offspring. They started a society—the National Divorce League—that

served the purpose of "preserving marriage for the glory of God and the sanctity of the

republic."[82]

Graduates of Andover championed and made countless local and national reforms

possible. It would be idle to attempt to enumerate the men who served as secretaries for several

denominational and non-denominational organizations. They commenced their activities very

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[81] Richard D. Shiels, "The Scope of the Second Great Awakening: Andover, Massachusetts, as a Case Study," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 2 (Jan, 2008): 230.

[82] Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary,* 140.

early in the institution's history, when new organizations were coming into existence rapidly, and they continued to direct such enterprises through the first Andover century until more than two hundred and fifty men had occupied such positions in seventy-two different societies. The American Tract Society used thirty-two, the American Home Missionary Society used twenty-four, and the American Bible Society used almost as many. At the same time, the American Board, the American Missionary Association, the Congregational Education Society, and the American Sunday School Union repeatedly turned to Andover men to lead their causes.[83]

Globally, the birth and promotion of the foreign missions movement at Andover not only served to advance Anglo-Protestant Orthodoxy into the world but also moved the young republic towards adopting a more globalist vision regarding its destiny. The sacred vision was clear— converting the world in its faith and culture to bring it into God's kingdom. [84] The early American foreign mission movement demonstrates how attuned Americans of the early Republic were to the events and peoples of the world around them. Missionary literature reminded Americans of the blessings they enjoyed and the duties they had to bear. For when Americans thought about the "heathen world," they did not simply sigh with relief that they were not part of that world; they wept for the fate of those who did not know Jesus and who would accordingly be damned in the next life, even as they were miserable in this present one. [85]

During this period, the government's political initiatives and the missionary objectives of Andover's Commission of Foreign Missions often enjoyed a mutually reinforcing relationship, underpinned by America's civil religion and the promotion of its sacred narrative. The sacralized

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[83] Rowe, *History of Andover Theological Seminary,* 141.

[84] Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism,* 76.

[85] Ibid., 208.

vision of America significantly influenced both domestic and foreign policies, as evident in actions like the Indian Removal Act and Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations proposal.[86] This intertwining of civil religion and politics left a lasting impact, resonating through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and presenting an enduring challenge for churches and missionaries.

The relationship between mission endeavors and government actions remained complex throughout the subsequent centuries, reflecting the intricate connection between culture and Christianity. The struggle to discern the balance between "pure religion" and the influences of culture and politics persists, confronting contemporary churches and missionaries.[87] As they seek to fulfill the gospel's call and spread its message, delineating fundamental religious beliefs and broader socio-political contexts remains a central and ongoing dilemma within American society. This enduring challenge, which first began at Andover Seminary, underscores the enduring significance of the historical interplay between political pursuits, missionary ambitions, and the larger cultural framework in shaping the American ethos.

Andover Seminary's mission to evangelically transform the nation and the global community for Christ vividly embodies the influence of the inaugural wave of the Second Great Awakening on American higher education. In demonstrating remarkable benevolence, the seminary extended theological training opportunities to a demographic that had hitherto faced barriers to accessing such education. Doing so significantly augmented the ranks of Protestant ministers, propelling the Christian faith into every nook of the nation, the expanding frontier, and across the globe.

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[86] Conroy-Krutz, *Christian Imperialism,* 147.

[87] Ibid*.,* 207.

Moreover, Andover Seminary catalyzed the establishment of numerous reform societies and cultivated leaders who would profoundly influence the trajectory of education, welfare, social justice, labor reform, and an array of pressing socio-political concerns faced by American society. Pioneering the concept of a graduate school laid the foundation for subsequent educational institutions to emulate. Professor Leonard Woods of Andover, commenting on this, wrote, "It is one of the most remarkable consequences of the establishment of this institution, and one of the clearest proofs of the great value attached to it by the community, that so many similar institutions have in so short a time been founded."[88] The overarching aim was to mold students capable of effecting transformative change that was aligned with the institution's vision. In this mission, Andover undeniably triumphed, leaving an enduring mark on the landscape of American higher education.

As the revivalist zeal began to settle in New England, several ministers focused on the West. Andover Seminary provided what many believed to be the model of higher education necessary to train leaders capable of transforming the West for Christ. Prominent New England ministers like Lyman Beecher and Theodore Weld wanted to establish a school to transplant the vibrant Christian Republicanism of New England into the West, where they believed the path to millennial glory lay. Such an effort came to fruition with the formation of Lane Theological Seminary.

Shifting the focus to the case study of Lane Seminary in the next chapter uncovers a contrasting yet equally significant narrative within the context of the Second Great Awakening's influence on theological education. Lane, akin to Andover, bore the unmistakable imprint of the

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[88] Woods, *History of Andover Theological Seminary*, 201.

awakening's influence. However, its response and outcomes diverged in critical ways. The zeal

for abolitionism within Lane Seminary and the subsequent events shed light on the tensions and

fractures emerging from differing perspectives on slavery and the moral imperative to eradicate

it. Exploring the experiences at Lane illuminates how the awakening's immense passion for

social justice and equality clashed with prevailing societal norms and theological doctrines,

further unraveling the intricate interplay between religious fervor, societal values, social action,

and the shaping of educational institutions during this transformative period.

Chapter 5

Rebels With a Cause: Lane Seminary

America's Western frontier in the early nineteenth century epitomized an expansive and rugged landscape, embodying a nuanced and ever-evolving moral terrain. As settlers pushed toward the western horizon, they ventured into a region where conventional ethical and social frameworks were often strained, altered, or absent. This frontier posed many challenges and prospects, giving birth to a unique blend of moral experiences and perspectives. Pioneers grappled with the collision of diverse cultures, ideologies, and value systems within this demanding terrain. A curious amalgam of paradigms—cultural retention and cultural change, tradition and modernity, authority and freedom—animated the rural ethnic communities.[1]

Native American tribes, firmly rooted in their distinct spiritual and moral worldviews, coexisted with European immigrants who carried traditional religious beliefs, including Catholicism. Concurrently, American pioneers, many of whom had rebelled against the structured Protestant orthodoxy of the Eastern states they had left behind, also sought their place in this new frontier.[2] It was not long before conflicts emerged, stemming from disputes over land rights, resources, and fundamentally differing worldviews, profoundly influencing the moral fabric of the region. The feverish desire for land and resources often disrupted communal cohesion, as greed and land hunger took precedence.

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[1] Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 130.

[2] Steven J. Keillor, *This Rebellious House and the Truth of Christianity, (*Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 113.

Furthermore, the absence of established institutions and the lure of economic opportunities created a frontier ethos emphasizing individualism and self-reliance.[3] As individuals navigated the paradigmatic environment of the West, with its beauties and difficulties, they tested the moral compass of the frontier. These settlers faced challenges such as scarcity, lawlessness, and social isolation—a stark contrast to the religiously motivated settlements in New England. Traversing the moral tapestry of the early Western frontier, one finds considerable examples of patriarchal rebellion, greed, and familism, often of which contributed to what many in the East saw as a culture of anarchy.

As the conviction in America's divine destiny to usher in God's millennial kingdom spread during the Second Great Awakening revivals in the American North and South, it initially appeared that the West might remain untouched by this spiritual enthusiasm. However, settlers on the frontier soon discovered that the West had captured the attention of numerous revivalists, reformers, and emerging religious sects born in the aftermath of the movement. Many heterodox groups, like the Mormons and the Shakers, ventured west, hoping to find their Zion. Several Protestant missionaries, like Andover's Samuel Mills Jr., set their eyes on the West, believing that the vast region needed to fully embrace the message of salvation before the nation could ever realize its sacred purpose.[4]

Home missionaries set out West to bring Christian values and ethics to the frontier, aiming to spread revival and reform to these pioneering communities to establish moral order; however, this proved quite tricky at first. Resistance frequently met religious efforts,

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[3] Keillor, *This Rebellious House and the Truth of Christianity,* 118.

[4] Thomas H. Kiker, "The Relationship between Samuel J. Mills Jr. and the Influence of the Second Great Awakening on Missions and Evangelism," PhD Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009, 135.

necessitating the expansion of the influence of traditional religious institutions in this fluid and dynamic frontier environment. When Mills arrived in Ohio, he wrote back to the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine* about the location's discovered moral conditions. In his letter, he reported of Cincinnati, "[I] found the inhabitants in a very desolate state; very ignorant of the doctrines of the gospel; and in many instances without Bibles or any other religious books."

Upon hearing this report of the perceived morally lapsed nature of the West, several leading ministers, influenced by the awakening's revivalist fervor, reforming passions, and millennial vision, considered the next steps necessary to transform the West. Among them, Connecticut minister Lyman Beecher stood out as a key figure. Beecher, a renowned congregationalist minister, expressed his thoughts on the West with great conviction:

> The West is a young empire of mind, power, wealth, and free institutions, rushing up to a giant manhood with a rapidity and a power never before witnessed below the sun. Moreover, she carries with her the elements of her preservation. In that case, the experiment will be glorious, the joy of the nation, the joy of the whole earth, as she rises in the majesty of her intelligence and benevolence and enterprise for the emancipation of the world.[5]

In Beecher's view, solving the moral dilemma of the West was imperative. He firmly believed that the nation's glorious destiny, envisioned as "the emancipation of the world," hinged on its capacity to bring about moral reform in the West. The question was—how?

Influenced profoundly by the awakening's perspective of education as a catalyst for social transformation, Beecher advocated for establishing a higher education institute aimed explicitly at training ministers and community leaders to address the unique challenges of the West. Discussing the matter, he writes:

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[5] Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West,* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1835), 12.

> The thing required for the civil and religious prosperity of the West is universal education and moral culture by institutions commensurate to that result in the all-pervading influence of schools, colleges, seminaries, pastors, and churches. When the West is well supplied in this respect, though there may be significant relative defects, there will be, as we believe, the stamina and the vitality of a perpetual civil and religious prosperity.[6]

Aligning with this vision, Lane Seminary was established, strategically situated in the very "desolate place" Samuel Mills Jr. had reported on—Cincinnati, Ohio. In this chapter, Lane Seminary serves as a second case study, shedding light on the profound impact of the Second Great Awakening on higher education institutes and their evolving vision to act as catalysts for change for the betterment of the world.

"A National Model Institution"

In October of 1828, Cincinnati bore witness to the arrival of two notable figures, the Lane brothers Ebenezer and William, who were prosperous merchants hailing from New Orleans. Fueled by the benevolence often instilled by the prevailing spirit of the Second Great Awakening, the brothers sought to invest their surplus funds in a venture "to promote the interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom and to produce the greatest amount of good."[7] Gathering a cadre of influential leaders for a pivotal meeting, the Lane brothers extended a generous offer: they pledged a substantial minimum of four thousand dollars to establish a new educational institution. Despite the brothers' opposition, the first trustees of the newly planned school decided to name the school after them, titling it Lane Seminary.

Although the Lane brothers themselves were devout Baptists, having heard of the current construction of a Baptist denominational elsewhere in the West, the brothers proposed the

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[6] Beecher, *A Plea for the West,* 13.

[7] "Where is Lane Seminary," *Cincinnati Journal,* September 8, 1829, quoted in Stuart C. Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan: A Portrait of Lyman Beecher,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 172-173.

creation of a Presbyterian seminary, reflecting once again the kind of united front that many

Protestant Evangelicals championed in the Second Great Awakening. The new pragmatism of the

era caused denominational and regional lines to be blurred as long as there was a common unity

around the voluntary ideal. Selecting Lyman Beecher, a Congregationalist, to serve as the

school's president further characterized this. *The Plan of Union* (1801) is what enabled this

choice. *The Plan* was an agreement between the Congregational churches of New England and

the Presbyterian Church in the United States to cooperate for the mutual support and joint effort

of evangelizing the American frontier.[8]

  As with Andover and countless other colleges of the period, lands donated in benevolence

provided Lane with a new campus. The Presbyterian minister James Kemper and his eldest son

Elnathan donated a sixty-acre section of his land in Walnut Hills to begin the new theological

seminary. Mirroring the fervor of the Second Great Awakening and its impetus for manual labor

reform, the trustees saw a unique potential in Lane Seminary. They believed the burgeoning

Western frontier needed a manual labor institute to cultivate "hardy ministers."[9] These ministers

carrying the kingdom into the remote parts of the frontier needed to maintain respectability

amongst the rugged pioneers of the region. To build such "hardy" students at Lane, they were

required to work "not less than three, nor more than four hours each day, in agricultural or

mechanical pursuits."[10]

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[8] D.G. Hart and John R. Muether, *Seeking a Better Country: 300 years of American Presbyterianism,* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 103.

[9] Stuart C. Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan: A Portrait of Lyman Beecher,* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 174.

[10] *History of the Foundation and Endowment of Lane Theological Seminary*, (Cincinnati: Ben Franklin Printing House, 1848), 6.

In New England, the echelons of wealthy merchants were soon abuzz with news about the burgeoning plans for a novel theological institution and manual labor school in Cincinnati. Among these astute businessmen were Arthur and Lewis Tappan, distinguished philanthropists and ardent abolitionists profoundly influenced by the sanctified vision of the Second Great Awakening and its call for societal transformation. Two of Lewis' sons attended the Oneida Institute, America's first official manual labor institution, where students had to perform tasks in agriculture to pay a portion of their tuition.[11] At the Oneida Institute, the Tappans crossed paths with Theodore Dwight Weld, a fellow student. Weld's remarkable oratory prowess left an indelible mark on the Tappans, prompting them to engage him as a peripatetic speaker, championing the cause of manual labor education.[12] He first carried this work to Andover Seminary, where he served for some time. However, after the seminary's leadership stopped the abolitionist debate, he moved elsewhere.

Seizing the moment, the Tappan brothers persuaded Weld that the recently established manual labor institute, Lane Seminary, would provide an ideal platform to showcase his talents. Encouraging him fervently, they envisaged Weld's role in elevating Lane into a "national, model institution."[13] Another alumnus of Oneida, J. L. Tracy, who had transitioned into teaching in Kentucky, reminded Theodore of a profound idea—that the Ohio Valley was pivotal as the "great battlefield between the powers of light and darkness." He posed a stirring question: "Why not

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[11] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 107.

[12] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 179.

[13] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, v*ol. 2, (Miami, FL: Hardpress, 2017), 320.

train the soldiers of the Cross within sight of the enemy's camp?"[14] In 1832, fueled by the

urgings of these men and inspired by the prospect of meaningful change, Weld made a pivotal

decision. He enrolled himself at the newly formed theological seminary in Cincinnati.

The Tappans had another person on their wishlist besides Weld to venture west to Lane.

This eminent figure was Lyman Beecher—an accomplished minister renowned for his

unyielding commitment to revivals, remarkable organizational prowess, staunch advocacy for

reform, and his millennial vision of the West. If the school were going to be a "model

institution," it would need a well-respected president to attract the best students from around the

country to come west. The Tappans offered to provide "liberal and regular donations" to the

institution if its trustees chose Beecher as president.[15] The notoriety of Beecher and the promise

of consistent financial support led to a unanimous decision by the Trustees to invite the

Connecticut minister to accept the position. Beecher would accept, and his induction as president

in December of 1832 marked the official constitution of Lane as an American theological

seminary and graduate school.

Lyman Beecher and America's Unfolding Cosmic Drama

In 1775, Lyman Beecher rose from a common and non-clerical stock. His father was a

New England blacksmith, and his mother died from tuberculosis two days after giving birth to

Beecher. His father, deeply afflicted by grief, gave their son to his aunt and uncle, the Bentons,

who raised him on their farm. Much of Beecher's love for God and piety grew out of the

religious upbringing provided by his adopted family. They baptized him into a world firmly

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[14] J. L. Tracy to Weld, Lexington, Ky., to Oneida Institute, November 24, 1831, quoted in Robert H. Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1982), 74.

[15] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan*, 177.

divided into the sacred and profane. His studious nature and lack of proficiency as a farmer made his uncle suggest to Beecher that college was the only place fit for him.[16] Influenced by his time at Yale under Timothy Dwight, Beecher became fully enveloped in the sacralizing vision of the new awakening.

Early in his ministerial journey, Beecher wholeheartedly embraced the American mythos and gradually reshaped the republic's position within the cosmic narrative. Beecher stands as one of the earliest influential American thinkers who expanded the concept of "spiritual Israel" beyond the Puritan culture of New England to encompass all Americans—and indeed all people—who dedicated themselves to God's mission of ushering in His millennial glory.[17] Beecher's ambition extended beyond revivalism; Beecher aimed to evangelize entire societies, beginning with his birthplace, Connecticut, and eventually encompassing the whole nation. Simultaneously, he sought to bring about a perfect society, firmly believing that it was America's destiny to manifest this vision into reality.[18]

Over the next five decades, Beecher emerged as a leading force in social reform. Issues such as temperance, Sabbatarianism, and dueling were among the crucial societal battles in which Beecher played a pivotal role. Beecher firmly believed that for America to fulfill its providentially ordained mission, it needed to embody holiness. Such a press towards societal holiness led to what was once commonplace now collapsing into the sacred and profane. Not everyone welcomed this growing loss of the common. Numerous critics contended that radical

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[16] Milton Runoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century*, (New York, 1981), 5.

[17] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 40.

[18] James W. Fraser, *"Pedagogue for God's Kingdom, Lyman Beecher and the Second Great Awakening,"* PhD. Dissertation, (Columbia University, 1975), 63.

reformers like Beecher eroded American society's social fabric, pitting neighbors against neighbors and fostering enmity. Beecher relentlessly pursued duelists, Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, and eventually slaveholders, denouncing these societal transgressors as threats to the community. He advocated for voters to oust politicians engaged in such activities while pushing for legislation that would enforce punitive measures against those who committed these "offenses against God and sacred society."[19]

In the Old Testament book of Joshua, Israel had recently obtained the promised land, and it soon was realized that many Israelite people had brought the religious idols of the past into the land. In the twenty-fourth chapter of the book, Joshua assembles all the tribes of Israel, and he admonishes them that if they are to keep this promised land and see it blossom into the glorious kingdom that God had promised, they would need to rid themselves of their idols. This message reflects the vision that Beecher carried with him. He desired to be an American Joshua, ridding the nation of its idols for the glorious kingdom to arise upon the land. In that same chapter, Joshua, urging the people to forsake their idols, gives this impassioned plea:

> Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:14-15, NIV).

Notice that Joshua, in his appeal, made clear that no matter what direction the rest of the nation went, he and his household would continue to serve the Lord, another area where Beecher wished to follow in Joshua's steadfast example. He would instill in his home the sacralized vision of the awakening and the reformist passion that fueled his actions. No single family was

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[19] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 43.

more active in social reform in America during the nineteenth century than the Beechers. In 1863, Reverend Leonard Bacon of Andover Seminary wrote, "This country is inhabited by saints, sinners, and Beechers."[20]

Throughout his life, Beecher was married three times. The marriages of his first two wives both ended due to them passing away from illness. Among these three marriages, Beecher fathered thirteen children, and every one of them, except one (due to his premature death), was a paramount contributor to social reform, abolition, women's rights, education, and American literature. A discussion on the impact of all of Beecher's children on American society would prove too lengthy and fall outside the purview of this project. However, noting a few of them is integral to illustrating how Beecher's sacred vision for America passed onto his children.

