

# The Ferment of Reform and Culture, 1790–1860

I could readily see in Emerson, notwithstanding his merit, a gaping flaw. It was the insinuation that, had he lived in those days when the world was made, he might have offered some valuable suggestions.

*Herman Melville, 1849*

**Prologue:** The War of Independence, the War of 1812, and the astonishing physical mobility of westward-pushing Americans disrupted the traditional churches and undermined cultural conventions of all sorts. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, a wave of religious revivals swept across the country, checking backsliding and summoning the people back to the hellfire religion of colonial days. The revivals of this “Second Great Awakening” inspired a host of humanitarian crusades—including campaigns for prison reform, temperance, women’s rights, and, eventually, the abolition of slavery. The combined effects of industrialism and democracy initiated far-reaching changes in the character of the family and in the roles of women. Meanwhile, an impressive group of writers, based mainly in New England, laid the foundations of a distinctively American literary tradition, which contained (perhaps paradoxically) healthy doses of social utopianism and unbridled individualism.

## A. Religious Ferment

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### I. A Catholic Views Camp Meetings (c. 1801)

*Kentucky-born Martin J. Spalding was an eminent Catholic prelate who died as the archbishop of Baltimore. He won many friends with his merry laugh, attractive speaking voice, and frank manner. Drawing on memoirs and oral testimony, he described some forty years later the great Protestant camp meetings in Kentucky, where*

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<sup>1</sup>M. J. Spalding, *Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions of Kentucky* . . . (Louisville, Ky.: Webb & Brother, Baltimore: J. Murphy, 1844), pp. 104–106.

*thousands assembled for a week or so to repent of their sins and to find emotional release from a grinding, monotonous frontier life. The camp meeting, though not confined to the frontier, was a typically frontier phenomenon and attracted camp followers who purveyed alcohol and sex. Who were the main participants in the meeting here described? How is the writer's own religious sensibility evident?*

To understand more fully how very "precious and astonishing" this great revival was, we must farther reflect: 1st, that it produced, not a mere momentary excitement, but one that lasted for several successive years. 2ndly, that it was not confined to one particular denomination, but, to a greater or less extent, pervaded all. 3rdly, that men of sense and of good judgment in other matters were often carried away by the same fanaticism which swayed the mob. 4thly, that this fanaticism was as wide-spread as it was permanent—not being confined to Kentucky, but pervading most of the adjoining states and territories. And 5thly, that though some were found who had good sense enough to detect the imposture, yet they were comparatively few in number, and wholly unable to stay the rushing torrent of fanaticism, even if they had had the moral courage to attempt it.

Such are some of the leading features of a movement in religion (!) which is perhaps one of the most extraordinary recorded in history, and to which we know of but few parallels, except in some of the fanatical doings of the Anabaptists in Germany during the first years of their history. The whole matter furnishes one more conclusive evidence of the weakness of the human mind when left to itself; and one more sad commentary on the Protestant rule of faith.

Here we see whole masses of population, spread over a vast territory, boasting too of their enlightenment and Bible-learning, swayed for years by a fanaticism as absurd as it was blasphemous; and yet believing all this to be the work of the Holy Spirit! Let Protestants after this talk about Catholic ignorance and superstition! Had Catholics ever played the "fantastic tricks" which were played off by Protestants during these years, we would perhaps never hear the end of it. . . .

Besides the "exercises" [described earlier] . . . there was also the jumping exercise. Spasmodic convulsions, which lasted sometimes for hours, were the usual sequel to the falling exercise. Then there were the "exercises" of screaming and shouting and crying. A camp meeting during that day exhibited the strangest bodily feats, accompanied with the most Babel-like sounds. An eyewitness of undoubted veracity stated to us that, in passing one of the camp-grounds, he noticed a man in the "barking exercise," clasping a tree with his arms, and dashing his head against it until it was all besmeared with blood, shouting all the time that he had "treed his Saviour"!! Another eyewitness stated that in casually passing by a camp in the night, while the exercises were at the highest, he witnessed scenes of too revolting a character even to be alluded to here.

One of the most remarkable features, perhaps, of these "exercises" is the apparently well-authenticated fact that many fell into them by a kind of sympathy, almost in spite of themselves, and some even positively against their own will! Some who visited the meetings to laugh at the proceedings, sometimes caught the contagion themselves. There seems to have then existed in Kentucky a kind of mental and moral epidemic—a sort of contagious frenzy—which spread rapidly from one to another.

Yet the charm was not so strong that it could not be broken, as the following incident, related to us by a highly intelligent Protestant gentleman, clearly proves. Some young ladies of his acquaintance came from one of those meetings to pass the night at this father's house. They were laboring under great nervous excitement, and, in the course of the evening, began to jerk most violently. The father, one of the most intelligent men in Kentucky, severely rebuked them, and told them bluntly that he would "have no such behavior as this in his house." The reproof was effectual, and the jerking spirit was exorcised! . . .

## 2. *Joseph Smith Has a Vision (1820)*

*Joseph Smith, prophet and first president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons), was born in Vermont and moved as a young boy with his family to the town of Manchester, in western New York. The region was at that time pulsating with religious fervor and denominational rivalry. Pious but confused, the fourteen-year-old Smith prayed for guidance. The result, he later wrote, was a vision that led him to shun the contending existing churches and move toward the establishment of the Mormon religion. In his account of the episode, which follows, what is revealed about the religious temper of the age?*

Some time in the second year after our removal to Manchester, there was in the place where we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. It commenced with the Methodists, but soon became general among all the sects in that region of country. Indeed, the whole district of country seemed affected by it, and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties, which created no small stir and division amongst the people, some crying, "Lo here!" and others, "Lo, there!" Some were contending for the Methodist faith, some for the Presbyterian, and some for the Baptist. . . .

I was at this time in my fifteenth year. My father's family was proselyted to the Presbyterian faith, and four of them joined that church, namely—my mother Lucy; my brothers Hyrum and Samuel Harrison; and my sister Sophronia. During this time of great excitement, my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong. My mind at times was greatly excited, the cry and tumult were so great and incessant. The Presbyterians were most decided against the Baptists and Methodists, and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the Baptists and Methodists in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others.

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<sup>2</sup>From Joseph Smith, *The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1920), chap. 1, verses 5, 7–24, 26.

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself, what is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it? While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."

Never did any passage of Scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passage of Scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible. At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James directs, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to "ask of God," concluding that if He gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture. So, in accordance with this, my determination to ask God, I returned to the woods to make the attempt. It was on the morning of a beautiful, clear day, early in the spring of eighteen hundred and twenty. It was the first time in my life I had made such an attempt, for amidst all my anxieties I had never as yet made the attempt to pray vocally.

After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction. But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name, and said—pointing to the other—"This is my beloved Son. Hear Him."

My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right—and which I should join. I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong, and the personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in His sight: that those professors were all corrupt; that "they draw near to me with their lips, but

their hearts are far from me; they teach for doctrines the commandments of men: having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof." He again forbade me to join with any of them: and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home. And as I leaned up to the fireplace, mother inquired what the matter was. I replied, "Never mind, all is well—I am well enough off." I then said to my mother, "I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true."

It seems as though the adversary was aware, at a very early period of my life, that I was destined to prove a disturber and an annoyer of his kingdom; else why should the powers of darkness combine against me? Why the opposition and persecution that arose against me, almost in my infancy? Some few days after I had this vision, I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers, who was very active in the before-mentioned religious excitement, and, conversing with him on the subject of religion, I took occasion to give him an account of the vision which I had had. I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying, it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the Apostles, and that there would never be any more of them. I soon found, however, that my telling the story had excited a great deal of prejudice against me among professors of religion, and was the cause of great persecution, which continued to increase; and though I was an obscure boy, only between fourteen and fifteen years of age, and my circumstances in life such as to make a boy of no consequence in the world, yet men of high standing would take notice sufficient to excite the public mind against me, and create a bitter persecution; and this was common among all the sects—all united to persecute me.

It caused me serious reflection then, and often has since, how very strange it was that an obscure boy, of a little over fourteen years of age, and one, too, who was doomed to the necessity of obtaining a scanty maintenance by his daily labor, should be thought a character of sufficient importance to attract the attention of the great ones of the most popular sects of the day, and in a manner to create in them a spirit of the most bitter persecution and reviling. But strange or not, so it was, and it was often the cause of great sorrow to myself. However, it was nevertheless a fact that I had beheld a vision. . . .

I had now got my mind satisfied so far as the sectarian world was concerned; that it was not my duty to join with any of them, but to continue as I was until further directed. I had found the testimony of James to be true, that a man who lacked wisdom might ask of God, and obtain, and not be upbraided.

## B. Social and Humanitarian Reformers

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### I. William Ellery Channing Preaches Reformism (c. 1831)

*The famed Boston minister William Ellery Channing (1780–1842) was a leading light in the Unitarian movement, which criticized Calvinistic Puritanism for its emphasis on human depravity. Channing, in contrast, preached a gospel of human goodness, dignity, and even perfectibility. Such doctrines gave powerful impetus to the reform crusades of the early nineteenth century. In the following sermon, entitled “The Perfect Life: The Essence of the Christian Religion,” how does Channing support his arguments for perfectionism? How does he portray the relationship of religious belief to worldly actions?*

I believe that Christianity has one great principle, which is central, around which all its truths gather, and which constitutes it the glorious gospel of the blessed God. I believe that no truth is so worthy of acceptance and so quickening as this. In proportion as we penetrate into it, and are penetrated by it, we comprehend our religion, and attain to a living faith. This great principle can be briefly expressed. It is the doctrine that “God purposes, in his unbounded fatherly love, to perfect the human soul; to purify it from all sin; to create it after his own image; to fill it with his own spirit; to unfold it for ever; to raise it to life and immortality in heaven—that is, to communicate to it from himself a life of celestial power, virtue, and joy.” The elevation of men above the imperfections, temptations, sins, sufferings, of the present state, to a diviner being,—this is the great purpose of God, revealed and accomplished by Jesus Christ; this it is that constitutes the religion of Jesus Christ,—glad tidings to all people: for it is a religion suited to fulfill the wants of every human being.

