The Nation's Mission: Social Movements and Nation-Building in the United States

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Long after the American revolution, social movements played important roles in the development of the United States as a nation, helping to define and express identities that were both larger and smaller than the nation itself. Movements that were founded to advance certain goals — temperance, religious conversion, or the abolition of slavery — consciously helped to shape and define "Americanness" and therefore played an important role in constituting the nation itself. Movements inspired by Protestantism have been a particular force. To outsiders — immigrants, the irreligious, non-Protestants, or foreigners — American social movements sought to impose American civilization on peoples, lands, and nations outside their cultural or political domain, all justified as a mission sanctioned and supervised by God.

Longtemps après la fin de la Guerre de l'indépendance, les mouvements sociaux ont joué d'importants rôles dans le développement des États-Unis en tant que nation, aidant à définir et à exprimer des identités à la fois plus grandes et plus petites que la nation même. Les mouvements voués à la défense de certaines causes — la tempérance, la conversion religieuse ou l'abolition de l'esclavage — ont consciemment aidé à façonner et à définir l'« américanité » et ont donc joué un rôle de premier plan dans l'édification de la nation. Les mouvements inspirés du protestantisme ont été particulièrement forts. Aux étrangers — les immigrants, les irréligieux, les non-protestants ou les étrangers —, les mouvements sociaux américains cherchèrent à imposer la civilisation américaine aux gens, territoires et nations hors de leur sphère culturelle ou politique, tout cela au nom d'une mission sanctionnée et supervisée par Dieu.

HISTORIANS OF UNITED STATES history tend to tell the stories of social movements as local ones. But these narratives, of movement activists imbued

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by reforming fervour to change themselves, their cities, their country, and the world, reflect motives and identities that weave the local and the global in suggestive ways. By what threads are the local stories of social movements in particular nation-states connected to a global fabric? With what ideologies do social movement activists influence national questions of belonging and exclusion? Did the people who imagined, led, and populated these movements think globally and act locally, as current bumper stickers exhort? Finally, what relation do social movements have to the nation, when we employ a more critical lens to examine the construction and creation of them both?

The short answer to these questions is simple: long after the American revolution, a social movement that literally created the United States, social movements played important roles in the development of the United States *as* a nation, helping to define and express identities that were both larger and smaller than the nation itself. During the early nineteenth century, not only were the country's boundaries loosely formed, contested, and complex, but Americans' sense of themselves as a people had not emerged even to the extent it has in our own time. That process took many years, and it was assisted by the numerous social movements that characterized American civic life. Movements founded to advance certain goals — temperance, for example, or religious conversion, or the abolition of slavery — consciously helped to shape and define "Americanness" and therefore played an important role in constituting the nation itself.

I want to direct a wide lens to early nineteenth-century social movements to show how they helped define what came to be thought of as a uniquely American mission. Further, I argue that the ways in which antebellum Americans, through social movements, articulated the meaning of their time, place, and people continue to inform how we understand the American nation itself. Here the perspectives of outsiders — both within the United States and internationally — provide the distance from the individual threads of this story that gives sharper focus to the pattern of the national fabric. What we see through this lens is that social movements are far more deeply woven into Americans' ideas about their nation than those movements' narrower goals might suggest.

First a warning: embracing the current fascination with globalization has special dangers for the history of social movements. After all, the neo-liberal and anti-ideological assumptions that pervade many studies of globalization tend to erase social movements from serious consideration. Efforts by people to join together to protect and transform their communities, schools, unions, physical environments, or government policies or to combat imperialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and poverty in their many local forms become *merely* local, backwards, provincial, and, worst of all, destined to defeat. That movements opposed to the institutions that represent global capitalism have arisen as prominent sources of social unrest is indicative of this frustration. The rhetoric of a global village, one dominated by markets and financial elites (international alliances that are quite different from those

Marx envisioned), can make people's efforts to control their lives, to work for greater justice in the distribution of wealth, and to challenge the dominance of some groups by others seem puny, hopeless, and irrelevant.[1]

Historians tell and interpret stories, however, and, in spite of global elites and the Internet, the stories of most people are grounded not simply in their nation-states but in families, communities, tribes, cultures, folk, and the social movements that they launch from each of these. The nation is a political jurisdiction, a provider of legal citizenship, and a sponsor of wars, domestic programmes, propaganda, and complex loyalties, but it has never been the only way in which people understand themselves or choose to act in the world. Historians need to convey those stories at the same time as we bring our particular analyses to bear on the complex realities that encompass them.

Social scientists' work in comparative and trans-national social movements does not, I think, provide historians with the models we need to address these issues. The nation is far too much a given in this work, although a few scholars attempt to transcend the "central reference in the liberal concept, the claim to access, inclusion, membership, and belonging to an already given political system".[2] Even in social movements that went beyond national boundaries — international workers' movements, bourgeois women's alliances, pacifist organizations, or environmental efforts, to name a few — the state (or states) are the central units against which they react, and whose policy-makers are the targets of their appeals. Thus, although much new work among social movement scholars is comparative, it fails to elucidate historical processes that shaped the nation itself.

