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PARADISE FOUND: RELIGIOSITY AND REFORM IN OBERLIN, OHIO, 1833-1859

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ABSTRACT

Founded as a quasi-utopian society by New England evangelists, Oberlin became the central hub of extreme social reform in Ohio's Western Reserve. Scholars have looked at Oberlin from political and cultural perspectives, but have placed little emphasis on religion. That is to say, although religion is a major highlight of secondary scholarship, few have placed the community appropriately in the dynamic of the East and West social reform movement. Historians have often ignored, or glossed over this important element and how it represented the divergence between traditional orthodoxy in New England and Middle-Atlantic states, and the new religious hybrids found in the West. While Oberlinians traced their religious heritage to Puritan Calvinism, they and other western evangelicals fused different theologies to create an ecclesiastical mechanism for gaining converts, promoting universalism, and combating sin. This was in contrast to traditional eastern orthodoxy where denominations remained pure.

Although Oberlin was exceptional for its time, even by Western Reserve standards, it properly embodied the religious zeal found in western settlements such as Galesburg, IL, and Olivet, MI. These communities espoused a belief in religious activism and universalism shared by their Ohio brethren. Much of the primary source material here comes from traditional religious sources; the works of Charles G. Finney, the doctrine of Perfectionism and Perfect Love, and the writings and speeches of activists. To contrast the relationship between East and West, it was important to incorporate Lyman Beecher and other orthodox churchmen as well as religious compacts such as the 1801 Plan of Union.

This study has led to several conclusions. First, that egalitarian democracy was shared between the orthodox and non-orthodox, but those empowered to partake greatly expanded in the West. This was due to the impact of non-orthodox Calvinism where Arminian theology demanded human agency for salvation. Secondly, Puritanical aspects of universal education encouraged the challenge of authority to expand the rights of others. Finally, universal agency and citizenship radicalized the women's rights and antislavery movements, empowering women and the growing black elite and middle class to sue for equality through conventional and non-conventional means. Thus, the Puritan foundation of democracy and religion fostered practical expression in the West, in contrast to the East where they remained theoretical.

DEDICATION

For absent friends and lost loves, you have not been forgotten. For Katelyn and Jacob,

so you may learn.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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PROLOGUE

PARADISE

AWAKENING IN THE WEST

Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didstinspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
                          – John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book I.

In 1789, President George Washington signed the Northwest Ordinance into law. An important catalyst in America's political and economic development, the act marked the first time since the French and Indian War (1754-1763) that colonists could legally traverse the great Appalachian Mountains to seek their fortune. Opportunistic settlers, who had been priced out of the land market in the East by wealthy elites, ventured into the great Ohio and Mississippi valleys in search of property and economic prosperity; the essence of American independence. The fruits of these wayfarers laid the foundation of northern industrialism, canals, railroads, and manufactories in growing urban centers where commerce commanded the stage. This was the birth of the American West.

While hearty, individualistic, fortune-seeking pioneers form the crux of the mythos of Manifest Destiny, they only account for one part of the whole. In order to sustain western civilization, settlers had to tame the West and mold it into something unique. For New Englanders, as with their predecessors before them, the only weapon sufficient

to conquer the West and spread civilization was the Bible. Indeed, cultivation and settlement did not solely advance on the desire for economic satisfaction, but through an airy biblical transcendence and belief in something abstractly divine. To these neo-Puritans, the West represented more than earthly sustenance, it was the ultimate reality of a land promised in the Book of Exodus.[1]

Given America's policy of a "wall of separation" between church and state, in contrast to the state sponsored ecclesiastical agencies of Europe, a multitude of faithful from New England and New York flooded lands in Michigan, Upstate New York, and Northeast Ohio, seeking to construct their unique versions of paradise.[2] Baptist, Methodist, Reformed, and the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) were among the largest denominations belonging to settlers, along with smaller upstart faiths such as the Shakers, Disciples of Christ (Campbellite), and Latter Day Saints (Mormon).[3] Although these denominations played a vital role, the war to control the West was led by the descendents of the Puritans, namely Calvinists. With its two influential branches, Congregationalism and Presbyterianism, Calvinism dominated the West and spearheaded much in the way of reform and societal change. Having played an intricate role in America's First Great Awakening (1720-1740), Calvinist ministers such as Jonathan Edwards with his sermon

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[1] Exodus 3:8. The King James Bible. "And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites."

[2] Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to the Danbury Baptists." January 1, 1802.

[3] Although the Shakers have roots in a small sect called the French Prophets, as well as English Quakers, the qualities that define Shakers are distinctly American. Celibacy, ritualistic dance, and simplicity are among these qualities. See, Catherine M. Rokicky, *Creating a Perfect World: Religious and Secular Utopias in Nineteenth-Century Ohio*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002).

"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," and George Whitfield, garnered converts and positioned the faith for its great expansion westward.[4]

These religious settlers were reformers of a sinful world. Robert Abzug, in his book *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, labeled these pioneers "religious virtuosos."[5] For Abzug, the material world was not the primary catalyst in shaping religious beliefs, despite having some influences. Rather, religion itself, in its most abstract form, reached beyond the material realm, forging a relationship between the earthly and heavenly.[6] Protestants, most of whom avoided the dogmatic holy orders of Roman Catholicism, were not accustomed to spirituality independent of the earthly.[7] Thus, the virtuosos fused the natural and abstract qualities of Providence to encourage cosmic unity between humanity and the divine.

Abzug's observation of religious reformers establishes the mentality for Puritan settlers during the Second Great Awakening (1800-1870). Cosmic unity between earthly and spiritual matters suggests that it was possible to create heaven on earth, or a new Eden. Much like their forebears in England, Puritans understood that the East was

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[4] Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and George Whitfield (1714-1770) were not members of any one denomination. Both men preached evangelically, and although Whitfield played a role in establishing Methodism, he was a proponent of Calvinism and Arminianism. See, Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitfield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), and *The New England Soul: Preaching Religious Culture in Colonial New England*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[5] Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4. Abzug borrowed the term, "religious virtuoso" from Max Weber's "Social Psychology of World Religions," published in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trs. And eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946)

[6] Ibid.

[7] This is in reference to monastic orders commonly found in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Catholic churches. These holy orders, in the eyes of American Protestants, worshiped God in an almost mystical fashion apart from the physical world. This was in contrast to American Protestantism, notwithstanding Transcendentalism, which placed more emphasis on community rather than sacred sacraments and dogma.

corrupted by the evils of consumerism and materialism, along with their unholy disciple alcoholism. Therefore, it was imperative that the pious withdraw, or separate, from old settlements and create something new on lands unspoiled and free from corruption. Abzug's reformers designed the ecclesiastical mechanism by which social reform communities were constructed, and for what purpose.

This is somewhat contrary to James Brewer Stewart who, in *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, argues that the basis for reform and westward expansion lay more in the materialistic than purely religious. Stewart argues that the European Enlightenment ingrained ideas regarding common civic rights and an emphasis on logic and reason.[8] Social reform issues, notably the antislavery movement, did not require Providence to make a case for its destruction, though Stewart concedes that evangelical Protestants were "at least as powerful as secular" thinkers in cultivating resistance to immoral behavior and practices.[9] The three qualities, materialism, religiosity, and secularism, exerted great influence over the economic engine of capitalism to sue for change. Stewart cites the Religious Society of Friends and the Calvinists as being two of the first denominations to purify themselves of slavery within, before utilizing industry to end slavery in the North.[10]

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[8] James Brewer Stewart, Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery. (New York: Hill and Want, 1976), 12.

[9] Ibid., 13

[10] Ibid., 23. This occurred in two different phases. Prior to the Great Awakening, the Society of Friends sought to expel slaveholders and slavery practices from their ranks, and move toward free labor abolitionism. After the American Revolution, Friends, and later Calvinists, harnessed the commerce industry to push slavery out of northern states and advocate for antislavery language in the Northwest Ordinance.

Although they do not totally disagree, there is an emphatic difference between both historians. Stewart places greater weight on the involvement of secular and materialistic thinking, whereas Abzug believes in the transcendent qualities of the religious mind. This is the crossroads of an interesting reality. Religious reformers in the West were egalitarian individuals who upheld the common Protestant traits of enterprise, thrift, and democracy, but who also blurred these ideas with their devout hyper-spirituality. The underlying theme of Protestant revivalists was the creation of a new world, and due to their emphasis on egalitarian democracy, it was a necessity that this new world be in the hands of the people. Although these religions, particularly Calvinism, were authoritarian, they championed the will of the masses to make decisions regarding their own governance.

Nathan O. Hatch in *The Democratization of American Christianity*, illustrates how American Protestantism espoused egalitarian democracy. Hatch argues that democracy, which essential "to the development of American" religiosity, was initiated by the separate but equal doctrine in the post-Revolutionary era.[11] The exceedingly large numbers of ministers, especially during the Great Awakening in the East, and Second Great Awakening in the West, allowed for more congregations to form and on what basis. This gave greater power to congregations to install and remove ministers of their choice at will.[12] The surge in ministers created a kind of "religious populism" in which common New Englanders wielded considerable control and choice in the role of the church, and

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[11] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of Christianity*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 3.
[12] Ibid., 4

their local confessions of faith.[13] Religious populism required that ministers, already in excessive number, seek out, embrace, and convert all who would listen regardless of rank in society, and encourage them to "interpret the Scripture."[14] The result was an increased spiritual awareness of the intrinsically good and evil in the world, yet the loss of total ecclesiastical purity.[15]

Hatch's religious populists, especially in the West, deviated from many of the traditional orthodox beliefs. One such aspect that will be discussed in greater detail is pre-destination. The notoriety of absolute pre-destination in Calvinism ceased to be a uniform belief in this period. The emergence of New School Calvinists brought elements of different philosophies that placed greater emphasis on personal salvation and agency. Salvation was no longer in the hands of a select group. The responsibility for absolving sin and ending the excesses of consumerism were the duty and the obligation of the pious. Thus, any and all who were willing could attain salvation.

In the West, especially in Ohio's Western Reserve, the religious and democratic qualities that laid the foundation for utopian and quasi-utopian societies, like Hudson and Oberlin, were imported directly from Puritan New England. Kenneth V. Lottich in *New England Transplanted: A Study of the Development of Educational and other Cultural Agencies in the Connecticut Western Reserve in Their National and Philosophical Setting*, argues that cultural beliefs in Northeast Ohio were "modified only slightly by

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[13] Ibid., 5
[14] Ibid.
[15] For example, Calvinists, especially in the West, rejected pure orthodoxy and instead embraced a mixture that consisted of traditional beliefs as well as Arminianism. Such ministers were referred as New School Calvinists, and included revivalists such as Charles Grandison Finney, Theodore Weld, and Lyman Beecher.

contact with the frontier."[16] This anti-Turnarian[17] stance opposed the belief that

democracy "was born in the forest" instead asserting that the tried and true eastern

foundation of "church, school, and town" easily traversed the mountains and found a new

home in the Western Reserve.[18] Although much of this is the case with the Western

Reserve's emphasis on piety, education, and New England governance structures such as

the township system, Lottich makes concessions. Lottich acknowledges that there was a

break between East and West, and that this allowed the West to tolerate and embrace

different ideas regarding the aforementioned qualities not found in traditional New

England.[19] Yet, Lottich believes that the changes did not alter the intrinsic Puritan

foundation, and in fact made the Western Reserve "more like New England than New

England itself."[20]

   Lottich is correct to point out that Puritanical qualities formed the important aspects of

Northeast Ohio, especially with regards to the township system and high regard for

education and literacy, yet the divergence is greater. The freedom to establish new

societies and to embrace and incorporate different ideologies created a new and much

more religiously radicalized citizenry. Utopian societies, mostly sectarian, made their

home in the Western Reserve and aided in various social reform activities.[21] The more

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[16] Kenneth V. Lottich in *New England Transplanted: A Study of the Development of Educational and other Cultural Agencies in the Connecticut Western Reserve in Their National and Philosophical Setting.* (Dallas: Royal Publishing Company, 1964), 11.
[17] Frederick Jackson Turner in "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," delivered in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, argued that the pressure of the frontier shaped American culture and democracy. Turner published an expanded version of his essay in 1921, *The Frontier in American History*.
[18] Kenneth V. Lottich, *New England*, 12
[19] Ibid., 13
[20] Ibid., 11
[21] Catherine M. Rokicky, *Creating a Perfect World*, 5

traditional religions, such as Calvinism, embraced the radically New School[22] beliefs that valued human agency in combating sin and bringing about the coming millennium. [23] Thus, while great thinkers, advocates, and financiers of reform activities made their homes in the East, the practical implementers of the lifestyle were found in the West.

Oberlin, Ohio is one such locality where a crossroads between the old and new existed during this period. Under the guidance of New School Calvinists such as Asa Mahan, Charles Finney, and John J. Shipherd, Oberlin embraced traditional elements, but radically altered them with new egalitarian philosophies. Social reform issues were taken to extreme levels in order to satisfy intense religious convictions. Although their counterparts in the East advocated antislavery, Oberlinians gave agency and citizenship to black residents and educated them alongside whites. While traditional New Englanders permitted women to obtain education, Oberlinians allowed and encouraged women to earn full collegiate degrees in a co-educational setting. Thus, while Lottich understates the influence of the West on traditional orthodoxy, he is correct to assert that the world created in the Western Reserve was "more perfect" than the one that was left behind.[24]

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[22] New School Calvinism is a non-traditional form of Calvinism that blended different religious theologies. The majority of New School subscribers were younger ministers who found supportive congregations in the West.

[23] Millennialism is a term used to describe religious believers who subscribed in the idea that the Son of God would return in the new millennium to make his final judgment. The result would be a new Heaven and a new Heaven on Earth.

[24] Kenneth V. Lottich, *New England Transplanted*, 11

CHAPTER I

CREATING ZION

RELIGION, DEMOCRACY, & THE QUEST FOR PERFECTION

> *"I propose through [God's] assistance to plant a colony*
> *somewhere in this region whose chief aim shall be to glorify*
> *God and do good to men to the utmost extent of their ability."*
> *– John J. Shipherd, 1832*

The antislavery and social reform movements of the antebellum era advanced on the authority of the church and its pious leaders. Indeed, the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening escalated the prominence of various social reforms, promising ultimate freedom in return for renouncing sinful vice. This form of freedom is the kind discussed by historian Eric Foner in which ultimate liberation came not in the political sphere, but in the social and religious one predicated on submission, toil, and piety.[25] As elements of the Second Great Awakening developed and grew in popularity, particularly revivals, and the expansion of education in the West, radicalism and schism over the importance of social reform occurred. Although religious bodies throughout the North faced some internal turmoil, the division between radicalism and conservatism broke along the lines of East and West, and in the bodies of the Congregationalist and Presbyterian churches. Social reform movements on the Western Reserve of Ohio, especially during the Age of Jackson, typified this break with tradition and integration of religion and reform.

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[25] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 3-4.

The social reform movement in Ohio's Western Reserve[26] advanced because of

several factors. The first was the unusual makeup of the region as opposed to the

remainder of the state, particularly the dominant New England Calvinist culture. This

influence came about after the initial settlement in 1796, significantly in 1801 the main

bodies of the Calvinist movement, the General Association of Connecticut and the

Presbyterian Church, formed a comprehensive plan to proselytize and expand throughout

the western frontier.[27] The goal of these "Presbygationalists" was to save the West from

heathens and Roman Catholics. Famed evangelist Lyman Beecher observed, "If we gain

the West, all is safe; if we lose it, all is lost."[28] The second factor was the civic structure

imported by Yankee settlers that incorporated democratic principles in all facets of daily

life – from forming congregations to electing local leaders. A third consideration

involved the emphasis on universal education through academies and degree-granting

collegiate institutions, allowing Christians to lead morally just lives while operating in a

social democratic framework.

These three ingredients are not separate from each other; that is to say, they cannot be

isolated and analyzed solely on their own terms. Education, for example, was considered

a necessity for preparing men and women for their roles in spreading revival and

religious fervor, and in many ways was religion itself.[29] Academies and manual labor

schools, established by Congregationalists, emphasized democratic New England

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[26] Present day Northeast Ohio. Claimed by Connecticut as territory, later as the colony of New Connecticut, before being partitioned and incorporated into the Northwest Territory.

[27] The 1801 Plan of Union was a system of interfaith cooperation between the main bodies of the Congregationalist and Presbyterian Church.

[28] Lyman Beecher, *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher*. ed. Barbara M. Cross, vol.2, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 167.

[29] Ralph Barton Perry, *Puritanism and Democracy*. (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1944), 192.

idealism along with religious doctrine. The influence of the three expanded and by the

1850s radicalized the antislavery movement, placing it at odds with the rest of the state

and the Presbyterian General Assembly.

An appropriate case study in observing how these three influenced the reform

movement is Oberlin and Oberlin College. Founded simultaneously in 1833 by two

Congregationalist ministers, Oberlin was a quasi-utopia[30] that embraced the evangelical

fervor of the Second Great Awakening. Although founded by Congregationalists under

the Plan of Union, the community evolved into the central hub of New School Calvinist[31]

evangelism from both the Congregational community as well as the Presbyterian.

Congregationalists such as John J. Shipherd and Theodore Weld, worked side-by-side

with such noted Presbyterians as Asa Mahan and revivalist Charles Grandison Finney to

advance the word of God through conversion, revival, and combating sin. Their efforts

would transform the community from a quasi-separatist society into the central hub of

Calvinist social reform during the Age of Jackson.

Oberlin was the quintessential product of evangelic revivalism. During the Second

Great Awakening, as historian Chris Padgett observed, Oberlin and other Western

Reserve communities were made up of thrifty, proud, and industrious New Englanders

who subscribed to the "providential destiny" of America.[32] In the same vein as the

Puritan statesman John Winthrop who believed the New World should be a "city upon a

hill," Oberlinians concluded that the Western Reserve was a "Zion in the wilderness" or a

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[30] Oberlin colonists were allowed to own property, thus Oberlin was not a true sectarian communal utopia.
[31] Calvinists who opposed traditional orthodoxy by advocating revival, emphasizing human agency, and encouraging the participation of women.
[32] Chris Padgett. John R. McKivigan, and Mitchell Snay. *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery*. (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 246.

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new kingdom for God's heaven on earth.[33] Settlers desired to spread revival and fervor

through missionary work in the untamed West and by maintaining their own particular

religious way of life at home. This way of life was predicated on strict Christian values

of plainness, simplicity, and education, while existing in a framework that maintained a

separation between religious and civic agencies.

