

CLASS 7

‘Outsider’ Forms of Christianity

- ‘Insider’ Denominations
- Sectarian Communities
- Resistance to Catholics



‘Insider’ Denominations

- Presbyterians
 - Led by Charles Finney, embraced the national zeal and culture of revival.
 - Among other popular revival ‘innovations,’ Finney introduced the ‘anxious bench’ inviting attendees to come forward for prayer or admonition.
 - Arminian Theology drew criticism from several church leaders, but brought more converts than ever

“...It is necessary to awaken men to a sense of guilt and danger, and thus produce an excitement of counter feeling and desire which will break the power of carnal and worldly desire and leave the will free to obey God.” – Charles Finney

- Finney’s revival campaigns in major northern cities like Boston, New York and Philadelphia became aligned with societal reform (co-education, abolition, etc.) in the North.



'Insider' Denominations

• Methodists

- Founded by John Wesley within the Church of England, the movement emphasized the free will of the individual to accept salvation, but also holiness and sanctification as a '2nd act of grace' for the necessary 'perfection' the Christian.
- Their presence in post-Revolution America exploded during the late 1700s and early 1800s due to the itinerant preaching of Methodist ministers led by Francis Asbury.
- Asbury's 'Circuit-Rider' preachers roamed the western frontier creating local churches focused on personal righteousness, piety, prayer and Bible study.
- Between 1771 and 1816, Methodists increased from roughly 300 lay-people, to over 200,000. By 1835 it was the largest Protestant denomination in the country.



'Insider' Denominations

• Baptists

- In contrast to the Methodists, formally maintained their Calvinistic theology, but preaching softened on doctrines like 'unconditional election' and 'limited atonement.'
- Like the Methodists, local Baptist preachers attacked the west with the same kind of evangelical fervor.
- Finney, Asbury, and several Baptist preachers were the most visible examples of an era of charismatic figures who matched the Christian faith to their time. Both theologically and stylistically, they framed the Gospel message in ways that fit the ethos of the new republic.
 - Arminianism appealed to the new freedom of the masses.
 - Their abilities were their own, not a representation of broader church authority.



'Insider' Denominations

- Despite doctrinal differences, an evangelical character infiltrated the most prominent Christian denominations, and many aspects of society.
 - **Mass Communication:** Between 1790 and 1830, nearly 600 religious magazines was founded. The largest had circulations of 25,000+
 - **Education:** 'Sunday Schools' became formal part of childhood education; New colleges and universities, sponsored and staffed by churches allowed more opportunity for higher education
 - **Politics:** The fervor of revivals heavily impacted political campaigns and strategies; Voting patterns were largely predictable based on denominational affiliation
- These elements combined to form a cohesive 'evangelical American' culture.



Sectarian Communities

- Where evangelical zeal moved into the mainstream of public life in America, religious liberty also allowed for other groups to carve out their own existence in the vast territory of America.
- **William Miller / 'Millerites'**
 - Miller's scientific interpretation of the prophetic texts of the Bible led to him calculate the date of Christ's return to around 1843
 - Miller became the most extreme proponent of the spirit of Millennialism which pervaded the era.
 - In the aftermath of his failure to calculate the coming of Christ, some residual followers maintained a portion of Miller's belief, and formed the 7th Day Adventist church.



Sectarian Communities



Sectarian Communities

- Joseph Smith / 'Mormons'
 - Reported visions of heavenly beings as a young man in the 1820s; in 1830, he published *The Book of Mormon* as the revelation of the Angel Moroni.
 - Smith promoted his 'translation' of the angelic vision as dependent upon the Judeo-Christian Scriptures, but as a message which transcended those traditions.
 - Mormons believed that this new revelation would provide a return to the true, primitive version of the New Testament.
 - Due to the widespread controversy with *The Book of Mormon* caused, Smith and his followers, known as 'Latter-Day Saints' migrated to Ohio in 1831, and then on to Utah in the 1840s, though Smith was killed by an angry mob during the trip



Sectarian Communities

- Under the strong leadership of Brigham Young, the journey and settlement in Utah became an ‘exodus’ from the attacks of the ‘Gentiles.’
- The Mormons became an insulated community, relying on their own fellowship for societal and economic survival

“We have been kicked out of the frying pan and into the fire, out of fire into the middle of the floor, and here we are and here we will stay...God will rebuke the frost and the sterility of the soil, and the land shall become fruitful.”