Secondly, issues that many historians deem fundamental are considered by many social movement theorists merely as variables in models of organization, membership, and political practice. For example, while scholars note Americans' high church membership, they are unconcerned with what compels people to organize around religiously based social change; churches become, along with print shops and restaurants, "supportive organizations" in the charts of organizational life.[3] In general, social movement analysis seeks to establish models that will help explain why contemporary movements emerge and what forms they take. While this work offers one set of

1 For an example of this perspective, see Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999).

2 Evelina Dagnino, "Culture, Citizenship, and Democracy: Changing Discourses and Practices of the Latin American Left", in Sonia E. Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar, eds., *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures: Re-visioning Latin American Social Movements* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1998), p. 51.

3 Hanspeter Kriesi, "The Impact of National Contexts on Social Movement Structures: A Cross-Movement and Cross-National Comparison", in Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 152. See, too, Naomi Rosenthal and Michael Schwartz, "Sponteneity and Democracy in Social Movements", in Bert Klandermans, ed., *International Social Movement Research: Social Movement Organizations in Europe and the United States*, vol. 2 (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1989).

ways to examine social movements across national boundaries, it does not inquire deeply into what role social movements play in people's lives, how movements help define the complex relationships among individuals, civic life, the state, and social change. Nor does it ask how social movements are themselves constitutive of nation-formation in particular times and places.

Notions of membership and belonging, pivotal to understanding national identities, are also central to the histories of social movements and the societal ills they confront. Like nationalism, social movements help define and express identity: as Leila Rupp puts it in her new book on the international women's movement, "Understanding how groups define 'who we are' provides the link necessary to explain how discontented constituencies mobilize for political action."[4] Only people who believe that they have claims on a society, who consider themselves, in some sense, citizens, form and join movements to change it. These activists are not necessarily bearers of the full privileges of citizenship, but they claim and assert the right to be heard by those who are. Thus the word nation itself evokes complicated questions of belonging, a mix of place, people, race/ethnicity, language, religion, legal systems, governmental policies, and relationships with whomever is "not us". Defining each of these has been a source of struggle and contestation in the United States, which has grappled from its earliest days with (what some believed were) limitless boundaries, deep divisions as to racial and religious definitions of the "people", and contrasts, conflicts, and overlaps between the law of the nation and that of a particular state. Indeed, the confusing nature of American citizenship has made the evolution of a national identity extremely untidy, since it involved a system of multiple states and sets of laws. Certainly the federal constitution established one framework for citizenship (as native-born or "naturalized" members of the U.S.), but states provided another, and the dance between the two continues to the present.[5]

Antebellum social reformers thought of themselves as members of communities both smaller and larger than a nation. If we take seriously what they said about their newly founded country, it was a federation of states, and it was as members of states that they first measured their sense of belonging. Even when they formed a federal government, Americans were reluctant to call it a "national" one. Without denying the importance of rituals and institutions that worked to reinforce a national identity, the amorphousness of the nation took many forms and lasted well beyond the first decades: recall Robert E. Lee's conclusion at the start of the Civil War that his greater loyalty lay with Virginia and thus with the Confederacy; the federal government's first reference to "the national forces" rather than the state troops in the *Civil*

4 Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 7.

5 Individual states mostly defined the rights of citizens through the nineteenth century, determining (at least until the Reconstruction and woman suffrage amendments partially restrained them) who could vote and sometimes permitting immigrants who were not *American* citizens to do so.

War Enrollment Act of 1863; and the system of burying "Union" soldiers by state in the cemetery at Gettysburg.[6] If the Civil War resolved, as Lincoln's Gettysburg Address put it, that "this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom", it was only obvious after the fact. On this level, antebellum Americans thought small, and local.

At the same time, as the Gettysburg address also suggests, many Americans thought big, and global. For them, the crucial identity that bound them to one another, that spurred them to join social movements, and that, in fact, defined their *national* mission, was as Christians. In describing the "vice and misery" suffered by New York's poor, moral reformer and urban missionary Margaret Prior appealed not to her fellow Americans but to "the Christians in our land".[7] To lawyer Stephen Colwell, it was the "Christians of the United States [who] have received from their Fathers the most important trust ever committed to men. The political institutions of this country, springing from Christian liberality, Christian civilization and intelligence ... are placed in their hands...."[8] The American Peace Society referred not to national boundaries, but to an end to war in "Christendom".[9] Perhaps only distance, whether of time or place or identity, can furnish the view that makes this evident: in the United States, the dialectic between politics and religion has been so tightly woven as to be most visible to the irreligious or to foreigners. It was to de Tocqueville "a form of Christianity which I cannot better describe by styling it a democratic and republican religion ... [F]rom the beginning, politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved."[10] "I do not know", he admitted, "whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion — for who can search the human heart? — but I am certain that they hold it to be indispensible to the maintenance of republican institutions."[11]

"The Science of Christian Government"

With this loyalty to Protestantism in the forefront, the first generation to have reached maturity in the United States formed social movements.