   Although it may seem like a paradox that a religious community, especially one

rooted in Puritanism, could maintain its influence in a structure where church and state

were separated, it is not without precedent. Anabaptists during the Reformation were the

first to institute this idea into their theological and civic fabric. Historian Ralph Barton

Perry suggests the major political contribution of the Anabaptists was their resistance to

"every authority, whether secular or ecclesiastical" that attempted to exert total control

over their daily lives.[34] In other words, the Anabaptists decreed that government

authorities remain independent of the church, concentrating on the civic duties of society

while the church focused on the "salvation of the soul" through "proper spiritual

agencies."[35] Calvinists, Baptists, and to a certain extent members of the Society of

Friends, followed the Anabaptists' lead in this belief of separation, although each of their

individual ecclesiastical dispositions differed.[36]

   The early policies of these sects transplanted to the American Northeast, primarily the

Massachusetts Bay Colony, where Puritans organized their society around a religious

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[33] John Winthrop. "A Model of Christian Charity."
[34] Perry, 97
[35] Ibid.
[36] Quakers believed in a relative separation of church and state, but it was not defined. They believed that all people, whether clergy or laity, possessed the inner light of God. Thus it was impossible to fully separate church and civic affairs.

community within a separate civic state.[37] The early reformers sought to limit the authority of both church and state in order to avoid bureaucratic discord and to protect both from the fallibility of man.[38] Puritan New England accomplished this to varying degrees, but never uniformly. Urban communities tended to form societies where religious and civic spheres were strongly defined while rural communities allowed for greater civic and religious intercourse.[39] Historian Robert Abzug argues that the period following the Revolution, when the Constitution was written, affirmed the principle of church and state separation while creating a "social framework" where tolerance for other religions was commonplace.[40] The idea surrounding this notion was that the Revolution and the Constitution "challenged the legitimacy of religious elites," thus a balance between secular and religious authority was necessary in order to have a functioning democracy.[41]

Well into the antebellum period, the evolution of this church/state relationship was brought to bear in northern courts. In 1849 Charles Sumner, attorney, abolitionist, and future U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, based his arguments around these principles when he successfully presented a case before the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Sumner insisted that tolerance and, more importantly, equality of others, was a fundamental responsibility of the state, regardless of race, religion, or cultural heritage:

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[37] New England colonies were founded on religious principles and were governed by a religious charter, but the governing authority was not the church. Rather, administrative authority was placed in the hands of elected politicians not necessarily in service with the church.

[38] Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 16.

[39] Perry, 106

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

[41] Ibid.

> Whatever may be his condition, and whoever may be his parents. He may be poor, weak, humble, or black; -- he may be of Caucasian, Jewish, Indian, or Ethiopian race, -- he may be of French, German, English, or Irish extraction; but before the Constitution of Massachusetts all these distinctions disappear … He is one of the children of the State, which, like an impartial parent, regards all its offspring with an equal care.[42]

By this point Sumner and many others interjected race and ethnicity into the ideology, thus expanding the notions beyond religious toleration into a cosmopolitan acceptance of humanity. Nevertheless, at their most basic level, the convictions of Sumner were established in the Great Awakening and augmented by post-Revolutionary thought. These egalitarian aspects of New England society spread with westward expansion and were inflamed by the Second Great Awakening. James Brewer Stewart argues that these enlightened principles influenced evangelicals on ideas surrounding freedom, secularism, and the dangers of religious dogma. [43]

Religious influence was never fully removed from the ideology of these Protestant reformers. Prior to the era of the American Revolution colonies entered a period of spiritual rediscovery called the Great Awakening. This time was punctuated by a drive to engage in revival, "challenge … established authority," and create unifying bonds between differing Protestant sects.[44] These ideas are important for two reasons, one, as Stewart and Abzug observed, the feelings toward individual freedom and equality regardless of rank evolved to allow New Englanders to view all humanity as being

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[42] Charles Sumner. "Equality Before the Law: Unconstitutionality of Separate Colored Schools in Massachusetts; Argument before the Supreme Court of Massachusetts," works, 15 vols, Lee & Sheppard, 1875-1883. Vol. II. 341-43.

[43] James Brewer Stewart. *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery.* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 12.

[44] Sydney E. Ahlstrom. *A Religious History of the American People.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 293.

entitled to certain rights and privileges.[45] The second was the strengthening of interfaith

bonds that would play an important role during the Second Great Awakening,

encouraging revivalists to seize upon different principles and ideas, incorporating them

into their expression of faith. These traits guided societies to develop along egalitarian

lines of acceptance rather than on antiquated doctrines of denominational purity.

   While the Anabaptists' contribution of civic and ecclesiastical separation is crucial,

there is still one other important element that facilitated this religious revolution.

Relating specifically to Puritanism, the qualities that encouraged the revivalist mentality

were not wholly Calvinist, but a combination of Methodism and, more importantly,

Arminianism.[46] While the former perfected the use of public revival, the principles of the

latter provided agency and choice, and promoted a human role in calling revival and

other religious practices. In other words, Arminian theology advocated "universal

atonement, and the resistibility of grace," eliminating absolute predestination which was

the hallmark of traditional Calvinist teachings.[47] By removing the constraints of absolute

predestination, those who incorporated Arminian theology created an environment that

encouraged the use of revival to gain congregants and save souls. The Arminian-

Calvinist hybrid found great dominance in the West where ministers could preach outside

the confines of the conservative orthodoxy.

   Oberlin as a society was the conglomeration of this complex fusion of different

religious and civic philosophies. The local government, established as a "colony," used

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[45] Robert Abzug, *Cosmos is Crumbling*, 5
[46] Arminianism is not a denomination, but rather the doctrines and philosophies of Jacob Arminius, a minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. Arminius' interpretation of scripture found its way into different sects of Protestantism, especially in American Calvinist and Baptist denominations.
[47] Perry, 99

Calvinism as its religious base, yet promoted revival and human agency. Overtime, egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism seeded a notable Baptist and Methodist population as the Reserve grew and diversified in the post-Civil War era. Already the product of the 1801 Plan of Union, the dominantly Congregationalist Oberlinians held their diversifying society together through the civic system that promoted cooperation between the faiths.

This was not surprising to William Kennedy who published his observations on the Plan of Union in 1856. Although Kennedy focused his examination on the key participants in the Plan – Congregationalists and Presbyterians – his views on the matter allowed readers to understand the Congregationalist mindset. Oberlin's basic fundamental foundations were suited, as Kennedy noted, for "democratic, cultured, intelligent, orderly, and generous New Englander(s)" which made up the dominant population of the village as well as a greater number of those residing in the Western Reserve.[48] Though the Reserve was not uniformly a religious utopia or quasi-utopia, as Kennedy and others viewed it at the time, Oberlin together with other Ohio villages Hudson and Burton were some of the leading Christian communities in the region. These villages promoted a democratic lifestyle where members could voice their minds and elect their leaders directly including their religious elders. While this is the case, it should be noted that there was variance between them, as Oberlin promoted universal agency.

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[48] William Sloan Kennedy, *The Plan of Union: or a History of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches of the Western Reserve; with Biographical Sketches of the Early Missionaries.* (Hudson, Ohio: Pentagon Steam Press, 1856), 145.

Unlike its industrial neighbors, Elyria and Lorain[49], Oberlin was one of the last major

settlements chartered, taking place in 1833, eleven years after the county government was

formally established. Having been settled later than most other nearby communities,

Oberlin was unusual in that it was not exclusively settled by immigrants who had come

directly from New England, but rather by residents who initially settled in Elyria,

Amherst, and other Lorain County settlements and became disenchanted with life in these

places.[50] The principal founders were two ministers, John J. Shipherd, and Philo P.

Stewart, who departed from nearby Elyria after becoming dissatisfied with what they saw

to be the degradation of society.[51] These men, strong in their belief that the path to God

was through the suppression of sinful vice, drinking, gambling, and excess, chose to

make their settlement a religious colony where residents were admitted only after

agreeing to live by a strict covenant.[52]

Shipherd was deeply troubled by what he had witnessed as a minister and missionary

in Elyria. He saw the once pious community of frontiersmen fall under the spell of evil

vice, notably alcohol and violence.[53] In addition, Shipherd believed the nature of

exploiting property for wealth and excess was the root of all that was evil in the world,

and that this affliction had become the main motivation for daily life in the community.[54]

He lamented that "something [had to] be done" or the future of Christian society would

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[49] At this time Lorain was named New Charleston.
[50] Robert S. Fletcher, *The History of Oberlin College from its Foundation Through the Civil War. Vol. I* (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College Press, 1943), 101.
[51] The Covenant of Oberlin Colony, 1833
[52] Robert S. Fletcher, *The History of Oberlin College,* 83
[53] Ibid.
[54] Robert S. Fletcher, "The Government of Oberlin Colony." Extract from the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol XX, No. 2, September, 1933, 182.

be lost in the sins they allowed to be committed.[55] Resembling his Puritan ancestors, who founded various communities as separatist colonies, Shipherd chose to establish his settlement nine miles southwest of Elyria where access was limited to the outside world and its many temptations.[56] According to Oberlin colonist and professor James H. Fairchild, Shipherd was "intensely occupied" with revival and the saving of souls, and he had hoped that through establishing a colony he would "hasten the coming" of God's kingdom.[57]

Oberlin was not a separatist community in the traditional sense. It did not operate as an institution outside the state and national political framework. Rather the community existed as a self-contained "Commonwealth in the state of Ohio," while continuing to participate in social and political movements at the national level.[58] Oberlin wished to be a vessel for the outpouring of piety, love, and religiosity, thus it was not so much isolated from the world as it was closed off from outside influences. In a letter to his followers in 1835, Shipherd reiterated these ideas, writing that the colony was a "highway for the Lord" or a "living fountain whose waters will refresh" those who thirst for the righteousness of God. Shipherd intended that society resist influence yet be influential on other communities.[59] He instructed his congregation to act as "zealous [performers] of

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[55] John J. Shipherd. Robert S. Fletcher, The Government of Oberlin Colony, 181.
[56] The Covenant of Oberlin Colony, 1833
[57] James H. Fairchild. *Oberlin: The Colony and the College, 1833-1883.* (Oberlin, OH: E.J. Goodrich, 1883), 12.
[58] John J. Shipherd. Robert S. Fletcher, The Government of Oberlin Colony, 182.
[59] John J. Shipherd. Pastoral Letter, New York. January 27, 1835.

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good works," to always embrace knowledge "for knowledge is power," and to be "vigilant" and active in all of these functions.[60]

While Shepherd and Stewart were the catalysts for establishing the community, the peculiar drive of Oberlin spirituality came from two clergymen who were not original colonists, Asa Mahan of New York, and Charles Grandison Finney of Connecticut. During the 1830s Mahan and Finney were both highly regarded ministers in the evangelical movement. Mahan had been a professor and trustee at Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, while Finney gained fame for his millennial revivals in Upstate New York and as minister of the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City. Although they belonged to the more conservative Presbyterian branch of the Calvinist faith, they often sided with social progressives that were mainly found among the Congregationalist church.[61] Their zeal to promote equality and insistence on holy perfection was matched only by their belief that education was the key to God. This was in keeping with the foundations and principles of Oberlin College that advocated "glorifying God and doing good to men" through education that sought to train "*body* and *heart* as well as the *intellect*" of both sexes.[62]

Coming from different parts of the country, Mahan and Finney established themselves in the community in the wake of the Lane Seminary Revolt. The event was one in which the trustees of Lane Theological Seminary circumvented the free and open expression of ideas by students and professors concerning social reform issues, notably slavery. Under

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Kennedy, *The Plan of Union,* 145
[62] Prospectus for the Oberlin Collegiate Institute (1833)

the leadership of revivalist and Lane President Lyman Beecher, the board of trustees

banned a series of academic debates between the student's abolition and colonization

societies. The board further polarized the atmosphere on campus by instituting a gag rule

prohibiting open discussion of abolition, as well as formally censuring the student

abolitionist society.[63] The Lane Rebels, as they became known in newspaper accounts,

argued that freedom of speech and freedom to explore moral questions were the

cornerstone rights of country and church:

> We believe free discussion to be the duty of every rational being. It is the acting
> out of the command '*prove all things*.' It is inquiry after immutable truth, whether
> embodied in the word, or hid in the works of God, or branching out through the
> relations and duties of man. We [are] bound to conduct this search, *wherever it
> may lead*, and to adopt the conclusions to which it may bring us.[64]

Mahan was adamant that freedom of speech was the tool for exploring moral

questions relating to faith and social reform.   After his resignation from Lane

Theological Seminary, he and his followers joined the Oberlin enterprise, but not before

securing two important concessions. The first was that black students were to be

admitted equally with white students and the second was that the community and college

should never interfere with freedom of speech and debate among students and faculty, no

matter how controversial.[65] Only upon agreement to these two issues would the Lane

Rebels unite with the college. Within this contractual debate a third party, the wealthy

Tappan brothers[66] of New York, guaranteed the salary of the new professors and

expenditures for the students provided that Charles G. Finney be appointed Professor of

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[63] Lane Seminary Defense of Students. *The Liberator*, vol. 5, no. 2, Jan. 10, 1835, pp. [5]-6.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Oberlin College Archives: RG 2/1 - Asa Mahan (1799-1889)
[66] Lewis and Arthur Tappan of New York City

Theology.[67] Thus, the college stood to gain considerably if the community elders agreed to the demands.

Believing that equality among the sexes and races was a cornerstone to his philosophy, Shipherd did not object to these demands and pleaded for community elders to concede. A skilled businessman as well as minister, he made his case before the community board. Shipherd argued both practically and philosophically. Practical reasons for admitting blacks were that "no valid institutions" in existence could provide them with schooling, and that educated blacks were "needed as ministers and missionaries" as well as teachers in the rapidly growing Mississippi Valley.[68] Philosophically Shipherd appealed to the notions of equality before the eyes of God and community.   "Education," he argued, was "essential [for black] emancipation," and by contributing to their enlightenment they would advance the cause for mind, body and intellect, the precepts of the college."[69] Above all else, Shipherd forced the board to understand that "God made [blacks] one blood" with whites and "objecting to [black students]" was akin to "objecting to Christ eating with sinners."[70]

No scholar of Shipherd would argue that moral justice and spirituality were secondary causes for his position in the debate; however, he did have secular interests in mind. Outside of moral and spiritual appeals, Shipherd reiterated the importance of the Tappan's generous donation to the school and that the prospect of gaining the spiritual

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[67] James H. Fairchild. *Oberlin*, 57
[68] James H. Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 59. During this period the Mississippi Valley referred to all land west of the Appalachian Mountains.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

leadership of Finney would bolster and strengthen the mission of Oberlin.[71] These

arguments together, crafted out of moral appeals and logic, did much to alter the minds of

the community. Prior to the arrival of the Lane Rebels, the colony had a contingent of

gradual emancipationists and colonizationists who were leery of integration, despite their

opposition to slavery and the unchristian treatment of blacks.[72] With the board's vote,

which was decided by a tiebreaker,[73] conservative participants waned and Oberlin's

evolution from a self-contained colony to one that crusaded for radical social reforms.

Although social reform occurred internally through dictates of the colony's covenant,

revival and conversion, these new tactics went beyond the spiritual and self-contained.

They extended into the greater political and social scheme of the country. Rather than

confine the advancement of faith through these methods, Oberlinians, under the guidance

of Mahan and Finney, sought to expand their scope to include proactively engaging what

they considered elements of a sinful world. Reforms varied from universally acceptable

or popular topics of the day such as temperance and the anti-Masonic movement to the

unusual and novel such as vegetarianism[74] and phrenology.[75] The most notable of social

reform issues were generally the most controversial: women's rights and abolition.

Oberlin sought to fuse these social reform movements with religion, thus making them

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[71] James H. Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 64
[72] James H. Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 62
[73] The deciding vote was cast by Fr. John Keep of Ohio City.
[74] Sylvester Graham, a Presbyterian minister and dietician, advocated a popular diet that today could be referred to as raw food veganism. Graham believed eating strictly vegetarian, drinking cold water, and avoiding stimulants such as tea, coffee, or sugar. His is best known as the inventor of the "Graham cracker," though its modern form bears little resemblance to the plain, flavorless bread of this time.
[75] Phrenology was a popular science developed by Franz Joseph Gall. It was believed that examining the shape of the skull could lead to a greater understanding of a person's behavior. This was a forerunner to modern psychiatry, though it lacked any internal medical substance.

one and inseparable. The desired result was to make earthly the heavenly dictates of God's Kingdom.

Returning to Ralph Barton Perry and his discussion of Puritan democracy, he observed that there were two competing antitheses from the 1820s to the 1840s. The first was the philosophy of Jacksonian Democracy, while the other was Romantic Humanitarianism. Perry described the former as a lifestyle built for the individual and the sturdy, hearty, and independent frontiersman.[76] This characteristic is referenced by other historians, including Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and was the defining characteristic of the Jacksonian era.[77] In direct opposition, Romantic Humanitarianism was defined as highly democratic and benevolent; its disciples aspiring for ultimate fulfillment and perfection.[78] As it related to the movement, these notions were popular with various branches of Puritanism (Calvinists), though mainly those in New England, because of their belief in respecting the "human individual, irrespective of his place" in the church, politics or from other means.[79] These principles grew steadily from the Great Awakening through the post-Revolutionary period.

Focusing on the idea of *perfection*, Oberlin and other Protestant communities had been coming to terms with what it meant to be perfect or to strive for perfection. John Wesley, the force behind Methodism, championed this idea in sermons and papers that after his death were organized into *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,* published in 1844. Prior to this work, however, there were few popular or leading publications on the matter.

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[76] Perry, *Puritan Democracy*, 139
[77] Arthur Schlesinger Jr., authored *The Age of Jackson*, in 1945.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Perry, Puritan Democracy, 192

This is especially true within Calvinism where the more orthodox Presbyterian Church held sway in the hierarchy of the Plan of Union. By the end of the 1830s, however, this would change when the Oberlin community wrote and disseminated such an account.