In the New Testament I learn that God regards the human soul with unutterable interest and love; that in an important sense it bears the impress of his own infinity, its powers being germs, which may expand without limit or end; that he loves it, even when fallen, and desires its restoration; that he has sent his Son to redeem and cleanse it from all iniquity; that he for ever seeks to communicate it to a divine virtue which shall spring up, by perennial bloom and fruitfulness, into everlasting life. In the New Testament I learn that what God wills is our perfection; by which I understand the freest exercise and perpetual development of our highest powers,—strength and brightness of intellect, unconquerable energy of moral principle, pure and fervent desire for truth, unbounded love of goodness and greatness, benevolence free from every selfish taint, the perpetual consciousness of God and of his immediate presence, co-operation and friendship with all enlightened and disinterested spirits, and radiant glory of divine will and beneficent influence, of which we have an emblem—a faint emblem only—in the sun that illuminates and warms so

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<sup>1</sup>William Ellery Channing, *Channing's Works* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1895), pp. 1001–1005.

many worlds. Christianity reveals to me this moral perfection of man, as the great purpose of God.

When I look into man's nature, I see that moral perfection is his only true and enduring good; and consequently the promise of this must be the highest truth which any religion can contain. The loftiest endowment of our nature is the moral power,—the power of perceiving and practising virtue, of discerning and seeking goodness. . . .

At this period, we see a mighty movement of the civilized world. Thrones are tottering, and the firmest establishments of former ages seem about to be swept away by the torrent of revolution. In this movement I rejoice, though not without trembling joy. But I rejoice, only because I look at it in the light of the great truth which I have this day aimed to enforce; because I see, as I think, in the revolutionary spirit of our times, the promise of a freer and higher action of the human mind,—the pledge of a state of society more fit to perfect human beings. I regard the present state of the world in this moral light altogether. The despotisms, which are to be prostrated, seem to be evils, chiefly as they have enslaved men's faculties, as they have bowed and weighed down the soul. The liberty, after which men aspire, is to prove a good only so far as it shall give force and enlargement to the mind; only so far as it shall conspire with Christianity in advancing human nature. Men will gain little by escaping outward despotism, if the soul continues enthralled. Men must be subjected to some law; and unless the law in their own breast, the law of God, of duty, of perfection, be adopted by their free choice as the supreme rule, they will fall under the tyranny of selfish passion, which will bow their necks for an outward yoke.

I have hope in the present struggle of the world, because it seems to me more spiritual, more moral, in its origin and tendencies, than any which have preceded it. It differs much from the revolts of former times, when an oppressed populace or peasantry broke forth into frantic opposition to government, under the goading pressure of famine and misery. Men are now moved, not merely by physical wants and sufferings, but by ideas, by principles, by the conception of a better state of society, under which the rights of human nature will be recognized, and greater justice be done to the mind in all classes of the community. There is then an element—spiritual, moral, and tending towards perfection—in the present movement; and this is my great hope. When I see, however, the tremendous strength of unsubdued passions, which mix with and often overpower this conception of a better order of society; when I consider the success with which the selfish, crafty, and ambitious have turned to their own purposes the generous enthusiasm of the people; when I consider the darkness which hangs over the nations, the rashness with which they have rushed into infidelity and irreligion, as the only refuge from priestcraft and superstition; and when I consider how hard it is for men, in seasons of tumult and feverish excitement, to listen to the mild voice of wisdom teaching that moral perfection alone constitutes glory and happiness,—I fear. I fear not for the final results; not for the *ultimate* triumphs of truth, right, virtue, piety; not for the gradual melioration of men's lot: but for those nearer results, those immediate effects, which the men of this generation are to witness and to feel.

## 2. Dorothea Dix Succors the Insane (1843)

*In 1840 there were only eight insane asylums in the twenty-six states. The overflow, regarded as perverse, were imprisoned or chained in poorhouses, jails, and houses of correction. Schoolteacher Dorothea Dix—a frail, soft-spoken spinster from New England who lived to be eighty-five despite incipient tuberculosis—almost single-handedly wrought a revolution. Filled with infinite compassion for these outcasts, she journeyed thousands of wearisome miles to investigate conditions and to appeal to state legislatures. Despite the powerful prejudice against women who were outspoken in public, she succeeded in securing modern facilities with trained attendants. Her horrifying report to the Massachusetts legislature is a classic. In the following excerpt, where does she lay the blame for the existing conditions?*

I must confine myself to few examples, but am ready to furnish other and more complete details, if required. If my pictures are displeasing, coarse, and severe, my subjects, it must be recollected, offer no tranquil, refined, or composing features. The condition of human beings, reduced to the extremest states of degradation and misery, cannot be exhibited in softened language, or adorn a polished page.

I proceed, gentlemen, briefly to call your attention to the present state of insane persons confined within this Commonwealth, in cages, closets, cellars, stalls, pens! Chained, naked, beaten with rods, and lashed into obedience!

As I state cold, severe facts, I feel obliged to refer to persons, and definitely to indicate localities. But it is upon my subject, not upon localities or individuals, I desire to fix attention. And I would speak as kindly as possible of all wardens, keepers, and other responsible officers, believing that most of these have erred not through hardness of heart and willful cruelty so much as want of skill and knowledge, and want of consideration.

Familiarity with suffering, it is said, blunts the sensibilities, and where neglect once finds a footing, other injuries are multiplied. This is not all, for it may justly and strongly be added that, from the deficiency of adequate means to meet the wants of these cases, it has been an absolute impossibility to do justice to this matter. Prisons are not constructed in view of being converted into county hospitals, and almshouses are not founded as receptacles for the insane. And yet, in the face of justice and common sense, wardens are by law compelled to receive, and the masters of almshouses not to refuse, insane and idiotic subjects in all stages of mental disease and privation.

It is the Commonwealth, not its integral parts, that is accountable for most of the abuses which have lately [existed] and do still exist. I repeat it, it is defective legislation which perpetuates and multiplies these abuses. . . .

Danvers. November. Visited the almshouse. A large building, much out of repair. Understand a new one is in contemplation. Here are fifty-six to sixty inmates, one idiotic, three insane, one of the latter in close confinement at all times.

Long before reaching the house, wild shouts, snatches of rude songs, imprecations and obscene language, fell upon the ear, proceeding from the occupant of a low building, rather remote from the principal building to which my course was

<sup>2</sup>*Old South Leaflets* (Boston, 1904), vol. 6, pp. 490–491, 493–494, 513, 518–519.

directed. Found the mistress, and was conducted to the place which was called “the home” of the forlorn maniac, a young woman, exhibiting a condition of neglect and misery blotting out the faintest idea of comfort, and outraging every sentiment of decency. She had been, I learned, “a respectable person, industrious and worthy. Disappointments and trials shook her mind, and, finally, laid prostrate reason and self-control. She became a maniac for life. She had been at Worcester Hospital for a considerable time, and had been returned as incurable.” The mistress told me she understood that, “while there, she was comfortable and decent.”

Alas, what a change was here exhibited! She had passed from one degree of violence to another, in swift progress. There she stood, clinging to or beating upon the bars of her caged apartment, the contracted size of which afforded space only for increasing accumulations of filth, a foul spectacle. There she stood with naked arms and disheveled hair, the unwashed frame invested with fragments of unclean garments, the air so extremely offensive though ventilation was afforded on all sides save one, that it was not possible to remain beyond a few moments without retreating for recovery to the outward air. Irritation of body, produced by utter filth and exposure, incited her to the horrid process of tearing off her skin by inches. Her face, neck, and person were thus disfigured to hideousness. She held up a fragment just rent off. To my exclamation of horror, the mistress replied: “Oh, we can’t help it. Half the skin is off sometimes. We can do nothing with her; and it makes no difference what she eats, for she consumes her own filth as readily as the food which is brought her.” . . .

The conviction is continually deepened that hospitals are the only places where insane persons can be at once humanely and properly controlled. Poorhouses converted into madhouses cease to effect the purposes for which they were established, and instead of being asylums for the aged, the homeless, and the friendless, and places of refuge for orphaned or neglected childhood, are transformed into perpetual bedlams. . . .

Injustice is also done to the convicts. It is certainly very wrong that they should be doomed day after day and night after night to listen to the ravings of madmen and madwomen. This is a kind of punishment that is not recognized by our statutes, and is what the criminal ought not to be called upon to undergo. The confinement of the criminal and of the insane in the same building is subversive of the good order and discipline which should be observed in every well-regulated prison. . . .

Gentlemen, I commit to you this sacred cause. Your action upon this subject will affect the present and future condition of hundreds and of thousands.