6 John Whitelay Chambers II, *To Raise an Army: The Draft Comes to America* (New York: Free Press, 1987), p. 51. The ambiguous relationship to the federal government, and therefore to the idea of a nation, is still pervasive, of course. Witness recent debates over "welfare magnet laws", in which states compete to maintain higher levels of public support for "their" citizens without "inviting" those of other states to migrate there. Interestingly, the court decision that overturned these regulations was based on the constitutional prohibition intended to prevent states from refusing entry to African Americans.

7 Quoted in Nancy Cott, *et al.*, *Roots of Bitterness*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), p. 201.

8 Stephen Colwell, "The Position of Christianity in the United States" (1854), in David Brion Davis, ed., *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath & Co., 1979), p. 220.

9 Quoted in Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800–1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1960), p. 113.

10 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1980), vol. 1, p. 300.

11 *Ibid.*, pp. 305–306.

Inspired by the work of British evangelicals who had organized to oppose the "tide of infidelity and the waves of licentiousnss" among the working classes,[12] some Americans rather reluctantly overcame denominational loyalties to form the benevolent empire. In the United States, the first "national" organizations were the American Bible, Tract, and Temperance Societies, the American Home Missionary Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Colonization Society. "It was to mold a nation", writes historian Clifford Griffin, "that the trustees of the Lord formed and ran their societies, established their thousands of auxiliaries, and sent out their hundreds of agents, missionaries, and colporteurs."[13] Indeed, the competitiveness, local patriotism, and defensiveness of turf that surrounded the founding of these organizations closely resemble the struggles that are traditionally associated with nation-building.[14] Even when they stressed more immediate and local goals (for instance, converting a single sinner or acquiring another name on a temperance pledge), participants in these social movements were deeply engaged in how the nation itself developed and how Americans ever since have expressed patriotism, imperialism, their sense of moral righteousness, and the boundaries of legitimate demands for social change at home and abroad. Although there were skirmishes over the nature of the relationship, for most American social reformers, Christianity and nationalism were inseparable, and it was in their organizational life that "religious zeal is perpetually warmed ... by the fires of patriotism".[15] Indeed, some, especially in New England, implicitly offered their own definition of the nation when they spoke of themselves as "probably the last peculiar people which God means to form, and the last great empire which he means to erect" before the return of Christ.[16]

Torn between optimism and fear for their new country, antebellum Americans became social activists in numbers and with an intensity that have not been surpassed before or since. They filled the churches of the Second Great Awakening of the 1820s and 1830s, built a multitude of organizations, and expressed utter confidence that they could, and were entitled to, transform the world. Their social movements had local, national, and international agendas. Closest to home, thousands of middle-class Protestants organized to alleviate poverty, which they saw as an essentially moral condition. A tradition of giving relief to the needy merged with a newer effort to transform the poor themselves, as women and men tramped through the streets of urban slums bestowing their lessons on the poor, foreign, and fallen. Deeply

12 Quoted in Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 54.

13 Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers*, p. 99.

14 See *ibid.*, chap. 2.

15 De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, p. 306.

16 Quoted in Martin E. Marty, *Pilgrims in their own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1984), p. 181.

ingrained (and, throughout American history, astonishingly consistent) notions of the worthy and unworthy poor pervaded this work. Thus, the Female Missionary Society for the Poor in the City of New York was formed in 1818 for those "who, either on account of their poverty, their wickedness or their ignorance, are destitute of the common ordinances of the Gospel".[17] The very names of relief societies, such as Rochester's Home for Friendless and Virtuous Females, Chicago's Erring Woman's Refuge, and the Penitent Female Refuge in Boston, signalled reformers' focus on the moral circumstances of the poor.

The national and international implications of their work were never far from reformers' thoughts or actions, though individuals worked on different fronts. Some focused explicitly on the threat that the federal government would be entirely secular, seeing in education, missionary activities, and laws enforcing the Christian sabbath a path to national salvation. Their oft-expressed commitment to religious liberty rarely included the right to be irreligious, and many leaders considered it the government's responsibility to ensure the nation's piety. Henry Boardman noted with alarm that "From the close of General Washington's administration in 1797, to the inauguration of General Harrison, there was not more than one message to Congress, or inaugural address, in which the Christian religion was distinctly recognized," and he was far from alone.[18] But when antebellum Americans referred to having established a "sisterhood of reforms" or to their country as a "chosen" one, they did not see their work as limited by mere national boundaries.