Catherine Beecher, Lyman's eldest child, advocated for women's rights and education, establishing schools to provide them with a higher education. She reworked her father's cosmic drama by positioning women as the primary drivers in creating values and models within middle-class Christian society. This reality remains prominent to the present day.[21] Edward, his third child, would become the first president of Illinois College, another college created as a manual labor institute that produced Christian laborers for all sectors of American industry. Edward wrote that training Christian laborers "would help secure an elevated national character, based on the full and harmonious development of all the powers of man—corporal and social, intellectual and moral."[22] Illinois College provides a compelling example of how even public institutions of

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[20] Quoted in Runoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century*, xv.

[21] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 191.

[22] Edward Beecher, *First Annual Report of the Society for Promoting Manual Labor in Literary Institutions,* (New York, 1833), 91.

higher education established during this period showcased a mission to educate students to be agents of industry and social and moral improvement. Harriet Beecher-Stowe, Beecher's sixth child, was a renowned author best known for her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It remains one of the most influential documents in American literature and history, significantly contributing to the awakening of northern sentiments to the horrors of slavery and garnering support for the antislavery cause.[23]

Henry Ward Beecher, Lyman's seventh child, would become the most well-known American minister in the second half of the nineteenth century. Like his father, there was no social issue that Henry did not perceive in terms of the sacred and the profane. His advocacy for social justice, abolition, temperance, women's rights, and education made him central in shaping American Christianity and culture. His emphasis on social action as part of the gospel cause profoundly influenced key twentieth-century social gospelites like Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Harry Emerson Fosdick in their mission. It is important to note that all twelve of Lyman Beecher's living children entered into ministry or education, actively working to reshape American society along the moral and religious lines of the millennial vision passed down by their father.[24]

As further evidenced by his children, Beecher's primary concern was establishing the kingdom of God on earth. He sought to harmonize blessedness and prosperity, firmly convinced by their attainability. He declared in an 1812 sermon, "The kingdom of God is a kingdom of means, and though the excellency of the power belongs to him exclusively, human

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[23] Runoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century*, 337.

[24] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 168.

instrumentality is indispensable."[25] For Beecher, no human instrument was more essential than education. He envisioned that educating the expanding nation's populace about their divinely ordained role in manifesting the Kingdom of God's emergence into human history would significantly bolster spiritual revival and social reform. The rise of voluntary associations, he believed, would be the primary agent for this kingdom's realization.

According to Beecher, the presence of educated ministers leading a Bible-reading public offered a glimpse of the millennial glory to come.[26] This belief is why the creation of higher education was so crucial for awakening leaders like Beecher. They were the keys to obtaining the kingdom. Describing the importance of these institutions on the moral growth of the nation, he wrote, "A nation is being 'born in a day,' and all the nurturing of schools and literary institutions is needed, constantly and universally, to rear it up to a glorious and unperverted manhood."[27]

In the early 1830s, just before assuming the role of Lane's president, Beecher embarked on a journey to Ohio with his daughter Catherine. During this trip, he became increasingly convinced that the vision of America as a righteous nation could only come to fruition if educated ministers and social reformers won the West to Christ. The influx of Catholic immigrants, accompanied by priests and missionaries, and the migration of heterodox sects into the West prompted Beecher's concern. His appeals to Massachusetts for support to counter the perceived Jesuit influence on pioneers did not receive the expected response, leading him to visit

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[25] Lyman Beecher, *A Reformation of Morals Practicable and Indispensable A sermon, delivered at New-Haven, on the evening of October 27, 1812,* (Utica: Printed by Merrell and Camp, 1813), 7.

[26] Beecher and many of his fellow ministers believed that this Bible-educated populace would consummate the New Covenant promise that everyone would know God and His Word. One of the promises Beecher pointed to was found in Jeremiah 31:34, which reads, "No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord."

[27] Beecher, *A Plea for the West,* 17.

the region himself.[28] Since 1828, the Ohio Valley remained a central focus for Beecher regarding

evangelical activism. He had proposed "Valley campaigns" of various sorts to the Bible Society,

the Tract Society, and finally, the Sunday School Union. In every destitute place where it was

practical within the Ohio Valley, these three societies, created to hasten the coming millennium,

were set to accomplish good work.

Beecher found solace in his visit to Cincinnati, weary of the growing discord and internal

disputes within the Boston community, where he felt an increasing sense of misplaced focus on

internal matters, diverting attention from the broader mission of reaching out to the lost and the

heathen. In 1832, he made an important announcement; Beecher decided to relocate to

Cincinnati to advance the gospel's work in the West.[29] The Trustees of Lane saw this move as a

providential sign and extended an offer for Beecher to assume the presidency of the new

seminary, an offer he enthusiastically accepted. He wrote to them in his acceptance letter:

> I can only say that if, after a full view of the subject, there shall appear to be a rational
> prospect of success in the establishment of such a seminary as we desire, it is my
> purpose, as at present advised, to accept the call and come on with my family in the fall,
> provided the condition of my health shall render it practicable, and may the Lord preserve
> and guide us all to do his will and trust his promises!"[30]

The prospect of merging influential figures like Lyman Beecher and Theodore Weld at

Lane Seminary stirred great excitement among reform-minded individuals, particularly the

Tappan brothers. However, amidst this enthusiasm, a brewing conflict loomed. Beecher and

Weld, two massively influential leaders of the Second Great Awakening, were on opposing sides

of the gradualist vs. immediatist debate regarding abolition. In New England, this debate had

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[28] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan, 156.*

[29] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, v*ol. 2, 264.

[30] Ibid., 281.

caused some stirring issues (like at Andover), but in Ohio, this would prove to be "the issue."

The Ohio River, a natural boundary between Ohio's hills and Kentucky's farms, symbolized the

division between slave and free states. Free blacks assembled in Cincinnati, while enslaved

individuals from Kentucky sought refuge alongside them, attempting to escape the clutches of

slavery. This would eventually create a palpable tension that profoundly affected Beecher, Weld,

and the future trajectory of the seminary.

Beecher was not just to be the school's president but also its first Professor of Theology.

Inducted into the office on December 26, 1832, Beecher's pedagogical approach to the subject

was applied theology. The belief is that the knowledge of God and his revealed will should drive

Christians not simply to propositional assent but to tangible action. Furthermore, this was the

goal of all education, from home to graduate school. As Beecher explained:

> Such, then, is the outline of mental training to qualify the influential minds of our nation
> for their high destiny. A work that should be commenced in the family continued in the
> common school and academy and consummated in the colleges and schools of medicine,
> law, and theology.[31]

A grand cosmic drama was underway, with the American West as its vast stage. Beecher was

determined to shape the students of Lane Seminary into faithful actors ready to fulfill their

crucial roles in that unfolding drama.

A Sacred Institute

Lane constructed its campus atop a hill, a characteristic shared by numerous collegiate

institutes of that era. "The city spread out like a map" was visible from the school's main lawn.[32]

Researchers have conducted limited investigations into the reasons behind educational

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[31] Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for Colleges,* (Cincinnati: Published by Truman and Smith, 1836), 44.

[32] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 171.

institutions' prevalence on hills. This choice may symbolize the location of knowledge's reception, as it was upon a mount that Moses received the Law and Jesus delivered his most recognized sermon. Additionally, the elevated position could have served as a representation of authority and intellectual ascension. Regardless of the rationale, hilltops emerged as a prominent geographical setting for many of America's earliest colleges.[33]

The campus of Lane was stunning, very much reflecting the beauty of Cincinnati, which was rapidly urbanizing and had taken on the name "The Queen City of the West."[34] The enthusiasm surrounding the developments at Lane under Beecher's presidency and the enrollment of significant Awakening leaders like Weld attracted numerous students nationwide. By 1834, students flocked from various regions: forty-four from the mid-Atlantic states, twenty-three from the Midwest, seventeen from New England, and eight from the South.[35] The initial year of Beecher's presidency, from 1832 to 1833, unfolded relatively smoothly, despite minor controversies with the Old School Presbyterians in Cincinnati, who were apprehensive about a Congregationalist leading a Presbyterian seminary and frustrated that Lane was going to be a New Divinity institution. Beecher was very pleased with the caliber of students who welcomed him in his first year at the school. Describing them, he writes:

> Our first class is forty, and the large majority of it is composed of men of mature age, powerful minds, and ardent and devoted piety. I have never known such power for intelligent and strong action condensed in a single class. Their progress in study is highly

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[33] A few of the notable schools that were constructed on top of a hill during this period, include Yale, Andover, Amherst, Dartmouth, Carleton, and Mt. Holyoke.

[34] Runoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century*, 135.

[35] Lawrence Thomas Lesick, *The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America,* (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1980), 70.

satisfactory to the faculty, and we are quite willing that their attainments should be the first specimens to represent the seminary.[36]

Lane students underwent rigorous training in theology, rhetoric, church history, biblical languages, mathematics, and natural philosophy. Beecher meticulously selected professors who shared his vision and dedication to educating students with the mission of redeeming American society. Many of these educators were Andover graduates, such as Calvin E. Stowe, a leading intellectual at the school and the future husband of Lyman's daughter, Harriet.[37]

Beecher consistently emphasized to his colleagues and trustees the importance of Lane's success. He asserted that if the school were to fail, the consequences would be severe. In his "Plea for the West," Beecher passionately wrote that if the institution did not succeed, "our intelligence and virtue will falter and fall back into a dark-minded, vicious populace—a poor, uneducated, reckless mass of infuriated animalism, to rush on as resistless as the tornado, or to burn as if set on fire of hell."[38] While Beecher's rhetoric often employed hyperbole, it remained anchored in his genuine belief in the gravity of the situation.

At Lane, students chose one of two tracks of study: a theological track and a literary track. The theological track cost students sixty dollars a year, and the literary track would cost them seventy-five dollars because it required an extra course of study.[39] The manual labor opportunities helped to cover the costs for these students. The manual labor system provided financial gain for students but a pecuniary loss to the institution. Students could work their way

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[36] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher,* vol. 2, 244.

[37] Lesick, *The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America,* 70.

[38] Beecher, *Plea for the West,* 36-37.

[39] *The Life and Services of Rev. Lyman Beecher D.D., as President and Professor of Theology in Lane Seminary: A Commemorative Discourse,* (Cincinnati, 1863), 9.

through school through the products of their labor, but these products were not sufficiently bringing in the financial revenue necessary to run the college. Schools quickly found themselves losing money by implementing manual labor programs. As schools relied heavily on donations for support, these programs became increasingly unsustainable. By the end of the Civil War, many manual labor programs nationwide would end; however, their legacy would remain in the physical education departments.[40] In the twentieth century, when federal dollars subsidized education costs, manual labor programs saw a rebirth in the development of federal work programs.

The students at Lane were all products of the Second Great Awakening and had very much embraced its revivalist, reformist, and sacralizing vision, but they were not all church ministers. Instead, men, reflecting the second wave of the awakening, came from all walks of life to carry this reforming vision into their specialty areas. For instance, Huntington Lyman, a student from New York, was a leader in New York's state militia and active in the political arena.[41] Thomas Williamson, a practicing physician from nearby Ripley, Ohio, desired to train at Lane to start a medical mission for Native Americans.[42] The students of Lane came to carry the school's sacralizing vision into all disciplines to ensure that no part of society would remain untouched. They created a student compact in the first years of the school, adopting many of the dietary reforms advocated by Sylvester Graham and the dispensing of "drinks that stirred the passions like alcohol, tea, and coffee." They also "removed all articles of luxury to live on

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[40] George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University Revisited: From Protestant to Postsecular*, (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2021), 205.

[41] *Lane Theological Seminary General Catalogue*, (1899), 21.

[42] Ibid.

principles of Christian simplicity and economy."[43] Many of these students had followed

Theodore Weld from the Oneida Institute and brought with them the ultraist religious sentiments

instilled at their former school.

The men gathered to study at Lane held firm opinions regarding all topics. Everything

was a sacred matter. There was no "middle" or "common" ground for these passionate

individuals. During this period, a letter from Lane students demonstrates how they renounced the

"dandy airs affected by the clowns who set themselves up as gentlemen" and condemned those

women who wore "gold and precious stones about their ears and bosoms."[44] This prophetic

cohort of students chose Lane because they believed it would equip them to spearhead the

imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God. They viewed Lane as a sacred institution destined to

bring salvation to the West, the nation, and the world, and they were unwavering in their pursuit

of this mission.

The fact that students could choose a higher education institution that aligned with their

personal preferences underscores how the market revolution had extended its influence to the

realm of education. Students were now far more expansive in their options. They could select a

school based on its faculty, pedagogy, academic offerings, student societies, and overall vision.

This cultural shift leveled the hierarchical structures and fostered an egalitarian spirit on many

college and graduate campuses. The religious and educational markets empowered students,

granting them a level of influence unprecedented in earlier times. Suppose a professor failed to

meet the student's expectations due to undesirable teaching methods or inadequate knowledge of

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[43] *Third Annual Report of the Trustees of the Cincinnati Lane Seminary*, (Cincinnati, 1833), 15.

[44] "Willard Jones and Benjamin Burge, Cincinnati, February 23, 1833, to Peter Washburn," in *Student Correspondence, 1833-1838,* Lane Theological Seminary Records, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

specific social issues; the students were unafraid to voice their dissatisfaction. In such cases, they boldly asserted that the professor "would never cross the threshold of a classroom as an instructor" and would take collective action to ensure this remained true.[45]

Intense were the passions of Lane's 'prophetic' band of students. They engaged in the development of numerous student-led societies and associations. They loved God and abominated the devil, including everything they believed reflected their enemy's work—soft living, intense drinking, and staunch infidelity.[46] Nevertheless, by the end of 1833, nothing sparked more passion among the students at Lane than the issue of slavery. Several of these students brought abolitionist convictions and found a champion of the cause to follow at Lane, not in Beecher or any faculty members, but in fellow student Theodore Weld.

Weld and many of his fellow Oneida students, influenced profoundly by Charles Finney, chose to enroll at Lane. Finney's new measures provided a pragmatic approach to revival and reform within a society. Like Beecher, Weld accepted the opportunity to come to Lane because he saw an enormous opportunity there. Weld believed he had found the gate to the West in Cincinnati, right on the Ohio River. He believed that if Lane and its students were going to bring about the sacral vision of America's true destiny as a millennial harbinger, it had to begin with keeping slavery from spreading into the West and immediately abolishing slavery where it already existed.[47]

Cincinnati was not only strategically positioned for Weld's antislavery efforts but also attracted students from the slave-holding South due to Beecher's prominence as a minister.

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[45] "E. Weed to Theodore Weld, August 2, 1832," in *Student Correspondence, 1833-1838.*

[46] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 181.

[47] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 82.

Recognizing this, Weld and like-minded individuals saw Lane as a unique opportunity to influence and reshape the perspectives of Southern students. The objective was to convict and transform the worldview of students coming from moderate and pro-slavery backgrounds. These students, fueled by their transformed convictions, would then carry their message of change back to their communities, sparking shifts in sentiments on slavery in places where abolitionist voices like Weld's had not been welcome.

This methodology reflected a new shift in the goal of American higher education, uniquely birthed out of the ideology of the Second Great Awakening, and continues to play a significant part in these institutions to the present day. For thinkers like Weld, education was not primarily about preserving an intellectual culture nor obtaining schools for personal success; it was about shaping the worldview, colonizing ideals, and directing students' actions to transform the world in the image they believed best reflected a heavenly society. For Weld and his followers at Lane, such a society was one where human slavery was extinct.

Lest this is argued as conjecture, two examples demonstrate this goal of bringing about ideological change, especially for students from the South. First, note how Weld himself described this as one of his goals for coming to Lane:

> I knew of a number who were coming from the Southern States to Lane, besides many of the Oneida Institute boys… When I went through the West and South and saw the situation at Lane Seminary, I was satisfied that was the place for us. I developed my views on slavery, and my intention to improve the excellent opportunity to introduce anti-slavery sentiments and have the whole subject thoroughly discussed.[48]

Weld held immense influence on the student body. Beecher, unaware of the troubled future looming on Lane's horizon over this issue, never once doubted Weld's significance among the

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[48] Quoted in Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 182.

students; he wrote, "In the estimation of the class, Weld was president. He took the lead of the whole institution."[49]

Located in the records of the "great debate" at Lane Seminary over the issues of slavery and colonization is the second example of this goal of ideological conversion at the institution. A southern student named James Thome had come to Lane in 1834, and shockingly, Thome was a member of a slave-owning family. The antislavery camp at Lane saw Thome as a primary target. Utilizing Finney's "conscience pressing" methods, these students set out to transform this man's worldview and thoroughly succeeded. Recorded in a student-produced tract describing the events surrounding the "great debate," one statement reads:

> Another [student] entered this institution last spring as the owner of two slaves. Having been taught to look upon slavery as a necessary evil and not a sin, he hired out his slaves where they would receive kind treatment, intending that the proceeds of their labor would aid him in his preparations for the ministry. Towards the close of the last session, facts were pressed upon his conscience, his duty was pointed out, he saw it, and returned to Kentucky, liberating his slaves—and now, instead of their working to educate him, he is working and studying to educate them.[50]

The goal was clear: moral transformation would lead to social transformation. Southern students were enlisted by their fellow Lane students to serve in leading and teaching Sabbath schools and Bible classes for the community of freed blacks in Cincinnati. [51] The objective was to expose these students to ideas and experiences they had been "shielded from" in their upbringing. As such, the actions reflected here at Lane and even more so at Oberlin (seen in the next chapter) would plant the seeds of the progressivist approach that would mark most American liberal arts colleges and universities.

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[49] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, v*ol. 2, 321.

[50] Samuel H. Cox, *Great Debate at Lane Seminary,* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1834), 6.

[51] Cox, *Great Debate at Lane Seminary, 6.*

Between 1832 and 1833, a significant cholera epidemic swept through Cincinnati, also affecting the seminary. This crisis momentarily shifted the focus away from the slavery issue as students and professors turned their attention to ministering to the sick and dying in their community. President Beecher was actively involved in providing essential supplies like medicine, food, and water and offering comfort at the bedside of sick students.[52] This spirit of mutual care and support permeated the school during this challenging period. Tragically, the epidemic claimed the lives of four students, with several others falling ill. Despite the grim circumstances, only one student left the school to return home; the majority believed it was best to stay and care for one another.[53] It is a fascinating paradigm that, in one of the darkest moments of the school's existence, the mutual love, care, and brotherly unity at Lane shone at its brightest. If ever the seminary truly reflected the glory it longed for as a sacred institute, it was during this time. Unfortunately, this unity would gradually diminish by the end of the following year as the issue of slavery came to a head.