In 1839 Oberlin College President Asa Mahan penned the grand treatise of Oberlin Congregationalism. Called the *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfectionism*, the document referred to informally as "Oberlin Perfectionism," provided the groundwork for radical religious abolition and social reform in the Western Reserve.[80] Mahan invoked the scripture of Matthew 5:48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" and demanded that Christians seek holiness through perfection.[81] All elements of daily life were included in the doctrine from the execution of common duties, both religious and non-religious, to show complete obedience to moral law.[82] An important dictate to the doctrine involved loving "our neighbors" and that all actions should be committed out of selflessness.[83]

Perfection, in the sense that Mahan used it, was *love.* Perfection and love were synonymous in the doctrine and acted as the foundation on which all acts were committed. This is in keeping with the principles established in 1 John 4:8, "God is love," and thus God, love, and perfection were one single element, much like a unified trinity.[84] "Love," in the words of Mahan, "was fulfilling the law" of God as well as the proof of our "love [of] God; this being the same love as that of Christ's when he died on

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[80] Donald W. Dayton, Discovering an Evangelical Heritage. (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 40.
[81] Asa Mahan, *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfectionism.* (Boston: D.S. King), 1.
[82] Mahan, *Perfectionism*, 10
[83] Ibid.
[84] 1 John, 4:8. The King James Bible.

the cross."[85] Thus, an intertwining between moral law and perfection legitimatized the call to combat sin through social reform movements. This notion operated in tandem with Finney's particular belief that the community was obligated to make the "sanctification of Christians the foremost important work" purifying the ranks of the faith and the sinful elements of the country.[86]

By this logic Oberlinians had redefined their confession of faith and redefined how they would view and tolerate sin. "The fundamental sprit and aim of Christianity," in the words of Mahan, "is the correction of all abuses" against God and humanity, thus community members and those who subscribed to the doctrine aggressively pursued perfection through demanding that slave-holding ministers, parishioners and those with sympathies for slave power be excommunicated until they had repented for their sins.[87] Finney agreed. He believed that these ministers and churchgoers "hindered" the fight when they took "the wrong ground in any question regarding human rights!"[88] Although women's rights and other social issues were included in this idea of perfection, the abolitionist cause was the most controversial and central to Oberlin's zeal during the pre-war years. As Oberlin College professor and politician James Monroe once publically stated, "the indignation of all honest men against a great crime soon finds stern expression and, in the case of slavery, it found expression through early abolitionists."[89]

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[85] Mahan, *Perfectionism,* 10-11
[86] Charles G. Finney in *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, 39
[87] Asa Mahan and Charles G. Finney in *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage,* 40, 19
[88] Ibid.
[89] James Monroe, *Oberlin: Thursday Lectures, Addresses, and Essays.* (Oberlin, Ohio: Edward J. Goodrich, 1897), 7.

This internal, religious purification became the source of tension in the Calvinist community. Although not all Congregationalists subscribed to Oberlin perfectionism, the Congregational Association of Connecticut, the unifying body in the Congregationalist Church, agreed with the spirit of the document believing that "oppression in all its forms is sin."[90] Notable supporters outside the community included Theodore D. Weld, a highly respected minister, abolitionist circuit speaker and Lane Rebel, and Jonathan Blanchard, minister, professor, and social reform activist.[91] In 1839, Blanchard spoke out in support of the radical measures in a speech to the students of Oberlin College. In his address Blanchard declared:

> Society is perfect where what is right in theory exists in fact; where practice coincides with principles, and the Law of God is the Law of the Land. … The Kingdom of God was a perfect state of society… the Kingdom is not of this world, it is *in* it.[92]

Upon the publication of the doctrine, the Oberlin Congregationalist Church and a number of nearby Congregationalist bodies withdrew from their local Presbyteries and the Western Reserve Synod. These churches formed the General Association of the Western Reserve as an administrative alternative and used this organization to disseminate the new doctrines.[93] The backlash from the Presbyterian General Assembly was quick and stringent. The Western Reserve Synod denounced the doctrine as heresy and crafted literature to counter the statements made by Mahan and other western evangelicals. The much larger Ohio Synod instituted a policy designed to refuse

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[90] Congregational Association in *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, 41
[91] Jonathan Blanchard was a professor, and later president, of Knox College in Galesburg, Il, and president of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Il.
[92] Jonathan Blanchard in *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage,* 9-10
[93] Padgett, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery,* 253

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recognition of ministers ordained at Oberlin College as well as refusing to send Western Reserve Congregationalist ministers on missions. In addition to this backlash from their Presbyterian brethren, some moderate voices of the revival movement looked with suspicion upon such doctrines.

A vocal opponent of the doctrine was Finney's eastern rival and Lane Seminary President Lyman Beecher. Beecher, whose public clashes over revival policy with Finney and his western radicals, believed that the axiom of "perfectionism" was a dangerous threat to genuine revival, being misguided radicalism.[94] Perfectionism was only a single objection among others between the two men. Beecher had previously sided with orthodox ministers in the East over Finney's methods, including naming sinners publically, allowing women to pray in public and insisting sinners sit in a special pew to hear the sermon.[95] When Beecher organized The Society for the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education, a system of financial support and administration consultation between theological and parochial schools in the West and churches in the East, he specifically omitted Oberlin due to his continued suspicion of Finney and what he referred to as "the hand of Oberlin."[96] Such were the impacts that Oberlin theology had on evangelicals. Although it simply appeared to be a split between differing ideologies, it was more than that; it was a clash over western and eastern revivalism.

The absorption of Lane faculty and students and the creation of a particular religious doctrine altered Oberlin's position in the Western Reserve. Notwithstanding the

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[94] Lyman Beecher to Lydia Beecher, Columbus [Ohio], February 23, 1839, Stowe-Day Library, Hartford, Connecticut.

[95] James Fraser, *Pedagogue for God's Kingdom: Lyman Beecher and the Second Great Awakening*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 63-64.

[96] Lyman Beecher in *Pedagogue for God's Kingdom*, 156

continued growth of free blacks in the community perpetuated a lasting impact on the colony's image and influence, though not in these immediate years. In the late 1840s, Oberlin as a multiracial utopia gained prominence in local spheres. By the 1850s, during the height of the sectional crisis, the colony attracted greater national *éclat*: infamy in the South and curious ambiguity in the North. Prior to the 1840s, the major effects of Oberlin radicalism revolved around the religious elements as they related to the civic and cultural structure of the community. The impact of the new egalitarian embrace of faith caused a riff in the Plan of Union and gave a safe haven to those antislavery activists who sought the freedom to express their ideas openly in an academic setting.

The lack of speech code restrictions ignited the community. The freedom to debate openly perpetuated the flow of ideas, some of which controversial. Charles Finney as professor and later president of the college encouraged his students and faculty members to debate the leading issues of the day. Many of these were strictly philosophical such as God's place in nature and the notion of abstaining from political engagement on religious principle. Others, however, dealt with the contentious including colonization, integration, and the use of violence in social reform.

In all of these instances Finney would act as moderator between two sides, delivering a judgment at the conclusion that often borrowed philosophies from both sides to create an altogether new viewpoint. The key to this system was the freedom to discuss and debate. As Finney, Mahan, and the Lane agreements dictated: "all sides [would be] openly discussed" and without censorship.[97] Oberlin thus borrowed and merged different

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[97] James H. Fairchild, *Oberlin*, 86

philosophies together "to create a distinct egalitarian philosophy of their own."[98] This was not unlike the fusion of Calvinism and Arminianism, or other earlier creations that were born out of the spirit of the American Revolution. Egalitarianism, thus, fostered religious precepts of tolerance and democratic order.

Oberlin social reform was rooted in its religiosity and New England civic underpinning. Although both came from a common source, namely New England Calvinism, they did not remain the same. New England civic virtue, the idea that the community was highly democratic, orderly, and sustained through education, remained steadfast during the Second Great Awakening. This is especially true in western New York and the Connecticut Western Reserve, where, as historian Kenneth V. Lottich believed, New England democratic culture did not appear because of the pressure of the frontier, as Frederick Jackson Turner argued, but had been transplanted by the settlers themselves in order to give structure to their new society.[99] Since Anabaptists had introduced separatism and the existence of secular agencies, the civic system remained relatively unchanged, even on the frontier. Yet there is some validity in Turner's assessment on the frontier, as compared to their wealthier established brethren in the East, social reformers in the West strove for immediate civic equality of the sexes and races and called for these changes rapidly; alarming moderates like Beecher and conservatives in the Presbyterian Church.

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Kenneth V. Lottich, *New England Transplanted: A Study of the Development of Educational and Other Cultural Agencies in the Connecticut Western Reserve in their National and Philosophical Setting*. (Dallas: Royal Publishing Company, 1964), 15.

Religion and religious doctrine continued to evolve rapidly from the traditional orthodoxy on the east coast. The influence on Oberlin evangelism can be traced to the Great Awakening and its challenge of the authority of religious and political elites. Equality, universal rights and privileges and, most importantly, acceptance of others regardless of creed, race, or ethnicity were at the heart of how the Great Awakening was interpreted in New England and later its settlements in the Western Reserve. The prevailing nature of these attributes is seen in the construction of the colony and the philosophical tenants. Yet unlike their Great Awakening forefathers, Oberlinians and other social reformers, predominantly in the West, placed heavy emphasis on the human element found in Arminianism. Human agency was the *graine de vie* in bringing about revival and instituting social change, thus merging the earthly with the heavenly to create a Godly world.

Christian perfectionism, though controversial, pushed authoritative challenge to extreme measures. Although Methodists embraced a similar notion of perfection and perfect love, their denomination remained relatively free of schism, whereas the Oberlin movement prompted a split in the Calvinist union, especially along the lines of east and west. To the Presbyterian and east coast orthodoxy, forcing ministers and parishioners to remove, shun and give repentance for holding slaves and committing other sins was a radical notion that would only create tension among the church and its wealthy, predominantly southern elites. This matter was compounded by the fact that Oberlinians had included, among their list of sinners, not only slaveholders but sympathizers and those who believed colonization was the only viable answer to the question of black

emancipation. To achieve pure perfection, only abolition and integration were acceptable

forms of sanctification.

CHAPTER II

CULTIVATING THE WHOLE

SOCIAL UPLIFT THROUGH UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

> *"When the panting and thirsting soul first drinks the*
> *delicious waters of truth, when the moral and intellectual*
> *tastes and desires first seize the fragrant fruits that flourish*
> *in the garden of knowledge, then does the child catch a*
> *glimpse and foretaste of heaven."*
>
> *– Horace Mann, 1847.*

If religion and democracy are the two great walls of social reform, education is the

cornerstone that unites these elements, preparing individuals to be ministers of justice.

Following in the footsteps of their predecessors in the Protestant Reformation, New

Englanders sought to establish an educational apparatus capable of sustaining secular and

ecclesiastical agencies. Whereas the Protestant Reformation by design required

practitioners to be literate in order to interpret the Bible, ministers in New England

emphasized a dual necessity for education. This necessity rested on the belief that

government administration, not simply personal salvation, was the responsibility of all

and not a select or appointed few. Thus, personal salvation and democracy were

invariably linked to universal education of the masses. This concept enabled social

reform to disseminate outward from New England and its former western settlements in

New York and Ohio.[100]

Ohio's Western Reserve as a whole embraced pedagogy and made great strides to

push enlightenment to the forefront of their society. The early 1820s saw the rapid

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[100] Western settlements in present day Upstate New York and Northeast Ohio had been previously claimed
by Connecticut for expansion.

growth of academic institutions, such as colleges, literary societies, and lyceums "in

proportion to population, far in excess" of the rest of the state, comparable to the East.[101]

Historian Kenneth V. Lottich observes that the entire region was "modified only slightly

by contact with the frontier," thus it retained much of the original New England culture

and societal attributes.[102] The overall style, with regards to education, was Puritanical,

emphasizing literacy and ideas of equality and freedom. This was in contrast to what

Lottich refers to as the "Greek democratic" style found in the South, which placed great

importance on social rank and militarism.[103] For northeast Ohio, what evolved was a

democratic world in which notions of class were subverted in favor of equality, both in

the eyes of God and the state.

The nature of Oberlin, with its accentuation on freedom of speech and openness to

new philosophies, created the proper climate in which to conduct experiments in higher

learning. As previously discussed, the community's overarching purpose was to act as a

respondent, or counterbalance, to the excesses of a sinful world.[104] Slavery, hyper-

consumerism, alcoholism, and secret societies such as the Freemasons, threatened the

institution of republican democracy and the very soul of American spirituality.[105] While

the founding of Oberlin was an attempt to combat such elements, remaining generally

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[101] William C. Cochran, *The Western Reserve and the Fugitive Slave Law.* (Cleveland, OH: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1920), 78.

[102] Kenneth V. Lottich, *New England Transplanted: A Study of the Development of Educational and Other Cultural Agencies in the Connecticut Western Reserve in their National and Philosophical Setting.* (Dallas: Royal Publishing Company, 1964), 11.

[103] Ibid., 13

[104] Historian Chris Padgett called this radical social reform mentality *Comeouterism,* a reference to the Book of Revelations. See "Comeouterism and Antislavery Violence in Ohio's Western Reserve" in John R. McKivigan, and Stanley Harrold, *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America.* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 193-209.

[105] The Covenant of Oberlin Colony, 1833

isolated from the outside world was not a potent enough strategy for administering social reform. Only through training in the arts, sciences, and labor could Oberlin's leaders hope to facilitate change in the American landscape.

Building on the foundation of their Puritan forebears, particularly the Rev. Joseph Glanvill and contemporaries such as pedagogue Horace Mann, the Oberlin Institute epitomized the critical belief that education was universal.[106] For Glanvill and Mann, although both men were from different periods, education was the ultimate weapon to advance Christianity and save souls. Equally important, however, was the understanding that personal enlightenment acted as a mechanism to break superstitious and dogmatic thinking while promoting unity. As observed in *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, Glanvill's seminal argument in defense of pedagogy and freedom of thought:

> 'Tis education is our Plastick: we are baptized into our opinions by our juvenile nature, and our growing years confirm those unexamined principles. For our first task is to learn the creed of our country: and our next [is] to maintain it.[107]

Glanvill believed that scholarship should not be censored and stifled in the name of religion. Such a guise would only hinder the church's ability to spread the Gospel in addition to cultivating the scientific and philosophical growth of humanity. Academic growth, especially growth related to spirituality, required overcoming inherited prejudices.

Historian Ralph Barton Perry has found much agreement in Glanvill's view of education and its impact on Protestant America. In *Puritan Democracy*, he identifies the

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[106] Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680) was an English clergyman, philosopher, and essayist. Horace Mann (1796-1859) was an American politician, educator, and founder of Antioch College (1852) in Yellow Springs, Ohio.
[107] Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*, 1661.

important connective tissues between pedagogy and theology. "Religion and education" writes Perry, were "one in the same."[108] It is impossible to separate these two elements and any attempt to do so would bring destruction to the practicing society. Perry highlights the importance of education as a way of maintaining the personal relationship between congregates and God, as well as understanding their legal and spiritual rights in both the secular and ecclesiastical governing system.[109]

New England Transcendentalist and Unitarian minister William E. Channing complements Glanvill, but extends his ideas to include social uplift. In *The Perfect Life*, a posthumously published collection of sermons and essays, Channing argues that Christianity has "one great purpose" to society, which is the "elevation of men above imperfections" to the state of "a divine being."[110] This notion was in agreement with Oberlin founder John J. Shipherd who, in his vision of the Oberlin Collegiate Institute, viewed the steady progression of society as an act of holiness:

> "knowledge is power." And permit me here to request that you enter early upon the system of colonial education, which I recommended last spring, and which the brethren then on the ground resolved to adopt. Reflection and conversation with intelligent persons have confirmed my opinion that the system proposed is one peculiarly worthy of Christ's disciples, not only on account of its intellectual but its moral bearing also.[111]

This comingling of religion and education ensured that social reform would be a point of prominence in the West. Unlike its eastern counterparts, which sporadically established institutions of higher learning, the West, under the keen eye of New England

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[108] Ralph Barton Perry, *Puritanism and Democracy*. (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1944), 192.
[109] Ibid.
[110] William Ellery Channing, *The Perfect Life, in Twelve Discourses* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1873), 245.
[111] John J. Shipherd, "Pastoral Letter," New York, 1835.

evangelicals, would hold numerous educational facilities by design in order to reaffirm America's religious destiny and to protect it from outside forces.

In Protestant America education not only extended God's will, but circumvented the increasing presence of the Roman Catholic Church. The early years of the Second Great Awakening saw the rise of Catholic dioceses in prominent New England communities, including Boston and New Haven. This caused great alarm among the Puritan elite. Churchmen, particularly Lyman Beecher in his sermon *A Plea for the West*, advocated religious revival and education to ensure that Protestants maintained control of western lands. For Beecher, protecting the West from the autocratic Roman Catholic Church was part of America's higher calling.[112] In his sermon, *A Plea for Colleges*, Beecher reiterated his beliefs and argued that "no means can so certainly meet and repel this invasion of Catholic Europe as a competent evangelical ministry and revival in religion."[113] In order to sustain the revival and preserve the West, institutions had to be erected in order to provide sufficient training in democratic principles and theology.[114]

Between 1799 and 1845, numerous institutions were established in western states and territories that maintained the Protestant, particularly Calvinist, belief system.[115] These institutions – Illinois College, Knox College, Lane Theological Seminary, Marietta College, Oberlin College, and Wabash College – were part of this growing movement

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[112] Lyman Beecher, *The Autobiography of Lyman Beecher: In Two Volumes*. Barbara M. Cross, editor. (Cambridge, MA, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 252.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Theological denominations that utilized election, representation, and open interpretation in their practices. This is contrary to the Roman Catholic Church whose top-down hierarchy was viewed as anything but democratic.
[115] James Fraser, *Pedagogue for God's Kingdom: Lyman Beecher and the Second Great Awakening*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985), 152-153.

toward civilizing the West, and protecting it from European despotism. Within the

ecclesiastical framework of his religious office, Beecher helped to form the Society for

the Promotion of Collegiate and Theological Education in order to maintain financial

stability among all member institutions.[116] Colleges that were successful would receive

less support, while those weaker would receive more.[117] Such complex networks, in the

eyes of Beecher, were vital to not only the institutions but to the republic as a whole. He

noted that the fate of the West rested on the ability of these institutions to disseminate

democratic ideals and goodness:

> Woe to the republic when our colleges—those orbs of intellectual day, shall fail to
> command respect, and by the formation of mind and morals, to disseminate
> knowledge and holiness through the land.[118]

Since its establishment in 1833, the Oberlin Collegiate Institute matured quickly into a

dual manual labor and traditional academic institution. Similar to its regional rival,

Western Reserve College in nearby Hudson, Ohio, Oberlin continued in the tradition of

long established schools in New England such as Dartmouth and Middlebury colleges.[119]

Although they shared a kinship, the ultimate strategy between the schools differed in the

nature of their approach to egalitarianism and revivalism. In addition to contrasting

philosophical and religious characteristics, the political nature of Western Reserve

College created certain inhibitions that limited its ability to influence reform. In other

words, the restrictions in what Western Reserve College would and would not allow

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[116] Lyman Beecher was suspicious of Oberlin doctrines and thus did not include them as a member
institution. See chapter I.

[117] James Fraser, *Pedagogue for God's Kingdom*, 154

[118] Lyman Beecher, 252

[119] Western Reserve College would move to Cleveland in 1882 and in 1967 merge with the Case Institute
of Technology to form Case Western University.

affected the school's ability to institute *progressive* reforms such as women's equality and racial integration. The ideological disagreements between the two institutions would inevitably produce a polar system on the Reserve – one where two versions of New England pedagogy would compete for overall dominance.