### 3. *T. S. Arthur’s Ten Nights in a Barroom (1854)*

*T. S. Arthur, an ill-educated New Yorker, became the moralistic author of seventy books and countless articles. His lurid Ten Nights in a Barroom was the Uncle Tom’s Cabin of the temperance crusade, and second only to Uncle Tom’s Cabin as the best seller of the 1850s. Endorsed by the clergy, it was put on the stage for an incredible run. Although the author was a foe of saloons, he was not a teetotaler, and he consistently advocated temperance by education rather than prohibition by legislation.*

<sup>3</sup>T. S. Arthur, “Night the Sixth,” *Ten Nights in a Barroom* (Boston: L. P. Crown, 1854).

*In his famous novel, Simon Slade's tavern ("Sickle and Sheaf") is portrayed as the ruination of quiet Cedarville. After numerous heart-tugging tragedies, the climax comes when the drunken tavern owner is murdered with a brandy bottle by his drunken son. Earlier in the book, the following conversation takes place. Enumerate and assess the arguments on both sides, and evaluate this interchange as propaganda in the battle against the bottle.*

The man, who had until now been sitting quietly in a chair, started up, exclaiming as he did so—

"Merciful heavens! I never dreamed of this! Whose sons are safe?"

"No man's," was the answer of the gentleman in whose office we were sitting; "no man's—while there are such open doors to ruin as you may find at the 'Sickle and Sheaf.' Did not you vote the anti-temperance ticket at the last election?"

"I did," was the answer, "and from principle."

"On what were your principles based?" was inquired.

"On the broad foundations of civil liberty."

"The liberty to do good or evil, just as the individual may choose?"

"I would not like to say that. There are certain evils against which there can be no legislation that would not do harm. No civil power in this country has the right to say what a citizen shall eat or drink."

"But may not the people, in any community, pass laws, through their delegated lawmakers, restraining evil-minded persons from injuring the common good?"

"Oh, certainly—certainly."

"And are you prepared to affirm that a drinking shop, where young men are corrupted—ay, destroyed, body and soul—does not work an injury to the common good?"

"Ah! but there must be houses of public entertainment."

"No one denies this. But can that be a really Christian community which provides for the moral debasement of strangers, at the same time that it entertains them? Is it necessary that, in giving rest and entertainment to the traveler, we also lead him into temptation?"

"Yes—but—but—it is going too far to legislate on what we are to eat and drink. It is opening too wide a door for fanatical oppression. We must inculcate temperance as a right principle. We must teach our children the evils of intemperance, and send them out into the world as practical teachers of order, virtue, and sobriety. If we do this, the reform becomes radical, and in a few years there will be no bar-rooms, for none will crave the fiery poison.

"Of little value, my friend, will be, in far too many cases, your precepts, if temptation invites our sons at almost every step of their way through life. Thousands have fallen, and thousands are now tottering, soon to fall. Your sons are not safe, nor are mine. We cannot tell the day nor the hour when they may weakly yield to the solicitation of some companion, and enter the wide-open door of ruin. . . . Sir! while you hold back from the work of staying the flood that is desolating our fairest homes, the black waters are approaching your own doors."

There was a startling emphasis in the tones with which this last sentence was uttered, and I did not wonder at the look of anxious alarm that it called to the face of him whose fears it was meant to excite.

“What do you mean, sir?” was inquired.

“Simply, that your sons are in equal danger with others.”

“And is that all?”

“They have been seen of late in the barroom of the ‘Sickle and Sheaf.’”

“Who says so?”

“Twice within a week I have seen them going in there,” was answered.

“Good heavens! No!”

“It is true, my friend. But who is safe? If we dig pits and conceal them from view, what marvel if our own children fall therein?”

“My sons going to a tavern!” The man seemed utterly confounded. “How can I believe it? You must be in error, sir.”

“No. What I tell you is the simple truth.”

#### 4. Dr. William Morton Administers Ether (1846)

*After the renowned English writer Sydney Smith sneered in 1820, “What does the world yet owe to American physicians and surgeons?” he finally got his answer in a dramatic form. Whiskey, opium, and mesmerism having failed as anesthetics, Dr. Crawford Long of Georgia performed the first known surgical operation with ether in 1842, when he removed a tumor from the back of a patient’s neck. Unfortunately for his fame, his exploits were not publicized until 1849. Meanwhile, Dr. William T. G. Morton, a Boston dentist working with Professor Charles T. Jackson of Harvard, independently experimented on patients seeking extractions. In 1846 he performed the “miracle” here described—the first public feat of its kind. Dr. Morton’s health ultimately broke down, and he died in poverty while trying to monopolize his discovery. In this latter-day account, what is remarkable about the skepticism shown?*

Meanwhile, within, all necessary preparations for the operation had been made. The patient selected for the trial was Gilbert Abbott, who was suffering from a congenital but superficial vascular tumor just below the jaw on the left side of the neck. The announcement that the operation was to furnish a test of some preparation for which the astounding claim had been made that it would render the person treated with it temporarily incapable of feeling pain, had attracted a large number of medical men to the theater. It was inevitable that nearly all of those present should be skeptical as to the result. As the minutes slipped by without any sign of Dr. Morton, the incredulous gave vent to their suspicions concerning him and his discovery.

“As Dr. Morton has not yet arrived,” said Dr. Warren, after waiting fifteen minutes, “I presume that he is otherwise engaged.”

The response was a derisive laugh, clearly implying the belief that Dr. Morton was staying away because he was afraid to submit his discovery to a critical test.

Dr. Warren grasped the knife. At that critical moment Dr. Morton entered. No outburst of applause, no smiles of encouragement, greeted him. Doubt and suspicion were depicted on the faces of those who looked down upon him from the tiers

<sup>4</sup>E. L. Snell, “Dr. Morton’s Discovery of Anesthesia,” *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 48 (1894): 589–591.

of seats that encircled the room. No actor about to assume a new role ever received a more chilling reception.

"Well, sir," exclaimed Dr. Warren abruptly, "your patient is ready."

Thus aroused from the bewilderment into which the novelty of his position had thrown him, he [Dr. Morton] spoke a few words of encouragement to the young man about to be operated on, adjusted the inhaler, and began to administer the ether. As the subtle vapor gradually took possession of the citadel of consciousness, the patient dropped off into a deep slumber.

Dr. Warren seized the bunch of veins and made the first incision with his knife.

Instead of awakening with a cry of pain, the patient continued to slumber peacefully, apparently as profoundly unconscious as before.

Then the spectators underwent a transformation. All signs of incredulity and indifference vanished. Not a whisper was uttered. As the operation progressed, men began to realize that they were witnessing something the like of which had never been seen before.

When the operation was over, and while the patient still lay like a log on the table, Dr. Warren, addressing the spectators, said, with solemn emphasis, "Gentlemen, this is no humbug."

But notwithstanding that Dr. Morton had thus demonstrated that a patient could be rendered completely insensible to suffering while undergoing an operation, yet for three weeks the employment of the ether at the hospital was discontinued, and surgery and agony still went hand in hand. In fact, instead of being hailed as a public benefactor, Dr. Morton found himself, for a short period immediately following the public announcement of his discovery, the target for indignant scorn and contempt. He was pilloried in the public prints by medical men and laymen as a charlatan.

## C. *The Changing Role of Women*

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### 1. *The Seneca Falls Manifesto (1848)*

*Lucretia C. Mott, a militant antislavery Quaker, received her first harsh lesson in feminism when, as a teacher, she was paid half a man's salary. Elizabeth C. Stanton, also a temperance and antislavery reformer, insisted on leaving the word "obey" out of her marriage ceremony. Both were aroused when, attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, they were denied seats because of their sex. These two women sparked the memorable convention at Seneca Falls, New York, that formally launched the modern women's rights movement. The embattled women issued a flaming pronouncement in the manner of the Declaration of Independence ("all men and women are created equal"). They not only proclaimed their grievances but also passed eleven resolutions designed to improve their lot. Which of the grievances listed here remain unresolved today?*

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881), vol. 1, pp. 70–71.

### Declaration of Sentiments

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they were accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master—the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to

be wholly regardless of the happiness of women—the law, in all cases, going upon the false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church, as well as State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation—in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

### Resolutions

WHEREAS, The great precept of nature is conceded to be, that “man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness.” Blackstone in his Commentaries remarks, that this law of Nature being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid, derive all their force, and all their validity, and all their authority, mediately and immediately, from this original; therefore,

*Resolved*, That such laws as conflict, in any way, with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature and of no validity, for this is “superior in obligation to any other.”

*Resolved*, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.

*Resolved*, That woman is man's equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.

*Resolved*. That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.

*Resolved*, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach, as she has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies.

*Resolved*, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior that is required of woman in the social state, should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.

*Resolved*, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill-grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in the concert, or in feats of the circus.

*Resolved*, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.

*Resolved*, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.

*Resolved*, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities.

*Resolved, therefore*. That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as a self-evident falsehood, and at war with mankind.

*Resolved*, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce.

## 2. New Yorkers Ridicule Feminists (1856)

*Male opponents of feminism claimed that the female crusaders were frustrated old maids (many, in fact, were married); that women would become coarsened and defeminized by entering the cutthroat arena of politics; that their husbands (if they were lucky enough to have husbands) would look after their rights; and that women, like black slaves, were divinely ordained to be inferior and would be happier in that status. An editorial in the New York Herald wondered what would happen if pregnant sea captains, generals, members of Congress, physicians, and lawyers were suddenly seized with birth pangs in critical situations. The following official report reveals the joking condescension with which the New York legislature approached the problem. How might feminists have answered these jibes?*

Mr. Foote, from the Judiciary Committee, made a report on Women's Rights that set the whole House in roars of laughter:

"The Committee is composed of married and single gentlemen. The bachelors on the Committee, with becoming diffidence, have left the subject pretty much to the married gentlemen. They have considered it with the aid of the light they have before them and the experience married life has given them. Thus aided, they are enabled to state that the ladies always have the best place and choicest tidbit at the table. They have the best seat in the cars, carriages, and sleighs; the warmest place in the winter, and the coolest place in the summer. They have their choice on which side of the bed they will lie, front or back. A lady's dress costs three times as much as that of a gentleman; and, at the present time, with the prevailing fashion, one lady occupies three times as much space in the world as a gentleman.