The Lane Rebels

In 1834, Lyman's son Charles Beecher wrote of the family's time at Lane, "Life was exuberant and glorious, at least for a little while." [54] Beginning in February of that year, Theodore Weld and the Oneida-influenced students that followed him began to amp up their pressure on the other students and the faculty at Lane to adopt an immediatist position for the abolition of slavery. The abolitionist students, later named the "rebels," proposed a series of public discussions on the issue of slavery. The faculty of the school, led by Beecher, though

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[52] Lesick, *Lane Rebels,* 74.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, v*ol. 2, 309.

abhorring slavery, held to a gradualist position of abolition and colonization (transporting

formerly enslaved people to Liberia). Hearing of the desire to have these discussions, Beecher

and the faculty advised the students that nothing was edifying about such a debate to the

seminary and that it would likely lead only to division. They advised to have any such discussion

postponed indefinitely.[55]

Despite the faculty's advice, these student "rebels" continued with the debate. For these

students, the topic was sacred: slavery represented a profound moral evil and a significant

hindrance to the millennial vision of the American nation. While Beecher was concerned about

the unyielding passion of these students and its potential impact on the school's future, he felt an

apparent affinity for these students as they were embodying the very reformist zeal that he had

helped birth in the awakening. In this public debate, which the faculty attended, the focus

centered on two pivotal questions: 1) Should the people of slave-holding states abolish slavery

immediately, and 2) Are the doctrines, tendencies, and measures of the American Colonization

Society deserving of support from the Christian public?

The debate covered nine evenings, each meeting lasting two and a half hours.[56] Eighteen

students actively participated in these discussions, yet none gave a more impactful testimony

than James Bradley. The narrative he unfolded before his fellow students held exceptional

weight. Bradley, a former slave, was taken from Africa as a toddler. As the lone African

American at Lane Seminary and one of the earliest black graduate students in American history,

Bradley embodied the transformative opportunities that the second wave of the awakening had

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[55] Cox, *Great Debate at Lane Seminary, 3*.

[56] Cox, *Great Debate at Lane Seminary,* 3. There are many descriptions of the "Lane debates," see for example Robert Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 150-66 and Stuart Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 189-203. While interpretation and details differ, the general outline is clear.

begun to provide for academic inclusion.[57] He emerged as the key speaker for the rebels because, in their eyes, he effectively dismantled a central argument put forth by proponents of gradual emancipation and continuous colonization. This argument posited that if slaves were immediately emancipated and integrated into American society, it would place them in a worse position.

Bradley's eloquence and logical precision systematically dismantled this line of reasoning. After discrediting that argument, Bradley devoted the last hour of his two-hour speech to elucidating a fundamental truth: slaves aspired for only liberty and education.[58] George Clark, a student at the time, described in a letter to Theodore Weld, written fifty years later, just how powerful Bradley's speech was: "I doubt that there was a dry eye in the chapel that day."[59] Bradley's testimony effectively solidified a predominantly one-sided discussion, significantly swaying numerous students towards the immediatist position on abolition, contrary to Beecher's stance and several other faculty members.

The conclusion of the debates poured over into further passion and zeal among the Lane Rebels. These students poured themselves into the black community to provide education and ministry in what became known as Cincinnati's "little Africa."[60] Theodore Weld so deeply integrated himself into the black community that he considered himself one of them. "If I ate in the city," he wrote, "it was at their tables. It was theirs if I attended parties, weddings, funerals, or schools. During the eighteen months I spent at Lane Seminary, I did not attend Dr. Beecher's

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[57] Lesick, *Lane Rebels,* 80.

[58] Quoted in *The New York Evangelist,* March 22, 1834.

[59] "George Clark to Theodore Weld, October 10, 1884," quoted in Lesick, *Lane Rebels,* 82.

[60] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator,* 97.

church once."[61] The students led by Weld also began planning the development of a school for women in Cincinnati. The Lane Rebels demonstrated the single most impactful wave of student social activism that the young nation had known, but it soon received significant backlash.

The citizens of Cincinnati began to show their displeasure with the antislavery activities at Lane and its students' entry into the black quarter of town. This local backlash raised concerns among the school's trustees and faculty, particularly regarding the rebels using highly condemning language towards those students and leaders who supported colonization as a solution to slavery.[62] Beecher, despite his profound passion, displayed a conciliatory leadership style. He likely empathized with these students, leading him to take a gentle approach to addressing the situation. Beecher frequently engaged with them, attempting to reason about their zeal and interactions with those with differing views. In a final attempt, the faculty and he gathered the passionate students to ease the escalating negative sentiments in the public and the growing division within the school.[63]

Beecher's talk with the students went well. He celebrated their passion and convictions as noteworthy and necessary. A student who was there that day recalled how Beecher "wanted us to know that he supported our vision to bring the terrors of slavery to an end, but that we were to do so with gentility, kindness, and humility, and that while working towards the cause of righteousness, we were to trust 'in the gradual and redeeming providence of our Lord.'"[64] The students had been harsh to a number of their instructors, but they respected Beecher and agreed

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[61] "Theodore Weld to Louis Tappan, March 9, 1836," in *Weld-Grimké Letters*, I, 99.

[62] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling,* 160.

[63] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 195.

[64] H. Lyman, "Lane Seminary Rebels," *Oberlin Jubilee* (1883): 63.

to be more cordial. The trustees were unhappy with the faculty, as they wanted them to come down much more sternly on these "rebels," but Beecher and other faculty members, like Stowe, did not see these students in that light. They may not have appreciated the students' treatment of their instructors at times, and they may have disagreed on how to end slavery. However, they believed their final goal was the same: the glory of God's earthly kingdom. The trustees had appointed a committee to devise several resolutions on dealing with these students. However, Beecher and the faculty postponed any application to them until after the faculty returned from summer vacation to discuss the issues better.[65]

As the semester ended and summer set in, it seemed as if peace was on the horizon at the seminary; however, once Beecher and the faculty left for vacation, a storm arrived instead. It was not uncommon for students to remain for the summer during this era, as they would use this time to work in their manual labor practices and focus on personal ministry endeavors and apprenticeships. While the faculty was gone, Lane's trustees stepped in and heavy-handedly enforced the new restrictions on Lane's students. One of the rebels of Lane, Reverend H. Lyman, recounts this moment in an article he wrote several years after the event:

> The term closed happily. The faculty had signified no disapprobation, no token of discontent among the students. However, the faculty had dispersed, and the trustees entered the stage. They convened in Cincinnati and took the seminary in hand. They then followed acts declarative and statutory, which entirely changed our relationship with the institution.[66]

Indeed, several relationships in the institution would change. Beecher got the first hint that something was not right while on the East Coast conducting fundraising visits. He visited Lewis

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[65] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, v*ol. 2, Kindle, location 4369.

[66] H. Lyman, "Lane Seminary Rebels," 63-64.

Tappan, whom he found sympathetic to the student abolitionists. Tappan reprimanded Beecher: "If you, doctor, were a thorough antislavery man, how easy would it be for you and Mr. Weld to go on harmoniously."[67]

This encounter deeply unsettled Beecher, highlighting the widespread awareness of the issues at Lane and the potential loss of financial supporters like Tappan. Realizing the urgency, Beecher promptly returned to Lane, only to discover the extent of the trustees' actions while reading letters from over seventy students requesting dismissal from the seminary. One of Lane's trustees, Asa Mahan, also the pastor of the Sixth Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, resigned from his post on the executive committee to show his support for the rebels.[68] Mahan would play a significant role in the lives of these students and be essential in the development of Oberlin College.

Beecher attempted to get the students to return and actively lobbied the trustees to change the student resolutions. He wrote to Weld, who had led the exodus of students from Lane, "I went to the trustees and told them that the manner of reformation in my absence was untimely, and the phraseology of the resolutions and orders was not the most apt and that they must let us offer terms. They have consented."[69] Despite the trustees withdrawing the resolution, the students had no interest in returning. The ship had sailed.

Many had set up a residence in Cumminsville, Ohio, continuing their antislavery activity in Cincinnati.[70] They could not, in good conscience, return to a school that they believed had

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[67] "Lewis Tappan to Theodore Weld, September 29, 1834," in *Student Correspondence, 1833-1839.*

[68] Henry, *Unvanquished puritan,* 200.

[69] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher,* vol. 2, Kindle, loc. 4393.

[70] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 202.

limited their sacred duty of transforming society toward greater righteousness. The students

issued a public statement for their departure and inability to return on moral grounds. If they

were to be deemed "rebels," they would be rebels of a righteous cause. They concluded their

statement as follows:

> Finally, we would respectfully remind the trustees that men, though students of a theological seminary, should be treated as men—that men, destined for the service of the world, need, above all things, in such an age as this, the pure and impartial, the disinterested and magnanimous, the uncompromising and fearless—in combination with the gentle and tender spirit and example of Christ; not parleying with wrong, but calling it to repentance; not flattering the proud, but pleading the cause of the poor. And we record the hope that the glorious stand taken upon the subject of discussion and up to the close of the last session, maintained by the institution, may be early resumed, that the triumph of expediency over right may soon terminate, and Lane Seminary be again restored to the glory of its beginning.[71]

In the wake of the students leaving, Tappan pulled his finances from the seminary and transferred

his support to a new college in Ohio whose mission was to carry the millennial vision of the

Second Great Awakening to its completion. The school, Oberlin College, would be a welcome

refuge for several of the Lane Rebels, who, under Asa Mahan's and Charles Finney's tutelage,

would work towards the perfection of American society.

The situation with the Lane Rebels highlighted the significant vulnerability of societal

sacralization. Compromise becomes impossible when all issues gradually collapse into the sacred

or profane. These students could not back off because they believed they were fighting for

righteousness and against evil. To lessen their zeal and not fight the battle with the passion they

so earnestly felt would be to go against their conscience. The idea of slavery as an undesirable

yet common part of humanity found itself rapidly disappearing in American social discourse.

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[71] *A Statement of the Reasons which Induced the Students of Lane Seminary to Dissolve Their Connection with that Institution, December 15, 1834*, (Cincinnati: 1834).

Abolitionists like the rebels of Lane Seminary were taking the stance that people must choose a side precisely what all forms of sacralization demand. When and where sacralization occurs within a given culture, polarization will follow, which is what happened at Lane. Behind every "culture war" stands feuding sentiments over differing visions of the sacred and profane. Moreover, the two-sided division at Lane foreshadowed what would happen to the entire nation in a matter of decades.

The events at Lane Seminary highlighted the changing landscape of American higher education during the Second Great Awakening. Students were increasingly active and vocal in expressing their beliefs, preferences, and concerns about education's moral and social aspects, setting the stage for a more student-centric and democratic approach to academia. The events surrounding the Lane Rebels exemplified the power of students to lead and influence social movements. This student-led initiative set a precedent for future activism within academic institutions, showcasing how passionate and organized students can drive change and challenge prevailing norms and policies.

In the 1930s, students at various institutions, from working-class colleges like Hunter and Brooklyn College to esteemed schools like Harvard, Columbia, and Vassar, spearheaded a burgeoning political activism that significantly influenced American society. They rallied behind Roosevelt's New Deal economics and expressed anti-war sentiments.[72] Moving into the 1960s, college students, especially those in the black community, played a pivotal role in the American Civil Rights movement. Their courageous actions, such as sit-ins at segregated lunch counters and active participation in Freedom Rides, directly challenged racial segregation and

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[72]Roger L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 514.

discrimination.[73] Moreover, during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s, college students were instrumental in advocating the anti-war movement.

The legacy of student societies initiated during the Second Great Awakening persisted into this era, epitomized by the formation of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1960. This organization galvanized students nationwide to protest the Vietnam War and advocate for peace and civil rights.[74] The concluding chapter of this work will delve into further instances of student activism and its enduring impact on American higher education and society. It is evident that student societies and activism, deeply ingrained in the fabric of American colleges and universities, trace their origins to the convictions forged during the Second Great Awakening— the belief that education serves the sacred purpose of realizing a better world, with students as its key agents. The rebels of Lane Seminary were pioneers in embracing this vision, blazing a trail for generations to come.

The Mission Continues: Lane After the Rebels

Contrary to the common perception of Lane Seminary, the institution did not shut down following the departure of anti-slavery students. Although later records show that most of the class of 1836 left the school prematurely, subsequent graduate classes still enrolled a notable number of students. The class of 1837 had 14 full-term students, and the class of 1838 had

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[73] Several notable works have demonstrated the massive impact of student activism in the civil rights movement. See especially James P. Marshall and Staughton Lynd, *Student Activism and Civil Rights in Mississippi,* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2013); and Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus,* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2012).

[74] Robert A. Golden, ed., *How Democratic is America?: Responses to the New Left Challenge. An Official Statement of Students for a Democratic Society, and Essays by Walter Berns [and others],* (Chicago, Rand McNally, 1971).

eight.[75] While these figures were smaller than the inaugural class of forty, they remained

respectable for a theological seminary during the early nineteenth century.

The years following the Lane rebellion were challenging for Beecher. The loss of

students, financial support from the Tappans, and increasing pressure from trustees and the

denomination cast a shadow over Lane's future. The Presbyterian denomination split in 1837–

1838 over the issue of slavery and the theological schism between the Old School and New

School Presbyterians.[76] Despite these difficulties, Beecher remained steadfast in his commitment

to Lane's mission. He continued to believe in the school's potential to equip and inspire ministers

dedicated to realizing the divine destiny of the West. However, he also needed to rally others to

maintain their belief in this mission.

Initially, many conceived that the educational instruments of voluntary societies, revivals,

and reforming publications of the awakening would bring a swift triumph. However, the

anticipated victory materialized slower than evangelicals like Beecher had envisioned.[77] The

Presbyterian church stood divided, slavery persisted without delay, and the nation's economy

could not sustain numerous religious endeavors. The prospect of the millennium arriving in their

lifetime dimmed, prompting this generation to brace for a protracted struggle. Beecher,

nonetheless, remained steadfast in his belief that the millennial kingdom was attainable, if not in

his time, at least in the next generation. He continued to emphasize that achieving this reality

hinged on cultivating laborers for the harvest through the proliferation of colleges. To reignite

and fortify this belief among potential donors and future students, he delivered a lecture at Miami

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[75] *Lane Theological Seminary General Catalogue*, (1899), 21-24.

[76] Hart and Muether, *Seeking a Better Country,* 128.

[77] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 232.

(OH) University titled "A Plea for Colleges," a year after the exodus of the rebels.[78] What added

even more weight to the importance of this lecture was that Miami (OH) University was

currently in the middle of a significant moment of division itself. Beecher spoke to one of the

student societies there, hoping his vision for the West could help reconcile the students.[79]

This lecture was a passionate call to action for establishing and sustaining colleges in

America, especially in the West. Beecher wrote and delivered the speech with immense

conviction:

> Shall nothing then be added to the reigning systems of collegiate and professional
> education? While the mind has quadrupled its power and everything within, without, and
> around us is running such a race, shall our colleges and theological seminaries alone
> stand back in the twilight of the dark ages?… There is no demand for subtraction but
> much for addition. The whole circle of the arts and sciences should, in their elementary
> principles, be included in a liberal course. Since, in addition to the vigor it communicates,
> it holds the lamp to every improvement of the monopoly of knowledge. It calls the entire
> republican community to a relative increase of knowledge, which begins to astonish and
> will soon emancipate and civilize the world.[80]

For Beecher, the path to witnessing the millennium's arrival remained steadfast. Establish

institutions of higher education imbued with a Protestant Christian worldview, shaping students

to drive social transformation. This development, he believed, would catalyze the growth of

Christian civilization, not just within America but across the globe. The advancement of

Christian society on a global scale would herald the glorious eschaton. Beecher remained

resolute in this vision, affirming Lane's commitment to this trajectory. In every letter and during

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[78] Lesick, *The Lane Rebels,* 140.

[79] Fraser, "Pedagogue for God's Kingdom: Lyman Beecher and the Second Great Awakening," 353.

[80] Beecher, *A Plea for Colleges,* 70-71.

fundraising excursions to the East, Beecher consistently conveyed a singular message to fellow Americans: "The religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West."[81]

The colleges championed by Beecher aimed to "disperse and share among the people the monopoly of knowledge and intellectual power that despotic regimes hoard for arbitrary rule, granting every child, even from humble families, a fair chance to compete for learning, honor, and prosperity."[82] Beecher saw American colleges as agents of democracy, accessible to all strata of society and spread throughout the nation, countering concentration in select locations. Contrary to criticisms, the proliferation of colleges in the nineteenth century was, in Beecher's view, a crucial democratic stride, indispensable for a republican government reliant on a merit-based elite rather than one based on birthright.[83] In Beecher's perspective, a genuine and steadfast republic would thrive on the shoulders of those who earned their place, not those born into it.

Throughout the 1840s, Beecher increasingly dedicated himself to his role as a professor at Lane, profoundly impacting the students. He adhered to his philosophy of applied theology, valuing education for its practical utility. At Lane, Beecher was never alone in his teaching endeavors. While he held a dominant position, the faculty collectively shaped and enriched the educational experience for Lane's students. Among them, Calvin Stowe stood out as a crucial figure, remaining at Lane until 1850. Stowe, a quiet and scholarly presence, was inspired by Beecher's vision and remained committed to the cause.[84] The Lane faculty consistently promoted

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[81] Beecher, *A Plea for the West,* 10-11.

[82] Beecher, *A Plea for Colleges,* 5.

[83] Ibid.*,* 15.

[84] John Stanley Harker, "The Life and Contributions of Calvin Ellis Stowe," PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1951, 157,

the president's vision: to educate students in classical studies and moral guidance, steering them toward the legitimate goals of a liberal education—cultivating their minds for acquisition and action.[85]

To achieve these objectives, Beecher recognized the necessity of a first-rate library at Lane, on par with any Eastern institution. It had to be extensive in the collection and varied in content, encompassing crucial works from both America and Europe. Stowe, who had librarian training at Andover, was entrusted with realizing this grand vision. He traveled across Europe, collecting notable works and modeling the library after prominent European higher education institutions, particularly those in Germany where he studied, adopting research and bibliographical elements from their Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) program.[86] Beecher aimed to provide students in the West with "complete access to the Fathers and the Classics." Lane Seminary intended to be a research hub where students, delving into the inspiring visions of the past, could unearth the visionary seeds of Western civilization's great thinkers to sow themselves in the world. Beecher's vision and Stowe's meticulous efforts led Lane to boast a library housing over ten thousand books by 1848.[87]

Beecher fervently and firmly believed in the effectiveness of the prevailing structure of higher education first birthed at Andover: four years of undergraduate liberal education for all students, followed by three years of specialized training in theology, law, or medicine for those aspiring to be leaders. Despite his desire for efficiency, Beecher championed this model and

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[85] Beecher, *A Plea for Colleges,* 69.

[86] Earle Hilgert, "Calvin Ellis Stowe: Pioneer Librarian of the Old West," *The Library Quarterly* 50, no 3 (July, 1980): 330.

[87] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 239.

ensured its adoption at Lane as the best approach to nurturing a cadre of elite individuals who would propel civilization to its zenith. Describing it as a "superstructure," Beecher passionately advocated for a thorough foundational education, emphasizing that taking ample time to build this intellectual and literary character would ultimately "cause future generations and nations to rise and call us blessed."[88]

After the dissolution of the Plan of Union in 1837, many Western colleges, including Lane, faced financial struggles due to the loss of much of their denominational support.[89] To address this, Beecher joined forces with New School leaders like Albert Barnes, Leonard Bacon, and other eastern allies to form a society that financially supported these colleges. Discussing this meeting, Beecher wrote to his wife Lydia, "Our prospect of success in forming an efficient society to superintend and cooperate with us in the support of Lane and our colleges is cheering, and I believe that we will go into permanent and successful operation for our relief."[90] The delegates from the West met with their Eastern counterparts in New York City on June 30, 1843. They agreed to the cooperative venture, a new benevolent society entitled The Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education at the West (SPCTEW), later known as the Western College Society.