Western Reserve College was founded in 1826 in Hudson, Ohio, in then Portage County.[120] It was the successor of the Burton and Tallmadge schools, located in the nearby villages Burton and Tallmadge. Established in 1821, the two schools' mission was to bring "quality education to the region."[121] When they ceased operations after a few years, they were replaced by Western Reserve College which continued in the same vein as its predecessors, emphasizing such enlightened tutelage as "writing, math, speech, logic, philosophy, classics, [and] letters," among sundry other disciplines.[122] With rigorous academic standards that focused primarily on classical education exclusively for young men, the school attracted students from New England and formed a respectable student body.[123] Gaining financial stability, the college emerged as one of the pre-eminent institution of higher learning west of the Appalachian Mountains.[124]

By contrast, the Oberlin Collegiate Institute was established simultaneously with the Oberlin community in 1833 in Russia Township, Lorain County.[125] Although there were preparatory schools in the region, along with the collegiate offerings at Western Reserve

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[120] Hudson is now part of Summit County. In 1840, portions of Portage, and Stark counties were partitioned to create Summit County.

[121] William Sloan Kennedy, *The Plan of Union: or a History of the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches of the Western Reserve; with Biographical Sketches of the Early Missionaries.* (Hudson, Ohio: Pentagon Steam Press, 1856), 236.

[122] Ibid.

[123] The Case Western University Archives. Western Reserve College would not admit women until 1872.

[124] The Hudson community, including Daivd Hudson, pledged 7,000 dollars for the construction and operation of the institution.

[125] In period maps, this section of Lorain County is referred to as "The Firelands."

College, the Oberlin founders were compelled to erect a school that encapsulated their particular ideals. As previous discussed, partly for reasons of philosophy and partly due to an agreement between the Rev. John J. Shipherd and the Connecticut Land Company, the school was required to cater to the intellectual growth of students, as well as serve a practical role in providing teachers and missionaries to the West.[126] Shipherd and his associate, the Rev. Philo P. Stewart, philosophically agreed with the parameters of this compact, but insisted that the student body represent the vanguard of Oberlinism – universal agency.[127] Thus, women as well as men were admitted to the institution in a coeducational system.[128]

Coeducation was an initial defining quality between Oberlin and Western Reserve College. While the mission of Western Reserve College was to provide universal education, that term applied to men of differing classes and not to the opposite sex. The contrasting characteristic is unusual given that at face value the institutions stemmed from the same cultural spring – New England Puritanism. Yet when examined closely, the unique structure of each school and the surrounding community reveals a divergence in ideological beliefs rooted in their ecclesiastical support system. The relationship between their mutual religious governing bodies and the academic hierarchy directly influenced the degree of enlightened reform permitted on campus.

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[126] Prospectus for the Oberlin Collegiate Institute (1833). The Connecticut Land Company was a corporation of wealthy New England investors who bought land originally claimed by Connecticut for westward expansion. These men were responsible for surveying the boundaries, dividing lots, and establishing many of the existing communities. Moses Cleavland, Caleb Atwater, and Aaron Olmstead are some of the notable investors.

[127] The Covenant of Oberlin Colony, 1833.

[128] Men and women were equally enrolled in the manual labor school, and both sexes could take liberal arts courses in an integrated setting. Women earned collegiate degrees, but not a traditional college degree. Oberlin did not admit women into its traditional baccalaureate program until 1837.

Twenty-five years prior to the founding of Western Reserve College, in the early

phase of the Second Great Awakening, the two major factions of Calvinism proposed and

agreed upon a plan of interfaith cooperation. The agreement, which became the Plan of

Union of 1801, called for the sharing of resources and ministers in order to "combat sin,

save souls, and represent the interests of God's Kingdom."[129] Since the two

denominations shared ecclesiastical beliefs, such a union was logical and ensured that

Calvinism would be the dominant religious power in the Valley of the Mississippi.[130]

While the agreement allowed congregants to choose their preferred denomination –

Congregationalism or Presbyterianism – the churches, regardless of the denomination,

were enrolled in representative based Presbyterian governing structure.[131] Rather than

allow the Congregational churches to maintain autonomy in loose, purely democratic

associations, as they had in New England, they were joined with local presbyteries, which

in turn were connected to larger synods, which in turn reported to the General Assembly

in Richmond, VA. Although allowed to function as a Congregationalist body, this loss of

autonomy acted as a source of tension as the social reform movement grew more

progressive.

Even though the plan was initially successful in forming new congregations and

aiding existing ones, there was mutual distrust among both factions. Ralph Barton Perry

notes that Congregationalists believed strongly in their ability to form voluntary

associations, and that these were "considered to be the best way to feel the direct

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[129] Kennedy, *The Plan of Union,* 197
[130] Refers to all land west of the Appalachian Mountains
[131] Ibid. 158

presence of God."[132] In addition, the political nature of Congregationalism favored a

purer form of democracy in contrast to the republicanism that aided in the governance of

the Presbyterian system. Congregationalists, who tended to be from New England,

disapproved of the republican system due to their belief that all parishioners "were

equally privileged" and not favored more or less by Providence.[133] Slowly, popular

opinion, particularly in the Western Reserve where the majority of its settlers were

culturally New Englanders, turned toward the idea of establishing a church system rooted

in pure Congregationalism.[134]

Presbyterians likewise held misgivings about uniting with Congregationalists and

allowing them to influence the church hierarchy. Presbyterians, who were generally

more conservative in their approach to social reform, feared that their more progressive

brethren would influence like-minded Presbyterians to enact policies that would fracture

the church.[135] Ecclesiastical disagreements, such as Oberlin Perfectionism[136], were

sources of tension since such doctrines were a slippery slope toward reconciling the most

sensitive issue in the church, slavery. Given the Presbyterian's wide geographical range

of parishioners, namely in lower New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and throughout the

South, the church was forced to walk a tightrope in order to keep peace over the issue of

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[132] Perry, 107
[133] Ibid.
[134] Kennedy, *The Plan of Union,* 188
[135] At this time the Calvinist denominations had progressive and conservative members – New School and Old School. While the Presbyterian Church was much more conservative, their existed a small number of New School members, predominantly from New England and Upstate New York, who shared an ideological kinship with New England Congregationalists. Charles Grandison Finney was one such churchman, and to a certain extent, Lyman Beecher.
[136] See chapter I.

slavery and integration.[137] The union with Congregationalists only exacerbated this issue

among others. In the eyes of Presbyterians, this gave Congregationalists an unfair

cultural advantage in the West. As observed by Presbyterian minister Thomas Barr:

> The compromise was indeed mainly at the expense of Presbyterianism; but not
> then so well seen as since. The Reserve was mainly settled by New Englanders.
> These, so far as they were professors of religion, were generally
> Congregationalists … The truth is that at the time of constituting the Grand River
> Presbytery, I do not recollect a single church within its limits, that was truly
> Presbyterian and so governed … The ministers within the limits were all
> Congregationalist by education, habit, and choice.[138]

For Presbyterians like Barr the union was on paper only and did not benefit the greater

Presbyterian Church.

Returning to education, the differing governing principles that permeated throughout

each institution guided them down mutually different paths. Western Reserve College,

though founded by David Hudson, himself a Congregationalist with utopian ideals, was

established as a Presbyterian institution in order to take advantage of the Plan of

Union.[139] In contrast, Oberlin College was founded by Congregationalists and New

School Presbyterians who, though members of the Plan of Union, did not require its

support in order to function.[140] Thus Western Reserve College was obligated, for reasons

of finance and tradition, to abide by a strict code as to what it would permit in its

classrooms. As Oberlin was for the most part self-sufficient, it was able to seek

additional support from outside sources such as Lewis and Arthur Tappan, who found

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[137] There were also Presbyterian communities in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Upstate New York, but the greatest concentration was found outside of New England.
[138] Thomas Barr. Kennedy, *The Plan of Union,* 162-163
[139] David Hudson. *Visions of the Western Reserve: Public and Private Documents of Northeastern, Ohio, 1750-1860*, ed. Robert Wheeler (Columbus, OH. Ohio State University Press, 2000), 58.
[140] Kennedy, *The Plan of Union*, 204

value in Oberlin ideology. This was by no means a small aspect as it directly affected the social reform movement, shifting the foundation on the Reserve from east to west.[141]

Coeducation was merely the beginning of a wide range of policies that separated the intended brotherhood of the colleges. Before the end of the 1830s, there were even stronger pedagogical philosophies that invited more differences than similarities. Indeed, the growing divergences eventually lead to the abrogation of the Western Reserve synod by the Presbyterian Church, and the creation of a Congregationalist Association in which Oberlin became the central power. Some of these were greatly controversial such as equality of the sexes in education, integration of the races in the classroom, and complete freedom of speech, while others were benign but emphasized the communal differences between Hudson and Oberlin. An example of one such pedagogical technique was Oberlin's commitment to manual labor as a necessary companion to traditional academics.

Capitalizing on the growing manual labor movement among Protestant revivalists, Oberlin employed a dual academic system in order to strengthen body and mind. In the words of John J. Shipherd, the use of this type of educational system was practical for the improvement of "*body* and *heart* as well as the *intellect*; for it aims at the best education of the *whole*" and not merely a single aspect of the student.[142] This ideology reflected the overall aims of the manual labor movement. Horace Mann, father of American pedagogy, subscribed to such a belief. In *Thoughts Selected from the Writings of Horace*

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[141] Geographically speaking, Western Reserve College was located near the eastern terminus of the Western Reserve, while Oberlin College was located near the western terminus.
[142] Prospectus for the Oberlin Collegiate Institute (1833)

Mann, he voices his philosophical position to manual labor and traditional academic scholarship:

> Soundness of health is preliminary to the *highest* success in any pursuit. In every industrial avocation it is an indispensable element, and the highest intellectual eminence can never be reached without it. It exerts a powerful influence over feelings, temper, and disposition, through these upon moral character.[143]

In lock step with this practice was the practical aspect of self-sustainment and financial stability through the manual labor experience. Oberlin College was not merely an institution of higher learning, but more importantly, a communal experience for advancing a certain set of principles.[144] Antithetically, Western Reserve College, having been founded outside of the manual labor movement, remained squarely focused on classical academics rather than combining them to create a hybrid system.[145] The resulting side effect was that the institution remained predominantly male, as there was no precedent for universal education of the whole, and thus the school approached issues from a male-centric perspective. With regards to progressive reforms, particularly equality, this placed the school at a considerable disadvantage to Oberlin College.

In 1835, after a year of heated debate, Oberlin College voted to admit non-white students in equal capacity, thus becoming the first institution in the nation to do so. Specifically, the institute voted not simply to admit students of color, but to admit students "irrespective of color," an important distinction in that it removed race from the rhetoric of its pedagogical administrative system.[146] The maneuver by Oberlin founder

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[143] Horace Mann, *Thoughts Selected from the Writings of Horace Mann*. (Boston: H.B. Fuller, 1867), 5.
[144] Prospectus for the Oberlin Collegiate Institute (1833)
[145] Barbara Brown Zikmund, "The Legacy of this Place: Oberlin, Ohio." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, no. 4 (2007): 499.
[146] Minutes 1:26, 28, and 35, Records of the Board of Trustees, Oberlin College Archives.

John J. Shipherd and likeminded evangelists had a multipronged effect on education in the Western Reserve. First, it brought radical New School Presbyterians Charles Grandison Finney, Asa Mahan, and John Morgan to the institute which bolstered the notoriety of its faculty. Secondly, it redefined the nature of race in society, particularly in regards to racial uplift. Lastly, the permanent ban on speech codes, a condition of the vote, depoliticized how social issues were addressed, debated, and promoted by the school.

Since 1834, the Oberlin Collegiate Institute had been in a struggle to reconcile its philosophical beliefs with the practice of admitting all students to its ranks, but not solely whites. In December of that year, the student body submitted an official petition that illustrated its position on the matter. Although the body was nearly split, a majority of the students did not support integration of the races.[147] This initial report by the students was disconcerting to Shipherd as he had hoped to strengthen the school financially and morally by establishing a colorblind admissions policy.[148] The emerging struggle was a localized version of a larger one sweeping the nation – integration vs. colonization.

The general makeup of students and colonists[149] in the Oberlin community were white egalitarians who labored as farmers and artisans. And there was a growing black population, including fugitive slaves, who sought sanctuary in the community. They had signed the Oberlin Compact to uphold Christian principles and combat sin through prayer

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[147] Students Certify Their Views to Admit Persons of Color, 1834. Oberlin, December 31st, 1834. OCA.
[148] James H. Fairchild. *Oberlin: The Colony and the College, 1833-1883.* (Oberlin, OH: E.J. Goodrich, 1883), 59
[149] As Oberlin was a colonial compact, the residents were referred to as colonists. This is unrelated to the term "Colonizationist" who opposed immediate abolition and integration.

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and lifestyle.[150] Although open to experimentation in diet, religious doctrine, and

coeducation, Oberlinians were divided regarding the status of blacks in their society and

the nation as a whole. While both students and colonists believed that slavery was

unchristian, and thus a mark against God, the belief that abolition and integration was the

path toward national salvation was contested. Opposition to abolition and integration

came from those who favored gradual emancipation and colonization, a long upheld

tradition in New England society that was slowly losing ground to the Garrisonian

abolitionist movement.

James H. Fairchild[151], colonist and professor, noted the division within the

community. Fairchild observed that before the arrival of the Lane Theological rebels[152] a

large contingent of Oberlinians "favored gradual emancipation and colonization" despite

the fact that founders, Shipherd and Stewart, "favored abolition and integration."[153]

Adding to the polarization was the fact that the Oberlin board of trustees was split on the

matter and was cautious to address an issue that might upset the stability of the

community.[154] The fear of division prompted the board to act conservatively and table

votes and debates in order to ascertain the impact of such decisions and hopefully quell

growing discontent. Believing that education was the key to social uplift, Shipherd,

Stewart, and their associates continued to push for admission irrespective of color.

In *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin,* Roland Baumann argues that Oberlinians

who opposed the radical measure were primarily fearful of the effects on sexuality and

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[150] The Covenant of Oberlin Colony, 1833
[151] Served as President of Oberlin College from 1866-1889.
[152] See Chapter I
[153] Fairchild. *Oberlin*, 62
[154] Ibid. 64

sexual contact between races. Baumann asserts that Oberlin colonists who feared

integration did so especially because of the close contact it would create "between black

men and white women."[155] The fear of miscegenation was a barrier that permeated

throughout both the North and South and would continue to be used as a legitimate legal

and philosophical argument until the U.S. Supreme Court ruling of Loving v. Virginia in

1967. Although such notions had not barred blacks from attending white schools, as in

the case of James Newton Templeton at the exclusively male Ohio University a decade

before, it interfered with allowing blacks to comingle with white women, threatening

universal education.[156] Despite its enlightened principles, these issues forced Oberlinians

to make a choice between their promoted lifestyle, and one not uncommon to those

communities the colonists had abandoned just a few years before.

   As previously discussed, Shipherd understood the conservative opposition and

employed a series of political and moral arguments to sue for internal reform. Under his

guidance a second petition was circulated, one that included students *as well as* colonists.

The petition supported the "the admissions of people of colour into the Institute" and a

plea for unity against "bitterness" and "division."[157] Shipherd not only sought support

from those in the community who held his views, but solicited assistance from those

students who earlier opposed the measure. With thirty-three signatures, the cautious

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[155] Roland Baumann, *Constructing Black Education in Oberlin: A Documentary History*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 22.

[156] James Newton Templeton was a black student at Ohio University from 1824 to 1828.

[157] Colonists Petition Trustees to Educate Colored Students, 1835. OCA.

Oberlin trustees after having tabled the discussion of black admission voted in favor of the measure.[158]

Although the board of trustees had previously postponed the vote in order to gather "more definite information on the subject" and determine whether or not the admissions policy would be out of line with the majority of schools in the United States, they waivered.[159] Recognizing that no such institutions existed "in our country an excitement in respect to our colored population," the trustees understood that non-white education could not be abandoned as it would alienate their local black population as well as the non-white population across the North.[160] The trustees approved the measure on the basis that "the education of people of color is a matter of great interest and should be encouraged & sustained in this Institution," thus ensuring that social uplift of minorities, including women as well as men, would be carried out equally for the betterment of society.[161]

Returning to Lyman Beecher and Joseph Glanvill, they advocated universal education and freedom of thought as well as social uplift. Shipherd's Oberlin experiment had achieved an impressive victory. Unlike the former men who argued outside of race, or in a manner in which race was implied to be white, Shipherd directly addressed sex and race and included them in the same social and educational sphere as white men. He recognized that blacks and women, like their white male counterparts, were indeed equal

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[158] Trustees by One Vote Accept Students "Irrespective of Color," 1835. OCA.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

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brothers in Christ.[162] In keeping with the overall vision of ministers such as Beecher and Finney, black graduates were an additional force to combat sin and European despotism through social reform.[163] In addition to race and sex, Shipherd recognized that the agreement to admit black student would bring Charles Finney and the Lane Rebels to Oberlin, bolstering the school's ability to conquer the West, and maintain the ideals of Glanvill. As one of the main conditions of the agreement included unrestricted free speech, Glanvill's belief in freedom of thought was upheld and academic inquiry protected.

Initiatives and reforms on such a large and rapid scale were not the case at Western Reserve College. Although the institution would admit its first black student, John Sykes Fayette in 1836, one year after the Oberlin vote, it was a slow process to implement. Regarding sex, as the school had remained a traditional educational institution; it had barred the entrance of women into the formal degree program until 1872 when it had re-established itself in Cleveland. The fight for equality of education in this period was one that encompassed two realms, the first was admitting black students and the second was allowing for unrestricted free speech among the student body to discuss such matters of equality. The ensuring fight pitted youthful and idealistic faculty members and students against older, conservative trustees. This, much like what had occurred in Oberlin, was a fight between integration and colonization.

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[162] Fairchild. *Oberlin*, 59
[163] Ibid.

In 1831, William Lloyd Garrison, the rabid New England abolitionist and editor of the *Liberator*, was arrested at a rally in Baltimore for blasting colonization.[164] The arrest sparked an intellectual debate over the nature of emancipation and the methods that should be used to bring about the end of slavery. While students were more or less ambivalent, leaning toward colonization but open to discussing abolition, the faculty and trustees formed the crux of two polarizing forces. On one end of the spectrum were the young, idyllic, evangelically motivated professors Elizur Wright Jr., Beriah Green, and Charles B. Storrs, all of whom believed that colonization was fundamentally in conflict with their "social responsibilities and the obligation[s]."[165] The three men argued that in order to spread social reform the school must educate its students to be abolitionists, and implement a colorblind admissions policy for all young men wishing to enter the institute.[166] Adopting these measures would create a sense of tolerance among students, making the social reform movement one that excluded racial divisions.