"It has thus appeared to the married gentlemen of your Committee, being a majority (the bachelors being silent for the reason mentioned, and also probably for the further reason that they are still suitors for the favors of the gentler sex), that, if there is any inequality or oppression in the case, the gentlemen are the sufferers. They, however, have presented to petitions for redress; having, doubtless, made up their minds to yield to an inevitable destiny.

"On the whole, the Committee have concluded to recommend no measure, except that as they have observed several instances in which husband and wife have both signed the same petition. In such case, they would recommend the parties to apply for a law authorizing them to change dresses, so that the husband may wear petticoats, and the wife the breeches, and thus indicate to their neighbors and the public the true relation in which they stand to each other."

## 3. Lucy Stone Protests Traditional Marriage (1855)

*Lucy Stone graduated from Oberlin College (America's first coeducational institution of higher learning) in 1847 and launched herself on a lifelong career as a reformer. She was an outspoken abolitionist and advocate of women's rights. Traditionalists were so irritated with her that they rudely repeated a poem published by a*

<sup>24</sup>E. C. Stanton et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881), vol. 1, pp. 629–630.

<sup>25</sup>E. C. Stanton et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (1881), vol. 1, pp. 260–261.

*Boston newspaper promising “fame’s loud trumpet shall be blown” for the man who “with a wedding kiss shuts up the mouth of Lucy Stone.” When she did marry Henry B. Blackwell in 1855, she hardly fell silent. Instead, with her new husband, she used the occasion to dramatize the plight of women. In her wedding declaration, which follows, what aspects of women’s condition are most condemned? In what ways does this document suggest the relationship between the abolitionist and feminist crusades?*

### Protest

While acknowledging our mutual affection by publicly assuming the relationship of husband and wife, yet in justice to ourselves and a great principle, we deem it a duty to declare that this act on our part implies no sanction of, nor promise of voluntary obedience to such of the present laws of marriage, as refuse to recognize the wife as an independent, rational being, while they confer upon the husband an injurious and unnatural superiority, investing him with legal powers which no honorable man would exercise, and which no man should possess. We protest especially against the laws which give to the husband:

1. The custody of the wife’s person.
2. The exclusive control and guardianship of their children.
3. The sole ownership of her personal, and use of her real estate, unless previously settled upon her, or placed in the hands of trustees, as in the case of minors, lunatics, and idiots.
4. The absolute right to the product of her industry.
5. Also against laws which give to the widower so much larger and more permanent an interest in the property of his deceased wife, than they give to the widow in that of the deceased husband.
6. Finally, against the whole system by which “the legal existence of the wife is suspended during marriage,” so that in most States, she neither has a legal part in the choice of her residence, nor can she make a will, nor sue or be sued in her own name, nor inherit property.

We believe that personal independence and equal human rights can never be forfeited, except for crime; that marriage should be an equal and permanent partnership, and so recognized by law; that until it is so recognized, married partners should provide against the radical injustice of present laws, by every means in their power.

We believe that where domestic difficulties arise, no appeal should be made to legal tribunals under existing laws, but that all difficulties should be submitted to the equitable adjustment of arbitrators mutually chosen.

Thus reverencing law, we enter our protest against rules and customs which are unworthy of the name, since they violate justice, the essence of law.

(Signed) *Henry B. Blackwell,  
Lucy Stone*

#### 4. Orestes Brownson Explores the Woman Question (1869)

*Not all reformers favored the changes in women's status that Lucy Stone and other feminists advocated. Orestes A. Brownson championed abolition and the Workingmen's party, and participated in the transcendentalist utopian experiment at Brook Farm in Massachusetts. But he stopped well short of supporting women's suffrage. Variouslly a Presbyterian, a Unitarian, and a Universalist, he converted to Catholicism in 1844. In the following passages from two of his articles in 1869, he bases his opposition to women's suffrage, in part, on religious arguments. What specific arguments does he cite? What was his view of women, and of the "feminine character"? What important differences did he see between men and women? Did he exalt women or insult them?*

The conclusive objection to the political enfranchisement of women is, that it would weaken and finally break up and destroy the Christian family. The social unit is the family, not the individual; and the greatest danger to American society is, that we are rapidly becoming a nation of isolated individuals, without family ties or affections. The family has already been much weakened, and is fast disappearing. We have broken away from the old homestead, have lost the restraining and purifying associations that gathered around it, and live away from home in hotels and boarding-houses. We are daily losing the faith, the virtues, the habits, and the manners without which the family cannot be sustained; and when the family goes, the nation goes too, or ceases to be worth preserving. . . .

Extend now to women suffrage and eligibility; give them the political right to vote and to be voted for; render it feasible for them to enter the arena of political strife, to become canvassers in elections and candidates for office, and what remains of family union will soon be dissolved. The wife may epouse one political party, and the husband another, and it may well happen that the husband and wife may be rival candidates for the same office, and one or the other doomed to the mortification of defeat. Will the husband like to see his wife enter the lists against him, and triumph over him? Will the wife, fired with political ambition for place or power, be pleased to see her own husband enter the lists against her, and succeed at her expense? Will political rivalry and the passions it never fails to engender increase the mutual affection of husband and wife for each other, and promote domestic union and peace, or will it not carry into the bosom of the family all the strife, discord, anger, and division of the political canvas? . . .

Woman was created to be a wife and a mother; that is her destiny. To that destiny all her instincts point, and for it nature has specially qualified her. Her proper sphere is home, and her proper function is the care of the household, to manage a family, to take care of children, and attend to their early training. For this she is endowed with patience, endurance, passive courage, quick sensibilities, a sympathetic nature, and great executive and administrative ability. She was born to be a queen in her own household, and to make home cheerful, bright, and happy.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry F. Brownson, ed., *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson* (Detroit: T. Nourse, 1885), vol. 18, pp. 388-389, 403.

We do not believe women, unless we acknowledge individual exceptions, are fit to have their own head. The most degraded of the savage tribes are those in which women rule, and descent is reckoned from the mother instead of the father. Revelation asserts, and universal experience proves that the man is the head of the woman, and that the woman is for the man, not the man for the woman; and his greatest error, as well as the primal curse of society is that he abdicates his headship, and allows himself to be governed, we might almost say, deprived of his reason, by woman. It was through the seductions of the woman, herself seduced by the serpent, that man fell, and brought sin and all our woe into the world. She has all the qualities that fit her to be a help-meet of man, to be the mother of his children, to be their nurse, their early instructress, their guardian, their life-long friend; to be his companion, his comforter, his consoler in sorrow, his friend in trouble, his ministering angel in sickness; but as an independent existence, free to follow her own fancies and vague longings, her own ambition and natural love of power, without masculine direction or control, she is out of her element, and a social anomaly, sometimes, a hideous monster, which men seldom are, excepting through a woman's influence. This is no excuse for men, but it proves that women need a head, and the restraint of father, husband, or the priest of God.

### 5. *The Beecher Sisters Defend the Home (1869)*

*Catharine and Harriet Beecher were but two of the eleven remarkable children of the equally remarkable Lyman Beecher. He was a powerful preacher who presided for nearly two decades over Cincinnati's Lane Theological Seminary, a notorious nursery of reformist and abolitionist ideas. Harriet, writing under her married name of Harriet Beecher Stowe, won worldwide fame in the 1850s as the author of Uncle Tom's Cabin. Catharine founded the Hartford Female Seminary in Connecticut, and, later, the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati. Opposed to women's suffrage, she crusaded ceaselessly for women's education in the domestic arts and became perhaps the foremost spokesperson for the idea that a woman's place was in the home. How, precisely, did the Beecher sisters define that place? Did they see the domestic sphere as confining or ennobling? In what ways, if any, did they deprecate women? In what ways might their position, in the mid-nineteenth century, have marked a positive, progressive advance in ideas about women's role?*

The authors of this volume, while they sympathize with every honest effort to relieve the disabilities and sufferings of their sex, are confident that the chief cause of these evils is the fact that the honor and duties of the family state are not duly appreciated, that women are not trained for these duties as men are trained for their trades and professions, and that, as the consequence, family labor is poorly done, poorly paid, and regarded as menial and disgraceful.

To be the nurse of young children, a cook, or a housemaid, is regarded as the lowest and last resort of poverty, and one which no woman of culture and position can assume without loss of caste and respectability.

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<sup>5</sup>Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The American Women's Home* (New York: J. B. Ford and Company, 1869), pp. 13–19.

It is the aim of this volume to elevate both the honor and the remuneration of all the employments that sustain the many difficult and sacred duties of the family state, and thus to render each department of woman's true profession as much desired and respected as are the most honored professions of men.

When the other sex are to be instructed in law, medicine, or divinity, they are favored with numerous institutions richly endowed, with teachers of the highest talents and acquirements, with extensive libraries, and abundant and costly apparatus. With such advantages they devote nearly ten of the best years of life to preparing themselves for their profession; and to secure the public from unqualified members of these professions, none can enter them until examined by a competent body, who certify to their due preparation for their duties.