The Western College Society had many purposes, each complementing the other. By centralizing and simplifying collegiate fundraising, the society could provide more funds for the colleges with far less effort. It connected itself to the existing American Education Society

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[88] Beecher, *A Plea for Colleges,* 36.

[89] Henry, *Unvanquished Puritan,* 231.

[90] "Lyman Beecher to Lydia Beecher, Philadelphia, May 19, 1843), in *Lyman Beecher Correspondence, 1830-1852, Lane Theological Seminary Records*, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

(AES), founded in 1815. It was the first fundraising agency in America to channel funds to colleges and seminaries through student scholarships. These scholarship societies, emerging from the reformative ideals of the awakening, were instrumental in sustaining many Western schools throughout the nineteenth century. During 1844–1874, the organization provided more than $600,000 in direct grants to some twenty-six Western colleges and seminaries.[91]

Along with this financial support came specific expectations that colleges and seminaries had to adhere to to be eligible for scholarships and grants. For instance, the school had to adopt the particular model of the four-year college and three-year professional school to be eligible for consideration.[92] The schools that did not fit this superstructure pattern first modeled at Andover Seminary would not receive financial aid. As a result, most schools conformed, solidifying this model of American higher education to the present. This process for developing criteria for establishing a legitimate institution of higher education would also be critical in the progressive development of academic accreditation, which would come to fruition beginning in Andover in the 1880s.[93]

Upon establishing the new benevolent society, Lane Seminary found financial stability, ensuring the continuation of its theological mission. The institution had weathered the storm of "the rebellion." Lyman Beecher, surveying the secure finances, extensive library, dedicated students, and accomplished staff, could take great satisfaction. The storm clouds of the 1830s had seemingly dissipated, and the light of his vision was now shining brightly. In 1850, Beecher

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[91] James Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop: The Rise of the Modern University,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 167.

[92] Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop,* 167.

[93] Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History,* (Athens: University Georgia Press, 1990), 437.

submitted his resignation to the board of trustees, stating, "If it pleases God to spare me with health a little longer, I think I may be useful to the Church of God, in which the opinions and wishes of many sustain me."[94] He relocated to Boston, where he would collaborate with his son Henry until his passing on January 10, 1863. Beecher's indelible influence imprinted itself thoroughly on American society, religion, and education, most notably at the institution he fought to preserve—Lane Seminary.

Lane's Lasting Impact

Lane Seminary cultivated a generation of influential students who went on to shape American religious, social, and political discourse. A standout among them was Josiah Strong, whose influence carried and reshaped the sacralizing vision of the Second Great Awakening into America's Progressive era (1890—1929). Strong, a Lane graduate, fervently propagated Beecher's belief in America's sacred destiny. In his renowned book, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis*, published in 1885, he expounded on American exceptionalism, advocating for the spread of Anglo-Protestantism and culture. Austin Phelps, the educational reformer from Andover Seminary, drafted the book's preface. Phelps wrote in the preface the basis of Strong's entire argument: "As goes America, so goes the world, in all that is vital to its moral welfare."[95]

Strong's book holds historical significance as one of the earliest instances where descriptive statistics were leveraged to support a morally charged call for social reform and gain

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[94] Charles Beecher, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, v*ol. 2, Kindle, location 7281.

[95] Austin Phelps, "Preface," in Josiah Strong, *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis,* (New York: Home Missionary Society, 1885), vii.

public backing for policies to eradicate social crises.[96] In it, Strong explicitly linked the importance of social science inquiry to maintaining America's millennial course. He viewed accurate social data as "God's alphabet," allowing people to prophesy about the future by understanding societal trends.[97] This reverential approach to statistics foreshadowed the belief in the transformative power of social research that drove social progressives throughout much of the twentieth century.

In subsequent works like "The Coming Kingdom" (1893), Strong reiterated the crucial role of social knowledge in reorganizing society. He advocated for educated, native-born Protestants to lead statistical studies and the development of social sciences within American higher education.[98] Strong significantly influenced the rise of the social gospel movement, particularly impacting prominent social-gospel theologians like Walter Rauschenbusch. Strong's ideas, originally stemming from Beecher's beliefs, profoundly affected American imperialism and the nation's policies toward other countries, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the United States was extending its global influence. This enduring belief in America as an agent of global transformation considerably influenced the subsequent generation of leaders, including Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. [99]

Lane Seminary stood as a cornerstone of education for nearly a century, ultimately merging with McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago in 1932, where it remains under that

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[96] Steven Stritt, "The First Faith-Based Movement: The Religious Roots of Social Progressivism in America (1880-1912) in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Sociology and Welfare* 41, no. 1 (2014): 82

[97] Strong, *Our Country,* 174.

[98] Stritt, "The First Faith-Based Movement," 83.

[99] John F. Wilson and Donald L. Drakeman, *Church and State in American History: Key Documents, Decisions, and Commentary from Five Centuries,* Fourth edition, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 160.

name to the present day. The institution's model and mission, aiming to cultivate intellectually adept students rooted in a Protestant Christian worldview, ready to usher the world towards a brighter future, left an indelible mark on educational institutions across America. Notably, in the classes of 1837–1838, Lane Seminary nurtured three individuals who would later become college presidents and founders: Robert L. Stanton, President of Miami (OH) University from 1866–1871; Jonathan Blanchard, President of Knox College from 1846–1860 and eventual founder of Wheaton College; and Henry L. Hitchcock, President of Western Reserve College from 1855–1871.[100] In 1879, Lane celebrated its alumni, citing that "five of them had become instructors in theological seminaries, nine had served as college presidents, and twenty-five had become professors in various colleges."[101] The legacy of Lane Seminary and the ideas fostered under Beecher resonated through these academic leaders, influencing an expanding array of American higher education.

The seminary had become the model nineteenth-century educational institution emphasizing intellectual growth, moral improvement, and social transformation. This reality further reflects the profound impact that the Second Great Awakening had on transforming American colleges and universities. As historian Douglas Sloan has convincingly argued:

> All nineteenth-century curricular programs, whether new or traditional, in the colleges proper or in other institutions, revolved around one or more of three major concerns: religion, revivalistic or rational; science, basic or applied; and culture, genteel or popular [including the classics]... Moreover, all three concerns and the studies based upon them, however much they may have otherwise conflicted, possessed two marks in common.

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[100] *Lane Theological Seminary General Catalogue*, (1899), 24-25.

[101] E. D. Morris, "The Alumni," in *Addresses and Proceedings at Lane Theological Seminary, December 1879* (Cincinnati: 1879), 33.

They all claimed a vital connection with the basic emotional and experiential dimensions of individual life, and they all looked toward the welfare of society as they conceived it.[102]

Many scholars have misconstrued Beecher's and other Awakening leaders' shift towards education and institutions as abandoning revivalism and its capacity to birth societal change. However, this interpretation fails to grasp the true beliefs these leaders held regarding the role of educational institutions. Beecher and his colleagues maintained that colleges and graduate schools were not a departure from revivalism but a means to institutionalize and perpetuate it. He viewed the college campus as akin to the new camp meeting—where God's profound truths revealed in Scripture and nature would perpetually ignite generations of souls.[103]

Kindred spirits revitalized students' minds and ignited their passions during this academic "camp meeting," empowering them to emerge prepared to make a lasting impact on Christ's Kingdom. This reality was unequivocally evident at Lane Seminary. The goal was harnessing and channeling revival through the academic institution, not abandoning it. While this might seem unconventional in contemporary academia, a glimpse of student activism on modern campuses reveals student-led rallies and groups fervently advocating for their "sacred" cause with a fervor that would be difficult to categorize as anything less than "religious." If colleges were to be the medium for institutionalizing a revivalist spirit and propelling it towards societal transformation, Oberlin College in Ohio would stand as the paramount exemplar. The narrative now pivots to Oberlin College, marking the final case study in this project.

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[102] Douglas Sloan, "Harmony, Chaos and Consensus: The American College Curriculum," *Teachers College Record* 73 (December, 1971): 227, emphasis mine.

[103] Fraser, "Pedagogue for God's Kingdom: Lyman Beecher and the Second Great Awakening," 370.

Chapter 6

Aiming for Perfection: Oberlin College

The preceding chapters have meticulously unfurled the canvas of the Second Great Awakening, revealing its profound influence in shaping the ethos of the early nineteenth century. These chapters have delved into the enthusiasm that stirred hearts, the theological visions that inspired minds, and the institutions that nurtured these convictions. In this case study, attention pivots to Oberlin College, the third and final institution of higher learning examined in this project. Of the three institutions, Oberlin most fully embraced the sacralizing vision of the religious awakening to strive for a perfect society.

Nestled in the quaint town of Oberlin, Ohio, amidst the expansive American frontier, a flame of unyielding conviction burned brightly within the hallowed halls of Oberlin College. Founded in 1833 by New School Presbyterian ministers John Jay Shipherd and Philo P. Stewart, Oberlin College bore the hallmarks of the continual transformation of conventional educational paradigms. It would be an institute established to educate "the whole man for the whole of society."[1]

Oberlin College stands as a beacon, and its history is a testament to the enduring power of an education steeped in religious conviction. Its alums became torchbearers of the awakening's transformative vision, advancing social progress and advocating universal equality. Oberlin was the first institution of higher education in the United States to admit men and women of all races. As more conservative schools clamped down on their policies towards

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[1] Robert Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College: From its Foundation through the Civil War,* (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943), 119.

outspoken student abolitionists, Oberlin welcomed them with open arms.[2] Indeed, the school became a beacon for the nation's most progressive students. The echoes of their endeavors still resonate in many of today's institutes of higher education, whose goal is to form a better and more egalitarian world.

This chapter will meticulously unravel Oberlin's inception, the religious foundations that propelled its mission, the integration of the era's revivalism and social reform into its educational approach, and its enduring impact on American higher education. Oberlin College is more than an institution; it is a living testament to the catalyzing fusion of sacred belief and universal education, echoing the awakening spirit that birthed it. An examination of Oberlin's history demonstrates how its visionaries, deeply influenced by the awakening, wove an educational fabric that envisioned not just academic enlightenment but also the spiritual and societal enlightenment of all individuals, regardless of gender or race.

The ideals and principles that created Oberlin in the nineteenth century continue to resonate, shaping the ethos of numerous contemporary progressive and liberal institutions of higher learning. Historian J. Brent Morris best described the beginnings of Oberlin College: "Oberlin was an idea before it was a place."[3] The school was in every way an embodiment of the most social activist impulses produced in the Second Great Awakening.

A Colony and a College

Between 1830 and 1831, Charles Finney, the most renowned evangelist of the period, was conducting his Rochester Revival in upstate New York. Paul E. Johnson, in his historical

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[2] J Brent Morris, "'All the Truly Wise or Truly Pious Have One and the Same End in View': Oberlin, the West, and Abolitionist Schism," Civil War history. 57, no. 3 (2011): 236.

[3] J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism : College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America,* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 12.

treatment of this revival, wrote that it "made new hearts in hundreds of thousands of middle-class men and women and set them off on a massive and remarkably successful crusade to remake society in God's name."[4] Finney, utilizing his "new measures," like the 'anxious bench' and protracted prayer meetings, emphasized the immediacy of conversion and a profound personal experience with God. The Rochester Revival, like other events of the Second Great Awakening, had a significant impact on social reforms. The heightened religious fervor often translated into activism for various social causes, including abolitionism, temperance, women's rights, and educational reforms. Because of its massive promotion of social reformation, Lyman Beecher, despite his issues with Finney's practices, stated that the revival "was the greatest revival of religion that the world has ever seen."[5]

Numerous individuals, including ministers, embarked on journeys to Rochester to partake in the divine experiences recounted by those who had attended the revivals. Among them was John Jay Shipherd, a minister profoundly impacted by vibrant descriptions of Finney's revivals in the Eastern press. Shipherd, traveling with his family en route from his former ministry in Vermont to the Western Reserve of northern Ohio to commence a new life as a home missionary, decided to pause in Rochester for a short period.[6] He would adopt many of Finney's new measures and also form a critical relationship with Finney himself, occasionally substituting as a preacher at the church Finney pastored. This alliance would prove crucial as the two men would

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[4] Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837,* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 4.

[5] Quoted in Charles G. Finney, *Autobiography of Charles G. Finney,* (New York, 1876), 301.

[6] Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism : College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America,* 13.

reunite to pursue the vision they believed the awakening had initiated—the journey toward millennial glory.

In 1832, Shipherd and his family arrived in Elyria, Ohio, where he assumed the role of pastor at the Presbyterian church. The Stewarts, another missionary family, had also recently arrived in Elyria, and the two families soon became very close. Philo Stewart, having previously served as a missionary to the Cherokee Indians in Mississippi, shared the conviction—with Finney, Beecher, Shipherd, and many others—that the redemption of the frontier would unfold the fulfilled destiny of America.[7] However, their reception in Elyria was less than welcoming. Adopting these new measures inspired by Finney did not sit well with the Old School Presbyterians in the community. Despite enduring numerous verbal attacks, Shipherd remained unwavering in his principles, and no one ever presented evidence to condemn him on any account of heresy. Nonetheless, on November 6, 1832, a narrow vote of 15–14 resulted in Shipherd's dismissal from his church.[8] For both Shipherd and Steward, this was a sign of providential clarity.

Undeterred, they collectively prayed and contemplated establishing a new community, placing a manual labor institution at its core. They envisioned a community vital to bringing Christian salvation and civilization to the West.[9] Just eight miles from Elyria, Shipherd, Stewart, and their followers planted their flag to establish a new colony that would become a "burning

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[7] James Harris Fairchild, O*berlin, Its Origin, Progress and Results an Address, Prepared for the Alumni of Oberlin College, Assembled August 22, 1860,* (Oberlin, OH: Shankland and Harmon, 1860), 3.

[8] Ibid., 84.

[9] Fairchild, O*berlin, Its Origin, Progress and Results an Address, Prepared for the Alumni of Oberlin College, Assembled August 22, 1860,* 4.

and shining light that shall lead on to the Millennium."[10] In homage to John Frederic Oberlin, a

German Lutheran renowned for similar utopian ideals centered around the fusion of community

and education, Shipherd and Stewart named their new colony "Oberlin."[11] The community at

Oberlin embraced the ideals promoted by key revivalist leaders like Nathan Beman, Asa Mahan,

and Charles Finney that, under the right conditions and through righteous actions, the human

condition and society were capable of perfecting. The most significant catalyst for such

perfectibility, these men believed, was education, beginning with children and culminating in the

collegiate institution.

As the people of Oberlin set out to establish their college, they first covenanted together

what would be the basis of their communal standards in a document known as the *Oberlin*

Covenant, which is one of the best and most concise documents that demonstrate the extent of

just how far the sacred had expanded in the Second Great Awakening. Everything came from

God, and thus, everything was to be used as an instrument to bring him greater glory. The

covenant called for very straight and modest living—no tobacco, coffee, or tea; it explicitly

denounced jewelry and tight ornamental clothing and prohibited all fancy homes, furniture, and

carriages lest they "bring vanity into the community."[12] Interestingly, in a covenant to establish

the parameters of communal living, there is quite an emphasis on its institution of higher

education. Two of the covenant's twelve resolutions read: "We will feel that the interests of the

Oberlin Institute are identified with ours and do what we can to extend its influence to our fallen

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[10] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 202.

[11] Roland M. Baumann, *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College: A Documentary History,* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 22.

[12] *Oberlin Covenant,* (1833), accessed October 2, 2023, https://www.oberlinheritagecenter.org/researchlearn/covenant.

race" and "We will make special efforts to sustain the institution of the gospel at home and among our neighbors."[13]

The Oberlin Collegiate Institution, as Shipherd named it, represented a remarkably innovative educational model that fully embraced the significant advancements of the Second Great Awakening. The institute, as organized initially, consisted of a theological school, a female seminary, a college, and a preparatory school.[14] The institution, infused with religious ultraism, embraced perfectionist ideals of social reform from its inception. Many of the new antebellum schools of higher education had tried at least one of these novel innovations. However, they had yet to embrace them all the way that Oberlin did comprehensively.

This institution of higher education rapidly set a new trajectory for American higher education, spearheading the way with its sacralizing vision and radical inclusivity. Unlike Andover and Lane, which focused on training professional ministers to transform society through the church and voluntary associations, Oberlin aimed to train individuals to be change agents across all aspects of society, not limiting to the church and state. In contrast to the top-down approach of previous educational institutions, Oberlin College embodied the true democratic spirit of the age with a bottom-up approach. This vision is evident in its original petition to obtain an academic charter from the state:

> Although literary institutions have been considerably multiplied in our infant republic, none have yet afforded its indigent youth, in general, an opportunity to acquire a liberal

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[13] *Oberlin Covenant,* (1833), accessed October 2, 2023, https://www.oberlinheritagecenter.org/researchlearn/covenant.

[14] Fairchild, O*berlin, Its Origin, Progress and Results an Address, Prepared for the Alumni of Oberlin College, Assembled August 22, 1860,* 6.

and thorough education through their own industry. *This extension of the benefits of liberal education to the whole community is yet desideratum.*[15]

The goal was that every graduate would carry the sacralized vision of the awakening back to their specific sphere of living. All members of society needed education if they were to be citizens of the millennial state. Hence, the communal college model of Oberlin was of immense importance to its founders. The Awakening's philosophy of education was pragmatic: educate as many people as possible, male and female, at minimal cost to equip them to evangelize the world and hasten the coming of the millennial kingdom of God, a golden age of righteousness.[16] While these ideas had been promoted previously and individually at other institutions, they converged into a singular institution of higher education with the creation of Oberlin College.

A Home for Rebels and Radicals

By 1835, just two years after its establishment, Oberlin grappled with a pressing need for students and financial support. The institution needed a president and had only a handful of notable teachers. Despite students supporting themselves primarily through manual labor, the school's future appeared bleak. John Jay Shipherd embarked on a recruitment mission to bolster enrollment, with Cincinnati as his initial stop.

In Cincinnati, Shipherd encountered a group of seventy-five students from Lane Seminary. These students, led by fellow student Theodore Weld, Asa Mahan, a Lane Trustee, and a professor named John Morgan, were the "rebels" that had recently departed Lane due to the institution's attempts to curtail their abolitionist activities. Shipherd recognized in these rebels a

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[15] "Minutes of the Oberlin Society, October 15, 1833," *Oberlin College Annual Reports.* Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College Archives, emphasis mine.

[16] Andrea L. Turpin, *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of American Higher Education, 1837-1917,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016), 24.

kindred spirit who shared his zeal and vision necessary to transform American society towards a

millennial consummation. He invited the Lane rebels to find a home at Oberlin, where they could

fearlessly continue their abolitionist mission.[17] Shipherd offered Mahan the college's presidency

and Morgan the mathematics professorship. Nevertheless, Shipherd lacked the most critical

element necessary to secure the institution's future: financing.