These strong ideals mirrored those that had been advocated in Oberlin in 1835, and likewise did not go unopposed. Permeating throughout the Hudson community and the college's board of trustees was a strong vanguard in favor of colonization. Unlike at Oberlin, where the vast majority of colonizationists were mainly entrenched in the board of trustees, the Hudson community had greater numbers that included trustees and non-student community members.[167] Key opponents to abolition and integration included

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[164] William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization* (Boston, 1832).

[165] Charles B. Storrs, *An Address, Delivered at Western Reserve College, Hudson, Ohio*, Feb. 9, 1831. (Boston, 1831), 6.

[166] American Anti-Slavery Society, First Annual Report (New York, 1834), 42.

[167] Lawrence B. Goodheart, "The Controversy at Western Reserve College, 1832-1833." *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Winter, 1982), 425.

Hudson founder David Hudson, Rev. Harvey Coe, and Rev. Caleb Pitkin. According to historian Lawrence B. Goodheart, the three were "practical men [who] wished to keep evangelical enthusiasm within what they considered reasonable bounds to avoid public controversy."[168] Though interested in promoting New England Christian virtues, they chose to preserve the integrity of the school by downplaying what they considered radical, revolutionary, and unnecessary reforms.[169]

The controversy at Western Reserve College surrounded a series of articles published by Wright in the college-operated *Hudson Observer and Telegraph* newspaper, as well as sermons delivered by Green to students in the college chapel. Both men argued that colonizationists were the unwitting accomplices of slaveholders, charging that they had committed "elementary errors" in believing that blacks should be removed from white society and barred from attending the college.[170] Wright further argued that the school failed to uphold its democratic Christian beliefs by not opening "their doors to all, without distinction of complexion, [to] educate a number of talented men of color" in order to prove that social uplift was possible in the black race.[171] Wright and Green subscribed to the beliefs of Glanvill and Channing that education was a tool to promote values and virtues for all, and should not be exclusively reserved for those of a certain race. Both men demanded that the school integrate and promote Garrisonian abolition, thus abandoning its colonizationist past.

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[168] Ibid. 426
[169] Ibid.
[170] Beriah Green, *Four Sermons Preached in the Chapel of the Western Reserve College, On the Lord's Days, November 18th and 25th, and December 2nd and 9th, 1832*. (Cleveland: Printed at the Office of the Herald, 1833), 1.
[171] American Anti-Slavery Society, First Annual Report (New York, 1834), 42.

The conservative vanguard on the board of trustees and in the community resisted and

did what they could to quell the internal rebellion. Although a healthy debate between

Wright and colonizationist Oliver Clark had transpired with little interference from the

school administrators, in the waning days of 1832, this would change. In December,

Warren Isham, editor of the *Observer and Telegraph*, closed down columns related to the

abolition and colonization debate.[172] Though Isham, a colonizationist, had been willing

to print material on behalf of the abolitionists' cause, Wright believed that he was being

censored by the colonizationist vanguard.[173] While Green and his growing student

supporters were still able to speak publically on the matter, the increased censorship

circumvented their influence in Northeast Ohio, and in the progressive social reform

movement as a whole. According to historian Chris Padgett, quoting Elizur Wright, the

trustees' actions in silencing the debate did little to stop the abolitionist revolution in the

Western Reserve, but it did shift the center of the social reform movement to Oberlin

College.[174]

The censorship ran contrary to the worldviews of Glanvill, and later Shipherd and Asa

Mahan. Such tactics stifled religious and academic growth and threatened God's

Kingdom with political discord and tyranny. Education, after all, was the keystone to

Protestantism, and thus was an important component in ensuring the spread of republican

democracy. Western Reserve College's tactic to maintain safe stability had a two-

pronged effect on the social reform movement, especially where education was

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[172] Goodheart, 425
[173] The Liberator, Jan. 5, 1833.
[174] Chris Padgett. John R. McKivigan, and Stanley Harrold. *Anti-slavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America.* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 262.

concerned. As noted by Chris Padgett, the central hub of social reform activity in the Western Reserve, and indeed one of the important hubs in the North, moved from Hudson to Oberlin where speech codes did not restrict debate and universal education, was the rule.

In addition, the rebellion at Western Reserve College, along with the similar event at Lane Theological Seminary discussed previously, shattered the tenuous Plan of Union. This action pushed New School Presbyterians and Congregationalists further from their conservative and cautious brethren. Although Western Reserve College would adopt similar reforms as Oberlin, it would take several years to regain the influence it had once held in the Western Reserve. The recovery was slow, and though successful, the college never again commanded the same presence in the movement as it had prior to 1833.

Education was the powerful tool of social reformers in the Western Reserve. Indeed, in the realm of American Protestantism, it was the preferred weapon to combat sin and circumvent European Roman Catholicism and despotism. Yet, as the reform movement grew progressive on the Western Reserve, the institutions that promoted holiness and Christian principles needed to undertake internal revolutions themselves. Pedagogical philosophies relating to the education of women and minorities required attention in order to adhere to the important Puritan belief that religion and education were one in the same. These were notions that in the East had long been ignored and replaced with traditional establishment elitism, but in the vast, dynamic West were employed in order to establish a dominantly Puritan world free from the excesses of the East.

Oberlin's philosophical beliefs extended the social reform movement in a way not previously considered feasible. Whereas at Western Reserve College opponents believed integration was inappropriate, dangerous, and non-effective, and that blacks could not attain the same level of academic prowess as their white counterparts, Oberlin conservatives feared only miscegenation; a concern that did not permeate for long.[175] The push by Oberlin evangelicals to educate universally, and in the coeducation style, fit with the growing consensus that salvation and social uplift could be achieved through enlightened tutelage. These beliefs allowed Oberlin, as opposed to Hudson, to form a cosmopolitan society in which a growing black population could receive the same level of education as white men or women from Boston. Thus, the social reform movement in Oberlin liberated itself from white, male-centric views on reform and approached social issues from a multicultural and egalitarian perspective.

Although Western Reserve College would slowly begin to admit black males in 1836, it lagged behind the blind enrollment policies of its western counterpart. In addition, Western Reserve College did not allow women to attend in any capacity until the early 1870s. The hesitation to embrace Oberlin's policies proved to be detrimental to the Hudson community where the latter continued to address social and moral issues from a predominantly white male-centric point of view. Thus, egalitarianism did not manifest in Hudson with the same intensity as in Oberlin. In the coming decade as tensions mounted between northern unionists and southern secessionists, Hudson remained relatively

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[175] *Observer and Telegraph*, Feb. 7, 1833.

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unnoticed as an important innovator in the social reform struggle, especially where race was concerned.

Pedagogical philosophies at Oberlin demonstrated the relationship between enlightenment and social reform. The Puritan notions of fighting sin and uplifting society through democratic egalitarianism were all products of the New England belief system. However, unlike in the East where traditional institutions were controlled by the Old School Calvinist movement, and in some parts of the West where this same element attempted to assert control through the Plan of Union, Oberlin had avoided usurpation and endeavored to adhere to a higher principle. By integrating manual labor with classical education, the founders hoped to train the body as well as the mind in order to better the spirit. Manual labor was the gateway for women to take their place in the traditional classroom alongside men, earning degrees to act as soldiers in this reform crusade. Lastly, by ignoring race, Oberlin challenged their evangelical compatriots to uplift society as a whole, rather than those of European decent. Near the close of the 1850s, the fruits of Shipherd's grand experiment in education and social reform would take center stage as the country pushed toward civil war.

CHAPTER III

COSMOPOLITANISM AND UNITY

BLACK CITIZENSHIP

"I am well, both in body and in mind. ... All three of my
poor comrades who are to ascend the same scaffold –
a scaffold already made sacred to the cause of freedom,
by the death of that great champion of human freedom,
Capt. John Brown – are prepared to meet our God."
                    – John A. Copeland, 1859.

As the 1850s came to a close, a resolution to one of the great social reform questions in America was at hand: what was to be the future of slavery? Although the issue had long evoked a multitude of feelings ranging from shame to unabashed pride depending on the role it played in a person's life, the decade featured a drastic escalation in the struggle between slave power and emancipationists. To be sure, the period was marked by political intrigue, judicial activism, partisan warfare, dramatic standoffs, and lastly, a failed slave insurrection. Opponents drew their battle lines, polarizing the political arena and forcing neutral parties to take sides in the affair. Of the growing discord, Kansas Governor Charles Robinson quipped that "either Carthage must conquer Rome, or Rome will subdue Carthage," conjuring images of Matthew 12:25[176], later famously referenced by Abraham Lincoln in 1858.[177] Understanding that freedom and slavery, like Robinson's ancient kingdoms of antiquity, could not coexist, reformers stood fast to administer justice by any means in order to destroy slavery once and for all.

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[176] Matthew 12:25, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand."
[177] The *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, July 4, 1857. Governor Charles Robinson was the first governor of Kansas, and an abolitionist jayhawk who opposed the pro-slavery border ruffians.

On a warm September day in 1858, the unsettling monotony of rural life was shattered. Just before noon, two Oberlin College students[178] hastily made their way to the center of town searching for the village elders. The young men, intensely anxious and flustered, reported to the people that one of their own, a young black man, had been taken by gunpoint just outside the town limits, and that the men responsible were making their way nine miles south toward Wellington, Ohio.[179] While all of the facts were not yet known, the people understood that the kidnappers were duly appointed executors of federal law and that the young man taken against his will was the latest victim of the infamous Fugitive Slave Law.[180] With all deliberate speed, citizens armed themselves and commandeered carriages and wagons, with the intent of intercepting the kidnappers and demanding the release of their captive.[181] After a heated standoff that lasted nearly four hours, the mob forcibly removed the young man from the custody of officers and returned to Oberlin, triumphant in their defiance.[182]

Although a center of holiness and goodwill, the seeds for this transgression were sown from the village's earliest days. For nearly two decades the community offered opportunity for those who were not traditionally considered the barristers of power and authority, blacks and women. Egalitarian principles fostered mutual tolerance and respect for human dignity and social uplift. Empowerment was the key to Oberlin's radicalization. Settlers were given citizenship and all of the powers and rights associated

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[178] One of the students, Ansel Lyman, served under John Brown at Bleeding Kansas in 1854.

[179] Jacob R. Shipherd, *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue*. (Boston: J.P. Jewett and Company, 1859), 24.

[180] The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law

[181] Ibid.

[182] This event is popularly known as the Oberlin Rescue, or Oberlin-Wellington Rescue.

with the privilege. Thus, all people connected with this experiment were granted a voice, education, and the ability and encouragement to craft a vision of a better tomorrow in which sin was suppressed and America's sacred principles were open to all. In order to form a more perfect society under Providence, Oberlin transformed itself from a rural college town to a cosmopolitan stronghold for mingling intellectuals and ideas.

The role of women in this cosmopolitan society was elevated beyond the norms of traditional communities. Much like their Quaker peers, women in Oberlin found opportunities to participate in social reform activities and take important leadership positions in programs and associations. Mary S. Sheldon in "Our Duty to the Oppressed" presented to the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society, argued for racial equality, while also highlighting women's important role in social reform as political players in the community. Of women's role, Sheldon declared:

> All that has been said is not only feasible, but important for us to perform, and the more so, that there are those about us daily, whom we can benefit by some of these methods, and thus, with the divine blessing, shall we be chosen instruments in the work of the redemption of our country.[183]

Sheldon, as noted by historian Roland Baumann, was one of many women who embraced Oberlin perfectionism in order to fight racism and reaffirm "the place and role of women in a community" where they "possessed agency."[184] Coeducation and opportunity for women stood as a remarkable contrast to most other societies where value was placed on the tradition of patriarchy for governance.[185] Such patriarch systems promoted male-centrism, upholding social elitism and conservative notions of gender

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[183] Mary Sheldon, "Our Duty to the Oppressed." May 28, 1850. OCA.
[184] Roland Baumann, *Constructing Black Education in Oberlin: A Documentary History*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010), 45.
[185] Baumann, *Constructing Black Education in Oberlin*, 44

roles and racial separation. Adopting multi-gender views precluded white male-centrism and ensured the promotion of a cosmic worldview.

Women were but a single part of this evolution. While there were not many communities in which women commanded a voice, there existed a precedent. Quaker, Shaker, and smaller utopian societies, religious and secular, had a history of allowing women to control agency, have choice, and command a presence in the public sphere.[186] Though this may be true for women, this was not the case for blacks, many of whom were either slaves or freedmen who existed on the periphery of society.[187] The strong footing provided by the Oberlin movement gave blacks a sense empowerment and entitlement to the rights and privileges of citizenship and equality under the law in the eyes of God. This sense was not so much abstract, that is to say purely academic in nature, but practical in that it was employed in the real world. As noted by historian Steven Lubet, while "Boston was the intellectual center of antislavery theory, Oberlin was … the heartland of abolitionist practice."[188] These concepts would inevitably spread as the black community grew in size and established a stronger voice in village affairs.

Integration was the unique quality that accentuated the society and fostered its cosmopolitan identity.[189] Steven Lubet notes that, for its time, Oberlin was the "most

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[186] The Society of Separatists of Zoar in Zoar, Ohio, was another such community that gave equality to women. For more information, see Catherine M. Rokicky's, *Creating a Perfect World: Religious and Secular Utopias in Nineteenth-Century Ohio*. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2002).

[187] There existed wealthy and prominent black communities within the city of Philadelphia. Yet despite the respect these inhabitants garnered from their white neighbors, they were denied citizenship because of their color. This is an important distinction.

[188] Steven Lubet, *Fugitive Justice: Runaways, Rescuers, and Slavery on Trial*. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 227.

[189] Integration in this sense is not merely referring to cohabitation, but shared aspects of all facets of everyday life. In larger cities, such as Philadelphia, Boston, and Cleveland, blacks there were aspects of integration, but not of the same quality.

fully integrated community in the United States."[190] Blacks, white men, and women,

went to the same church, lived on the same streets, patronized the same shops, and took

part in all facets of civic discourse. John Mercer Langston, a black attorney and

antislavery activist, on his first encounter in Oberlin, observed that "blacks sat in all seats

of the church, were welcomed guests at all homes and businesses" and overall, "the

treatment accorded [to] colored people" was "remarkable."[191] Langston, along with elder

brothers Charles and Gideon, commanded respect and leadership positions in the

community, with the former becoming one of the first black elected officials in the

state.[192] These impressions and experiences were a contrast to the younger Langston's

encounters with discrimination in Chillicothe, Ohio, where he had first practiced law.[193]

In 1841, black students[194] organized a petition in which they affirmed the positive

impact of the community on their moral, intellectual, and social well-being. The students

applauded the college and its national and international supporters for "elevating [their]

people from [a] state of degradation" to the level of their white peers.[195] Furthermore,

and most importantly, was the students' appreciation that the Oberlin movement

emphasized character and merit over race and lineage. The advantages afforded to

residents reflected the intrinsic qualities of the Declaration of Independence, the universal

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[190] Steven Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 230

[191] John Mercer Langston*, From the Virginia Plantation to the National Capitol, or, The First and Only Negro Representative in Congress from the Old Dominion*. (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1894), 102.

[192] In 1857 Langston was elected to Oberlin city council, and in 1860 was elected to this Oberlin school board. After the Civil War, Langston was the first black Representative elected in the State of Virginia.

[193] John Mercer Langston, 168

[194] One of the three chairs on the petitioning committee was Charles Henry Langston, leader of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescuers.

[195] Three Colored Students Attest to Oberlin's Commitment to Education and Social Uplift, 1841. OCA.

rights of all protected by divine Providence.[196] Indeed, by 1841, the defining qualities of

Oberlin's values were transposed on the sacred concept of Americanism; namely that all

were created equal, and "endowed … with certain unalienable Rights."[197]

Since Oberlinians derived all their notions of universalism and perfectionism from

scripture, administering justice was considered the duty of Higher Law. Chris Padgett, in

"Comeouterism and Antislavery Violence in Ohio's Western Reserve," discusses the

implications of invoking such an ideology, observing that in the Western Reserve, Higher

Law demanded strict obedience even when it was contrary to the "Civic Law of Man."[198]

The essence of Higher Law is critical. Once a society rejects civic laws in the name of

morality a vacuum is created in which a different set of codes, derived from regional

values, is enforced in its place. In other words, when a smaller society, such as Oberlin,

outright rejects national and state law, the void is filled by the local interpretation of right

and wrong. In the case of Oberlin, this was perfectionism or Higher Law. As with all

laws, civic or ecclesiastical, the abiding society naturally practices and defends them

zealously.

By the 1850s three federal mandates threatened the stability of cosmopolitanism and

Higher Law: the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), and lastly, the

decision of *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857). The Fugitive Slave Act and *Dred Scott* case

were particularly ominous to black residents, as the former extended federal powers to

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[196] John Mercer Langston, 151
[197] Declaration of Independence. July 4, 1776.
[198] Chris Padgett, "Comeouterism and Antislavery Violence in Ohio's Western Reserve" in *Anti-slavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America*, ed. John R. McKivigan, and Stanley Harrold (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 197.

officers and bounty hunters while the latter threatened personal liberty laws.[199] The

overarching implication of *Dred Scott* struck an alarming chord with the community,

especially among blacks who had the most to lose by the court's ruling. In the decision,

Chief Justice Roger Taney asserted that any "negro" or person of color "whose ancestors

were brought to this country and sold as slaves" was not recognized as a citizen of the

United States, regardless of their present status of servitude.[200] Taney further asserted

that:

> A State, by its laws passed since the adoption of the Constitution, may put a
> foreigner or any other description of persons upon a footing with its own citizens
> as to all the rights and privileges enjoyed by them within its dominion and by its
> laws. But that will not make him a citizen of the United States, nor entitle him to
> sue in its courts, nor to any of the privileges and immunities of a citizen in another
> State.[201]

In its ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court made it clear that those of African descent,

whether full blooded or of mixed heritage, were not citizens, could not be citizens, and all

state or local laws providing them with such privileges were not recognized by the federal

government.[202] The ramification for the court's decision was twofold. First, it

circumvented the rights of states to declare a person free within their borders if that

individual was held as a bondman. Secondly, it asserted that the very essence of what it

meant to be an American was ancestry and race, a notion contrary to the Declaration of

Independence where the rhetoric was colorblind. Thus, efforts to emancipate slaves and

offer all non-whites the privilege of citizenship were thwarted. Frederick Douglass, one

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[199] The United States Congress. "The Fugitive Slave Act." September 18, 1850. *Dred Scott v. Sandford.* 60
U.S. 393 (United States Supreme Court, March 6, 1857)
[200] *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 1857.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Mixed heritage includes Louisiana creoles, also known as *les gens de couleur*.

of the renowned abolitionist activists of this time and certainly the most prominent of

African descent, was candid in his response to the ruling, arguing that:

> The ballot box is desecrated, God's law set at nought, armed legislators stalk the halls of Congress, freedom of speech is beaten down in the Senate. The rivers and highways are infested by border ruffians, and white men are made to feel the iron heel of slavery. This ought to arouse us to kill off the hateful thing. They are solemn warnings to which the white people, as well as the black people, should take heed.[203]

Douglass understood the broad impact of the Taney's opinion, that its immediate effects

would only bolster the ability of slave catchers to retrieve "property" from northern states

and in the end encourage violent conflict to fester. Thus, the strength of the Fugitive

Slave Law greatly increased as northerners stood wary in the face of encroaching slave

power.