Woman's profession embraces the care and nursing of the body in the critical periods of infancy and sickness, the training of the human mind in the most impressible period of childhood, the instruction and control of servants, and most of the government and economies of the family state. These duties of woman are as sacred and important as any ordained to man; and yet no such advantages for preparation have been accorded to her, nor is there any qualified body to certify the public that a woman is duly prepared to give proper instruction in her profession. . . .

During the upward progress of the age, and the advance of a more enlightened Christianity, the writers of this volume have gained more elevated views of the true mission of woman—of the dignity and importance of her distinctive duties, and of the true happiness which will be the reward of a right appreciation of this mission, and a proper performance of these duties. . . .

What, then, is the end designed by the family state which Jesus Christ came into this world to secure?

It is to provide for the training of our race to the highest possible intelligence, virtue, and happiness, by means of the self-sacrificing labors of the wise and good, and this with chief reference to a future immortal existence.

The distinctive feature of the family is self-sacrificing labor of the stronger and wiser members to raise the weaker and more ignorant to equal advantages. The father undergoes toil and self-denial to provide a home, and then the mother becomes a self-sacrificing laborer to train its inmates. The useless, troublesome infant is served in the humblest offices; while both parents unite in training it to an equality with themselves in every advantage. Soon the older children become helpers to raise the younger to a level with their own. When any are sick, those who are well become self-sacrificing ministers. When the parents are old and useless, the children become their self-sacrificing servants.

Thus the discipline of the family state is one of daily self-devotion of the stronger and wiser to elevate and support the weaker members. Nothing could be more contrary to its first principles than for the older and more capable children to combine to secure to themselves the highest advantages, enforcing the drudgeries on the younger, at the sacrifice of their equal culture.

Jesus Christ came to teach the fatherhood of God and consequent brotherhood of man. He came as the "firstborn Son" of God and the Elder Brother of man, to teach by example the self-sacrifice by which the great family of man is to be raised to equality of advantages as children of God. For this end, he "humbled himself" from the highest to the lowest place. He chose for his birthplace the most despised

village; for his parents the lowest in rank; for his trade, to labor with his hands as a carpenter being “subject to his parents” thirty years. And, what is very significant, his trade was that which prepares the family home, as if he would teach that the great duty of man is labor—to provide for and train weak and ignorant creatures. Jesus Christ worked with his hands nearly thirty years, and preached less than three. And he taught that his kingdom is exactly opposite to that of the world, where all are striving for the highest positions. “Whoso will be great shall be your minister, and whoso will be chiefest shall be servant of all.”

The family state, then, is the aptest earthly illustration of the heavenly kingdom, and in it woman is its chief minister. Her great mission is self-denial, in training its members to self-sacrificing labors for the ignorant and weak: if not her own children, then the neglected children of her Father in heaven. She is to rear all under her care to lay up treasures, not on earth, but in heaven. All the pleasures of this life end here; but those who train immortal minds are to reap the fruit of their labor through eternal ages.

To man is appointed the out-door labor—to till the earth, dig the mines, toil in the foundries, traverse the ocean, transport merchandise, labor in manufactories, construct houses, conduct civil, municipal, and state affairs, and all the heavy work, which, most of the day, excludes him from the comforts of a home. But the great stimulus to all these toils, implanted in the heart of every true man, is the desire for a home of his own, and the hopes of paternity. Every man who truly lives for immortality responds to the beatitude, “Children are a heritage from the Lord: blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of them!” The more a father and mother live under the influence of that “immortality which Christ had brought to light,” the more is the blessedness of rearing a family understood and appreciated. Every child trained aright is to dwell forever in exalted bliss with those that gave it life and trained it for heaven.

## D. Transcendentalism and Earthly Utopias

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### I. Ralph Waldo Emerson Chides the Reformers (1844)

*Dissatisfied Europeans let off steam in the 1840s in a series of armed revolts; dissatisfied Americans let off steam in various reformist protests. Every brain was seemingly gnawed by a “private maggot.” Ralph Waldo Emerson—poet, essayist, transcendentalist, and ever-popular lyceum lecturer—delivered this famous discourse on the New England reformers in 1844. A nonconformist himself, he had resigned his Unitarian pastorate in Boston after disagreeing with his congregation over the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. What might have linked the phenomena that Emerson describes and the southern spirit of political nullification? Did Emerson oppose all reform?*

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<sup>1</sup>R. W. Emerson, *Complete Works* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1884), vol. 3, pp. 240–243.

What a fertility of projects for the salvation of the world!

One apostle thought all men should go to farming, and another that no man should buy or sell, that the use of money was the cardinal evil; another that the mischief was in our diet, that we eat and drink damnation. These made unleavened bread and were foes to the death to fermentation.

It was in vain urged by the housewife that God made yeast as well as dough, and loves fermentation just as dearly as he loves vegetation; that fermentation develops the saccharine element in the grain, and makes it more palatable and more digestible. No; they wish the pure wheat, and will die but it shall not ferment. Stop, dear nature, these incessant advances of thine; let us scotch these ever-rolling wheels!

Others attacked the system of agriculture, the use of animal manures in farming, and the tyranny of man over brute nature [animals]. These abuses polluted his food. The ox must be taken from the plow, and the horse from the cart; the hundred acres of the farm must be spaded. And the man must walk, wherever boats and locomotives will not carry him.

Even the insect world was to be defended—that had been too long neglected, and a society for the protection of ground-worms, slugs, and mosquitoes was to be incorporated without delay.

With these, appeared the adepts of homoeopathy, of hydropathy, of mesmerism, of phrenology, and their wonderful theories of the Christian miracles! Others assailed particular vocations, as that of the lawyer, that of the merchant, of the manufacturer, of the clergyman, of the scholar. Others attacked the institution of marriage as the fountain of social evils. Others devoted themselves to the worrying of churches and meetings for public worship, and the fertile forms of antinomianism\* among the elder Puritans seemed to have their match in the plenty of the new harvest of reform.

With this din of opinion and debate, there was a keener scrutiny of institutions and domestic life than any we had known. There was sincere protesting against existing evils, and there were changes of employment dictated by conscience. . . .

In politics, for example, it is easy to see the progress of dissent. The country is full of rebellion; the country is full of kings. Hands off! Let there be no control and no interference in the administration of the affairs of this kingdom of me. Hence the growth of the doctrine and of the party of Free Trade, and the willingness to try that experiment in the face of what appear incontestable facts.

I confess the motto of the *Globe* newspaper is so attractive to me that I can seldom find much appetite to read what is below it in its columns: "The world is governed too much." So the country is frequently affording solitary examples of resistance to the government, solitary nullifiers who throw themselves on their reserved rights; nay, who have reserved all their rights; who reply to the [tax] assessor and to the clerk of the court that they do not know the state, and embarrass the courts of law by nonjuring [refusing to take an oath] and the commander-in-chief of the militia by nonresistance.

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\*The belief that Christian faith alone, not obedience to moral law, ensures salvation.

## 2. The “Paradise” at Brook Farm (c. 1846)

*Of the numerous communal schemes of the 1840s, Brook Farm (1841–1847) attractively combined “plain living with high thinking.” Pooling their poverty, the members were to share the intellectual feast, while contributing enough manual labor to keep the enterprise going. But the sandy soil, combined with inexperience in farming, contributed to their undoing. Nathaniel Hawthorne, who extracted a perceptive novel from the adventure (The Blithedale Romance), recorded in his diary: “Mr. Ripley put a four-pronged instrument into my hands, which he gave me to understand was called a pitchfork, and he and Mr. Farley being armed with similar weapons, we all commenced a gallant attack upon a heap of manure.” The following description was written some years later by Robert Carter, a well-known writer who enjoyed the friendship of nearly all the literary giants of his generation. How does Carter explain the purposes of Brook Farm and the general causes of its failure?*

At Brook Farm the disciples of the “Newness” [transcendentalism] gathered to the number, I think, of about a hundred. Among them were [George] Ripley, the founder of the institution, Charles A. Dana, W. H. Channing, J. S. Dwight, Warren Burton, Nathaniel Hawthorne, G. W. Curtis, and his brother Burrill Curtis. The place was a farm of two hundred acres of good land, eight miles from Boston, in the town of West Roxbury, and was of much natural beauty, with a rich and varied landscape. The avowed object of the association was to realize the Christian ideal of life by making such industrial, social, and educational arrangements as would promote economy, combine leisure for study with healthful and honest toil, avert collisions of caste, equalize refinements, diffuse courtesy, and sanctify life more completely than is possible in the isolated household mode of living.

It is a remarkable feature of this establishment that it was wholly indigenous, a genuine outgrowth of the times in New England, and not at all derived from Fourierism [French cooperative socialism], as many supposed. Fourier was, in fact, not known to its founders until Brook Farm had been a year or two in operation. They then began to study him, and fell finally into some of his fantasies, to which in part it is to be ascribed the ruin of the institution.

Of the life of Brook Farm I do not intend to say much, for I was there only one day, though I knew nearly all the members. It was a delightful gathering of men and women of superior cultivation, who led a charming life for a few years, laboring in its fields and philandering in its pleasant woods. It was a little too much of a picnic for serious profit, and the young men and maidens were rather unduly addicted to moonlight wanderings in the pine-grove, though it is creditable to the sound moral training of New England that little or no harm came of these wanderings—at least not to the maidens. So far as the relation of the sexes is concerned, the Brook Farmers, in spite of their free manners, were as pure, I believe, as any other people.