Mahan directed Shipherd to the Tappan brothers, Arthur and Lewis, in New York. The

brothers, strong abolitionists themselves, had withdrawn their financial support from Lane upon

hearing of the incident. Shipherd and Mahan traveled to New York to meet with the Tappan

brothers for potential financial backing. The brothers were enthusiastic about Oberlin's mission

and pledged to donate $10,000 to the school to finance the hiring of Mahan, Morgan, and six

other professors.[18] However, their support hinged on three significant conditions.

First, the renowned revivalist Charles Finney, a close friend of the Tappans, was to be

appointed as the head of the college's theological department. Finney added the second

condition, stipulating that the college's admissions program and internal management should be

under faculty control without trustee interference.[19] Given the recent tumultuous events at Lane,

Finney was steadfast in ensuring faculty had this significant assurance. This deal would later

become known as the Finney Compact. The final condition was a unanimous agreement among

Mahan, Morgan, Finney, and the Tappan brothers: "Oberlin must admit black individuals on the

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[17] James Harris Fairchild, *Oberlin: The Colony and the College, 1833-1883,* (Oberlin: E.J. Goodrich, 1883), 55.

[18] Geoffrey Blodgett, ed., *Oberlin History: Essay and Impressions,* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2006), 15.

[19] Finney, *Autobiography,* 178.

same terms as white individuals, eradicating any racial discrimination within the institution."[20]

None of these men would cross the institution's threshold without explicitly agreeing to this final

condition.

Though Shipherd wholeheartedly agreed to these conditions, the reception back home

was much more debated, and it took many meetings by the trustees, present faculty, and students

to conclude this matter. The fact that the school was already paving the way for the coeducation

of men and women presented enough unique challenges. However, the principle of black

admissions on the same basis as that of whites proved beyond imagination for many. Bias and

prejudice are difficult obstacles to overcome, and the situation at Oberlin brought this reality to a

head, as observed in a letter to Shipherd written by Oberlin's financial agent at the time:

> Can you bring into one school blacks and whites, male and female? I do not believe it…
> and in trying this you will lose Oberlin. For as soon as your drakes begin to come in any
> considerable numbers unless they are entirely separate, the whites will start to leave, and
> at length, your institute will change color!… The people and scholars at Oberlin would
> say nothing about one or two, or even half a dozen blacks as members of Oberlin, but
> when they should become numerous, the subject assumes a different shape and new
> importance… I do beseech you to look at this business well and in the fear of God.[21]

These sentiments, far from being isolated to Oberlin, reflected the pervasive ideology of most

white Americans at the time. Even including a few black students was too radical a step for

many. The chief concern of integration's opponents was "amalgamation," which meant

interracial sex, marriage, and descent. Lyman Beecher, for instance, condemned coeducation,

writing, "This amalgamation of sexes will not do. If you live in a powder house, you blow up

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[20] Finney, *Autobiography,* 178.

[21] "Benjamin Woodbury to John J. Shipherd, March 24, 1835," *Treasurer's Office Files,* box 1, Oberlin College Archives.

once in a while."[22] This integration would not be a walk in the park at Oberlin initially. Oberlin historian George Blodgett wrote, "At first, the student body at Oberlin strongly divided on this issue, with a clear majority (55 percent) against black admissions."[23]

Shipherd found himself at a pivotal crossroads, yet the grand vision he held for Oberlin was too profound to compromise. He had purposefully recruited rebels and radicals who shared his audacious ambition. Maintaining the status quo was not his aim; he sought progression towards a glorious future. He had actively sought thinkers who resonated with his ambitious vision of what America could become, viewing education as the key to realizing that vision. Shipherd fully embraced the awakening's perspective on education, seeing it not merely as a means to uphold tradition and orthodoxy but as a crucible for societal advancement. The time had come for Shipherd to stand firm in this belief, and that precisely is what he did.

Drafting a long letter to the trustees, Shipherd gave them twenty reasons to admit black students and accept the other conditions. In the letter, Shipherd argued that the admission of students irrespective of color was "eternally right" and that it was of great disappointment to think that they "would reject promising youth who desire to prepare for usefulness because God had given them a darker hue than others."[24] Toward the end of the letter, Shipherd shifted from moral arguments to practical considerations.

In reason eighteen, Shipherd declared: "The men and money that would make our institution most useful cannot be obtained if we reject our colored brother… they are all men we

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[22] Quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College, 377.*

[23] Blodgett, *Oberlin History,* 16.

[24] "J.J. Shipherd to N.P. Fletcher, church Clerck, Jan. 27, 1835," quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 176.

need, irrespective of their antislavery sentiments."[25] His message was clear: Oberlin's grand vision and potential to elevate the West towards glory would crumble without including African-American students. Hence, it was not surprising that in concluding the letter to the trustees, Shipherd asserted, "I have pondered the subject well… if the injured brother of color, and consequently, brothers Finney, Mahan, and Morgan, with eight professorships and $10,000, must be rejected. Then I must join them."[26]

Faced with the looming departure of Shipherd and the pressing need for financial support, the school's trustees convened once again. It is crucial to emphasize that this was not merely a vote on admitting black students—it was a fundamental decision regarding granting academic freedom to the faculty. This move would significantly reduce the trustees' authority. The vote ended in a deadlock, evenly split. In this pivotal moment, John Keep, the board's chairman, cast the decisive vote to affirm all the proposed conditions.[27] This juncture in the school's history is a compelling case study, illustrating the profound influence donors can wield in shaping the vision and trajectory of educational institutions.

With this decisive vote, the Oberlin Collegiate Institution emerged as the vanguard of progress in American higher education. It became a college that welcomed individuals of all races and genders, eager to contribute to realizing God's kingdom on earth. The faculty now possessed substantial power and freedom to shape the institution according to their vision. The

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[25] "J.J. Shipherd to N.P. Fletcher, church Clerck, Jan. 27, 1835," quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 176.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Blodgett, *Oberlin History,* 17.

so-called rebels and radicals had found their home at Oberlin—a transformative shift that would resonate through the annals of educational history.

Oberlin's Innovations

During the summer of 1835, Oberlin experienced a remarkable transformation, bolstered by its new president, staff, and financial support from the Tappan brothers. The winds of change had already swept through the institution, rapidly disseminating during the preceding spring. The *New York Evangelist*, a staunch proponent of Finneyite social reform, closely monitored and disseminated circulars by Shipherd, articulating the institution's evolving structure and offerings. The reports evoked national excitement surrounding Oberlin, culminating in a significant surge in student enrollment. Between the autumns of 1834 and 1835, the student body nearly tripled, with an impressive 225 new students (167 men and 58 women) enrolling in Oberlin in 1835.[28] Students drawn to what was undeniably novel came to Oberlin to experience these shifting paradigms in American higher education. Oberlin promised to nurture a generation of students equipped to manifest heaven on earth, embodying the essence of the Second Great Awakening. However, what set the school apart was its visionary goals and the educational model it embraced to pursue this vision.

The Oberlin model rested on numerous critical innovations, birthed out of a sacralized vision for society, working together for the holistic development of the students. The first innovation was its full embrace of manual labor, widely adopted among colleges during the early antebellum period. As noted in an earlier chapter, the sustainability of this practice proved unreliable until the creation of federal funding to subsidize student work programs in the

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[28] Fairchild, *The Colony and the College*, 67.

twentieth century. Nevertheless, manual labor remained a prominent means for students to pay for their education during the awakening. This innovation significantly increased American social mobility, second only to the student benevolence societies with their creation of grants and scholarships.[29]

However, what set Oberlin's Manual Labor program apart from several others was that not only was it a means to develop healthy students through physical education (Oberlin boasted one of the first gymnasiums among institutes of higher education), but it was also a means of "practical" education that would serve to train students to be leading innovators and skilled laborers in the fields of agriculture, mechanical, and commercial education.[30] Labor and working-class men were often those most given to alcoholism and the unruly behavior that unsettled reformers like Finney and Mahan. If they could train up a generation of faithful leaders and laborers to carry a Christian influence into these fields, their bottom-up vision of reform could genuinely begin to take place.

Another distinctive feature of early Oberlin was its sincere commitment to health reform, aligning with the period's unique focus on the connection between body and soul. Oberlin students were mandated to embrace a specific health philosophy rooted in the Awakening's physiological reforms—Grahamism—which regulated all aspects of community and campus life. This incorporation of dietary discipline stemmed from the belief that health and faith were intimately intertwined. Health impairments were viewed as a diminishment of one's "power of

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[29] Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Legacy of this Place: Oberlin Ohio," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, no. 4 (Fall, 2007): 499.

[30] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 355.

doing good," equivalent to sinning against God.[31] Although Grahamism waned by the mid-1840s

due to decreasing student support, Oberlin's dedication to abstinence from stimulating beverages

endured, aligning with the prevailing temperance movement.

In addition to dietary reforms, moral reforms at Oberlin vividly illustrated the gradual

expansion of the sacred and the profane. Students exhibited wariness towards the allure of

theater, novels, and the waltz, considering them moral pitfalls. Many argued that the theatre was

corrupting and enabling individuals to "witness the lewd conduct of impure women." Even

novels presented a threat to undermine moral virtues. In an article from the school's *Advocate of*

Moral Reform, a poem reads:

> PUT DOWN THAT NOVEL! It is wasting your time.
> PUT DOWN THAT NOVEL! It is perverting your taste.
> PUT DOWN THAT NOVEL! It is giving you false views of life.
> PUT DOWN THAT NOVEL! It is endangering your morals.
> PUT DOWN THAT NOVEL! It will ruin your soul.[32]

The waltz, a contemporary dance craze, was deemed excessively intimate due to its required

physical closeness.[33] Even attending events like circuses or race courses was viewed as

spiritually dangerous. In 1835, the Oberlin Female Moral Reform Society was established.

During the antebellum period, it was common for women to show a more robust dedication to

moral reform. This reality reflected the emerging Victorian notions of a woman's sanctifying role

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[31] Asa Mahan, "The Intimate Relation between Moral, Mental and Physical Law," *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* 3 (May 11, 1839): 156.

[32] *Advocate of Moral Reform* 14 (January 15, 1848), 11, emphasis original to the source.

[33] Zikmund, "The Legacy of this Place: Oberlin Ohio," 499.

in the family and society. Subsequently, many female moral reform societies sought to combat

prostitution and rescue young women from the sex trade.[34]

A crucial element of innovation in Oberlin's educational framework was curriculum

reform. In 1828, a Yale report titled "On the Course of Instruction" set forth definitive guidelines

for collegiate education, explicitly addressing the needs of the Western frontier.[35] The report

strongly advocated teaching Greek and Latin, upholding the traditional liberal arts curriculum.

However, at Oberlin, a stark contrast emerged in the approach to these guidelines compared to

Lane Seminary's full embrace, as detailed in the previous chapter. Professors and clergy at

Oberlin initially found themselves at odds with this traditional view. President Mahan emerged

as a prominent voice against what he perceived as the potential dangers of engaging with pagan

authors, advocating instead for studying biblical languages. In his view, reading Greek and Latin

classics was better suited for educating heathens than Christians.[36] He would carry this view to

the University of Cleveland, founded in 1850.

This unique perspective influenced the professors at the Oberlin Collegiate Institute in

shaping the curriculum. They aimed to create an intellectually rigorous and socially beneficial

curriculum, aligning with the evolving American spirit in education. However, the faculty also

recognized the need for competitiveness and academic rigor. Consequently, they continued to

require Greek and Latin studies, emphasizing texts "pure in morals and valuable for sentiments

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[34] *Advocate of Moral Reform* 4 (November 15, 1838), 169.

[35] *Reports on the Course of Instruction at Yale College; By A Committee of the Corporation And the Academical Faculty,* (New Haven, CT: Printed by Hezekiah Howe, 1828).

[36] Blodgett, *Oberlin History,* 25.

as well as style."[37] Amidst these adaptations, philosophical and speculative subjects retained a central position within the curriculum. The faculty believed that students needed an expanded and well-rounded field of study if they would be beneficial in all parts of society. The course catalog of Oberlin included classes in Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography, Botany, History, Rhetoric, Stenography, Natural Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Latin, Greek, English Composition, and even a class on sacred music (an essential 'new measure' that helped in the persuasion of human affections).[38] This broad curriculum for undergraduate students was another step forward in transforming the American liberal arts college.

Another foundational innovation of Oberlin College, particularly during the 1830s and 1840s, was its integration of Finney's revivalistic methods into campus life. This ethos mirrored Beecher's belief that educational institutions could harness and channel the enthusiasm of revivalism. Finney, America's foremost proponent of revivalism, brought his massive revival tent to Oberlin, accommodating 2,000 to 3,000 people. Atop the tent, a banner proudly declared "Holiness unto the Lord," a phrase still resonant in many American churches today, especially those within the Pentecostal tradition.[39] Departing from traditional Protestant orthodoxy, Finney argued that a "revival of religion was not a miracle but the result of the proper use of the constituted means."[40] According to him, revival followed a science—a method of human persuasion that, when effectively employed, could generate an uninterrupted flow of revivalism.

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[37] Zikmund, "The Legacy of this Place: Oberlin Ohio," 499.

[38] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College, 129.*

[39] Ibid., 182.

[40] Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revival,* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1846), 12.

Finney celebrated the continuous revival spirit that characterized early Oberlin, emphasizing how "gales of divine influence swept over us from year to year, producing abundantly the fruits of the Spirit." He noted that very "few students came without being converted."[41] Revivals kept Christians spiritually engaged and drove sinners toward repentance, channeling their religious energy constructively. Moreover, it fostered a non-sectarian Christianity, uniting students based on their conversion rather than denominational affiliation.[42] Oberlin's revivalism nurtured religious cooperation and intellectual openness, presenting an early model of American ecumenism and pluralism within higher education.

However, ecumenism and non-sectarianism were secondary objectives of Oberlin's revivalism. The paramount goal was, as Finney's banner proclaimed, "Holiness," or as Mahan termed it, "Christian perfection." Finney saw this perfection not as eradicating the capacity to sin but as a state where one could live consistently without committing a known sin.[43] The theological perspective emphasized that faith in Christ saves sinners from their sins (justification), accompanied by the belief in "a second blessing." The second blessing was the belief that through the indwelling Holy Spirit, a "higher and more stable form of Christian life is attainable and is the privilege of all Christians."[44] Finney believed that through faith, obedience, and the power of the Holy Spirit, Christians could reach a stage of maturity where sin no longer had dominion over their lives.

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[41] Finney, *Autobiography,* 188.

[42] Zikmund, "The Legacy of this Place: Oberlin Ohio," 499.

[43] Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada,*178.

[44] Ibid.

Oberlin's perfectionism represents a unique amalgamation of ideas drawn from Scottish philosophy, neo-Calvinism, and Wesleyan theology.[45] This fusion provided a sense of reassurance to many students and faculty at Oberlin, affirming a belief in God's perfecting work in Christ. This understanding formed a central theme at Oberlin, bolstering the confidence in the potential for man's perfectibility through the embrace of Christian principles and instilling hope in the concept of a millennial transformation of society. Finney's new measures and ideas regarding human autonomy and self-determination found a significant market in the democratic religious landscape of that era. In these beliefs, the Oberlin faculty were sowing the seeds for what would give birth to the humanism of the coming century. Finney's ideals have demonstrated profound ideological influence on the trajectory of American religion, politics, and commercialism despite sparking considerable controversy in his time.[46]

The integration of Christianity with reform and the classification of human and social error as sinful or profane facilitated the extension of Oberlin's doctrine of "Perfectionism" or "full sanctification" into the realm of social philosophy and action. Consequently, it became a privilege and a duty for individuals to progress toward perfection in all aspects of life with God's aid.[47] This focus on holiness and Christian perfection propelled Oberlin to actively participate in numerous social justice movements, ranging from abolitionism and women's rights to civil rights. Such an emphasis on social justice remains a prominent pillar of the school's mission even to this day.

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[45] Zikmund, "The Legacy of this Place: Oberlin Ohio," 499.

[46] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 172.

[47] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 234.

However, Oberlin's faculty and students promoting a pervasive perfectionist mentality posed dual challenges. Firstly, many students began to feel that pursuing perfection demanded excessive introspection, leading them to believe it was more beneficial to devote their time to fulfilling God's will to the best of their ability.[48] Secondly, this outlook often cultivates a watchful eye among its advocates, prompting them to notice and critique any perceived misstep by their peers, seniors, or subordinates. Oberlin's students did not shy away from passing moral judgment on each other, promptly alerting of observed faults and demanding immediate repentance and reform by those who committed them.[49] While the methods of assessment and ethical standards have evolved since antebellum America, the persistence of such "campus judges" acting as moral prosecutors and highlighting the actions and speech of individuals they deem "morally intolerable or offensive" continues in various forms within contemporary American colleges and universities.[50]

Coeducation and Integration

In all of Oberlin's innovations produced by its belief in the transformative power of education, no two were more important to the future of American education and society than Oberlin's practice of coeducation and integration. Mt. Holyoke had been the first women's institute of higher education, and some schools, including Lane Seminary, had allowed a handful of black male students to attend. However, Oberlin College was the first institution in the United States to simultaneously admit both men and women, regardless of race. Such action was a

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[48] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 228.

[49] Blodgett, *Oberlin History, 23.*

[50] For scholarly works detailing this continual phenomena see Michael Bérubé and Jennifer Ruth, *It's Not Free Speech: Race, Democracy, and the Future of Academic Freedom,* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2022); and Mordechai Gordon, *Education in a Cultural War Era: Thinking Philosophically about the Practice of Cancelling,* 1st ed., (New York, NY: Routledge, 2022).

radical departure from the prevailing norms of gender and racial segregation in education. It emphasized that education was a fundamental right for all, regardless of gender or race.

Coeducation at Oberlin was a pioneering initiative that granted women access to higher education, empowering them to acquire knowledge and skills traditionally reserved for men. By the 1830s, the idea of female teachers and women's education had gained wide acceptance. The agitation for collegiate education for women shared the same inspiration as many of the humanitarian movements of the first half of the nineteenth century.[51] Shipherd said from its founding that the Oberlin Collegiate Institute was committed to "the elevation of female character by bringing within reach of the misjudged and neglected sex all the instructive privileges which hitherto have unreasonably distinguished the leading sex from theirs."[52] Although he did not anticipate coeducation initially, his commitment emphasized the importance of providing women with suitable instruction. Shipherd's dedication to offering relevant education to women was evident when they expressed interest in pursuing collegiate courses, leading to their inclusion in the institute.

By 1835, about a fourth of Oberlin's students were women. They were only allowed to participate in the preparatory school at this point, but the college grew accustomed to their presence. In 1836, the Trustees evaluated the success of the "joint education of the sexes," concluding that the mental influence of the sexes upon each other was decidedly happy.[53] The policy of joint education demonstrated no serious drawbacks; instead, it was seen as fundamental

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[51] Turpin, *A New Moral Vision: Gender, Religion, and the Changing Purposes of American Higher Education, 1837-1917, 66.*

[52] Quoted in Frances Juliette Hosford, *Father Shipherd S Magna Charta A Century Of Coeducation In Oberlin College*, (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1937), 5.