– Brigham Young

- Despite the harsh conditions of the region, the community flourished and became a fixed people in the Western U.S.



Sectarian Communities

- Utopian Communities
 - ‘Shakers’ were a millennial/restorationist sect that practice communal living, celibacy, equal gender roles, pacifism, and ecstatic worship.
 - The Oneida, NY community had 200+ residents committed to ‘Christian Perfection,’ Christian Socialism and Polygamy
 - The ‘Harmony Society’ in Pennsylvania and later Indiana believed in universal salvation during the approaching millennium, practiced public confession and celibacy.
- These experimental collectives are examples of the ideological and geographical freedom in post-Revolution America.



Sectarian Communities

- The religious and social freedom of the era meant new opportunities for Women in the expression of faith.
 - Women participated in revivals, and became active in the voluntary societies and advocacy movements of day on religious grounds.
 - Phoebe Palmer, a devout Methodist, became a popular preacher and writer, promoting Christian perfection and Holiness
- No group of Christians was more on the ‘outside’ than African-American slaves in the South.
 - During the period of revivalism, many slaves became converted. While many became subordinate members of ‘white’ churches, some more progressive slave-owners allowed slaves to form their own plantation congregations.



Resistance to Catholics

- Between 1830 and 1860, the U.S. population increased 2 ½ times over, but in that same time span, the number of Catholics in America grew ten-fold to over 3 million.
- Due to harsh economic and political conditions in Europe, huge waves of immigrants from Catholic populaces like Ireland and Germany came to U.S.
- By the time of the Civil War, Catholics had suddenly become the largest Christian group in the nation.
- John Carroll became the first Catholic Bishop in the U.S. in 1789. He and his successors recruited many priests, educators and missionaries to America



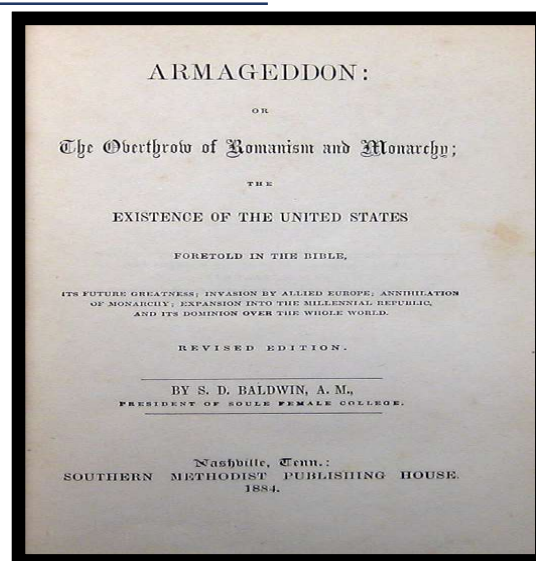
Resistance to Catholics

- Many Protestants felt threatened by the emergent Catholic presence in American society. At a basic level the threat was economic as Catholics had infiltrated the job market. But the worries were political-spiritual as well.
- Protestants saw republicanism and freedom as proof that God was behind their successful efforts to urbanize the East and expand in the West.

The opinions of the Protestant clergy are congenial with liberty, they are chosen by the people who have been educated as freemen, and they are dependent on them for patronage and support. The Catholic system is adverse to liberty, and the clergy to a great extent are dependent on foreigners opposed to the principles of our government, for patronage and support. –
Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West*



Resistance to Catholics



Resistance to Catholics

- Irrational fears were that Catholic doctrines and values would seep into American culture through the influence of Pope, possibly returning America to its European roots.
- Some Protestant churches and organizations took measures to discriminate against Catholics. Most prominent were those in the world of education, where schools were mandated to use 'Protestant' versions of the Bible, and political bureaucracies worked to ensure that Catholic schools did not receive equal government funding.
- Despite these efforts, Catholics continued to increase in numbers without gaining a major political footing.



Review Questions

A) How do the efforts of major denominational figures like Finney and Asbury still have an impact in the cultural Christianity of Today?

B) Despite the fact that the Millerites and Mormons were marginal groups theologically and socially, they were still able to gain large amounts of adherents, even in the face of obviously false claims. Why do these types of groups have such an influence?

C) Why did Protestants fear so strongly that Catholic immigration to America would change their way of life?