The enterprise failed pecuniarily, after seeming for some years to have succeeded. Fourierism brought it into disrepute, and finally a great wooden phalanstery [main building], in which the members had invested all their means, took fire, and burned to the ground just as it was completed. Upon this catastrophe the asso-

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<sup>2</sup>*Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 39 (1889): 127–128.

ciation scattered (in 1847, I think), and Brook Farm became the site of the town poorhouse.

### 3. Henry David Thoreau Praises Spiritual Wealth (1854)

*Henry David Thoreau, a leading transcendentalist, had worn a green coat to the Harvard chapel because the rules required black. He tried his hand at teaching, but when the authorities criticized his use of moral suasion, he whipped a dozen surprised pupils, just to show the absurdity of flogging, and forthwith resigned. While the Brook Farmers sought stimulation in association, he sought it in solitude. Building a hut on the shore of Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts, he spent over two years in philosophical introspection and in communion with the wildlife, including fish and moles. His experiences unfold in his classic *Walden*, which was socialistic enough to become a textbook of the British Labour party. James Russell Lowell accused Thoreau of trying to make a virtue out of his indolence and other defects of character. Which of Thoreau's observations in *Walden* have been weakened or strengthened by the passage of over a hundred years? Which ones would we regard as absurd today?*

For more than five years I maintained myself thus solely by the labor of my hands, and I found that by working about six weeks in a year, I could meet all the expenses of living. The whole of my winters, as well as most of my summers, I had free and clear for study.

I have thoroughly tried schoolkeeping, and found that my expenses were in proportion, or rather out of proportion, to my income, for I was obliged to dress and train, not to say think and believe, accordingly, and I lost my time into the bargain. As I did not teach for the good of my fellow-men, but simply for a livelihood, this was a failure.

I have tried trade. But I found that it would take ten years to get under way in that, and that then I should probably be on my way to the devil. I was actually afraid that I might by that time be doing what is called a good business.

When formerly I was looking about to see what I could do for a living, . . . I thought often and seriously of picking huckleberries. That surely I could do, and its small profits might suffice—for my greatest skill has been to want but little—so little capital it required, so little distraction from my wonted moods, I foolishly thought. While my acquaintances went unhesitatingly into trade or the professions, I contemplated this occupation as most like theirs; ranging the hills all summer to pick the berries which came in my way, and thereafter carelessly dispose of them. . . . But I have since learned that trade curses everything it handles; and though you trade in messages from heaven, the whole curse of trade attaches to the business. . . .

For myself, I found that the occupation of a day-laborer was the most independent of any, especially as it required only thirty or forty days in a year to support

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<sup>4</sup>H. D. Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1893), pp. 110–111, 112, 498, 505–506, 510.

one. The laborer's day ends with the going down of the sun, and he is then free to devote himself to his chosen pursuit, independent of his labor. But his employer, who speculates from month to month, has no respite from one end of the year to the other. . . .

I left the woods for as good a reason as I went there. Perhaps it seemed to me that I had several more lives to live, and could not spare any more time for that one. It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived there a week before my feet wore a path from my door to the pond-side; and though it is five or six years since I trod it, it is still quite distinct. It is true, I fear, that others may have fallen into it, and so helped to keep it open.

The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity! I did not wish to take a cabin passage, but rather to go before the mast and on the deck of the world, for there I could best see the moonlight amid the mountains. I do not wish to go below now. . . .

However mean your life is, meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. It is not so bad as you are. It looks poorest when you are richest. The fault-finder will find faults even in Paradise. Love your life, poor as it is. You may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours even in a poorhouse. The setting sun is reflected from the windows of the almshouse as brightly as from the rich man's abode; the snow melts before its door as early in the spring. I do not see but a quiet mind may live as contentedly there, and have as cheering thoughts, as in a palace.

The town's poor seem to me often to live the most independent lives of any. Maybe they are simply great enough to receive without misgiving. Most think that they are above being supported by the town; but it oftener happens that they are not above supporting themselves by dishonest means, which should be more disreputable.

Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society. If I were confined to a corner of a garret all my days, like a spider, the world would be just as large to me while I had my thoughts about me. . . .

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth.

#### 4. *Emersonisms and Thoreauisms*

*The following pithy sayings are culled from the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, who were close transcendentalist friends and nonconformists. In what areas does there seem to be a close similarity in thinking? How many of these observations have been borne out by personalities or experiences in American history?*

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\*In 1845 Thoreau was jailed for one night for refusing to pay his poll tax to a state (Massachusetts) that supported slavery. The tax, much to his disgust, was paid by an aunt. Legend has it that Emerson visited him in jail, saying, "Why are you here?" Thoreau allegedly replied, "Why are you not here?"

### Government

The less government we have, the better—fewer laws, and the less confided power. (*Emerson*)

I heartily accept the motto “That government is best which governs least.” Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which I also believe: “That government is best which governs not at all”; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. (*Thoreau*)

Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison.\* (*Thoreau*)

Of all debts men are least willing to pay the taxes. What a satire this [is] on government! (*Emerson*)

### Reform

We are reformers in spring and summer; in autumn and winter we stand by the old; reformers in the morning, conservers at night. Reform is affirmative, conservatism negative; conservatism goes for comfort, reform for truth. (*Emerson*)

Every reform was once a private opinion. (*Emerson*)

Beware when the Great God lets loose a thinker on this planet. (*Emerson*)

There is no strong performance without a little fanaticism in the performer. (*Emerson*)

Every burned book enlightens the world. (*Emerson*)

Every reform is only a mask under cover of which a more terrible reform, which dares not yet name itself, advances. (*Emerson*)

If anything ail a man so that he does not perform his functions, if he have a pain in his bowels . . . he forthwith sets about reforming—the world. (*Thoreau*)

### Wealth

The greatest man in history [Jesus] was the poorest. (*Emerson*)

If a man own land, the land owns him. (*Emerson*)

Poverty consists in feeling poor. (*Emerson*)

I would rather sit on a pumpkin, and have it all to myself, than to be crowded on a velvet cushion. (*Thoreau*)

They take their pride in making their dinner cost much; I take my pride in making my dinner cost little. (*Thoreau*)

Men have become the tools of their tools. (*Thoreau*)

To inherit property is not to be born—it is to be stillborn, rather. (*Thoreau*)

That man is the richest whose pleasures are the cheapest. (*Thoreau*)

### Great Men

To be great is to be misunderstood. (*Emerson*)

Shallow men believe in luck. (*Emerson*)

Every hero becomes a bore at last. (*Emerson*)

If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come around to him. (*Emerson*)

Great men are they who see that spiritual is stronger than any material force; that thoughts rule the world. (*Emerson*)

The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops—no, but the kind of man the country turns out. (*Emerson*)

An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man. (*Emerson*)

There are men too superior to be seen except by a few, as there are notes too high for the scale of most ears. (*Emerson*)

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, however measured or far away. (*Thoreau*)

### Living

Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. (*Emerson*)

The only gift is a portion of thyself. (*Emerson*)

Hitch your wagon to a star. (*Emerson*)

Nothing is so much to be feared as fear.\* (*Thoreau*)

We do not quite forgive a giver. (*Emerson*)

Do not be too moral. You may cheat yourself out of much life so. Aim above morality. Be not simply good; be good for something. (*Thoreau*)

I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. (*Thoreau*)

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. (*Thoreau*)

## E. Three Views of the Indians

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### 1. Alexis de Tocqueville Predicts the Indians' Future (1835)

*Alexis de Tocqueville, the remarkable French commentator whose observations of American life in the 1830s inspired his classic Democracy in America (1835), speculated in that book on "the present and probable future condition of the Indian tribes." Near present-day Memphis, he actually witnessed the westward migration of some Choctaw Indians in the year immediately following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, as described in the selection that follows. What feature of white civilization did Tocqueville find most injurious to the traditional ways of Indian life? How accurate were his predictions about the Native Americans' future?*

When the Indians were the sole inhabitants of the wilds whence they have since been expelled, their wants were few. Their arms were of their own manufacture, their only drink was the water of the brook, and their clothes consisted of the skins of animals, whose flesh furnished them with food.

The Europeans introduced among the savages of North America firearms, ardent spirits, and iron; they taught them to exchange for manufactured stuffs the

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\*Perhaps Franklin D. Roosevelt's most famous saying, uttered in his inaugural address in 1933, was: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

<sup>1</sup>Pages 321–339 from *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville. Edited by J. P. Mayer and Max Lemer. Translated by George Lawrence. English translation copyright © 1965 by Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

rough garments that had previously satisfied their untutored simplicity. Having acquired new tastes, without the arts by which they could be gratified, the Indians were obliged to have recourse to the workmanship of the whites; but in return for their productions the savage had nothing to offer except the rich furs that still abounded in his woods. Hence the chase became necessary, not merely to provide for his subsistence, but to satisfy the frivolous desires of Europeans. He no longer hunted merely to obtain food, but to procure the only objects of barter which he could offer. While the wants of the natives were thus increasing, their resources continued to diminish.

From the moment when a European settlement is formed in the neighborhood of the territory occupied by the Indians, the beasts of chase take the alarm. Thousands of savages, wandering in the forests and destitute of any fixed dwelling, did not disturb them; but as soon as the continuous sounds of European labor are heard in their neighborhood, they begin to flee away and retire to the West, where their instinct teaches them that they will still find deserts of immeasurable extent. "The buffalo is constantly receding," say Messrs. Clarke and Cass in their *Report* of the year 1829; "a few years since they approached the base of the Allegheny; and a few years hence they may even be rare upon the immense plains which extend to the base of the Rocky Mountains." I have been assured that this effect of the approach of the whites is often felt at two hundred leagues' distance from their frontier. Their influence is thus exerted over tribes whose name is unknown to them, and who suffer the evils of usurpation long before they are acquainted with the authors of their distress. . . .