Christianity has, since its earliest days, been an expansionist religion, and it found in American reformers those who would willingly build their empire one convert at a time. Although they disagreed about the details, most social reformers of the day shared prominent Calvinist minister Lyman Beecher's confidence that "this nation is, in the providence of God, destined to lead the way in the moral and political emancipation of the world".[19] In this tradition American social reformers, acting as Christians and only implicitly as representatives of the American state, exported their religious and social teachings along with their notions of individual rights and citizenship. The social movements that emerged in this context, including temperance, moral reform, antislavery, home and foreign missions, conversion of Jews and Catholics, missions to the "heathen", and relief of the poor, expressed a

17 Female Missionary Society for the Poor in the City of New York, "Constitution" (1818), p. 7. For a discussion of this in a comparative perspective, see Daniel T. Rodgers, "Why is Poverty a Public Problem? Rhetorics of Obligation in American Social Policy", in Michael B. Katz and Christoph Sachße, eds., *The Mixed Economy of Social Welfare: Public/ Private Relations in England, Germany, and the United States, the 1870's to the 1930's* (Baden-Baden, 1996), pp. 25–50.

18 Quoted in John R. Bodo, *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812–1848* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1980 [1954]), p. 35. See also *An Inquiry into the Moral and Religious Character of the American Government* (1838).

19 Lyman Beecher, *Plea for the West* (New York: Arno, 1977 [1835]), pp. 10–11.

range of political and social goals, but they all reflected a consensus among American Protestants about what were coming to be considered middle-class values, a distinctive political culture, and a definition of national identity that was intrinsically Protestant. "The voluntary society is peculiar to modern times, and almost to our own age," wrote the leading American missionary, Rufus Anderson, in an 1837 article entitled "The Time for the World's Conversion Come". "Like our own form of government, working with perfect freedom over a broad continent, it is among the great results of the progress of Christian civilization."[20] That we call the earliest Anglo-American collaboration on behalf of social reform the "benevolent empire" should signal the extent to which movement activists saw their national identities and goals as subsets of a larger Christian mission; rhetorically committed to the separation of church and state, they nevertheless founded religiously based movements that were deeply interwoven with a supposedly secular political culture. Those few freethinkers (many of them, significantly, not American-born) who fretted that (in Lyman Beecher's approving words) the "rapid and universal extension of civil and religious liberty [was] introductory to the triumph of universal Christianity", were labelled infidels and dismissed from serious consideration.[21]

These Protestant convictions underscored an American mission that was equally pertinent in New York's slums, among Native Americans, in the Pacific islands, or in Liberia: they sought to establish Protestant Americans as the moral arbiters of both the nation and the world. Thus abolitionist Lewis Tappan founded the American Missionary Association, which viewed its mandate as spreading the word of evangelical antislavery in such disparate places as Siam, the West Indies, and Kentucky, as well as among fugitive slaves in Canada; by the eve of the Civil War the Association had established "antislavery missions" in Africa and Turkey as well.[22] National borders made no real distinctions among sinners, in the evangelical worldview. To the Presbyterians whose work for the Board of Foreign Missions encompassed Hawaii, Syria, Burma, Africa, and East Asia, as well as missions to Native Americans, religion and patriotism were essentially one and the same; in the words of one historian, "Doing the glorious work of the Lord and winning Indians to the enlightened life-style of middle-class Protestants appeared quite consistent with doing the work of the United States."[23] In

20 Quoted in Andrew F. Walls, "The American Dimension in the History of the Missionary Movement", in Joel A. Carpenter and Wilbert R. Shenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels: American Evangelicals and Foreign Missions, 1880–1980* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eeardmans Publishing Co., 1990), p. 6.

21 Beecher, *Plea for the West*, p. 9.

22 See Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1969), pp. 293, 300.

23 Michael C. Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes Toward American Indians, 1837–1893* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), p. 24. In the 1980s more than 39,000 career Protestant foreign missionaries from this continent as well as 30,000 additional short-term workers were employed overseas by various evangelical societies. See Carpenter and Shenk, eds., *Earthen Vessels*, p. xii.

their view, religious and political goals were entirely compatible; in its 1824 Memorial to Congress, for example, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign (*sic*) Missions argued that christianizing American Indians would allow "the government of our nation, and Christians of nearly all denominations" to make amends for "the neglect with which these aboriginal tribes have been treated in regard to their civil, moral, and religious improvement".[24] This idea was at the heart of much of American exploration: "Now we realize the great vision of Columbus, and reach the Indies by the West," wrote American missionaries to the west. "The barriers of ages are broken; and the heart of China is now open to the direct influence of Protestant America."[25] The American hopefulness that citizens, acting together, could reshape their society was infused with both secular meaning and the absolute faith that, as educator and author Catharine Beecher put it, "The principles of democracy ... are identical with the principles of Christianity."[26] This connection was not lost on King Kamehamehan of Hawaii for one, who asked visiting American missionaries in 1838 to teach his advisors and himself "the science of Christian government".[27]