In Oberlin, where equality and agency reigned, hostilities between the village and the

outside world escalated in the wake of the decision. Suspicious of southern slave politics,

Oberlinians concluded that government policy was shifting toward nationalizing the

peculiar institution despite the longstanding line between the free North and slave

South.[204] Determined to stand as one in the face of opposition, the community vowed to

foster defiance against tactics that undermined Higher Law. This was not the first time

Oberlinians united to defy federal law. Prior to 1857, after the passage of the Fugitive

Slave Act, representatives of Oberlin, along with other communities in the Western

Reserve, affixed their names to a petition that declared the legislation unconstitutional, a

mark on the Declaration of Independence, and a "hostile [offense] to every principle of

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[203] Frederick Douglass, "Speech on the Dred Scott Decision." May, 1857.
[204] Steven Lubet, *Fugitive Justice*, 232

justice and humanity."[205] The assertive response in 1850 acts as a prelude to later and more aggressive tactics used at the decade's end.

In the early years, from the mid 1840s through 1854, the village practiced classical resistance favored by prominent abolitionists of the day such as William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Charles G. Finney, the Presbyterian minister and evangelist from New England, advocated these tactics as they were in keeping with the concept of goodwill, yet effective for aiding those in need.[206] He considered breaking unjust laws the duty of devout Christians, but while the laws of man were secondary, the law of God was to always be respected, thus violence was never encouraged.[207] Finney preached non-violent law breaking that was in the spirit of Christian doctrine. During this time the most famous illustration of Oberlin non-violence was housing and protecting fugitive slaves, and if it were necessary, guiding fugitives across the border into Canada.[208]

These passive tactics would not last very long as the community continued to grow and diversify. As more non-whites sought refuge, and as more became accustomed to citizenship and educational opportunities, radicalization soon followed. The 1830 census of Lorain County reveals that only three blacks, or people who identified as non-white, were residents, but by 1840 the number grew to sixty-two.[209] Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, the non-white population across the Western Reserve as a whole surged with

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[205] Cleveland *Leader*, April 14, 1859.
[206] Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion.* Edited by William G. McLoughlin. (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 251
[207] Ibid.
[208] These tactics form the foundation of what is commonly referred to as the Underground Railroad.
[209] Census Chart. William C. Cochran, *The Western Reserve and the Fugitive Slave Law*. (Cleveland, OH: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1920), 79. William Cochran was a young boy when he witnessed the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue in 1858.

Cuyahoga County, Lorain County, and Erie County being the dominant destinations respectively.[210] By the end of the 1850s, Lorain County was home to 549 non-white residents, second only to Cuyahoga County where there were 894, a more than 100% increase from the previous census.[211]

Although this trend was widespread across the Western Reserve, with non-white residents growing in number from 167 in 1820 to 2,082 by 1860, the motivations and benefits sought were anything but universal.[212] Non-whites who settled in the Cleveland and Sandusky areas did so for the abundance of work available. Laborers could find steady employment as hoteliers and barbers, as well as industrial work in foundries, manufactories, and shipping along the Great Lakes and the burgeoning Ohio & Erie Canal.[213] Migrants were typically escaped slaves from the South, or free blacks from rural communities in Pennsylvania or southern Ohio. One such individual was John Malvin, the free son of a slave father and free mother, who migrated from Virginia to Cleveland and found work as a carpenter, and later as a canal boat captain.[214] While he and others faced some levels of discrimination in these industrial cities, non-whites enjoyed access to opportunities not previously available to them. At the same time, these wayfarers benefitted from the anonymity of larger cities where they could easily disappear if confronted by federal authorities.

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[210] Specifically the communities of Cleveland, Oberlin, and Sandusky in those aforementioned counties.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Visions of the Western Reserve: Public and Private Documents of Northeastern Ohio, 1750-1860, ed. Robert Wheeler (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 7
[214] John Malvin was born of a slave father and free mother, and was an active figure in social uplift programs for people of color. In 1835 he helped to establish the State Convention of Colored Men in Columbus, Ohio. For additional information see *Autobiography of John Malvin: A Narrative*. (Cleveland: Leader Printing Co., 1879)

Quite the opposite from its regional neighbors, the 549 black residents of Lorain

County were not concentrated in the county's industrial centers, Elyria and Lorain, but

rather in the dominantly agrarian Russia Township in and around Oberlin. Migrants who

ended up in Oberlin were either free blacks seeking education, or fugitive slaves seeking

farm work and the promise of a better future.[215] The aforementioned brothers John

Mercer and Charles Henry Langston were two such men searching for enlightenment,

while blacksmith Augustus Chambers, harnessmaker Lewis Sheridan Leary, and

carpenter John Copeland Jr. were skilled tradesmen looking for social uplift.[216] These

men embody the spirit of Oberlin's black radicalism. Although the two brothers were

classically educated in contrast to the primarily skilled vocational training of the others,

they all shared two common aspects, namely equality and the fear of outsiders depriving

them of a free life in their cosmopolitan society.

In a speech before the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1855, John Mercer Langston

argued on behalf of emancipation while also promulgating the qualities of citizenship

espoused in Oberlin. Langston argued:

> The colored man hates chains, loathes his enslavement and longs to shoulder the
> responsibilities of a dignified life. He longs to stand in the church, in the state, a
> man; he longs to stand up a man and may well adopt the sentiment of the Roman
> Terence when he said … "I am a man, and there is nothing of humanity as I think,
> estranged to me!"[217]

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[215] Cochran, *The Western Reserve*, 80

[216] Although manual labor was a requirement at Oberlin College and all students, including the Langston's, were obligated to learn practical skills, they excelled greatly in traditional academics. Other former students, John Copeland Jr. for example, showed promise as scholars, but favored the manual labor education for one reason or another. Despite focusing on industrial training, Copeland had a higher than average literacy rate.

[217] John Mercer Langston, 152. Langston quotes the playwright Terence, also known as Terentius, in English as well as in Latin – "Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto."

In his rhetoric, Langston epitomized the extent to which living in a cosmopolitan society had benefitted him. His education and responsibilities as lawyer and elected official reshaped his self-image to not merely as a black man, but as a man working toward the goal of bettering society and the human race. These notions were important to Langston, as slavery not only placed blacks in bondage, but whites as well. In the same speech he observed that "there is not within the bosom of this entire country, a solitary man or woman who can say 'I have my full share of liberty'" as long as slave power continued to tighten its grip around the republic.[218] In order for his black and white peers to attain ultimate freedom, slavery needed to be defeated and equality of citizenship extended to every member of society. Several years later, during the events of the famous Oberlin Rescue, Langston would revisit this notion again, pleading that the system was responsible for the destruction of all souls and goodwill. "If you hate slavery because it oppresses the black man" then you should "hate it for its enslavement of white men."[219]

While many black Oberlinians were in agreement with Langston's ideals, there were those who carried a much more practical and somewhat suspicious view. Indeed, those outside the black educated elite, artisans, shopkeepers, and fugitive slaves, placed considerably more importance on protecting themselves rather than cultivating black and white unity through fanciful oratory. It is not that the qualities and beliefs espoused by those like Langston were not important to these skilled and common laborers, as these individuals shared mutual friendships and respect with their fellow white citizens. Non-

[218] Ibid.
[219] John Mercer Langston, 188

whites, who were not members of the black elite, were at greater risk for capture by unscrupulous officers and bounty hunters. Thus, while black elites and their laborer counterparts were held equally in the eyes of the federal government, the reality was that the latter was an easier target of malicious intent.

Augustus Chambers is one such laborer who was suspicious of outsiders. Although he enjoyed the company of whites in Oberlin, he distrusted the national system and doubted its ability to render fair justice. Early in 1858, several months prior to the Oberlin Rescue, rumors had spread around the village that slave catchers were roaming about Russia Township on the outskirts of town. Prompted by fears of capture and sale down South, Chambers armed himself and prepared to inflict violent resistance if forced. When asked of his intentions by a friend, a white man, Chambers declared that if any of those slave catchers "darkens my door, he is a dead man."[220] Sensing the horror in the eyes of his friend, Chambers added that while he would never kill a man, he would never hesitate to kill a man-stealer, swearing that "as God is my judge, the man who tries to take my life will lose his own."[221]

Chambers is not the only black man to take this approach. Anson P. Dayton, a United States Deputy Marshal for Ohio's Northern District, incurred the wrath of James Smith, a stonecutter by trade. As a marshal Dayton had the obligation of enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law, but it was not this matter that made him despised in the community, rather it was his zealous drive to capture fugitives that made him hated and feared. Dayton created an infamous reputation for forming alliances with bounty hunters and for going

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[220] Cochran, *The Western Reserve*, 123
[221] Ibid.

above and beyond the call of duty in setting traps for unsuspecting residents around the Western Reserve.[222] After a failed plot to capture a fugitive on the east side of Cleveland, Smith angrily confronted Dayton and struck the marshal repeatedly with his cane.[223]

Smith and Chambers are a window into the mind of common blacks in Oberlin. While those like them never doubted that the community would stand up for their freedom and protect them from the hands of injustice, they were certain that the quaint beliefs in human dignity held by white and black elites would prove little use in the eyes of a rigged system. As long as blacks involved in disputes or charged with crimes were brought before judges and magistrates in Lorain County, they were guaranteed a fair hearing. However, when pressed with defending their freedom, or right to freedom, before the bench of a federal judge, it was clear that they were playing by rules that benefitted only their white accusers, even in the more progressive northern district of Ohio's United States District Court.[224] Chambers candidly observed the sad state of affairs for those of his race at the hands of federal authorities:

> I will never trust them. A man with a drop of colored blood in his veins has no
> show. Any white man who wants to make a few hundred dollars can swear away
> my rights. They will not let *me* say a word. … They will take me way off

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[222] Anson P. Dayton was a local shopkeeper and entrepreneur in Oberlin in the early 1850s. After financial burdens forced him to close his business, the community supported him until he was able to secure a position as a federal marshal. Dayton changed his political affiliation to the Democratic Party and became an advocate for the Fugitive Slave Act. For additional information see, Robert S. Fletcher, *The History of Oberlin College from its Foundation Through the Civil War.* Oberlin, Ohio: (Oberlin College Press, 1943)

[223] Cleveland *Leader*, December 14, 1858. Smith's attack on Dayton was not so much in response to the failed attempt to capture another fugitive slave, but over rumors that Dayton was conspiring with southern bounty hunters to falsely claim Smith as their slave.

[224] The United States District Court of Ohio was subdivided in the 1850s into northern and southern districts. Although there have been additional subdivisions since – in Akron, Toledo, Dayton, Cincinnati, etc – the dominant center of law in the northern district at this time was Cleveland, while Columbus held this designation in the southern district.

somewheres where you-uns can't come and moren'n likely they won't try me at all. They'll slip me over the Ohio river if they can and say nothing to nobody.[225]

The conglomeration of educated idealism and practicality was wholesomely embodied in Charles Henry Langston, the elder brother of John Mercer. The elder Langston, who in 1841 was a chairman on the petition that reaffirmed Oberlin's commitment to people of color, held in highest regard for the principles of freedom in the Declaration of Independence and the supremacy of Higher Law, yet he was a shrewd man who understood that "Man [shall] not live on bread alone."[226] In other words, Langston believed that in order to promote social reform and other radical ideology, there needed to be an element that promoted an image of strength in the face of opposition. Arguments for freedom could not be won solely on the basis of appealing for sympathy, instead there had to be tactics that worked in tandem with rhetoric to demonstrate the lengths reformers were willing to go in the cause for emancipation. That is not to say that Langston was violent or desired violence, but he understood the viciousness of his enemies and had no qualms about taking acceptable measures against those who threatened his people with injustice.

Returning to that September day in 1858, when two students reported that a young black man had been abducted by federal authorities, Langston was one of those who rode to Wellington to aid in the fight against tyranny. The Oberlin-Wellington rescue proved to be that definitive moment where Oberlinians could pair open defiance with philosophical rhetoric in order to attack the very soul of the slavery system. For

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[225] Cochran, *The Western Reserve*, 124
[226] Matthew 4:4, "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Langston, his part in the event would be twofold in that he took the definitive leadership position in the mob and gave the most publicized and rousing declaration of human rights when he was placed on trial for his actions. Along with Langston, thirty-six others, white and non-white, from the lowest to highest levels of class in Oberlin, stood united in their incarceration despite their ability to post bail, or plead guilty for lesser penalties. Langston and his comrades were able to walk this slippery slope between violence and quaint idealism in their efforts to liberate a fugitive slave.

During the rescue, Oberlin residents learned that the federal marshal and his associates had taken residence in an upstairs room of the Wadsworth Hotel.[227] The mob, at this point numbering well over seventy members[228], surrounded the building and demanded the release of the captured fugitive.[229] It was at this time that Langston spearheaded an effort to negotiate the release of Price, out of the belief that a peaceful resolution was preferable to violence.[230] After four hours, in which the two sides argued over the legitimacy of the federal warrants, rumors circulated in the crowd that the marshal had sent a telegram for militia assistance.[231] Faced with either retreating from the standoff or committing to action, Langston delivered a final ultimatum to his opponents. "Give the

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[227] The site of the hotel is now occupied by the Wellington Public Library.

[228] Reports on the number of rescuers vary. Witnesses for the prosecution claimed the number to be anywhere from 500 to 1,000. These outlandishly large numbers were also corroborated and celebrated by the most radical of abolitionists. Estimates by historian Nat Brandt stand around 100, while Steven Lubet places his estimate much higher – around 300. Regardless of the exact number, historian Stanley W. Campbell rightly points out that the event was the largest slave rescue on record.

[229] John Price

[230] William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 318.

[231] The Liberator, September 26, 1858.

boy up."[232] Rebuffed, Langston ordered the mob to break down the doors to the hotel

and take Price by force.[233]

In the immediate aftermath of the rescue, Langston, his brother[234], and the people of

the town pledged to use these tactics again should slave catchers make further threats

against the community. Men and women stood to be "armed and ready to pursue a

rescue" at the sound of an alarm.[235] It was clear to outside commentators that federal

authorities who attempted to seize a black citizen from Oberlin did so "at the peril of

[their] life."[236] The community succeeded in flexing the muscles of social reform in

order to liberate a man held, not simply in the bondage of another man, but in the grip of

a system that showed no justice to people of color. For Langston, what he and the rest of

his comrades achieved for Price reached beyond race, delivering salvation to the ideals of

a nation, not simply its underprivileged members.

Action in Wellington placed the spirit of reform on public display, but the subsequent

trial of the men involved elevated the event from a petty scrap between locals and

mercenaries to something greater. Rather, the trial transformed the affair into the

dramatic, vigorous embodiment of Americanism. Steven Lubet observes that the

audacious theatrics of jury trials in the 1850s bolstered the cause for freedom among

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[232] Shipherd, *History of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue*, 110
[233] John Copeland and Lewis Sheridan Leary, two rescuers involved with Price's extraction, were black tradesmen in Oberlin who later accompanied John Brown on his raid of Harpers Ferry. Leary was killed in the raid, Copeland was tried and hanged in December of 1859.
[234] John Mercer Langston was absent from rescue, having been in Cleveland that day for an appearance in court.
[235] The *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 27, 1858
[236] Ibid.

likeminded reformers.[237] Despite not carrying the same influential weight as Supreme

Court decisions, these "grand sideshows" were the forum in which the hypocrisy of the

law was revealed.[238] The thirty-seven indicted stood as the representatives of Rev. John

Winthrop's shining city and Jefferson's glorious republic, championing "Justice and

Mercy" as divine truths to which all were beholden.[239]

Once again, Charles Henry Langston took center stage as the living exemplification

of the black citizen. Cultured, romantic, and determined, he was the product of equal

education and social idealism on a scale the likes of which had not been seen in the

United States. Having been found guilty by an all-white jury, Langston was allowed to

speak openly to the court before sentencing. Langston knew, as did recently convicted

rescuer Simeon Bushnell and the other men waiting in to stand trial, that the guilty

verdict was inevitable. Judge Hiram V. Wilson[240] was a prominent Democrat, the jury

and jury pool were also prominent Democrats with various interests in maintaining the

current state of affairs.[241] Despite the promise of a fair and impartial hearing, the makeup

of the men administering the law sent a clear and resolute message that the federal

government desired to make an example of these interlopers.

In defense of Judge Wilson, the rescuers had no intention of arguing their innocence in

the traditional manner. That is to say, they never contested that they did, indeed, interfere

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[237] Steven Lubet, Fugitive Justice, 28
[238] Ibid.
[239] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity."
[240] Although Democrats were more likely to be sympathetic to slave owners, Judge Hiram V. Wilson was unusual in that he had a record of opposing federal slave policies. Prior to his nomination to the bench, Wilson was one of the men on the Committee on Resolutions which crafted the 1850 Cleveland pledge that denounced the Fugitive Slave Law.
[241] The *Liberator*, April 29, 1859.

with the federal marshal and his bounty hunters; rather, they admitted freely that they committed the act.[242] Within the parameters of the Fugitive Slave Law, the rescuers violated the statue and their subsequent guilty verdicts were in keeping with the policies regarding those who defied the legislation. However, this was not the contested issue in the minds of Langston and his Oberlin rescuers. For Langston, the issue was justice under the law and Providence.

The rescuer argued principle, that all members of society, regardless of race and gender, shared a common brotherhood. Of his reasoning for why he took part in liberating Price, a man he did not know, Langston proudly declared that Price was not a stranger, but "a *man*, a *brother*, who had a right to his liberty under the laws of God, under the laws of Nature, and under the Declaration of American Independence."[243] By redefining the universal rights of the America's founding document in an egalitarian sense, Langston highlighted Oberlin's Higher Law beliefs and placed them at the center of the debate over the moral question of slavery. While there were legal considerations in his mind, Langston zealously favored the moral high ground, promoting the idea that there was an inherent flaw in how the national civic law had been implemented despite its powers having been derived from the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."[244] This framing shifted the focus away from the particulars of the law itself, to the entire system, especially the ruling of *Dred Scott*.

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[242] Shortly after being charged with obstruction of justice, the Oberlin community held a "Felon's Feast" in which defense strategies were discussed, money was raised, and speeches were given that celebrated their bold and daring raid.
[243] Charles Henry Langston's Speech at the Cuyahoga County Courthouse. May 12, 1859.
[244] Declaration of Independence. July 4, 1776.