A few European families, occupying points very remote from one another, soon drive away the wild animals that remain between their places of abode. The Indians, who had previously lived in a sort of abundance, then find it difficult to subsist, and still more difficult to procure the articles of barter that they stand in need of. To drive away their game has the same effect as to render sterile the fields of our agriculturists; deprived of the means of subsistence, they are reduced, like famished wolves, to prowl through the forsaken woods in quest of prey. Their instinctive love of country attaches them to the soil that gave them birth, even after it has ceased to yield anything but misery and death. At length they are compelled to acquiesce and depart; they follow the traces of the elk, the buffalo, and the beaver and are guided by these wild animals in the choice of their future country. Properly speaking, therefore, it is not the Europeans who drive away the natives of America; it is famine, a happy distinction which had escaped the casuists [moralists] of former times and for which we are indebted to modern discovery!

It is impossible to conceive the frightful sufferings that attend these forced migrations. They are undertaken by a people already exhausted and reduced; and the countries to which the newcomers betake themselves are inhabited by other tribes, which receive them with jealous hostility. Hunger is in the rear, war awaits them, and misery besets them on all sides. . . . [T]hey have no longer a country, and soon they will not be a people; their very families are obliterated; their common name is forgotten; their language perishes; and all traces of their origin disappear. . . .

I should be sorry to have my reader suppose that I am coloring the picture too highly; I saw with my own eyes many of the miseries that I have just described, and was the witness of sufferings that I have not the power to portray.

At the end of the year 1831, while I was on the left bank of the Mississippi, at a place named by Europeans Memphis, there arrived a numerous band of Choctaws (or Chactas, as they are called by the French in Louisiana). These savages had left their country and were endeavoring to gain the right bank of the Mississippi, where they hoped to find an asylum that had been promised them by the American government. It was then the middle of winter, and the cold was unusually severe; the snow had frozen hard upon the ground, and the river was drifting huge masses of ice. The Indians had their families with them, and they brought in their train the wounded and the sick, with children newly born and old men upon the verge of death. They possessed neither tents nor wagons, but only their arms and some provisions. I saw them embark to pass the mighty river, and never will that solemn spectacle fade from my remembrance. No cry, so sob, was heard among the assembled crowd; all were silent. Their calamities were of ancient date, and they knew them to be irremediable. The Indians had all stepped into the bark that was to carry them across, but their dogs remained upon the bank. As soon as these animals perceived that their masters were finally leaving the shore, they set up a dismal howl and, plunging all together into the icy waters of the Mississippi, swam after the boat.

The expulsion of the Indians often takes place at the present day in a regular and, as it were, a legal manner. When the European population begins to approach the limit of the desert inhabited by a savage tribe, the government of the United States usually sends forward envoys who assemble the Indians in a large plain and, having first eaten and drunk with them, address them thus: "What have you to do in the land of your fathers? Before long, you must dig up their bones in order to live. . . . Beyond those mountains which you see at the horizon, beyond the lake which bounds your territory on the west, there lie vast countries where beasts of chase are yet found in great abundance; sell us your lands, then, and go to live happily in those solitudes." After holding this language, they spread before the eyes of the Indians firearms, woolen garments, kegs of brandy, glass necklaces, bracelets of tinsel, ear-rings, and looking-glasses. If, when they have beheld all these riches, they still hesitate, it is insinuated that they cannot refuse the required consent and that the government itself will not long have the power of protecting them in their rights. What are they to do? Half convinced and half compelled, they go to inhabit new deserts, where the importunate whites will not let them remain ten years in peace. In this manner do the Americans obtain, at a very low price, whole provinces, which the richest sovereigns of Europe could not purchase.

These are great evils; and it must be added that they appear to me to be irremediable. I believe that the Indian nations of North America are doomed to perish, and that whenever the Europeans shall be established on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, that race of men will have ceased to exist. The Indians had only the alternative of war or civilization; in other words, they must either destroy the Europeans or become their equals. . . .

The Spaniards pursued the Indians with bloodhounds, like wild beasts; . . . [the Americans] kindly take them by the hand and transport them to a grave far from the land of their fathers.

The Spaniards were unable to exterminate the Indian race by those unparalleled atrocities which brand them with indelible shame, nor did they succeed even in wholly depriving it of its rights; but the Americans of the United States have ac-

completed this twofold purpose with singular felicity, tranquilly, legally, philanthropically, without shedding blood, and without violating a single great principle of morality in the eyes of the world. It is impossible to destroy men with more respect for the laws of humanity.

## 2. George Catlin Dreams of a National Park to Preserve the Indian Way of Life (1832)

*George Catlin (1796–1872), a Pennsylvanian who gave up the practice of law to study art, joined an American Fur Company expedition to the upper Missouri River in 1832. He made detailed observations of the landscape and of the Indian way of life. His descriptions and paintings of Native American culture and individual Indians are among the richest sources for understanding the antebellum West, though Catlin has been criticized for inaccuracies, especially for romanticizing Indian ways. While camped in present-day South Dakota in 1832, Catlin witnessed the slaughter of hundreds of buffalo (bison) by Native Americans who sold the animals' tongues to white traders for liquor. Disgusted by this spectacle, Catlin proposed a vast national refuge for both buffalo and Native Americans—an idea that eventually blossomed into the distinctive American system of national parks, including Yellowstone National Park. How does Catlin assess the buffalo's importance to Indian life? How realistic—or romantic—was his proposal for a “nation's Park”? To what extent did the eventual national park system realize Catlin's dream?*

### Letter—No. 31

#### Mouth of Teton River, Upper Missouri

. . . Nature has no where presented more beautiful and lovely scenes, than those of the vast prairies of the West; and of *man* and *beast*, no nobler specimens than those who inhabit them—the *Indian* and the *buffalo*—joint and original tenants of the soil, and fugitives together from the approach of civilized man; they have fled to the great plains of the West, and there, under an equal doom, they have taken up their *last abode*, where their race will expire, and their bones will bleach together. . . .

It is not enough in this polished and extravagant age, that we get from the Indian his lands, and the very clothes from his back, but the food from their mouths must be stopped, to add a new and useless article to the fashionable world's luxuries. The ranks must be thinned, and the race exterminated, of this noble animal, and the Indians of the great plains left without the means of supporting life, that white men may figure a few years longer, enveloped in buffalo robes—that they may spread them, for their pleasure and elegance, over the backs of their sleighs, and trail them ostentatiously amidst the busy throng, as things of beauty and elegance that had been made for them!

Reader! listen to the following calculations, and forget them not. The buffaloes (the quadrupeds from whose backs your beautiful robes were taken, and whose

<sup>2</sup>George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians* (New York: 1841), pp. 260–264.

myriads were once spread over the whole country, from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean) have recently fled before the appalling appearance of civilized man, and taken up their abode and pasturage amid the almost boundless prairies of the West. An instinctive dread of their deadly foes, who made an easy prey of them whilst grazing in the forest, has led them to seek the midst of the vast and treeless plains of grass, as the spot where they would be least exposed to the assaults of their enemies; and it is exclusively in those desolate fields of silence (yet of beauty) that they are to be found—and over these vast steppes, or prairies, have they fled, like the Indian, towards the “setting sun”; until their bands have been crowded together, and their limits confined to a narrow strip of country on this side of the Rocky Mountains.

This strip of country, which extends from the province of Mexico to lake Winnipeg on the North, is almost one entire plain of grass, which is, and ever must be, useless to cultivating man. It is here, and here chiefly, that the buffaloes dwell; and with, and hovering about them, live and flourish the tribes of Indians, whom God made for the enjoyment of that fair land and its luxuries.

It is a melancholy contemplation for one who has travelled as I have, through these realms, and seen this noble animal in all its pride and glory, to contemplate it so rapidly wasting from the world, drawing the irresistible conclusion too, which one must do, that its species is soon to be extinguished, and with it the peace and happiness (if not the actual existence) of the tribes of Indians who are joint tenants with them, in the occupancy of these vast and idle plains.

And what a splendid contemplation too, when one (who has travelled these realms, and can duly appreciate them) imagines them as they *might* in future be seen, (by some great protecting policy of government) preserved in their pristine beauty and wildness, in a *magnificent park*, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes. What a beautiful and thrilling specimen for America to preserve and hold up to the view of her refined citizens and the world, in future ages! A *nation's Park*, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty!

I would ask no other monument to my memory, nor any other enrolment of my name amongst the famous dead, than the reputation of having been the founder of such an institution.

Such scenes might easily have been preserved, and still could be cherished on the great plains of the West, without detriment to the country or its borders; for the tracts of country on which the buffaloes have assembled, are uniformly sterile, and of no available use to cultivating man.

It is on these plains, which are stocked with buffaloes, that the finest specimens of the Indian race are to be seen. It is here, that the savage is decorated in the richest costume. It is here, and here only, that his wants are all satisfied, and even the luxuries of life are afforded him in abundance. And here also is he the proud and honourable man (before he has had teachers or laws), above the imported wants, which beget meanness and vice; stimulated by ideas of honour and virtue, in which the God of Nature has certainly not curtailed him.