Framing Americanness

Numerous historians, myself included, have focused on the ways in which the language of Protestant activism invited American women to exercise public authority and have explicated "the religious character of women's patriotism".[28] That many antebellum Protestants, both defenders and opponents of women's political rights, argued that Christianity had offered women the highest possible status is a fascinating and complex question for another time; so are the ways in which, throughout the world, women become political symbols during times of state-building and nation-formation.[29] This rhetoric, while gendered, also framed the way American reformers defined "Americanness" itself. Let me offer a few examples from an array of social movements, and suggest that we listen closely to these activists' words. My point is not to measure the religiosity of specific move-

24 American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Memorial to the Senate and the House of Representatives, quoted in Davis, ed., *Antebellum American Culture*, p. 234. As president, of course, Andrew Jackson took a much different view of the best policy toward the Indians and instituted their "speedy removal" from native lands. Jackson, Second Annual Message (1830), quoted in Davis, *Antebellum American Culture*, p. 240.

25 Quoted in Marty, *Pilgrims in their own Land*, p. 180.

26 Catharine Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841), in Jeanne Boydston, Mary Kelley, and Anne Margolis, *The Limits of Sisterhood: The Beecher Sisters on Women's Rights and Woman's Sphere* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 130.

27 Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (New York: Oxford, 1997), p. 20.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

29 See, for instance, the collection edited by Valentine M. Moghadam, *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

ments. I want instead to point out how social movements' Christian assumptions helped to shape national identity and thus define who was within, and who outside, the mainstream of national life.

Social activists who were not among the dominant classes insisted on their own belonging and rights as Americans by drawing instinctively on a Christian consensus. Disfranchised since 1839, African-American men in Pennsylvania organized to regain their political rights, declaring in 1848, "We do not make our appeal to you as christian sects, or political parties, but as men — christians and republicans — beseeching you to apply the same principles and practice to us as religion and republicanism dictates should belong to others...."[30] Labour reformers, too, blended religious and political ideals, as when, in 1832, Samuel Whitcomb assured a group of New England workers, "That by which we judge the poor, industrious common people, bears the mark of a *christian* origin, [while] that intended for the opulent and elevated, shows a strong resemblance to Mahometanism."[31] Decades later, Uriah Stephens of the Knights of Labor encouraged workers to become educated in political economy so that "members become thoroughly informed as to their rights as citizens, both in the abstract or higher laws of God, and legally, or in the present laws of the land".[32] Beginning in 1912, the American Federation of Labor supported the Men and Religion movement's Labor Forward programme of union "revivals" to shore up support and renew members' zeal with "a Christian condemnation of capitalists who would deny wage-earners a decent living".[33] "The union label is a religious emblem," declared the *Garment Worker*. "It is a religious act to buy goods to which this label [is] attached, an act blessed on earth and honored in heaven." Others insisted that labour agitators were the "true followers of Christ and are struggling to establish upon earth the kingdom of God".[34]

30 "Appeal to the Voters of Pennsylvania", in the *Minutes of the State Convention of the Coloured Citizens of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1849; reprint Philadelphia: Historic Publication #228, 1969), p. 9.

31 Quoted in Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 65. This is a huge literature, but see, for example, Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Paul Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution, Lynn, Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Albany: State University of New York, 1981).

32 Quoted in Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 437.

33 Elizabeth and Kenneth Fones-Wolf, "Trade-Union Evangelism: Religion and the AFL in the Labor Forward Movement, 1912–1916", in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), pp. 154, 168. So implicit are Christian assumptions that, after noting that Samuel Gompers was "not at all religious", the Fones-Wolfs argue that he supported the campaign as in line with "legitimizing of the workers' Christian dignity" (p. 160). See also Herbert G. Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age", in his *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 79–117.

34 Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf, "Trade-Union Evangelism", p. 169.

Historian Mari Jo Buhle has pointed out that small-town, American-born women brought the religious assumptions and rhetoric of the temperance crusade to the socialist movement. As one Oklahoma woman put it, "I am fifty-one years of age but I am with the Socialists to help pull down Satan's ranks and build God's kingdom here on earth."[35]

As Whitcomb's reference to "Mahometanism" suggests, building a nation means forging an "us" in part by establishing a "them", a process in which social movements played an important part. Antebellum social movements helped to do the work of nation-building not by defining themselves in opposition to the state, as has been the case among followers of liberation theology in Latin America, for example, but by persuasively describing a more amorphous threat to religious and secular institutions. As was so often the case, Lyman Beecher was vigilant in alerting people to the dangers of Catholics in their midst: "This danger of uneducated mind is augmenting daily by the rapid influx of foreign emigrants", he wrote in 1835, "unacquainted with our institutions, unaccustomed to self-government, unaccessible to education, and easily accessible to prepossession, and inveterate credulity, and intrigue, and easily embodied and wielded by sinister design."[36] Similarly, as I have argued elsewhere, religious and sexual infidelity were closely allied as enemies of Protestant social reform; indeed, they delineated what was un-Christian, and un-American, in the antebellum years.[37] If Americans' formal civic status did not require a pledge of allegiance to a particular religion, notions of religious respectability pervade discussions of citizens' rights, and atheists, Jews, and Universalists were at different times and in various states prohibited from testifying in court or running for office. Activists' unwillingness to question this consensus certainly dampened some radical protest and maintained categories of exclusion. Supporters of woman suffrage, for instance, insisted time and again that they were "refined and domestic" and "do not scoff at religion, repudi-