[53] Oberlin Collegiate Institute, *Minutes of the Board of Trustees*, March 9, 1836.

to the very essence of human society, promoting a harmonious and inclusive learning

environment. Historian Frances Hosford, an 1891 graduate from Oberlin herself, details how, as

early as 1836, every college study in the school's catalog, including the ancient languages

(Hebrew, Greek, and Latin), was open to any competent woman who desired it.[54]

In 1835, before the institute was two years old, Oberlin's female students had organized a

strong and permanent women's literary club. In 1837, four young women completed the

preparation for the college course and were admitted into the incoming freshman class. Finally,

in 1841, those four female students became the first women in the English-speaking world to

earn their bachelor's degrees by completing a program of studies identical to that required of

men.[55] This was not an easy road for these trailblazing women, but the magnitude of their

accomplishments was not lost on them.

Mary Hosford, who was thirteen when she first started at Oberlin and one of these first

female graduates from 1841, wrote in a letter to another female student a few months before her

graduation:

> The trials, perplexities, and discouragements with which we met in our first year, you are
> quite well acquainted. The sophomore year was hardly less difficult. We seemed destined
> to days and nights of toil and fatigue. But these last two years have been fraught with
> comfort and pleasure, and we have succeeded beyond our expectations. Often, I look
> back to the time when so many, who occupied the most influential stations in the school,
> stood out against the course we were pursuing, and especially the unkind coldness and
> indifference of her to whom we would look for sympathy and counsel, and contrast with
> our situation, with our incentives to take the course which seemed best to us and the
> situation and incentives to action that are laid before those who are behind us. Most of the
> faculty are now in favor of women taking the college course, and Mrs. Cowles [The

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[54] Hosford, *Father Shipherd S Magna Charta A Century Of Coeducation In Oberlin College, 34.*

[55] Zickmund, "The Legacy of this Place: Oberlin Ohio," 499.

Ladies' Principle] is advising all those young ladies who have the strength and means to take a thorough course![56]

These female Oberlin graduates firmly believed their efforts had forged a path for more women to embrace challenging courses and pursue a comprehensive collegiate education. However, they could hardly have imagined the profound impact their determination and successful completion of the bachelor's program would have in altering the national perception of the value of women's education. Their accomplishments initiated a gradual shift, marking the beginning of coeducation evolving into the prevailing model in institutes of higher education across the contemporary Western world.

At Oberlin, female students assumed sex-segregated roles within the college community, aligning with the anticipated familial responsibilities they would undertake. These roles encompassed fulfilling labor requirements in areas such as laundry, sewing, and dishwashing. The primary objective behind including women in education at Oberlin during that era extended beyond merely increasing the number of Christian teachers capable of educating children, a task that aligned with the rapidly emerging schools for children nurtured by the awakening's vision of education. It also aimed to educate future mothers, whose influence on their children would be vital for the continuous nurturing of faithful generations.[57]

Contemporary society often holds such perspectives as embodying sexism and oppression. However, it is crucial to contextualize the beliefs and ideologies prevalent during that era. During this period, the underlying conviction for so many was that America was a New Israel, and the chief concern was generational rebellion, akin to the challenges faced by Israel in

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[56] "Mary Hosford to Mary Kellogg, June 24, 1841," quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin,* 380.

[57] Blodgett, *Oberlin History,* 13.

the Old Testament.[58] Each subsequent generation was perceived as straying from the covenant, displaying its propensity towards 'forgetfulness.' For most leaders of the Awakening era, the quest for a millennial civilization began in the home, and no one was more important in ensuring the morality of their home than a wife and mother. From this time forward, women as spiritual matriarchs would emerge as a prominent theme within American evangelicalism. This development is precisely why so many "new movements" have materialized in American Christianity, like that of "masculine Christianity" promoted by Billy Sunday, designed to draw men back into the religious spaces.

Lucy Stone, one of Oberlin's first female graduates, significantly impacted the trajectory of women's rights and activism. Born on August 13, 1818, in West Brookfield, Massachusetts, she hailed from a family deeply rooted in the values of education and equality. By sixteen, she had already become a school teacher, showcasing her early dedication to education and progress.[59] Stone emerged as a pioneering force in the fight for women's rights during a time when societal norms severely restricted women's opportunities and rights. Alongside influential figures like Catherine Beecher, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, Stone played a pivotal role in advancing the cause of women's suffrage. She co-founded the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), advocating for a gradual approach to achieving suffrage, contrasting with the more radical strategies employed by some suffragists.[60] Stone was not afraid of making waves; she not only often appeared at the chapel without her bonnet (a shocking

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[58] See chapters 2 & 3 of this project.

[59] Hosford, Father Shipherd S Magna Charta A Century Of Coeducation In Oberlin College, 87.

[60] Sally G. McMillen, *Lucy Stone: An Unapologetic Life,* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 179.

cultural offense of this period), but when she was married to the abolitionist Henry Blackwell, she chose to keep her maiden name.[61] Since its inception, Oberlin had been a home for rebels, and Lucy Stone would be no exception.

Stone was a staunch abolitionist deeply interested in the day's politics. She thoroughly immersed herself in the awakening's vision of social transformation. She believed that women, alongside their male counterparts, had a place in bringing about such a glorious civilization.[62] She noticeably stood out among her peers at Oberlin for being both an excellent and remarkably informed speaker, and that is what she set out to do at a time when female public speaking was not only unheard of but was primarily shunned. Oberlin had taught Lucy well about the prevailing prejudice against women speaking in public, especially on sensitive issues. However, this did not cause her to question her career choice; instead, it encouraged her.[63] Stone's speeches were powerful and persuasive, making her an influential figure in the suffrage and abolition movements. Her ability to articulate the need for women's rights and gender equality drew massive attention and support for the cause.

Stone was not alone in her speaking prowess among these early female graduates of Oberlin. She left a remarkable influence on several female students. Antoinette Brown was one of the people who reflected Oberlin's coeducation and integration mission. Arriving at Oberlin in 1846 at age twenty, this young, exuberant black female student paved a path many claimed to be either impossible or unallowable. Inspired by Stone, Brown would push the envelope further than Stone could have imagined. After completing her undergraduate school, Brown did

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[61] Hosford, Father Shipherd S Magna Charta A Century Of Coeducation In Oberlin College, 91.

[62] McMillen, *Lucy Stone,* 65.

[63] Ibid., 67.

something that shocked several of Oberlin's professors by applying for admission to Oberlin's

theological school to train for ministry.

The Theology Department required all entering students to publicly state their reasons for

studying for the ministry. When her turn came, Finney moved to excuse her from this exercise,

noting, "Oh, we do not ask the women to speak," but then he just as quickly changed his mind

and said, "Certainly, if she is going to be a regular student, we must have her tell her

experience… If you think you ought to preach, you must preach."[64] Brown did preach and very

much impressed Finney. Seeing the young woman preach, Finney, rather than being concerned,

was perhaps more supportive of what was happening than anyone else. For the revivalist, this

was a clear picture of the glorious realities of the millennial vision drawing all the nearer,

believing just as it was at the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) that the prophecy of Joel's millennial

vision was further coming to fruition:

> And it shall come to pass afterward,
> that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
> Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
> Your old men shall dream dreams,
> and your young men shall see visions.
> Even on the male and female servants
> in those days, I will pour out my Spirit.
> (Joel 2:28–29, ESV)

Here was a daughter of God set apart to prophesy, Finney believed, and he would gladly serve

the cause, even to the criticism of several of his peers. Because of this experience, Finney would

accept all manner of women's public speaking in the academic setting, making it a standard

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[64] Quoted in Turpin, *A New Moral Vision,* 80.

practice for female graduates to join their male counterparts in publicly reading their graduating

essays by 1859.[65]

Brown proved to be a keen scholar. Her theological arguments were published in

Oberlin's academic papers, further demonstrating how progressive Oberlin was proving itself to

be. In her theological papers, Brown specifically presented a scholarly challenge to the

traditional interpretations of the New Testament's prohibition against female preachers. Brown

meticulously presented her argument by highlighting biblical instances of commendable women

(Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Huldah, Mary) holding positions of authority and speaking the Word

of God.[66] Secondly, she conducted an interpretive analysis of the two primary New Testament

texts prohibiting female preaching: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, "Let your women keep silence in the

churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak." And 1 Timothy 2:11–12, "Let a woman

learn in silence… I suffer not a woman to teach nor usurp authority over the man, but to be

silent."

In her analysis, Brown contested the King James interpretation, delving into the

underlying Greek text. By studying the Greek words for "speak" or "teach" and examining their

translations throughout the New Testament, Brown argued that Paul was prohibiting a specific

kind of speaking that was happening in the church of Corinth or Ephesus (places known for

pagan prophetesses), rather than establishing a complete prohibition against Christian female

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[65] Turpin, *A New Moral Vision,* 80.

[66] Mark Noll, *America's Book: The Rise and Decline of Bible Civilization,* 1794-1911, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 383-384.

preachers. She believed the latter conclusion would "contradict Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians

11:4, which instructs women in how they are to pray and prophesy."[67]

One cannot overstate just how pivotal Brown's exegetical analysis was. She provided one

of the earliest comprehensive egalitarian interpretations of these New Testament passages, which

are still held by many today. She also demonstrated that not just women but women of color

could perform high-level biblical scholarship. Through her influence, she paved the path for

others, including the most famous female preacher of the nineteenth century, Phoebe Palmer.[68]

In 1853, the Congregational Church ordained Antoinette Brown Blackwell (now

married), making her the first woman to attain ministerial ordination in the United States. Her

achievements and tireless work for gender equality helped pave the way for future generations of

women to pursue leadership roles in both religious and secular spheres. In 1908, when she was

eighty-three, Oberlin conferred upon Antoinette Brown Blackwell the honorary degree of Doctor

of Divinity, a victory emblematic of Oberlin's commitment to coeducation and integration.[69]

Initially, Oberlin did not make explicit efforts to recruit African-American students after

the trustees decided to integrate. Factors like financial constraints and limited educational

opportunities barred many black individuals from enrolling. However, one early African

American student, John Mifflin Brown, emphasized that nowhere else could a person of color get

an education "as cheap as he can at Oberlin, and at the same time, be respected as a man."[70]

African-American enrollment remained below five percent of Oberlin's student body before the

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[67] Antoinette Brown, "Exegesis of I Corinthians XIV., 34, 35; and I Timothy, II, 11, 12," *Oberlin Quarterly Review* 4 (July 1849): 361-366, (entire article, 358-373).

[68] Noll, *America's Book, 388.*

[69] Hosford, *Father Shipherd S Magna Charta A Century Of Coeducation In Oberlin College,* 98.

[70] Quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 114.

Civil War but steadily increased after 1835. Five years post-integration, twenty black students—

five women and fifteen men—had joined various departments, a significant milestone given the

prevailing circumstances. Though seemingly modest, these numbers marked the highest minority

enrollments in higher education during that time. By 1861, Oberlin had enrolled approximately

245 black students, surpassing the combined enrollments of all other integrated colleges.[71]

Many early Oberlin students were formerly enslaved people, and because of this, their

entry into the institution often occurred at older ages than their white counterparts. Despite

sporadic incidents of explicit prejudice, the relationship between black and white students was

notably successful, particularly in the shared dining facilities. At the time, sharing a meal was

considered one of the greatest expressions of relational intimacy short of physical contact. One

historical researcher notes that "Many white students were, in fact, eager to dine with their

African American classmates."[72] One term into this new integration experiment, the faculty and

trustees were generally pleased with the results. Writing to Gerrit Smith, another New York

philanthropist, trustee chairman John Keep noted that the Langstons (the first two black students

at Oberlin) were "as well received and treated as others."[73]

Following the agreement between Shipherd, Mahan, Finney, the Lane Rebels, and the

Tappans to admit black students on equal terms as whites, Oberlin swiftly adopted not only an

anti-slavery stance but an abolitionist one. The college's distinct commitment attracted wealthy

donors, including those from Great Britain and Northern abolitionists, contributing funds to the

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[71] Fletcher, A History of Oberlin College, 536.

[72] John Frederick Bell, "Equality by Degrees: Abolitionist Colleges and the Throes of Integration, 1833-1895," PhD Dissertation, Harvard University, 2017, 47.

[73] "John Keep to Gerrit Smith, Jan 16, 1836," *Student Correspondence, 1833-1883*, Box 9, Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin College.

fight for equal rights. By fully integrating black students into all aspects of campus life, Oberlin challenged the prevailing dehumanizing views held by many, making it a focal point in the cultural struggle for abolition and racial equality.[74]

Such actions put Oberlin College at the center of the culture wars over the abolition of slavery and the equal treatment of blacks through their full integration into all parts of American society. These abolitionist donors flooded Oberlin with money because the college had become the most tangible location for the desired social transformation. Upon his death in 1858, Charles Avery, a Pittsburgh-based cotton merchant turned abolitionist, donated $25,000 to Oberlin for a professorship on the condition that:

> The college shall enroll needy colored students free of tuition on the same conditions as whites, to the number of fifty at a time if so many should apply, and if at any time the College shall refuse to receive colored students on the same terms as whites, the fund shall revert to the heirs or to such person or persons as halls be authorized to receive it."[75]

This funding was vital in maintaining a steady stream of black graduates at Oberlin, especially when society afforded little to no opportunities for black Americans to progress economically enough to pay for a college education. However, the integrated education model, which began at Oberlin and then was duplicated at colleges like Berea and Howard, foreshadowed what American higher education would ultimately become.

Guided by prominent black students like Charles and John Langston, George Vashon, and William Howard Day, alongside their committed white counterparts, numerous groups emerged dedicated to the cause of abolition and social justice. As first acknowledged by Robert Fletcher,

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[74] Christi M. Smith, *Reparation and Reconciliation: The Rise and Fall off Integrated Higher Education,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 74.

[75] Oberlin College Board of Trustees, "Minutes of the Meeting of the Board, June 26, 1866," Record Group Board of Trustees II, 1834–1906, vol. 1, Oberlin College Archives.

Oberlin was a "hotbed of abolitionism."[76] Referred to as "the rescuers," many Oberlin students actively established Underground Railroad routes across Ohio, aiding escaped slaves on their journey north toward Canada. Many of them were arrested and spent time in prison for their actions, further adding to the notoriety of the college. The prevailing belief was that the Underground Railroad extended its reach wherever an Oberlin graduate settled.[77]

Oberlin's growing number of outspoken abolitionists significantly intensified the polarization around the slavery issue. Many black and white students later became influential figures in education, politics, and their communities, leaving a lasting impact on the evolving narrative. Abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates staunchly upheld their beliefs, viewing any compromise on the matter as a compromise with perceived wickedness. In Ohio and throughout the Northern States, the emerging Republican Party rallied behind the Oberlin Rescuers. This infusion of radicalism proved to be a turning point, rescuing the party from its drift towards conservatism and setting it on a trajectory that would ultimately culminate in a policy of national emancipation.[78]

From its beginning, Oberlin had harbored a grand aspiration—to reform the nation and the world, eradicate the scourge of alcohol, enhance educational methodologies, elevate personal moral standards, foster piety, and abolish slavery—all through the power of moral persuasion.[79] Through its innovative coeducation and integration model of community and education, Oberlin sought to provide an example of what was possible for America. However, it was becoming clear

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[76] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College, 236.*

[77] Nat Brandt, *The Town that Started the Civil War,* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1990), 41.

[78] J. Brent Morris, "*A Hotbed of Abolitionism,"* 213.

[79] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 416.

that neither religious nor intellectual persuasion could overcome the entrenched ideological beliefs held by many. Impatient advocates pressed for a more direct route to their goal—an appeal to force.[80] By the beginning of the 1860s, the moderate and gradualist stances on slavery and racial integration had lost significant ground, and the simmering culture war erupted into the Civil War. For Oberlin and the nation, the antislavery debate reached its conclusion. The inevitable realization dawned that the crucible of the battlefield would be the only viable means to deal with the issue conclusively.

During the war, nearly two-thirds of all of Oberlin's male students, black and white, would enlist to fight for the Union cause. These students knew their beliefs had brought them to this point of action. As one student enlistee said, "We must now put up or shut up."[81] It was common for Oberlin students who joined the army ranks to distinguish themselves as bold leaders and soldiers. One of Oberlin's black students who had enlisted to now "put up" was a formerly enslaved person, Henry Peal, who had purchased his freedom and came to Oberlin before the war started. A flag bearer for the 55th Massachusetts Colored Regiment, Peal, and another former black student of Oberlin, William Carney, together would show incredible heroics at the siege of Fort Wagner and become two of the four African American men awarded the Gilmore Medal of Honor for bravery.[82]

On November 8, 1864, the Oberlin community came together at the polls, unified in their support for the reelection of Republican Abraham Lincoln to the presidency. Students, faculty, alums, and townspeople, all dedicated to the antislavery movement, stood firm in their resolve.

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[80] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 416.

[81] George Frederick Wright, *Story of My Life and Work,* (Oberlin: Bibliotheca Sacra Company, 1916), 96.

[82] J. Brent Morris, "*A Hotbed of Abolitionism,"* 238.

They were the individuals who consistently pushed forward, never turning back, constantly

identifying and pursuing what they believed necessary to attain a redeemed American nation.

The resounding victory in 1865 saw Lincoln reelected, the Confederacy defeated, and the

Thirteenth Amendment passed, formally abolishing slavery in America. Oberlin College's

students diligently worked towards this goal for thirty years, envisioning an American Zion

where freedom, Christ's presence, and peace would prevail for everyone, regardless of race.

Undoubtedly, this institution had served as a profound catalyst for change, bringing about a

radical transformation of American society.

Nevertheless, despite this incredible transformation, America still had a long way to go to

obtain the sacralized vision of millennial glory. The war destroyed the "slaveholding Egypt," and

its slaves stood now freed, but the wilderness, just like it was for Old Testament Israel, proved to

be a long journey. The abolitionist veterans of Oberlin steadfastly maintained their commitment

to complete emancipation and social integration and promote African-American rights.

After the war, when teachers sponsored by the American Missionary Association went

south to educate former slaves, more individuals from Oberlin took on this mission than from

any other place in America.[83] The goal of reconstruction was now moving ahead, and it proved

challenging. Very few people had an answer for how an integrated America could look. Amid the

confusion and uncertainty of the future, many turned their eyes to the only place that had proven

to do it well: Oberlin College. As an editor of the *Chicago Tribune* wrote:

> "Oberlin claims to have solved the social problem of the nation... For a whole
> generation, [African Americans] have enjoyed equal rights and privileges of the

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[83] Morris, "*A Hotbed of Abolitionism,*" 241.

institution… They sit side by side in the classes, the lecture halls, and the public assemblies. The teachers assure me that they find no difference in their abilities."[84]

Unfortunately, Oberlin's passionate vision of embracing black students wavered in the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was not fully rekindled until nearly the second half of the twentieth century. Historian J. Brent Morris aptly captures this: "Oberlinites in the antebellum antislavery struggle had come as close as any to staying the encroachments of worldliness, but, like their perfectionism, it remained a constant striving rather than a final realization."[85] In the 1960s, Oberlin students fervently supported the Civil Rights Movement, striving to instigate essential transformations in American society. Once again, these students fully embraced the ideals of another zealous minister and a visionary dreamer.