The nation's foundation, having been created from a universal belief in equality under God, demanded protection from slavery, a sin that was reprehensible for its predication on excess, and for the idea that society could purchase beings that were made in the image of God.[245] The emotions that Price's kidnapping conjured in Langston challenged his manhood and courage, obligating him to act with his conscience despite the risks to his own personal freedom.[246] Seeding the rescuer's investment in personal freedom and responsibilities as a citizen of Oberlin was the legacy of his father. Born in Virginia, the Langston brothers had an unusual childhood compared to others of their race. Lucy Langston, mother to the brothers, was a slave, while Ralph Quarles, their father, was her owner. Quarles manumitted Langston, moved away from his plantation, and entered into a lifelong civil partnership in which he raised his sons as his own, and bequeathed them his estate upon death.[247]

Both Langston brothers, Charles as the elder especially, took great pride in their father's legacy as a decent and respectable man, and as a veteran in the American Revolution. In his speech, the elder Langston argued that he and his fellow prisoners espoused the ideals of his father:

> I had been taught by my Revolutionary father - and I say this with all due respect to him - and by his honored associates, that the fundamental doctrine of this government was that *all* men have a right to life and liberty, and coming from the Old Dominion, I brought into Ohio these sentiments, deeply impressed upon my heart.[248]

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[245] Book of Genesis, 1:27.
[246] Langston's Speech
[247] Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 11-12
[248] Langston's Speech

These sentiments were the essence of Americanism. Although Langston and other non-whites were not considered citizens in the eyes of the federal government, they shared the belief that they held this distinction regardless because of their heritage. Thus, Langston and his compatriots were mandated by honor to pursue the rescue of Price.[249] Citizenship and the right thereof was a main focal point to the Oberlin Rescuer debate.

The crowd in the gallery, many representing the cause of abolition from around the Western Reserve, understood the nature Oberlin citizenship. The universal sense of equality on which the community prided itself had gained various forms of notoriety across the North and South since its inception.[250] While the South was, at best, suspicious, and at worst, condemning, the North was much more ambivalent on non-whites being granted equality and the freedom to mix with white women. Newspapers in Massachusetts referred to Oberlinians as "highly respectable citizens" while commentators in nearby Elyria likened the community to a "detestable sink of Abolitionism" and the citizens themselves as extremists.[251] Nevertheless, all sides throughout the North understood the implications of Oberlin citizenship and the privileges granted to those of all races and genders.

With citizenship in mind, Langston turned his bitter rhetoric toward *Dred Scott*, the court case that for over a year had set the North on fire with antislavery sentiment. The rescuer referred to himself proudly as a citizen of Ohio, before quickly correcting himself stating that in the eyes of Chief Justice Taney he was merely "an *outlaw of the United*

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[249] Ibid.
[250] Oberlin welcomed all races when it was first established in 1833, but it would not be until 1835 when the college implemented its colorblind admissions policy that black residency grew.
[251] Lowell *Daily Citizen*, April 21, 1859. Lorain County *Eagle*, May 25, 1859.

States" lacking all recognition as a legal member of society.[252] While his clever wit

delighted the onlookers in the gallery, it revealed the hypocrisy in the legal system of the

late antebellum period. A man, with no legal status other than as property under federal

law, could be tried and punished as a man for violating said law. Langston, recognizing

this, pointed out to the Judge that he could not be found guilty because his trial lacked the

fairness of impartiality guaranteed by the Constitution "not merely to its citizens, but *to*

all persons" regardless of status.[253] In order for his trial to have been fair, he would have

needed to have been tried before a judge, jury, and prosecution of his social rank;

referencing the common law practice of equals trying equals. Langston argued:

> I was tried by a jury who were prejudiced; before a Court that was prejudiced;
> prosecuted by an officer who was prejudiced, and defended, though ably, by
> counsel that were prejudiced. And therefore it is, your Honor, that I urge by all
> that is good and great in manhood, that I should not be subjected to the pains and
> penalties of this oppressive law, when I have *not* been tried, either be a jury of my
> peers, or by a jury that were impartial.[254]

The inhumane and dangerous combination of the Fugitive Slave Act and the *Dred*

Scott case threatened the sanctity of human dignity, civil rights, and the freedom of those

not held in bondage. However, to non-whites in Oberlin such as Langston, Chambers,

and Copeland, the understanding that those who were free could be claimed by citizens of

South Carolina or Mississippi fanned flames of anger and paranoia. The Fugitive Slave

Law, in tandem with *Dred Scott*, decimated the benefits of living in a free state such as

Ohio or Illinois, rendering the states powerless to defend legal residents from border

ruffians from across the Mason-Dixon Line. Langston observed that, whatever course of

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[252] Langston's Speech
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.

action he took on that day in Wellington, his personal wellbeing and that of his entire race were already in jeopardy since the court's ruling:

> When I appeal to the people, they say he has a right to make me a slave, and when I appeal to your Honor, *your Honor* says he has a right to make me a slave, and if any man, white or black, seeks an investigation of that claim, they make themselves amenable to the pains and penalties of the Fugitive Slave Act, for **BLACK MEN HAVE NO RIGHTS WHICH WHITE MEN ARE BOUND TO RESPECT.** I, going to Wellington with the full knowledge of all this, knew that if that man was taken to Columbus, he was hopelessly gone, no matter whether he has ever been in slavery before or not.[255]

Langston concluded his dynamic speech on both an appeal and a promise. First, he prayed that, if confronted with the same heinous act of man-stealing, the court members would have rode to Wellington in the name of justice, the men of the court having conscience, courage, manhood, and fear of the Lord. Finally, Langston declared that, regardless of what they would have done then or how the Judge would administer his punishment, he and his fellow citizens would continue to oppose, defy, and fight the legal injustices that were poisoning the essence of Americanism.[256] On his concluding note, Langston received an immense standing ovation from the gallery, so much so that the Judge and his bailiff had difficulty in silencing the room. The Cleveland *Leader* newspaper noted that the onlookers were so enthralled "the listeners forgot that [Langston] was a black man, he spoke a white language, such as few white men" ever spoke.[257] Although he was sentenced to pay a small fine and serve several weeks imprisonment, Langston and his rescuers achieved a great victory for the cause of social reform.

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[255] Ibid. Emphasis included in original transcript.
[256] Ibid.
[257] John Mercer Langston, 188

In the aftermath of the trial[258], when the media frenzy faded away and all of the

rescuers were released and returned to Oberlin, the questions raised by the event still

lingered. How could a nation, founded on the intrinsic principles of Providence in the

Declaration of Independence, circumvent the rights of an entire people? More

importantly, how could reformers rectify this sin? As the 1850s drew to a close, the fear

of border crossings and kidnappings exacerbated by the Fugitive Slave Law, and the ever

prejudiced definition of Americanism created by *Dred Scott* were issues that demanded

reconciliation. Oberlin citizens of every color searched within for ways to undermine the

federal slave policy, yet it would be a familiar face from a distant world who would push

the matter to Frederick Douglass', feared and ultimately bloody conclusion.

In the summer of 1859, John Mercer Langston enjoyed a pleasant walk in the

company of a man who called himself John Thomas. Unfamiliar to the residents,

Thomas claimed that his visit to the village was for the sole purpose of seeking counsel

from Langston on special matters that he would reveal when the time was appropriate.

As the two men spoke casually of business, Thomas indicated that he had not been

completely honest with his counterpart; he had something he wished to disclose. Thomas

revealed that he had no legal business which he was interested in discussing, rather, he

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[258] Although thirty-seven men were indicted, only two ever stood trial. The defense, after the conviction of Bushnell, argued that the same jury that convicted one man could not render an impartial verdict on another. Thus, a new jury had to be selected each time a new trial was initiated. This slowed the prosecution and elevated the costs of the case. In addition, this tactic proved to be a media nightmare for the federal government the longer the trial continued. Other factors that slowed the process of were appeals made to the State Supreme Court of Ohio. Bushnell and Langston filed a complaint arguing that the Fugitive Slave Act was unconstitutional, later filing a writ of habeas corpus. Lorain County entered the fray in an attempt to halt the government's case by arresting the U.S. Marshal and the slave catchers for kidnapping under Ohio law. While the marshal and his men were incarcerated, and during the appeals process, the gunboat, *USS Michigan*, was deployed off the shores of Cleveland to enforce federal authority.

declared that he wished to "strike a blow which shall destroy American Slavery" once and for all."[259] Sensing that Langston was taken aback by this sudden change in conversation, Thomas quickly revealed himself as John Brown Jr., son of the infamous abolitionist jayhawk who gained notoriety for partisan warfare in Kansas. "For this purpose" Brown continued, "we need, and I seek to secure men of nerve and courage" for the enterprise that his father planned.[260]

This was not Langston's first encounter with associates of Brown. During the trial of his brother and other Oberlin rescuers, the senior Brown and his top lieutenants had made several splashes around the Western Reserve, giving speeches and regaling in stories of his exploits in Kansas. Brown was an old resident, having grown up in Hudson, and was familiar with the local antislavery community including Selma, Ohio[261], Western Reserve College, and Oberlin College.[262] Returning from Kansas, Brown's short visit would be his last before departing to Virginia to commence his raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. Brown's most trusted men, his son and John Henry Kagi, a radical abolitionist and reporter for the Cleveland *Leader*, made several visits with the incarcerated rescuers and with Langston in Oberlin.[263]

The business of the younger Brown was the same as that of Kagi when he met with Langston in March, namely the complete destruction of slavery in the United States. To show his appreciation and support for the Oberlin cause, Kagi offered to organize a jail break for the thirty-seven rescuers, but Langston graciously declined, believing that such

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[259] John Mercer Langston, 191
[260] Ibid.
[261] Where the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* was published.
[262] Brown's father, Owen Brown, was once a trustee of Oberlin College.
[263] Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 353

action would only hinder the cause of reform.[264] Although holding doubts in what

Langston considered, in the words of historians William and Aimee Cheek, a "vague

enterprise," the activist allowed Kagi and the younger Brown to speak to small

congregations of interested Oberlin residents, and circulate information among the

community's most radical members.[265] It was through these various meetings that

Brown's associates were introduced to rescuers Lewis Sheridan Leary, and John

Copeland. Educated in the manual labor school and skilled in trades, the two men were

members of the growing radical black middle class that included, among others,

Augustus Chambers, James Smith, and John Watson. Along with another Oberlin

resident, Shields Green, Leary and Copeland would join Brown and his small band of

revolutionaries for the ill-fated insurrection.

On December 16, 1859, John Copeland was hanged for treason in Charlestown,

VA.[266] Fellow rescuer Lewis Sheridan Leary had been killed in the raid, while Shields

Green joined Copeland on the scaffold. In his final letters to friends and family,

Copeland reflected on his decision to join the raid, and the redemption that awaited him

for doing God's will. He did not lament, instead he asserted that he was "leaving a world

filled with sorrow" and that "God in his mercy" forgave him for any sins and

transgressions he may have committed."[267] On the nature and righteousness of his cause,

Copeland argued his motives:

> It was a sense of the wrongs which we have suffered that prompted the noble but
> unfortunate Captain Brown and his associates to attempt to give freedom to a

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[264] John Mercer Langston, 192
[265] Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 353
[266] Now West Virginia.
[267] John Copeland, December 16, 1859.

small number, at least of those who are now held by cruel and unusual laws, and by no less cruel and unjust men. To this freedom they were entitled by every known principal of justice and humanity, and for the enjoyment of it God created them. And how dear brother, could I die in a more noble cause?[268]

Copeland and his fellow Oberlinians died with the knowledge that they stood in the name of God and for the principles of their community. They were children of the Lord, honest sinners, and citizens of Oberlin, a community which they found a small but powerful alley in the fight for their freedom and social uplift. Likewise, the community was inspired by the sacrifice of their fellow citizens and sought to honor their service. The village, on the days which Brown and Copeland were hung, sounded the church bell to mourn their passing. In 1865, when the carnage of America's civil war ceased, a monument was erected in which the village celebrated the sacrifice of their comrades, and reaffirmed their right and title of citizenship:

> These colored citizens of Oberlin, the heroic associates of the immortal John Brown, gave their lives for the slave. *Et nunc servitudo etiam mortua est, laus deo.*[269]

Black residents of Oberlin, whether they were members of the educated elite, fugitive slaves, or the rising middle class, were products of a revolutionary society. This cosmopolitan world, where egalitarianism was embraced, instilled black residents with education, equal treatment, and finally the privilege and responsibilities of citizenship. Empowered to create change, they were the products of social reform and wished to spread that reform to others of their race. Although fully unified with their white counterparts, the growing power of pro-slavery activism in the federal government

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[268] John Copeland, December 10, 1859.
[269] Monument to the Oberlinians Who Participated in John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry. Latin translation: "And thus slavery is finally dead, thanks be to God."

radicalized the black citizens, especially those outside the educated elite. In the end, the

work of black activists in the Oberlin Rescue, and the few who took part in the dramatic

raid on Harpers Ferry, resoundingly declared to the nation that the Oberlin movement

would not be content to remain isolated in the Western Reserve. Rather, as slave power

grew so did resistance with reformers defiantly delivering the will of God and the

divinely inspired Declaration of Independence to all members of society.

BEYOND AWAKENING

THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is
Your reward in heaven: for so persecuted
they the prophets which were before you. Ye
are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have
lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?
It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be
cast out, and to be trodden under foot of
men. Ye are the light of the world. A city
that is set on a hill cannot be hid.
                                  – Matthew, 5:12-14.

Near the turn of the 20th century the industrial explosion of the Gilded Age gave way

to the dawning of a new epoch, the Progressive Era. This critical moment was a

crossroads in the economic and cultural development of the national landscape. As

Frederick Jackson Turner's wild and untamed frontier vanished into the final sunset of

the 19th century, pastoral nostalgia lost its position of importance in the modern era.

American intellectual circles once dominated by the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson and

Mark Twain was overshadowed by popular, albeit controversial, European theorists and

philosophers, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Frederich Nietzsche. With mass

immigration, urbanization, and mechanization, Americans searched for answers not in the

Bible of Christ, but rather in the bible of Western progress. To a growing number of

Americans it appeared, as Nietzsche declared, that God was dead.[270]

In 1907 Walter Rauschenbusch, a Presbyterian minister from Upstate New York,

recognized the growing discord. As a minister in the infamous Hell's Kitchen

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[270] Frederick Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. (Leipzig: Verlag von E. W. Fritzsch, 1887), Section 125.

neighborhood of Manhattan, Rauschenbusch experienced firsthand the afflictions of this

new era. Indeed, the problems plaguing Manhattan were similar to those in every major

U.S. city – overcrowding, disease, and poverty. Beyond that, the lack of effective

government leadership, marred with corruption, indicated to the minister that America

was in the midst of a great social crisis. Seizing upon this theme, Rauschenbusch penned

the first[271] in a series of treatises on the role of the Gospel in combating atrocities in

America's growing urban areas.

In *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch lamented the effects of

industrialization on a once pious society. The "wedge of inequality" was rooted in the

excesses of human existence, in the desire to control profit rather than better

civilization.[272] Cities, once symbols of the success of Protestant democracy and

ingenuity, evolved after the Civil War into the very enemies of such ideals. The catalyst

of this transformation was industrialization itself. As Rauschenbusch noted, the United

States once had great social equality, but it declined into a "European" like state during

the Industrial Revolution.[273] The unfortunate ramifications of this conversion meant that

these cities had come to represent both "the pride and shame of Christian civilization."[274]

Rauschenbusch was not a disenchanted minister seeking to eliminate progress; after

all, progress was not the threat to humanity. In fact, progress was both "natural" as well

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[271] *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, 1907. *Christianizing the Social Order*, 1912. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 1917. Although Rauschenbusch coined the phrase "Social Gospel " in 1917, the Christian socialist movement began around the 1890s, and had roots going back as far as the mid 1870s.
[272] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1907), ix.
[273] Ibid., 249. Rauschenbusch is not addressing race relations in his work. His primary focus is on the differences between classes irrespective of race. Thus, while there was social inequality prior to industrialization, Rauschenbusch attributes most of that to race and not between classes. Instead, he argues that before the Industrial Revolution there was a sense of commonality between men of differing classes.
[274] Ibid., 246

as "divine."[275] In *Christianizing the Social Order* published seven years later, he laid out a clearer path toward recovery. America's Protestant denominations recognized the need for what Rauschenbusch referred to as "social Christianity."[276] That is to say Christian Socialism in contemporary parlance. He observed, "the modern social problem is the problem of capitalistic industrialism" which is exacerbated when a nation moves from small economic agrarianism to mechanization.[277] Rauschenbusch borrowed rhetoric from some of the most renowned American ministers, including contemporary Josiah Strong, and the Second Great Awakening Congregationalist Horace Bushnell.[278]

   Although Rauschenbusch was one of the more recognizable voices in the Social Gospel movement, having popularized the phrase, he was not unique. Much like the revivalists of the 19th century, he believed that there was a cry for a new movement to rectify the wrongs of profit-hungry industrialists. For several decades, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and other Protestant denominations established "men's clubs, social unions … and church conventions" in order to foster discussion on topics relating to social Christianity.[279] The most famous of these was Chautauqua Institution in New York (1874), as well as the various incarnations of Chautauqua across North America, including a successful lecture circuit after 1900. In 1908, the Methodist

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[275] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1914), 30.
[276] Ibid., 11
[277] Ibid., 8
[278] Horace Bushnell was a clergyman from Harford, CT. He was active during the Second Great Awakening, pursuing social justice issues. His most famous sermon was the "Preliminary Dissertation on the Nature of Language as Related to Thought and Spirit," published in 1849. Historian Sydney Ahlstrom has referred to Bushnell as the "Father of Progressive Orthodoxy" in his edited compilation, *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1967).
[279] Rauschenbusch, *Social Order*, 11

Episcopal Church issued a declaration in which they argued that social advocacy was the duty of the church:

> We deem it the duty of all Christian people to concern themselves directly with certain practical industrial problems. To us it seems that the churches must stand – for equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.[280]

The aim of the Methodist's declaration was to gain a stronger social support structure for workers under the heel of despotic employers. Humane housing, a living wage, rights and protection for women and children, and the complete obliteration of poverty from urban centers, were among the ultimate goals.[281] It was natural for the church to be an instrument in this call for societal and government change, as it was the most democratic institution in the nation. Rauschenbusch noted that the elected offices in Washington created to protect the rights of the less fortunate evolved to become "fortification[s] of predatory interests."[282] The church in contrast, was the "essential" entity for influencing public opinion and was an organization "of the people, by the people, and for the people."[283]

Although Rauschenbusch and other members of the Social Gospel movement advocated socialism, they were hardly Marxists. Unlike in the latter where God was nothing more than a distraction from attaining the ultimate goal of worker equality, Christian socialists advocated God and spirituality in every aspect of reform. "All varied departments of the movement," Rauschenbusch declared, "found their spiritual center and unity in the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth," which was the cornerstone of

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[280] "The General Conference Journal of the Methodist Episcopal Church," 1908, 545. Famous speakers at Chautauqua included Theodore Roosevelt, Russell Conwell, and populist William Jennings Bryan.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Rauschenbusch, *Social Order*, 3
[283] Ibid., 7

Christian socialism.[284] Democracy could not exist without God and the church. Specifically, democracy could not exist without God and the American Protestant church.