35 Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870–1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 116. The rhetoric of "conversion" pervaded the socialist movement in the United States (see for example p. 120). In more recent social movements as well, Protestant faith has joined secular principles in articulating a national vision. When Martin Luther King, Jr., declared it part of "the long tradition of our Christian faith" that "God is on the side of truth and justice", he maintained a link between Protestant beliefs and political ideals in a way that made it difficult to describe the Civil Rights movement as un-American (as, for instance, Communist Party challenges to racism were not). King's address to the First Annual Institute on Non-Violence and Social Change in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1956, quoted in James Melvin Washington, ed., *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World: Martin Luther King, Jr.,* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1992), p. 23.

36 Beecher, *Plea for the West*, p. 49.

37 See Lori D. Ginzberg, " 'The Hearts of Your Readers will Shudder': Fanny Wright, Infidelity, and American Freethought", *American Quarterly*, vol. 46 (June 1994), pp. 195–226, and " 'Pernicious Heresies': Women's Political Identities and Sexual Respectability in the Nineteenth Century", in Alison Parker and Stephanie Cole, eds., *Women and the Unstable State in Nineteenth Century America* (Lubbock: Texas A & M Press, 2000), pp. 139–162.

ate the Bible, nor blaspheme God".[38] With the exception of the Jew and self-declared infidel Ernestine Rose, few suggested that Christianity *should* be irrelevant to the granting or withholding of political rights.[39]

In addition to the Catholics, African Americans, and Native Americans who numbered among the actual "outsiders" within the United States, social reformers focused a great deal of rhetorical attention on the fearful trio of "Jews, Turks, and infidels" against whom "protestants and patriots" needed to gird themselves.[40] Identifying this group as a serious danger was numerically absurd; we can understand the fear they evoked only if we shift to the international perspective of Christianity, through which lens they were a "global other" that threatened the larger American/ Protestant mission. United States Protestants described the special threat posed by Turks, or Mahomedans, terms that subsumed all Moslems in lurid descriptions of non-monogamous marriage, the veiling of women, lechery, and a backwards religion. When American reformers wished to "prove" that Christianity had granted women their greatest rights, they employed a "pervasive characterization of Islamic societies as backward and particularly degrading to women".[41] "The sad story of woman's wrongs, where the true God is not worshiped, is, or should be, familiar to my fair readers," remarked a writer in the *Ladies' Repository*, who went on to praise missionaries' "redemption of their sisters from the servility and degradation of paganism".[42] Underscoring these assertions of religious superiority was a defence of Americans' own moral standards, civil inequalities, and economic disparities.

Having "Jews, Turks, and Infidels" exemplify the global threat to Christianity made it simpler to view the political authority and sexual practices of religious outsiders within the United States, such as Mormons, as dangerous to the nation. Rhetorically, the two were inseparable. As Ian Tyrrell notes, "Not only did the American WCTU attack polygamy at home with ferocity equal to that dealt the institution abroad, but temperance women also used the same language to describe Mormon practices that they devised for 'heathens' abroad. ... Mormonism was, stated a tract approved by the WCTU,

38 *The Knickerbocker*, 3/8/54, quoted in Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881; repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), vol. 1, p. 611.

39 For a rare antebellum defence of a true separation of Christianity from government (and of women's rights) see Elisha P. Hurlbut, *Essays on Human Rights* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1848).

40 The latter phrase is Beecher's, *Plea for the West*, p. 62.

41 Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, p. 58. The emergence of a Western discourse against veiling is a fascinating story in this context. As Leila Ahmed notes, the English Lord Cromer, a founder of the Men's League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, campaigned against the veil, arguing that it symbolized women's degradation. "Veiling ... became the symbol now of both the oppression of women ... and the backwardness of Islam, and it became the open target of colonial attack and the spearhead of the assault on Muslim societies." Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), chap. 8, p. 152.

42 *Ladies' Repository* (April, 1841), p. 122.