The Path to Progressivism

The legacy of Oberlin College is a vibrant tapestry interwoven with the threads of progressivism, inclusivity, and an unwavering dedication to social justice. From its very foundation, Oberlin charted a course as a radical institution, harboring aspirations to reshape the landscape of education and society. At a critical juncture in history, the college stood as a beacon during the abolitionist movement, attracting kindred spirits committed to eradicating slavery. The ethos of the Second Great Awakening profoundly influenced Oberlin's vision, underscoring the moral imperative of education and societal transformation. Through its innovative approaches, Oberlin became a catalyst for change, galvanizing individuals to actively participate in various social justice movements. Its alumni emerged as influential figures in the abolition of slavery, the fight for women's suffrage, the civil rights movement, and beyond.

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[84] "Commencement Week at Oberlin," *Chicago Tribune*, August 29, 1865.

[85] Morris, "*A Hotbed of Abolitionism,*" 247.

The college's influence radiated beyond its physical confines, imprinting its values on the nation's conscience and policies. Historian George Schmidt, in his treatment of the history of American liberal arts colleges, argued that Oberlin was "one of the most influential colleges in the land."[86] Moreover, Oberlin College stands as a beacon illustrating the deep-rooted connections between the ideology of American Progressivism and historical American Protestantism. By the end of the nineteenth century, under the presidency of James Fairchild, Oberlin continued its mission of engaging the moral concerns of the day. Fairchild, speaking on the task of Oberlin students at a commencement address, declared, "Each student belongs still to the world… The student still shares in the responsibilities of common life and is here for a better outfit for the work before him."[87] In detailing Fairchild's vision, Oberlin historian John Barnard states, "The ideal student was both judge and activist, forcefully applying Christian moral principles to all human situations and institutions."[88]

During the 1890s, Oberlin College experienced the dual influence of professionalization and the burgeoning social gospel movement. The Social Gospel, a prominent movement within American Protestantism during this time, aimed to apply Christian principles to tackle the socio-economic challenges of industrialization, urbanization, and immigration.[89] It was a response to the perceived adverse effects of the Industrial Revolution and an assertion that Christianity

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[86] George P. Schmidt, *The Liberal Arts College: A Chapter in American Cultural History*, (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1975), 30.

[87] James H. Fairchild, *Educational Arrangements and College Life at Oberlin,* (New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1866), 8.

[88] John Barnard, *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism at Oberlin College,* 1866-1917, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1969), 6.

[89] Christopher H. Evans, "The Social Gospel as 'the Total Message of the Christian Salvation,'" *Church History* 84, no. 1 (2015): 196.

should actively contribute to creating a fairer and more just society. The inception of the Social Gospel can be seen as an extension of the reformist spirit born out of the Second Great Awakening, addressing a fresh set of societal issues.

Scholars have highlighted the distinctiveness of the progressive Protestant Reformers of the Social Gospel, emphasizing their modern inclination to transform societal structures.[90] However, this research project underscores that the aspiration for a thorough transformation of all of American society, particularly its social frameworks, was a holistic vision advocated not only by the ideologues of the Second Great Awakening but also by the educational institutions it inspired. The Progressive Era's Social Gospel represented a revitalized continuation of the American Protestant reform ethos from the Second Great Awakening. Oberlin stood as a compelling example of bridging these two periods.

Oberlin College showcased remarkable adaptability in response to the evolving landscape of American higher education. The burgeoning social sciences, giving rise to disciplines like economics, sociology, and political science, were swiftly integrated into Oberlin's academic fabric. As the college aspired to be a leading research institution in the early twentieth century, it notably possessed the nation's most extensive library.[91] In contrast to peers at other institutions, social scientists at Oberlin did not see a dichotomy between personal reformist tendencies and professional detachment as scholarly advisors. Instead, Oberlinites, in line with their founding ethos, seamlessly melded academic research with active engagement in social change.[92] If

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[90] Gary Dorrien, "Social Salvation: The Social Gospel as Theology and Economics," *in The Social Gospel Today,* Christopher H. Evans, ed., (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001),101.

[91] John Mark Tucker, "Azariah Smith Root and Social Reform at Oberlin College," *The Journal of Library History* 16, no. 2 (1981): 281.

[92] Tucker, "Azariah Smith Root and Social Reform at Oberlin College," 283.

Oberlin was to redeem society, it became clear that a mind sharpened by rigorous scholarship needed to join moral passion and religious conviction.

Oberlin professors founded the Institute of Christian Sociology, whose first president was the social gospel advocate Washington Gladden. In 1895, the institute sponsored a symposium on human poverty, bringing together such luminaries as Jane Addams, Samuel Gompers, and Clarence Darrow. Oberlin graduates Howard H. Russell and Wayne B. Wheeler played crucial roles in the nation's temperance movement. As the Anti-Saloon League director, Russell arranged federation agreements with over 250 temperance and church groups representing over 9,000,000 people in 40 states and territories.[93] Many more instances could illuminate the unwavering dedication to social reform that continued to be a cornerstone of Oberlin's mission. Nonetheless, Henry Churchill King elevated this vision to even greater heights upon assuming the college's presidency in 1902.

King was a former theological professor at Oberlin whose primary studies dealt with the new practice of historical criticism to discover the "historical Jesus." By examining the humanity of Christ, King believed that a more significant relationship with Jesus was possible. He argued that this personal relationship provided the key to adequately restructuring Christian theology.[94] King argued that this renewed understanding of Jesus produced a greater social consciousness in man. He stated that Christianity's goal was the "application of the ethics of Christ to every social problem" and that this was "the key task of the twentieth century."[95] In those words, King

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[93] Barnard, *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism,* 98-99.

[94] Ibid., 116.

[95] Henry C. King, *Theology and Social Consciousness,* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1907), 111-112.

provided one of the clearest appraisals of the mission of the Social Gospel, and this ideology

thoroughly propagated itself at Oberlin.

Over the next decade, Oberlin continued to develop its field of social sciences, insisting

on the necessity of education's mission being one of social focus. Albert Wolfe, professor of

economics and sociology at Oberlin from 1905–1914, detailed why he believed the social

sciences to be essential to higher education:

> Young men today recognize quickly how much the country has for them to do; they have caught something of the social as opposed to the individualist spirit, and they are unwilling to spend four of the best years of life attaining a purely individual culture. In this situation, the college must meet. If it meets it rightly, the place of college in America will be greater than ever; if it does not, there will be a very significant loss, not only to the colleges, which is a secondary matter *but to their social well-being, which should be the college's primary concern*.[96]

Wolfe's argument was straightforward: The purpose of education was to equip students to

progress society toward the greater good. Though this terminology would not be accepted,

Oberlin continued to train students' minds because it desired to see students prepared as

missionaries to carry the school's sacred vision into all parts of society.

Oberlin influenced generations of students who graduated from it, imbuing them with a

zeal for bettering the lives of humanity as the highest expression of sacred duty. The movement

for political, economic, and social reform in the early twentieth century bore the

indistinguishable marks of the religious and academic beliefs first promoted in the Second Great

Awakening. Oberlin, reflecting the trajectory of the entire country, had merely been "refashioned

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[96] Albert B. Wolfe, "Social Focus of College Studies: To What Extent Do the Subjects Pursued during the Four Years of College Course Show a Tendency toward a Social Focus? An Investigation of the Programs of Students in One College," *Religious Education* IX (April, 1914): 148.

in the transition from an agrarian to an industrialized, bureaucratized, urban society."[97] Nevertheless, the school's mission to transform the nation remains essentially unchanged.

The ease with which Oberlin transitioned from a staunchly evangelical to a thoroughly progressive institution demonstrates the tight relationship and affinity between the two. Through its moderate liberal theology, pro-progressive political stance, high standards of academic training, and support for student social activism, Oberlin became the model for which the progressive liberal arts colleges of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have continued to follow. The most evident difference between Oberlin, the evangelical school, and Oberlin, the progressive school, was the orientation of its goals. For the evangelical school, the goal was the redemption of the individual, which would bring about the redemption of society. This was inverted for the progressive school, where the goal was the redemption of society, which would bring about the redemption of the individual.

As secularization gradually washed over colleges and American higher education institutes in the twentieth century, it is fascinating that Oberlin's mission towards social betterment has remained steadfast. It has continued to champion women's rights and feminist movements, maintain an abundantly activist student body, and remain progressive in its political advocacy. Since the 1960s, the school has continued to address its capacity to be more thoroughly integrated, adopting an abundantly multicultural environment.[98] Though long removed from the Second Great Awakening, the worldview and mission at Oberlin still deeply

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[97] Barnard, *From Evangelicalism to Progressivism,* 126.

[98] Baumann, *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College: A Documentary History*, 320.

reflect the fruits born out of its sacralized vision to usher in a better world. Vestiges of this vision still resonate in Oberlin's current mission statement:

> We prepare graduates with the knowledge, skills, and perspectives essential to confront complex issues and create positive change in the world. Oberlin is committed to educational access and opportunity. We offer a diverse and inclusive residential learning environment that encourages a free and respectful exchange of ideas, and we share an enduring commitment to a sustainable and just society.[99]

Many consider Oberlin College one of America's most secular and progressive schools today. Nevertheless, its mission statement continues to reflect several of the values birthed in the religious awakenings of the nineteenth century. This demonstrates that the secularization of American higher education reflects not so much a loss of the sacred as merely its shifting.

From its inception, Oberlin College envisioned its mission to develop graduates with a profound intellect and a deep commitment to social transformation. The commitment to gender and racial inclusivity, abolitionism, and Christian perfectionism at Oberlin epitomized the awakening's influence on American higher education. Expanding beyond the innovations of Andover Theological Seminary and Lane Theological Seminary, Oberlin demonstrated the clearest example of a college that bought entirely into the sacralized vision of the Second Great Awakening. Oberlin's responsiveness to the changing educational landscape was a testament to its resilience and foresight. The embrace of social gospel ideals, the incorporation of burgeoning social sciences, and the commitment to merge scholarly research with social action showcased the institution's adaptability and dedication to a broader societal mission.

This ethos nurtured academic excellence and ingrained in its community a deep-seated obligation to address the time's pressing social and economic challenges. Incorporating emerging

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[99] "Mission and Values," Oberlin.edu, accessed October 6, 2023, https://www.oberlin.edu/about-oberlin/mission-and-values.

fields like economics, sociology, and political science reflected Oberlin's aspiration to lead academic innovation. It was more than a pursuit of knowledge; it was a vision to equip students with the intellectual tools needed to effect tangible societal change. Furthermore, the continuity of Oberlin's legacy as a bastion of progressivism is apparent. From its origins rooted in the abolitionist movement, Oberlin continually positioned itself at the forefront of societal shifts. From the Second Great Awakening to the Progressive Era, Oberlin's profound evolution illuminates the university's pivotal role in becoming a catalyst for social transformation. It highlights how higher education institutions actively molded not only the intellects of individuals but also the very nature of the society they were poised to influence.

Conclusion

Catalysts for Change

In the epilogue of his thorough treatise on the rise of the modern university, historian

James Axtell makes the following note about American colleges and universities:

> An often overlooked characteristic of American universities is their 'broad and deep commitment to public service… Today, a commitment to public service permeates essentially all segments of the university community and has led to strong interactions with U.S. businesses, industry, and government.[1]

Like many other historians, Axtell originated this socially-improving vision of the American

university in the country's progressive era, when educational and political leaders like Woodrow

Wilson branded American higher education institutions as the training ground for national and

global betterment.[2] These scholars are correct in their assessment of Wilson's educational vision.

While serving as the President of Princeton, Wilson established the school's motto as "In the

Nation's Service." In 1988, the university expanded that vision to include "and in the Service of

All Nations."[3]

One can visit several American universities today, secular or religious, and discover

students driven by a socially-bettering ethos. Contemporary students believe that one of the

primary purposes of their education is to create a better world that aligns with the sacral vision

established by their respective universities' ultimate concerns. The mission statement of Harvard,

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[1] James Axtell, *Wisdom's Workshop: The Rise of the Modern University,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 371.

[2] For other historical works that agree with Axtell see Adam R. Nelson, "Woodrow Wilson on Liberal Education for Statesmanship, 1890-1910," in *The Educational Legacy of Woodrow Wilson: From College to Nation,* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia Press, 2012), 185-206; and Charles M. Vest, *The American Research University from World War II to World Wide Web: Governments, the Private Sector, and the Emerging Meta-University,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[3] James Axtell, *The Making of Princeton University: From Woodrow Wilson to the Present,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 604.

a secular and Ivy-League college, states: "The mission of Harvard College is to educate the citizens and citizen-leaders for our society. We do this through our commitment to the transformative power of a liberal arts and sciences education."[4] Liberty University, one of the most prominent Christian institutes of American higher education, declares in its mission statement:

> Liberty University develops Christ-centered men and women with the values, knowledge, and skills essential to impact the world… who will make significant contributions to their workplaces and communities, follow their chosen vocations as callings to glorify God and fulfill the Great Commission.[5]

Examining numerous other mission statements from various higher education institutions reveals a common and resounding focus: nurturing and instructing students to transform the world positively in harmony with the school's visionary ideals. The mission of these schools—training students to bring about the transformation of society—is universal to nearly all of them. The difference lies not in these institutions' mission to improve the world but in their vision of what constitutes a better one.

Higher education institutions have become the most prominent catalysts for change in American society. More than religion or familial instruction, education has become the modern vehicle for instilling values and ethics. Reinhold Niebuhr, the great American public theologian, reflected on higher education in his typical prophetic manner: "The religious problem is the ultimate issue in education."[6] Education is understood as the key to both individual and

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[4] "Mission, Vision, and History," college.harvard.edu, accessed October 8, 2023, https://college.harvard.edu/about/mission-vision-history.

[5] "Educational Philosophy & Mission Statement," liberty.edu, accessed October 8, 2023, https://www.liberty.edu/about/purpose-and-mission-statement/.

[6] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Contribution of Religion to Cultural Unity* (New Haven: Hazen Pamphlets, 1945), 3.

collective progress. No one championed this more than the academic philosopher and educator John Dewey. He believed education should be reformed and applied to create specific social outcomes. In his work *Philosophy and Civilization,* Dewey wrote, "Just as soon as we begin to use knowledge and skills we have, to control social consequences in the interest of a shared, abundant and secured life, we shall cease to complain of the backwardness of our social knowledge."[7] Dewey's philosophy, rather than creating a new dynamic regarding the relationship between education and social action, as is often believed, was merely continuing a tradition that first began in the Second Great Awakening.

As the twentieth century progressed, with the decline of traditional religion and the ascent of modernity in the Western world, educational institutions assumed a pivotal role, supplanting churches as the sanctuaries where young individuals received a profound meta-narrative they could align with, along with the necessary knowledge, skills, and motivation to drive it toward fulfillment. For many progressive institutions, that meta-narrative is the transcendent goal of establishing a more socially just and equitable society marked by racial and sexual inclusivity, ideological tolerance, and the self-autonomy to define and do with oneself as they see fit. A recent article in the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* takes special note of this kind of idealism in contemporary social activism. It states:

> A final point to consider is the continuing role social justice idealism plays as the defining frame of reference for student activism… Racism continues to be the most powerful and compelling force in necessitating student organizing for a just society. Still, issues linked to sexism, classism, and heterosexism also shape the work of contemporary student activists.[8]

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[7] John Dewey, *Philosophy and Civilization*, (New York: Minton, Balch, & Co., 1931), 329.

[8] Robert A. Rhoads, "Student Activism, Diversity, and the Struggle for a Just Society," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2016): 199.

In the profound exploration of the evolution of American higher education, historians and sociologists have rightfully acknowledged the American university's role as a social catalyst, giving students the essential knowledge and skills to ignite positive change in the impending world. Nevertheless, these scholars have not fully contemplated the profound link between the transformative mission of higher education and its ideological origins in America's Second Great Awakening. Nor have they thoroughly examined the religious underpinnings of student social activism in American higher education. Both of which this research has attempted to demonstrate.

This research project aimed to vividly illustrate the transformation of American higher education into a catalyst for change during the American Second Great Awakening. The research findings unequivocally showcased that the confluence of religious fervor and visionary aspirations for social reform during this era significantly influenced the inception and evolution of American universities and colleges. This transformation imbued these institutions with the capacity to become dynamic agents of progressive social change, wholly dedicated to nurturing, empowering, and mobilizing students to foster a better world.

The research, starting in the second chapter, emphasized the profound entwinement of American ideology within a mythos that bestows a sacred destiny upon the nation since its inception. Many Americans embraced themselves as a "new Israel," a chosen covenant people of God created with a divine purpose. This perception took root during the First Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, intertwined with millennial aspirations that envisioned America as a Zion where the kingdom of God would manifest tangibly. The merging of various elements,

including biblical literalism, millennial vision, and republican ideology, fused into a distinct aspect of American revolutionary consciousness.

As the nation came into its own, the American mythos and the belief in its manifest destiny evolved and expanded, particularly during the transformative era of the Second Great Awakening. Within this profound spiritual movement that touched every facet of the young republic, religious fervor transcended individual conversion—a focus of the first awakening—shifting towards the aspiration of national conversion and, subsequently, even global conversion. Several religious leaders envisaged the country as a millennial herald, with its society aspiring to mirror heaven on earth through the zealous efforts of social reformers.

This distinctive vision continues to serve as a foundational pillar of American exceptionalism. It represents a national belief marked by a perpetual mission into uncharted territory to establish an ideal society, fortified by millennial aspirations and accompanied by apocalyptic warnings—each influenced by the prevailing currents of its respective era.[9] The American spirit is one uniquely marked by divine prerogative. A divine prerogative that has sought to establish a heavenly kingdom of peace and prosperity on earth. However, this prerogative begs the question, "What does such a kingdom look like, and to whom does it belong?" At the time of the Second Great Awakening, questions like this profoundly drove the idealistic reformers of the period to answer those questions and to bring them into existence.

In the third chapter, historical evidence illuminates the profound transformative impact of the sacralized vision associated with the Second Great Awakening on American society. Within this crucible of religious fervor and millennial anticipation, the American populace experienced

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[9] Blake Hart, "An Ever-changing 'Errand into the Wilderness:' The Root of American Exceptionalism, a paper submitted to Liberty University, (May 6, 2022), 2.

an apex of spiritual zeal, giving rise to innovative spiritual and philosophical ideologies. These ideologies transcended the redemption of individual souls, aspiring to shape America into the manifestation of its long-awaited providential destiny as a sacred nation and benevolent empire. Consequently, many idealistic institutions emerged dedicated to catalyzing the necessary social transformations. Prominent leaders of the Second Great Awakening, such as Lyman Beecher, Charles Finney, and Asa Mahan, advocated for education as the most pivotal means to drive these transformations essential for societal perfection.