There are, by a fair calculation, more than 300,000 Indians, who are now subsisted on the flesh of the buffaloes, and by those animals supplied with all the lux-

uries of life which they desire, as they know of none others. The great variety of uses to which they convert the body and other parts of that animal, are almost incredible to the person who has not actually dwelt amongst these people, and closely studied their modes and customs. Every part of their flesh is converted into food, in one shape or another, and on it they entirely subsist. The robes of the animals are worn by the Indians instead of blankets—their skins when tanned, are used as coverings for their lodges, and for their beds; undressed, they are used for constructing canoes—for saddles, for bridles—l'arrêts, lasos, and thongs. The horns are shaped into ladles and spoons—the brains are used for dressing the skins—their bones are used for saddle trees—for war clubs, and scrapers for graining the robes—and others are broken up for the marrow-fat which is contained in them. Their sinews are used for strings and backs to their bows—for thread to string their beads and sew their dresses. The feet of the animals are boiled, with their hoofs, for the glue they contain, for fastening their arrow points, and many other uses. The hair from the head and shoulders, which is long, is twisted and braided into halters, and the tail is used for a fly brush. In this wise do these people convert and use the various parts of this useful animal, and with all these luxuries of life about them, and their numerous games, they are happy (God bless them) in the ignorance of the disastrous fate that awaits them.

Yet this interesting community, with its sports, its wildnesses, its languages, and all its manners and customs, could be perpetuated, and also the buffaloes, whose numbers would increase and supply them with food for ages and centuries to come, if a system of non-intercourse could be established and preserved. But such is not to be the case—the buffalo's doom is sealed, and with their extinction must assuredly sink into real despair and starvation, the inhabitants of these vast plains, which afford for the Indians, no other possible means of subsistence; and they must at last fall a prey to wolves and buzzards, who will have no other bones to pick.

It seems hard and cruel, (does it not?) that we civilized people with all the luxuries and comforts of the world about us, should be drawing from the backs of these useful animals the skins for our luxury, leaving their carcasses to be devoured by the wolves—that we should draw from that country, some 150 or 200,000 of their robes annually, the greater part of which are taken from animals that are killed expressly for the robe, at a season when the meat is not cured and preserved, and for each of which skins the Indian has received but a pint of whiskey!

### 3. *John James Audubon Is Pessimistic About the Indians' Fate (1843)*

*The great naturalist and ornithologist John James Audubon (1785–1851) followed Catlin's route on the upper Missouri a decade later, on a hunting trip. How does his assessment of the Native Americans differ from Catlin's? What factors might account for their differing appraisals?*

May 17, Wednesday [1843] . . . We have seen floating eight Buffaloes, one Antelope, and one Deer; how great the destruction of these animals must be during high

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<sup>3</sup>Maria Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals* (New York: 1877).

freshets! The cause of their being drowned in such extraordinary numbers might not astonish one acquainted with the habits of these animals, but to one who is not, it may be well enough for me to describe it. Some few hundred miles above us, the river becomes confined between high bluffs or cliffs, many of which are nearly perpendicular, and therefore extremely difficult to ascend. When the Buffaloes have leaped or tumbled down from either side of the stream, they swim with ease across, but on reaching these walls, as it were, the poor animals try in vain to climb them, and becoming exhausted by falling back some dozens of times, give up the ghost, and float down the turbid stream; their bodies have been known to pass, swollen and putrid, the city of St. Louis. The most extraordinary part of the history of these drowned Buffaloes is, that the different tribes of Indians on the shores, are ever on the lookout for them, and no matter how putrid their flesh may be, provided the hump proves at all fat, they swim to them, drag them on shore, and cut them to pieces; after which they cook and eat this loathsome and abominable flesh, even to the marrow found in the bones. In some instances this has been done when the whole of the hair had fallen off, from the rottenness of the Buffalo. Ah! Mr. Catlin, I am now sorry to see and to read your accounts of the Indians you saw—how very different they must have been from any that I have seen! . . .

June 7, Wednesday . . . We reached Fort Clark and the Mandan Villages at half-past seven this morning. . . . The Mandan mud huts are very far from looking poetical, although Mr. Catlin has tried to render them so by placing them in regular rows, and all of the same size and form, which is by no means the case. But different travellers have different eyes! We saw more Indians than at any previous time since leaving St. Louis; and it is possible that there are a hundred huts, made of mud, all looking like so many potato winter-houses in the Eastern States. As soon as we were near the shore, every article that could conveniently be carried off was placed under lock and key, and our division door was made fast, as well as those of our own rooms. Even the axes and poles were put by. Our captain told us that last year they stole his cap and his shot-pouch and horn, and that it was through the interference of the first chief that he recovered his cap and horn; but that a squaw had his leather belt, and would not give it up. The appearance of these poor, miserable devils, as we approached the shore, was wretched enough. There they stood in the pelting rain and keen wind, covered with Buffalo robes, red blankets, and the like, some partially and most curiously besmeared with mud; and as they came on board, and we shook hands with each of them, I felt a clamminess that rendered the ceremony most repulsive. Their legs and naked feet were covered with mud. They looked at me with apparent curiosity, perhaps on account of my beard, which produced the same effect at Fort Pierre. They all looked very poor; and our captain says they are the *ne plus ultra* of thieves. It is said there are nearly three thousand men, women, and children that, during winter, cram themselves into these miserable hovels. . . .

After dinner we went up the muddy bank again to look at the corn-fields, as the small patches that are meanly cultivated are called. We found poor, sickly looking corn about two inches high, that had been represented to us this morning as full six inches high. We followed the prairie, a very extensive one, to the hills, and there found a deep ravine, sufficiently impregnated with saline matter to answer the purpose of salt water for the Indians to boil their corn and pemmican, clear and clean; but they, as well as the whites at the fort, resort to the muddy Missouri for their

drinking water, the only fresh water at hand. Not a drop of spirituous liquor has been brought to this place for the last two years; and there can be no doubt that on this account the Indians have become more peaceable than heretofore, though now and then a white man is murdered, and many horses are stolen. As we walked over the plain, we saw heaps of earth thrown up to cover the poor Mandans who died of the small-pox. These mounds in many instances appear to contain the remains of several bodies and, perched on the top, lies, pretty generally, the rotting skull of a Buffalo. Indeed, the skulls of the Buffaloes seem as if a kind of relation to these most absurdly superstitious and ignorant beings. . . .

June 11, Sunday. . . . We have seen many Elks swimming the river, and they look almost the size of a well-grown mule. They stared at us, were fired at, at an enormous distance, it is true, and yet stood still. These animals are abundant beyond belief hereabouts. We have seen much remarkably handsome scenery, but nothing at all comparing with Catlin's descriptions; his book must, after all, be altogether a humbug. Poor devil! I pity him from the bottom of my soul; . . .

July 21, Friday. . . . By and by we saw Harris sitting on a high hill about one mile off, and joined him; he said the bulls they had killed last evening were close by, and I offered to go and see the bones, for I expected that the Wolves had devoured it during the night. We travelled on, and Squires returned to the camp. After about two miles of walking against a delightful strong breeze, we reached the animals; Ravens or Buzzards had worked at the eyes, but only one Wolf, apparently, had been there. They were bloated, and smelt quite unpleasant. . . . Bell's horns were the handsomest and largest, mine next best, and Harris's the smallest, but we are all contented. Mr. Culbertson tells me that Harris and Bell have done wonders, for persons who have never shot at Buffaloes from on horseback. Harris had a fall too, during his second chase, and was bruised in the manner of Squires, but not so badly. I have but little doubt that Squires killed his bull, as he says he shot it three times, and Mr. Culbertson's must have died also. What a terrible destruction of life, as it were for nothing, or next to it, as the tongues only were brought in, and the flesh of these fine animals was left to beasts and birds of prey, or to rot on the spots where they fell. The prairies are literally covered with the skulls of the victims, and the roads the Buffalo make in crossing the prairies have all the appearance of heavy wagon tracks. . . .

August 5, Saturday. . . . Provost tells me that Buffaloes become so very poor during hard winters, when the snows cover the ground to the depth of two or three feet, that they lose their hair, become covered with scabs, on which the Magpies feed, and the poor beasts die by hundreds. One can hardly conceive how it happens, notwithstanding these many deaths and the immense numbers that are murdered almost daily on these boundless wastes called prairies, besides the hosts that are drowned in the freshets, and the hundreds of young calves who die in early spring, so many are yet to be found. Daily we see so many that we hardly notice them more than the cattle in our pastures about our homes. But this cannot last; even now there is a perceptible difference in the size of the herds, and before many years the Buffalo, like the Great Auk, will have disappeared; surely this should not be permitted. Bell has been relating his adventures, our boat is going on, and I wish I had a couple of Bighorns. God bless you all.

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### *Thought Provokers*

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1. How might a skeptical secular critic explain the religious revivalism of the early nineteenth century?
2. Article VIII of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution requires that “cruel and unusual punishments” shall not be “inflicted.” In what respects did Dorothea Dix find the Constitution being widely violated? Why do reformers invariably encounter difficulties?
3. In what ways was it a man’s world in the nineteenth century? How much has changed today? In what ways did the changes in women’s role in the early nineteenth century represent an improvement or a deterioration from earlier conditions?
4. Is there less reformism in America today than there was in the 1840s? Assess the soundness of Emerson’s remark: “Men are conservative when they are least vigorous, or when they are most luxurious. They are conservatives after dinner.” It has been said that the wise man reduces his wants; the fool increases his income. Comment in the light of Thoreau’s philosophy. What would happen to our economic and social structure if large numbers of people literally followed Thoreau’s teachings?
5. By what means did the arrival of white pioneers transform the environment and the Native American cultures of the trans-Appalachian West?