'The Islam of America'."[43] Tyrrell has argued convincingly that a moral and cultural imperialism attached to American women's temperance crusade, although he describes it as "ironic" that the efforts of the WCTU "became enmeshed in the extension of European values and in the domination of large portions of the globe by the imperial powers".[44] I would suggest that this was not an accidental or ironic meshing, but that the mission of Protestant conversion and American civilization were always and inextricably related. "For God, Home, and Humanity" was the WCTU's motto, as its activists went about initiating movements for woman suffrage in New Zealand, Australia, and, more surprisingly, Japan. For them, as for both their converts and their opponents, Protestantism, temperance, and the rights of individual citizens signified Americanism itself. Consider Leila Rupp's observation that, when international women's meetings "opened with a public prayer, [it was] a practice objected to not by women from different religious traditions but by European Christian women who found it an expression of Anglo-American culture".[45]

And so it was. Just as many eighteenth-century Native Americans first associated Europeans with their religious customs, if one lived outside the United States before the middle of the nineteenth century, the first American one would likely see was a missionary. By century's end, the Board of Foreign Missionaries of the Presbyterian Church supported more than 1,200 foreign missionaries and nearly 6,000 "native" workers.[46] These missionaries represented, in Gail Bederman's words, a "discourse of civilization [that] linked both male dominance and white supremacy to a Darwinist version of Protestant millennialism ... [and that] had been rooted in American culture for centuries".[47] The lessons of "civilization" that they offered — of hard work for individual gain, temperance, private property, female sexual and economic subordination, distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor, and white supremacy, as well as republican political principles — constituted a nearly seamless fabric with Protestant and American culture in all areas of life.

Social Movements, Social Change

Exploring how a global religious identity helped shape the United States as a nation shifts how we understand the specific histories of social movements themselves. Recent historians of American social movements, largely sym-

43 Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 140–141.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

45 Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, p. 56. In Ontario, according to Mariana Valverde, the WCTU's motto was "For God and Home and Native Land". Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), p. 58.

46 Coleman, *Presbyterian Missionary Attitudes*, p. 12.

47 Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 25–26.

pathetic with reformers, tend to stress the radical implications of their efforts, especially when reformers organized to end slavery, demand women's rights, establish utopian communities, or organize on behalf of labourers and the poor. An international lens complicates this, sometimes uncomfortably. For example, historians generally accept Garrisonian abolitionists' righteous (and correct) charge that the movement to colonize freed slaves in Liberia was a racist one; they view colonization largely as a tepid precursor to real abolitionism. At the same time, historians have largely ignored abolitionists' silence regarding colonizationists' more intense and immediate concern: christianizing Africa. From the "outside", these apparent contradictions are harder to miss. To immigrants, the irreligious, non-Protestants, or foreigners, American social movements sought to impose American civilization on peoples, lands, and nations outside their cultural or political domain, all justified as a mission sanctioned and supervised by God.

Certainly religion, in the antebellum era and beyond, has served radical as well as conservative goals.[48] Women, the enslaved, workers, and colonized peoples — many have found in religion both a source of dignity and a mandate to change their society, to exercise their rights as human beings, and to assert that they have a "right to have rights". Religiously based movements have played important roles in establishing national identities, in the emergence of states, and in the granting or refusing of rights. The complex relationship between Islam and national movements in Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan, Algeria, Turkey, and elsewhere has sanctioned both coercion and liberation, individual rights and religious conformity, restrictions on women and opportunities for feminist advocacy.[49] Throughout Latin America social movement activists have at significant risk to themselves made demands on the state on the basis of their religious identities and Christian imagery.[50] These identities serve multiple and often contradictory purposes. To oversimplify with one example: in the United States supporters of woman suffrage embraced the rhetoric of Christian respectability to advance their cause, while French women did not receive suffrage until after World War II, in part because radical politicians feared the political effects of their religious

48 For a look at my own personal scepticism about progressive religion, see "The Heathen Wing: Reflections on Secular Jewish Traditions", *Bridges*, vol. 7 (Summer 1998), pp. 7–14.

49 Margot Badran argues, for instance, that modern Egypt (and the idea of "Egyptness") emerged from a complex mix of religious and secular nationalisms and a local feminist discourse and movement that were inseparable from them both. See her *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). See also Moghadam, *Gender and National Identity*; Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*; Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Hem Lata Swarup and Sarojini Bisaria, *Women, Politics, and Religion* (Etawah, India: A. C. Brothers, 1991); Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds., *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

50 See, for example, Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women's Grassroots Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

loyalties.[51] Markedly different relations among religion, social movements, and the state influenced these and other decisions about citizens' political rights. In the United States, religious and national identities seem to have blended so smoothly (making Christianity, in legal scholar Stephen Feldman's words, "the normal, the neutral, and the natural") that the story of social movements' pervasive Christianity is generally told as one that stands apart from the emergence of the nation itself.[52]

If my proposed view-from-the-outside flattens the diversity of Christian sects, the rise of religious liberals, and the challenges posed by freethinkers, it nevertheless highlights what has been a remarkable consensus about what constitutes an "American" morality. In this sense, turning an international lens to the study of social movements in the United States is like spending a year abroad. Both reveal how religious Americans are and how they enact their religion in ways that are both nationalistic and nation-constituting. Nearly all nineteenth-century observers remarked on the intense religiosity of Americans (there was "no country in the world", noted de Tocqueville, where "the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men") and accepted that Protestantism was central to the American mission to assert itself as the model and source of progress, modernity, and change.[53] This is not to suggest that the political and legal changes that social movements accomplished are unimportant. Throughout American history, ordinary people have organized to demand that their nation live up to its stated political ideals, and they have in the process gained rights and greater justice for oppressed and excluded peoples. The wide lens of internationalism gives those victories a more complicated meaning, however. If Protestantism has inspired progressive social activism in the United States, it has simultaneously and inextricably been a force for conservatism, for establishing limits to the kinds of social change that Americans consider possible, and for declaring other moral standards and traditions outside the true faith.