The Second Great Awakening instigated a paradigm shift from the traditional emphasis on theological education to a broader scope encompassing moral and civic education. Colleges and educational institutions began embracing a more holistic approach, aiming to equip students with academic knowledge, moral fortitude, and social responsibility. This transformation represented a departure from the early colonial education models, primarily focused on conserving religious tradition and classical education. The sacralized vision of the second awakening infused institutions with a profound sense of purpose, fostering a more inclusive and expansive approach to education entrenched in millennial aspirations. This departure from the traditional ivory tower approach advocated for a dynamic fusion of knowledge and moral commitment, laying the foundation for a progressively engaged form of higher education that would continue to evolve in the subsequent decades.

Three case studies were central to conducting this historical analysis to demonstrate how the ideology and practices of the Second Great Awakening directly transformed higher education institutes. In tracing the historical trajectory of Andover Theological Seminary, Lane Theological Seminary, and Oberlin College, it becomes evident that these institutions were not created in the

Second Great Awakening to be mere citadels of academia; they were vanguards of a transformative vision. These institutions produced scholars and passionate advocates for change, several of whom would play significant roles in the continual transformation of American society. Each of them reveals just how progressive a movement the Second Great Awakening was, demonstrating how, with each passing phase of the movement, its ideology and demands for reform became more progressive.

In chapter four, the research analyzed the impact of the ideology of the Second Great Awakening on the creation and transformation of Andover Theological Seminary, the first graduate school and theological seminary in America. It also reflects the most traditionally conservative of the three schools studied. Though birthed out of a desire to protect orthodoxy and stave off Harvard's Unitarian takeover, Andover proved to be the true child of the Second Great Awakening's vision and reforming impulse. The prevailing Enlightenment-influenced Calvinism that emphasized reason and intellectualism gave way to a more dynamic and experiential theology, Hopkinsianism, symbolic of the awakening's spirit

This shift saw a growing emphasis on cultivating seminarians' piety and spiritual zeal, reflecting the awakening's focus on personal religious experience. The school adopted many products stemming from the awakening's reformist pulse, such as manual labor and student social activism. Benevolence, another significant aspect of the Second Great Awakening, facilitated the attendance of several students from lower-income and working-class backgrounds at colleges like Andover. It promoted access to education and improved social mobility at an unprecedented rate during that period.

Andover showcased the evolution of professional schools in America, enabling the licensing of professionals for trusted work through education. This theological school pioneered a model that medical and law schools would adopt by the end of the century. Andover also became the central hub of domestic and international missionary activity, embracing the awakening's vision of a redeemed world. It proved to be one of the first institutes of higher education where students had a dream of global betterment thoroughly instilled in them. The awakening's influence permeated Andover, catalyzing changes in its pedagogy, curriculum, and the institution's role in society, ultimately paving the way for a more experiential and socially engaged form of education.

In chapter five, the research conducted a historical analysis of Lane Seminary, the second case study and the most moderate of the three schools in this project. The research findings shed light on multiple dimensions in which the ideology and enthusiasm of the Second Great Awakening fundamentally altered the nature and purpose of Lane Seminary. The awakening significantly broadened the scope of education at Lane. The institution evolved from a primarily theological training center to a more comprehensive educational institution, incorporating a broader range of subjects beyond theology. Lyman Beecher and his colleagues at Lane maintained that colleges and graduate schools were not a departure from revivalism but a means to institutionalize and perpetuate it. In his view, the college campus was akin to the new camp meeting—existing to ignite souls by revealing God's profound truths in Scripture and nature. This channeled revivalist spirit produced a genuine desire among students and faculty to engage with contemporary societal issues, urging them to address the moral and social challenges of the time.

This newfound focus on societal betterment and moral action necessitated an expanded curriculum, transforming Lane Seminary into an institution with a more holistic and socially engaged approach to education. Students and faculty were inspired to address issues such as slavery and social inequality, aiming to effect positive societal change. The awakening motivated them to become active agents of change, reflecting a shift from a secluded, contemplative approach to theological studies to an outward-facing, engaged approach that sought to address societal ills.

Furthermore, the Second Great Awakening nurtured a spirit of collaboration and collective action within Lane Seminary. Students and faculty united to engage in discussions, debates, and organizational efforts targeting social injustices. A close examination of the experiences at Lane brings to light how the awakening's passionate pursuit of social justice and equality clashed with prevailing societal norms and theological doctrines. This clash further unraveled the intricate interplay among religious fervor, societal values, social action, and the influence of educational institutions during this transformative period. Notably, this discord culminated in the first significant student-led walkout in American history, as the Lane Rebels, deeply offended by what they perceived as the "silencing" of Lane's Trustees, chose to leave the school. They sought a place that better aligned with their vision of a perfect society, which fervently demanded the immediate emancipation of all enslaved people.

The events at Lane best reflected, as historian Nathan Hatch so adequately detailed, the democratizing shift in the Second Great Awakening, demonstrating that it had overtaken not just American Christianity but also American education. This religious revival reshaped the curriculum, expanded the institution's mission, instilled a sense of social responsibility, and

fostered a culture of collaboration and activism. Through these transformations, Lane Seminary emerged as an exemplar of the societal and educational shifts catalyzed by the Second Great Awakening during the nineteenth century.

In chapter six, the final case study of this research project, an in-depth analysis was conducted on the most progressive of the schools born out of the awakening's transformative vision, Oberlin College. Oberlin became home to the rebels of Lane and many of the "radicals" of the awakening, like Charles Finney, Asa Mahan, Antoinette Brown, and Lucy Stone. This institute of higher education represented a remarkably innovative educational model that fully embraced each of the significant advancements of the Second Great Awakening. As originally organized, the institute consisted of a theological school, a female seminary, a college, and a preparatory school.[10] This institution embraced several ultraistic religious ideals, including its perfectionist individual and social reforming pursuits. No institution more embodied the sacralized vision and reforming spirit of awakening than Oberlin. It rejected the traditional Calvinist beliefs of American Protestantism by greatly emphasizing the freedom of the will and the power of one's self-determination towards a more perfect state of being.

The leaders and students of Oberlin College fully embraced inclusivity and equality in education. The awakening's egalitarian principles influenced the college to admit students regardless of race or gender, making Oberlin a pioneer in coeducation and racial integration. This shift, emphasizing equal spiritual worth and opportunities for all individuals, transformed the college into the preeminent trailblazer for inclusive education during a time of prevalent discrimination and segregation. Because of its progressive attitude towards social change,

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[10] James Fairchild, O*berlin, Its Origin, Progress and Results an Address, Prepared for the Alumni of Oberlin College, Assembled August 22, 1860,* 6.

Oberlin would graduate influential leaders who played numerous roles in every significant social and political reform movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Oberlin's responsiveness to the changing educational landscape was a testament to its resilience and foresight. The institution's embrace of social gospel ideals, incorporation of burgeoning social sciences, and commitment to merging scholarly research with social action showcased its adaptability and dedication to a broader societal mission. The embrace of social gospel ideals revealed Oberlin's recognition of the responsibility of education beyond the classroom. This ethos nurtured academic excellence and ingrained in its community a deep-seated obligation to address the time's pressing social and economic challenges.

Incorporating emerging fields like economics, sociology, and political science reflected Oberlin's aspiration to lead academic innovation. It was more than a pursuit of knowledge; it was a vision to equip students with the intellectual tools needed to effect tangible societal change. By fully embracing the belief in education's role in perfecting society, Oberlin continually positioned itself at the forefront of intellectual, moral, and societal shifts. The historical analysis of its transformative journey from the early waves of the abolitionist movement into the progressive era demonstrates just how vital the ideology of the Second Great Awakening was in transforming the long-term mission of American higher education by giving birth to the progressive spirit of the American liberal arts college.

These three institutions—Andover, Lane, and Oberlin—emerged as embodiments of the revolutionary shift toward higher education in the Second Great Awakening. Tracing the progressive developments across these three institutions gives context to the educational model that trained the future generation of leaders who created America's progressive era and further

embedded this sacralized vision into the mission of higher education. This project offers a comparative analysis through the case studies that enhance our understanding of how different institutions responded to the awakening's ideological changes.

These institutions trained students to excel in academic pursuits and channel their knowledge and abilities towards a greater societal good to create a utopian vision. By integrating religious principles, liberal arts education, and a keen awareness of contemporary challenges, they set the stage for the continuing transformative mission of higher education. The three schools used for this project epitomized the convergence of sacred conviction, academic enlightenment, and the earnest desire for societal betterment. As noted earlier, these realities still predominantly abound in the contemporary mission statements of American colleges and universities.

The conclusions of this research have strong contemporary relevance, informing current higher education and societal practices. Additionally, they offer valuable data to address historiographical research gaps and enhance our understanding of the intersection of religion, education, and socio-political reform. Understanding how religious movements have influenced educational philosophies in the past can help current educators, policymakers, and students reflect on the philosophical underpinnings of contemporary education. This reflection can guide reform efforts that align educational goals with societal needs. Secondly, acknowledging the historical shift towards a broader curriculum in response to societal challenges can inspire the design of interdisciplinary curricula that equip students more holistically to better deal with the social and global challenges of the day.

Thirdly, demonstrating how past religious awakenings motivated social activism begs the question of what the current ideological convictions are undergirding the goal of social responsibility among American colleges and universities today. Moreover, how does the passionate enthusiasm that marks these movements differ from what is considered "religious?" Especially when using Tillich's definition of religion as one's "ultimate concern."[11] It is not uncommon for a progressive American university to be declared Marxist in its ideology, but perhaps this interpretation deserves some revision or at least further qualification. For instance, in an article discussing the rise of the term "cultural Marxism" to describe many of the modern social movements on college campuses, the author notes:

> Marx took little or no interest in the ideological precursors of the contemporary movements that excite many of today's conservatives to blame his ideology—multiculturalism, feminism, and identity politics. Marx would have discounted many of these concerns as "superstructural" diversions from the realities of class struggle.[12]

Perhaps these progressive developments are less reflective of Marx's teachings than has been often argued. Though aspects of his ideology are present in many educational and political movements in contemporary America, many progressive and liberationist beliefs promoted on campuses today are remnants of a once prominent liberal Protestant tradition born explicitly out of the Second Great Awakening.

This tradition was pivotal in establishing the egalitarian foundation and fostering social activism that remains prevalent on contemporary university campuses. For example, the research indicates that Oberlin College was propelled by a progressive form of Protestantism to fully

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[11] Martin Marty, "Religion," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, edited by Joan Shelley Rubin and Scott E. Casper, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[12] Andrew Lynn, "Cultural Marxism" *The Hedgehog Review* 20, no. 3 (2018): 150.

embrace coeducation, racial integration, and social activism during the Second Great Awakening.

This evidence, among others, enriches our understanding of current theories concerning the

origins of American progressivism, particularly its roots within institutes of higher education.

Another contribution of this research is that it provides a portion of the explanation

behind developing a more globalized vision in higher education. By examining the development

of the global missions movement at Andover Seminary during the Second Great Awakening, this

research provides a window into the shift in educational philosophy to include that of global

improvement. This research also provides more data for the historiographical debates on

developing an expanded American foreign policy during the progressive era.

The great debates in this field involve a contest between idealist and realist

interpretations of U.S. global history. The "idealists" understand U.S. foreign policy as an

expression of the ideals of Americanism and the exercise of U.S. power in the name of liberal

ideals and political democracy. "Realists," on the other hand, were more inclined to emphasize

naked power and national self-interest as the salient forces in global change, seeing the world as

a chessboard of strategic national actions.[13] The Andover missionaries fit in the "idealist" camp,

believing that the expansion of Christian civilization was the key to redeeming all the nations.

These Andover students were also paramount in developing international relations among other

missionary associations across the Atlantic and Pacific to forge alliances for the goal of global

outreach.

This research offers vital insight into the transformative role of higher education as a

catalyst for societal change. These institutions aimed to cultivate intellectual missionaries who

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[13] Neil Smith, *American Empire: Roosevelt's Geographer and the Prelude to Globalization,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 8.

could actively reshape the world according to their ideals. They underwent substantial

transformations, aligning their entire existence with the vision of a perfect society. However, they

often found that their utopian goals remained elusive. Numerous benefactors, exemplified by the

Tappan brothers at Lane and later at Oberlin, generously funded these institutions, contingent

upon the schools' willingness to adapt their educational mission to match the donors' aspirations.

When contemplating a choice of higher education institution, it is essential to consider the vision

and objectives of its primary donors, as these are likely to influence the institution's mission and

long-term direction.

While this research has endeavored to thoroughly analyze the transformative influence of

the Second Great Awakening on American higher education, multiple limitations should be

acknowledged. First, the researcher may have constrained the depth of the case studies regarding

Andover, Lane, and Oberlin due to the necessity of maintaining a broader perspective across the

historical and ideological landscape of the Second Great Awakening. Conducting a more

exhaustive examination of individual cases might reveal additional nuanced insights.

Another limitation was the availability and accessibility of primary sources, especially

from these institutions. Due to travel and financial restraints, the writer could not visit these

archives physically, which limited the scope of the primary sources available for this research

project. However, the fact that several of these institutions' archives had digitized extensive

collections in their databases provided sufficient primary source evidence to conclude this

research project. Researchers who seek to dive further into this area of research should aim to

visit the physical archives of these institutions, primarily looking for more examples of student

correspondence to examine how the desires of these students served to drive the transformation of these institutions.

A third limitation of this study is its focused examination of only three higher education institutions, two of which primarily functioned as theological schools. Delving deeply into these particular case studies enriches the depth of analysis, and it could restrict the ability to generalize the findings to a broader array of institutions and contexts during the Second Great Awakening. Throughout this work, the writer aimed to illustrate how many of these transformations significantly influenced many colleges from that era. However, conducting further research encompassing a larger sample size of colleges, such as including more public universities like the University of Georgia that emerged during the Second Great Awakening, would better demonstrate the Second Great Awakening's impact on schools not primarily led by religious figures, despite the prevalent influence of religious leaders in the educational landscape of that period.

Another limitation of this study is that it primarily adopts a religious, social, and educational perspective, potentially limiting a more comprehensive exploration of interdisciplinary facets, such as economics, politics, or cultural dimensions, that might have also influenced the transformation of education during the Second Great Awakening. The study also adheres to a particular historical timeframe (late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century). However, acknowledging the continued evolution of American higher education beyond this timeframe would provide a more holistic view of the awakening's lasting influence.

Finally, inherent biases might consciously or unconsciously influence the writer's interpretations. This researcher—a traditional Protestant Christian—has made every effort to

uphold neutrality and objectivity, enabling the evidence from the source documents to steer the conclusions of this work. However, the possibility of bias remains. In recognizing these various limitations, future research might focus on addressing these constraints, engaging in broader case studies, exploring more interdisciplinary perspectives, and considering the enduring impact of the awakening on present-day higher education and society.

To build upon this research, several potential avenues for future studies could deepen the understanding of the topic and its implications. One possible research project could be to conduct a comparative analysis of other religious movements throughout American history and examine their impact on higher education. It would be a significant research project to detail the development and mission of Catholic universities in early nineteenth-century America and compare those with their Protestant counterparts.

A compelling research project could explore the peak of student social activism in the 1960s and 1970s. This era coincided with another significant religious revival, spearheaded by ministers such as Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr. Additionally, unorthodox religious movements relatively new to American society, such as the Nation of Islam led by figures like Malcolm X and Black Liberation Theology primarily taught by James Cone, began to emerge. Both of those phenomena mirror what transpired during the Second Great Awakening.

Another potential study would be to explore how the sacralized vision (ultimate concern) of the Second Great Awakening has shifted since and how the evolution of that vision has led to changes in moral and ethical standards in American society. Coinciding with this would be a study that seeks to explore how and why, despite their secularization, American colleges have maintained their immense zeal for social activism and reform, especially from the 1960s onward.

Such a study could examine if secularization was not a loss of the sacred but rather a collapse of the sacred into the political or even the once mundane. Such research could provide critical answers to whether or not the culture wars of the modern campus demonstrate the same polarization that marked the era before the Civil War because of the similar cultural developments that occurred in the years before it.

Future research should explore how Darwinian evolution and the advent of modernity impacted or undermined the sacralized vision and religious fervor observed during the Second Great Awakening. It would be crucial to investigate whether sacred elements transitioned into the political sphere and discern how contemporary political rallies mirror the revivalist and reformist spirit of nineteenth-century camp meetings. Additionally, it is worth examining whether the present "woke" movement parallels a religious awakening and whether its emphasis on the "sacred self" aligns with the embrace of human autonomy initially advocated in Finneyite revivalism.

An intriguing study could explore integrating modern technological advancements into religious-based educational institutions and programs like Liberty University. This study would specifically focus on how these institutions incorporate online courses, digital resources, and virtual communities for religious studies. It would examine how this integration connects with the earliest educational mission of Andover, with its ambition to spread Christian civilization worldwide. Additionally, it seeks to analyze how the expansion of Christian education across various fields builds upon the sacralized vision of Beecher and Finney, aiming to encompass every sphere of society under the redemption of Christ.

One final potential avenue of research would be to broaden its scope to study how religious movements influenced higher education beyond the United States and analyze their impact on education in other countries and regions. Is the same student-led social activism found in American universities and colleges reflected in those of other countries? These various avenues of research provide a broader perspective on the transformative influence of religious movements on higher education and shed light on the enduring impact of historical ideologies on several structures and practices.

In conclusion, this dissertation uncovers the lasting influence of the Second Great Awakening's sacred ethos on American higher education. At the heart of this transformative era was a deep-seated belief in the providential destiny of the American nation, marked for a divine purpose. This belief, rooted in the early stages of the Second Great Awakening, infused American higher education, shaping its institutions into powerful conduits of societal and intellectual reform. Seminaries and colleges such as Andover, Lane, and Oberlin emerged as pioneers, reimagining their school's objectives, teaching methods, and social utility to fulfill the spiritual aspirations of the era.

The Second Great Awakening sparked a departure from conventional theological instruction towards a more expansive, holistic model of education that encompassed social issues and championed experiential learning. It instilled in its students and faculty a profound sense of social responsibility, giving rise to vibrant student activism toward the prevailing social challenges of the time. While acknowledging the limitations of this study, particularly in encapsulating the vast spectrum of religious and educational diversity, this research underscores the pivotal role the Awakening's religious movements played in sculpting America's educational

landscape. The indelible imprint of the Second Great Awakening is unequivocally present in American higher education.

With their steadfast dedication to being agents of change, these institutions eagerly embraced the challenge of progress, aiming to create a more just and prosperous society. However, this pursuit raises essential questions about the nature of such progress and the means to achieve it. As the educational landscape and societal values continue to evolve, the commitment to forge a brighter future remains constant, urging educators and students to engage in reflective examination. They are called to define the ideal of this better world and determine the guiding principles that will navigate their efforts. In the pursuit of universal advancement, it is imperative to recognize that the genesis of enduring change lies in the courage to pose challenging questions, the humility to change where necessary, and the resolve to undertake decisive action. The passion to change the world for the better has become an established goal of higher education. The critical question for this generation of students and educators is: what vision creates the best chance of getting there?

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