On the role of American Roman Catholics in this new reform movement, Rauschenbusch was doubtful. In the years since the Second Great Awakening, Roman Catholics gradually found less discrimination than in years prior, yet they continued to be held in contempt by most of Protestant America. Nativist organizations, threatened by the growing number of immigrants from Roman Catholic and Orthodox Catholic countries, sought to keep non-Protestants relegated to the periphery of society.[285] Although Protestants did not wish to have intercourse with the Church of Rome, they, much like Lyman Beecher years before, wished them to join the great reform cause and embrace American democracy. However, similar to reformists from the 19th century, Rauschenbusch did not believe that the Church of Rome had the qualities that would perpetuate a democratic reform movement, and in fact, believed they were the enemies of it.

Rauschenbusch argued one of the major issues was that the Church of Rome despised socialism and believed it to be a rival to the one true church. "Catholicism and Socialism" observed Rauschenbusch, "are the two most powerful voluntary organizations in the modern [world], and the impending duel between the two is of deep concern to us all."[286] In the eyes of Christian socialists, the misguided attempts by the Roman Catholic Church disrupted the "natural course" of the political movement in the United States, and

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[284] Ibid., 19. The doctrine to which Rauschenbusch is referring is *Matthew* 6:9-13, commonly referred to as the Lord's Prayer.
[285] The second incarnation of the Ku Klux Klan is one example of such an organization.
[286] Ibid., 27

did not aid the common citizen.[287] Rather, the hierarchical church was the embodiment

of the corrupt Washington political machine that bonded closely with the interests of

wealthy and unscrupulous industrialists. In order for Catholics[288] to aid in reform, they

needed to embrace socialism and Americanize. By distancing themselves from Rome

and their various patriarch governors, Rauschenbusch believed that positive change

would occur:

> If the entire Catholic Church in America could follow its own Christian and
> American spirit, unhampered by foreign tendencies and influences, there would
> certainly be a sudden and splendid spurt toward democracy.[289]

The Roman Catholic and other Orthodox churches were two parts of a growing social

conservatism in America's ecclesiastical bodies. The third was the internal struggle

between Christian socialists and purveyors of Christian orthodoxy. Indeed, while the

Social Gospel movement rapidly grew in popularity from 1907 to the mid-1930s, a well-

supported establishment in favor of traditional conservatism rose to protect their rank in

the social order. These individuals believed in hierarchy, notions of good breeding, and

that class was an intricate part of a modern economy. For proponents of the Social

Gospel, Protestant conservatives resembled their Roman and Orthodox Catholic

counterparts in their unwavering support for order, rank, and authority.[290]

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[287] Ibid.

[288] Roman Catholics and Orthodox Catholics.

[289] Rauschenbusch, *Social Order*, 26

[290] It is important to note that a number of parishes and dioceses of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox
Catholic church promoted reforms similar to the Social Gospel. Some of these programs included
unionization and general uplift of the urban poor. Various incarnations of this social movement have been
called Catholic Liberation Theology, and were inspired by the works of St. Francis of Assisi. In the eyes of
those like Rauschenbusch however, who was wary of Catholicism's anti-democratic structure, the Catholic
churches shared a common bond with conservative orthodoxy. Thus, it should be understood that Catholics
at the time were not actively perpetuating poverty, however the social strides made by these parishes and
dioceses were neither sanctioned nor prohibited by Rome.

Such ideology threatened the movement's ability to bring social justice to the urban poor and restore American piety. The dangers of conservatism had little to do with the former's belief in the Holy Scripture; instead, it dealt mainly with their role, or lack thereof, in promoting God's Kingdom on earth. For Christian socialists, members of the conservative movement valued their own social uplift rather than the uplift of their fellow man. In a similar tone to his assessment of the Roman Catholic Church's inability to be democratic, Rauschenbusch criticized his fellow Protestants for their willingness to keep others less fortunate in a state of perpetual poverty. He argued that those in "controlling positions" used more effort to "preserve for themselves" wealth and influence rather than assist in the reformation of society.[291] Conservative Protestants stood "against any change" unless it benefitted *their* agenda.[292]

Proponents of the Social Gospel had much in common with their Second Great Awakening forbears. Activists of both movements understood the need to protect themselves from the world's excesses, and both desired to bring about God's Kingdom on earth. In addition, they found cautious or antagonistic opponents who, in their eyes, did not advocate social justice or democracy and instead enabled despotism. For western revivalists, such as Charles Finney, these included Old School Presbyterians, and most elite southerners, whereas for Rauschenbusch and Christian socialists, the main opponents were wealthy industrialists irrespective of regional and, most, religious denominational backgrounds.[293] Lastly, institutions like Chautauqua[294] fulfilled a similar

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[291] Ibid., 31
[292] Ibid.
[293] The exception being the Roman Catholic Church, which in both eras represented European despotism.
[294] All incarnations of the movement.

role to collegiate schools such as Oberlin, where religion formed an indispensable partnership with the lyceum, thus fostering egalitarianism.[295]

Despite similarities, however, there were intrinsic differences between the revivalists of the past and Christian socialists of the early 20th century. Oberlinians and their western allies sought to accomplish their goals by seeking assistance from wealthy eastern investors and philanthropists, the major industrialists of their day.[296] At great financial loss on the part of these benefactors, many remained powerful allies in reform, and rapturously embraced the cosmic goals of the movement. In contrast, Christian socialists targeted most, but not all, wealthy industrialists and gained support from Americas growing bourgeoisie. Thus, the issue in the latter movement revolved around notions of class, rather than simply cosmic ideology.[297]

Those like Rauschenbusch advocated extreme and often polarizing measures to ensure equality between the classes. The most notable of these was the complete removal of private property from society. To most Christian socialists, this was a necessity as private property did not serve "the general welfare of the people," rather it ensured that the resources and benefits of land remained controlled by a privileged few.[298] The advocated alternative to private property was a state system in which equally dispersed

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[295] For more information specifically relating to Chautauqua, consult Jon Schmitz's lecture, "The Origins of Chautauqua." Schmitz discusses the intricate nature of religious study, camp meetings, and lyceum. The lecture is available online through the Chautauqua archive.

[296] Notably Lewis and Arthur Tappan of New York City.

[297] It should be noted that wealthy investors at this time, mainly Congregationalists/Presbyterians, and Quakers, did in fact advocate a political free labor movement. This movement would benefit business; however, a number of these individuals, such as the Tappan brothers, gravitated toward a perfected cosmic worldview.

[298] Rauschenbusch, *Social Crisis*, 222

lots reverted to the state after death, rather than passing to the next generation.[299] This was in contrast to Oberlinians who, despite believing that private ownership was an "evil" avenue for excess and exploitation, did not forbid its ownership.[300]

The final major distinction between the two movements was their ultimate goal. For Oberlinians and their antebellum associates, an important crux in social reform was withdrawing from old settlements in the East and establishing Zion in the great American West. As John J. Shipherd argued in the Oberlin Covenant, it was necessary to retreat from the "deplorable condition[s]" of Godless commercialism, and form a center where God and social justice was the foundation.[301] Oberlinians built their world from the ground up, and controlled this society through a purely democratic system of elected officials. For its time, Oberlin was a Zion in the wilderness, isolated and difficult to reach.

By the modern era, the frontier had largely disappeared, and reformers shifted their immediate focus from the agrarian countryside to the metropolis. Although Christian socialists and those of similar beliefs found sanctuary in places like Chautauqua, the ultimate target of reform was inward toward the cities where the afflictions of the modern world festered. They had no intention of withdrawing; rather, they aimed to mobilize the church to facilitate a democratic revolution internally. While Oberlinians created a model democratic society to emphasize spirituality *over* politics, Christian socialists

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[299] Ibid.
[300] Robert S. Fletcher, "The Government of Oberlin Colony." Extract from the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, Vol XX, No. 2, September, 1933, 187.
[301] The Covenant of Oberlin Colony, 1833.

sought to transform the national representative system by emphasizing spirituality *within*

politics. Declared Rauschenbusch:

> They are sweeping and ventilating the worst corners of our common home, the
> cities, by uniform accounting and commission government. They are turning our
> so-called representative government into self-government by the initiative,
> referendum, and recall.[302]

The shift from the countryside to the city is logical and appears to have had adverse

effects on older reform societies. Prior to and overlapping with the Social Gospel

movement, Oberlin retrogressed from its once progressive and egalitarian perch. Indeed,

around the time when Rauschenbusch was writing his treatises, African Americans in

Oberlin experienced their own social crisis. While women's rights organizations

continued to prosper, the prominence of black citizens once a hallmark of the community,

greatly decreased. The once proud beacon of reform had been compromised.

As the Western Reserve industrialized and its manufacturing centers[303] expanded,

many older white families and immigrants withdrew to smaller places like Oberlin. Now

serving as a bedroom community for industrial workers, the cosmopolitanism that

brought the village prestige and scorn in the 19th century, developed advents of racism

found mainly in other heavily diversified northern cities. Although still welcomed to

attend First Church, black residents established their own worship centers to avoid

prolonged intercourse with increasingly hostile whites. According to educator Cally L.

Waite, these dominantly black churches satisfied the desire for communal fellowship that

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[302] Rauschenbusch, *Social Order*, 3
[303] Akron, Cleveland, Elyria, Lorain, Sandusky, and Youngstown.

had been lost, similar to "the role that black churches played throughout the country."[304]

Neighborhoods developed de facto segregation, with relative concentrations of black and

Polish residents to the poorest sections of town. As the 20th century progressed, these

parts of Oberlin were likened to local versions of Harlem or Hell's Kitchen.[305]

The college was not immune to the changing racial attitudes either. New

administrators, taking the place of the older generation, expanded the size of the student

body, thus altering the demographics irrevocably. Enrollment now boasted freshmen

who were second and third generation college educated and from wealthier backgrounds.

This was a different and perhaps inevitable change from the days of Finney, when the

vast majority of students were poor and paid for their studies through manual labor and

scholarships.[306] Tension mounted between these new students, and the poorer African

Americans who felt equally entitled to their place at the college.

Starting in 1882, before the resignation of President James H. Fairchild, trustees

implemented new social policies on behalf of the modern student body. For the first time

in the school's history, white students protested longstanding policy, demanding

segregated dining tables. While the founding principles of the school remained, students

believed the college needed to adapt to different "class predjudice[s]" that had not existed

in the founding era.[307] The administration, recognizing the signs of the times, conceded

despite the protests from black students. Following this landmark event, the wall of

resistance continued to erode with the formation of separate literary societies in 1905, and

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[304] Cally L Waite, *Permission to Remain Among Us: Education for Blacks in Oberlin, Ohio, 1880-1914*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 73.
[305] The Oberlin *Review*, December 13, 1955.
[306] Cally L Waite, *Permission to Remain Among Us*, 83
[307] Oberlin *Review*, February 3, 1883, 115.

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finally, segregated housing four years later.[308] Regardless of the well-articulated

arguments by members of the black student body, the infamous separate but equal

doctrine found a comfortable home within walls that were built to resist it.

The racial divide reached an unfortunate crescendo when in 1960 a fire engulfed a

home in a dominantly black section of town. Dubbed by local news as, "the Lincoln

Street fire," the event took the lives of nine black children in an impoverished

household.[309] The subsequent investigation revealed that the town shut off heating access

due to unpaid bills. In order to keep warm in the cold Ohio winter, the family utilized an

antiquated oil heater that eventually sparked the blaze.[310] Public embarrassment and

shame prompted town officials to look inward in order to address the urban decay they

and their predecessors had allowed to occur over the past eighty years.

Shocked by the events of the fire and the inability of authorities to address the plight

of the poor, council chairman Eric Nord put forth a strategy to reassert Oberlin's

commitment to community and social uplift. In a plan that mixed elements of

Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel, and Oberlin's tradition, Nord implemented a series of

reforms to improve the situation and better the community. He declared:

> This is the thing we want to do something about immediately to make sure that
> there is no new occupancy of … inadequate dwellings. A definitive program
> along these lines will be recommended at the [council] meeting … The public [is]
> urged to be prepared to assist in [the] appraisal of the program presented and its
> final formulation.[311]

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[308] Cally L Waite, *Permission to Remain Among Us*, 81
[309] The *Chronicle-Telegram*, February 25, 1960.
[310] Ibid.
[311] Ibid.

The resulting program created new public housing for the poor and elderly and scattered the units in order to avoid ghettoization, thus reintegrating the city.[312] Although such a strategy was in the vein of his reform predecessors, it was more secular in tone. Indeed, by the 1960s, Oberlin, as with many similar societies, evolved from Christian cosmopolitanism to modern cosmopolitanism. Christianity still played a role in this type of society, but was no longer the central foundation. Instead, the unifying themes were now the egalitarian past and historical contributions made by the original founders to race and gender relations. In order to return to the idyllic state envisioned by Shipherd and Finney, Oberlin needed to embrace this new modernism, while keeping a steady eye on its historical roots.

Out of the ashes of the Lincoln Street fire, Oberlin re-established itself as a stronghold for egalitarianism and progressive reforms. By the mid-1960s, the town was recognized for its historical contributions as well as its current fight in achieving social equality. Speaking at the 1965 Oberlin College commencement, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. espoused the beliefs of the previous social movements and the community's legacy in reform. King declared that the nation was in a moment of "revolution" in which the work of a growing number was "sweeping away the old order of slavery and racial segregation" and embracing a new national unity.[313] Part of this struggle involved

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[312] The program called for two apartment complexes for the elderly, and fifty-four "pagoda houses." The pagoda houses were built throughout the city, some in small clusters and others completely integrated into older neighborhoods. Urban planners sought to circumvent the problems of high crime and stigma which plagued other public projects in Cleveland and Detroit. See, Geoffrey Blodgett, *Oberlin Architecture: College and Town. A Guide to its Social History*. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), 215.
[313] Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution." Commencement Address for Oberlin College, June 1965.

casting off the shackles of "isolation" and embracing a "world perspective" in order to advance unity and brotherhood.[314]

Segregation, inequality, commercialism, materialism, and excess, these were the enemies of humanity that King conveyed to his listeners.[315] The dangers recognized by Shipherd in 1833, and targeted by Christian socialists in the early 20th century remained potent in the modern world. It took educated and morally righteous men and women to fight against these old adversaries to bring about justice. Without these innovative thinkers, reformers were doomed to fail. "There are all too many people," King spoke solemnly, "who … fail to achieve the new mental outlooks that the new situation demands."[316]

This would not be the case for the college. In 1967, Oberlin College opened one of the first African American Studies departments in the country, satisfying demands for education that was racially and "socially relevant."[317] In the early 1960s, the college launched a series of lectures on human sexuality. Dubbed the "Sex Lectures"[318] by the Oberlin *Review*, the assemblies addressed the nature of homosexuality, and its place in society. Students, in opposition to the antiquated notions of the visiting lecturers, argued that homosexuality would "cease to be a "problem'" if it was studied and "accepted as a natural phenomenon." [319] Notwithstanding disagreements over the moral direction of the forum's speakers, the event laid the foundation for the college's Gender, Sexuality, and

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[314] Ibid. King would later cite poet John Donne, "No man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main…"
[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid.
[317] African American Studies Department of Oberlin College.
[318] The sex lecturers were a series of two assemblies given by two visiting professors of biology.
[319] The Oberlin *Review*, December 2, 1960.

Feminist Studies department established in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thus, students and faculty alike in Oberlin's rebirth ensured that innovative work in justice and understanding would not disappear like the frontier.

Oberlin and Oberlin College was and continues to be an important experiment in the national social reform movement. On the foundation of Puritan democracy, the village was able to establish a stronghold of tolerance and progressive ideology. Its First Great Awakening roots fostered a sense of kinship between people of differing genders, races, and social stations, while also espousing a common unifying belief that all were equal in the eyes of God. This perfectionist doctrine was the community signature, and encouraged its members to embrace uplift in order to bring about God's heaven on earth. The elements of the Second Great Awakening revolutionized the role of education, emphasizing both manual labor and traditional liberal arts. The result was a universal system that promoted social elevation and the general wellbeing of all citizens.

As the Civil War loomed, Oberlinians did not quiet their call for justice and instead pushed the issue of racial equality to a new level of intensity. In direct response to encroaching slave power, prominent black thinkers and activists argued for national recognition of their natural and God given rights, while their black middle class counterparts prepared to defend their Oberlin citizenship, offering the ultimate sacrifice. Women used their education and newfound powers of political agency to assist the abolitionist movement while also demonstrating to the country that their sex had the ability to lead in the public sphere. The work of Shipherd and Stewart had come to pass; there was a Zion in the American West.

Despite the decline in its original principles, from the mid-1880s to the 1960s, history and tradition captured the imagination of a new generation. While these young activists did not place Puritanism at the center of their battle cry for social justice, they embraced the work of their 19th century predecessors and strove to bring about a new type of egalitarian world. Expanding their notion of cosmopolitanism to include a trans-Atlantic worldview, the college established programs in order to train the reformers for tomorrow with a sense of understanding of world plight. Although the retrogression was an embarrassment to the legacy of the founders, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. honored the accomplishments of the community:

> I can never come to this campus without a deep sense of appreciation and gratitude for all that this great institution has done for the cultural, political, and social life of our nation and the world.[320]

In 1990 Oberlin, now a city, voted to permit the sale of liquor within the city limits, ending 157 years of temperance.[321] While this and other 19th century Puritanical aspects have largely disappeared as the community diversified and evolved to its contemporary form, the sacred ideals of democracy remain. Collegiate cooperatives, an emphasis on local foods, local business, and a push toward innovation is still found in the 21st century. These elements ensure that citizens and students maintain control over the institutions that directly affect their daily lives. Thus, over 175 years after its founding, Oberlin continues to be a symbol of democratic action transforming society. Although now

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[320] Ibid.
[321] Although a temperance society, Oberlin allowed the sale of alcohol at the local inn for travelers and visitors since the late 1840s.

secular in this modern world, it remains a "shining city upon a hill" for those seeking

enlightenment, tolerance, and the promise of justice.[322]

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[322] John Winthrop. "A Model of Christian Charity."

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