The nineteenth century was of course an age of nationalism. Even as the world, through trade, conquest, war, printing, and travel, became smaller, states hugged their borders, educated their youth in the language of citizenship, and declared national loyalties supreme. Indeed, the lens of nationalism enables us to understand disparate bits of experience as parts of a process of creating nations. Secular nationalists and Islamic modernists struggled over whose vision would most closely mould an independent Egypt; in Austria and elsewhere diverse peoples received free education at the cost of speaking the "language of the country", which was not, it need hardly be said,

51 Karen Offen, "Women, Citizenship and Suffrage with a French Twist, 1789–1993", in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 161.

52 Stephen M. Feldman, *Please Don't Wish me a Merry Christmas: A Critical History of the Separation of Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 266.

53 De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1, pp. 303–304.

their own; in western Europe and North America Jews were transformed, bit by bit, from "strangers into citizens"; and the Northern victory in the American Civil War is commonly described as having established once and for all the national unity of the United States.[54] A great deal, of course, was lost in that process. As Bonnie Anderson has recently demonstrated, the first international women's movement of the nineteenth century emerged in the 1830s from a freethinking, antislavery, and socialist climate, when, in German feminist Louise Otto's words, "a fresh breeze blew through the world". By mid-century a different atmosphere prevailed, as nationalism and religious orthodoxy permeated even the most progressive social movements.[55]

American historians, with a nod toward the forces of nationalism, commonly designate the antebellum decades as an age of reform. During those restless years thousands of women and men joined movements to alleviate poverty, educate children, alter drinking habits, abolish slavery and war, establish socialist communities, and advance working people's, African Americans', and women's equal rights — in sum, to perfect the experiment in human government that many believed was destined to be the most democratic and virtuous in the world. Yet what the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson referred to as "a fertility of projects for the salvation of the world!"[56] inextricably linked that larger world to the construction of the United States as "one nation under God". This age of reform was an essential partner to American nation-building. Nor is this lesson confined to the experience of the United States. The enduring (and often nearly invisible) conflation of religion, civic life, and nation-building may offer a useful angle to historians who examine different societies' efforts to limit alcohol, educate youth, and reform people's sexual behaviour, in other words, to build "character" along with "civilization". Thus, while Britain's temperance movement was surely an attempt to control the labouring classes, it was also part of that nation's more expansive efforts at building and shaping its Christian empire. Similarly, as Bruce Curtis notes in his work on educational reform, instituting "Christian education" in Upper Canada was intimately related to the process of "creat[ing] forms of civil and religious universality through educational forms of classlessness". Much the same can be said of social purity movements later in the nineteenth century. As Mariana Valverde argues, the discourse of moral purity was central to the consolidation of English Canada. Canada's Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist networks of foreign missions concentrated on expanding Christianity in China, Japan, and India, but "from

54 Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770–1870* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 7. The quote from the 1867 Austrian constitution is in E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848–1875* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), p. 120.

55 Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830–1860* (New York: Oxford, 2000), p. 100.

56 Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New England Reformers", in *Essays: Second Series* (Columbus, Ohio, 1969), p. 276.

the beginning 'foreign' included Native peoples" in defining their national mandate. "Canadian state formation", Valverde argues, "(with the important exception of Quebec) has as one of its ideological pillars the establishment of Protestantism as a kind of joint-stock state religion."[57]

Perhaps more than in other self-declared "Christian" countries, the bond in the United States between national and religious identities persists to the present time. We have but to look to discussions of prayer in schools, prohibitions of flag-burning, angst over presidential sexual behaviour and citizens' moral values, appeals for "volunteerism" to provide for the poor, impassioned debates over posting the ten commandments on schoolroom walls, and politicians flocking to prayer breakfasts to witness the pervasiveness of Christianity in American political and organizational life. Perched on a wave of dislocation and uncertainty even amidst prosperity, many Americans seek religious explanations to express their relationship to the larger society. In so doing, they reaffirm categories designed to marginalize individuals and groups who are thought to stand outside a shared religious and moral tradition; full membership in the nation remains dependent on notions of religious, moral, and sexual respectability defined in terms of us and them, native-born and immigrant, Christian and other, and virtuous and deviant.

57 Bruce Curtis, "Preconditions of the Canadian State: Educational Reform and the Construction of a Public in Upper Canada, 1837–1846", in Norman Knowles, ed., *Age of Transition: Readings in Canadian Social History, 1800–1900* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1998), pp. 252–253; Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, pp. 115, 26.