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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

IN CASH OR KIND:

THE MANUAL LABOR MOVEMENT AND

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE AMERICAN LEARNED CLASS,

1820-1860

by

CHRISTOPHER J. STOKUM
B.A., University of Pittsburgh, 2012
M.A., Boston University, 2017

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Approved by

First Reader

Jon H. Roberts, Ph.D.
Tomorrow Foundation Professor of History

Second Reader

Andrew Robichaud, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of History

Third Reader

Nina Silber, Ph.D.
Jon Westling Professor of History

Fourth Reader

Maurice Lee, Ph.D.
Professor of English

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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2022

Major Professor: Dr. Jon H. Roberts, Tomorrow Foundation Professor of History

ABSTRACT

The manual labor movement generally has been regarded as a failed attempt to improve the educational prospects of the antebellum laboring class by enabling students to pay tuition in cash or kind. This dissertation argues that between 1820 and 1860, the movement accomplished a rather different objective on behalf of learned, not laboring, Americans. By inviting indigent youths to exchange work for education, manual laborism subordinated a portion of the laboring class's productive power to learned-class interests. Steered by a graduate clergy who associated economic dependency with intellectual servitude, the movement constructed a national network of private academies that afforded the antebellum learned class a degree of freedom from market prerogatives. Many of these colleges remain in operation, forming laborism's most durable legacy: a mechanism for endorsing the learned class's rational autonomy from market constraints and thereby regulating access to moral and intellectual authority in a capitalist economy.

Earlier studies of manual laborism have struggled to account for the movement's concurrent popularity among abolitionists, slavers, evangelicals, religious traditionalists,

trade unionists, merchant capitalists, and utopian reformers. Some scholars have regarded manual laborism as a democratizing movement that was infiltrated by reactionary forces, while others have seen in it a social control program that was undermined by egalitarian insurgents. By contrast, “In Cash or Kind” anchors manual laborism in the relatively stable interests of a geographically diffuse, ideologically diverse, but materially unified learned class. In so doing, this project traces important continuities between seemingly antagonistic reform movements, political persuasions, and religious traditions.

Situated at the confluence of intellectual and labor history, “In Cash or Kind” presents an institutional account of learned-class formation in the antebellum period. It compares manual laborites’ memoirs, manifestoes, and school constitutions with student demographics and college financial reports to interrogate the gap between the movement’s stated agenda and its eventual outcomes. In that gap, “In Cash or Kind” locates the material origins of an American learned establishment that continues to stand in a vexed relationship with working people.

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Introduction: Free Institutions

In late November 1832, a rising star of abolitionism wrote to a prominent South Carolina slaveholder requesting advice. Theodore Dwight Weld wished to know how "distinguished literary gentlemen" like the Charleston-based attorney Thomas S. Grimké proposed to improve the flagging health of the nation's student population. An agent of the newly formed Society for the Promotion of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions, Weld tried to broach the subject neutrally, but he soon tipped his hand. "Has [manual labor] a favorable influence on the mind?" Weld inquired. "[H]as it a tendency to clarify perception, to quicken the suggestive principle, to render more acute the power of investigation and analysis, and generally, to compact and give impulse to mental energy?" Weld was just getting started. If manual labor were incorporated into the curricula of colleges and theological seminaries, he asked, "what would be the *practical* effects upon the community? Would it probably have a tendency to establish common bonds of sympathy between the learned and laboring classes? Would it make labor honorable, and the laboring man more respected? Would its *political influence* probably contribute to the perpetuity of our free institutions?"[1]

Implicit in Weld's letter was an assumption of common cause that flouts our received understanding of antebellum social and political allegiances. Where we might expect to uncover traces of rising sectionalism, we instead find an ardent liberator hailing a Southern planter as a fellow stakeholder in "our free institutions." The lines of

[1] Thomas S. Grimké, *Correspondence on the Principles of Peace, Manual Labor Schools, &c.* (Charleston, SC: Observer Office Press, 1833), 11.

solidarity here are tripwires for our intuitions. Traced back to their anchor points, they reveal a social world of paper-thin strata and deep imbrications, where wrinkles in power could bring such strange bedfellows as Weld and Grimké into intimate acquaintance. The dilemmas that Weld invoked—the relationship between body and mind, the acrimony between laboring and learned Americans, the disrepute of socially necessary work, and the brittleness of a particular set of institutions—these were predicaments around which unexpected coalitions formed. In due course, the manual labor movement in American education would come to serve as these coalitions' public face.

In its most basic form, manual laborism pledged to reduce barriers to learning by permitting students to pay tuition in cash or kind. One of the signal pedagogical innovations of the antebellum period, manual laborism marshalled support from prominent clergymen, statesmen, financiers, and labor leaders. In a period of religious factionalism and escalating political disunion, the movement's devotees transcended denominational, partisan, and regional lines. Manual laborism triggered an outpouring of donations, mobilized a national network of reformers, and incited fierce debate on lecture circuits and in the popular press. In the eyes of its most fervent supporters, manual laborism expressed a millenarian ambition to realize God's government on earth by bringing about the harmony of body, mind, and spirit. It was a panacea in an age that brimmed with fixes and cures—a complete remedy that promised to eradicate invidious social hierarchies, vouchsafe republican liberty, and sacralize the mundane. It has generally been regarded as a failure.

To the Progressive historians who were attracted to laborism's combination of book-learning and hands-on experience, the movement "failed almost utterly."[2] This perception endured throughout the twentieth century. Although manual laborism was tried many times during the antebellum period, wrote one historian of education in 1934, "in each case it failed."[3] Consensus still holds that "in some deep sense the movement failed"—that it was a "general failure" that piled at its feet a wreckage of "failed seminaries [and] academies."[4] Historians in search of social determinants for manual laborism's poor performance have theorized that it "failed because of lack of adequate markets."[5] Others have been content to simply observe that "[i]t failed to make money."[6] That the movement's memory remains at all alive appears to be a profound act of historical generosity.

If the manual labor movement was indeed a failure, it was a strange sort of one. Its proponents established more than fifty secondary schools, colleges, and theological

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[2] Fred D. Crawshaw, "Schools and Shop Methods," *Manual Training and Vocational Education* 17, no. 3 (November 1915), 180.
[3] Willard William Bartlett, *Education for Humanity: The Story of Otterbein College* (Westerville, OH: Otterbein College, 1934), 30.
[4] Jeffrey A. Mullins, "'In the Sweat of Thy Brow': Education, Manual Labor, and the Market Revolution," *Cultural Change and the Market Revolution in American, 1789-1869*, ed. Scott C. Martin (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 165; Stephen P. Rice, *Minding the Machine: Languages of Class in Early Industrial America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 95; Kenneth H. Wheeler, *Cultivating Regionalism: Higher Education and the Making of the American Midwest* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois UP, 2011). See also Dorothy Orr, *A History of Education in Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1950), 148; Donald Charles Swift, *Religion and the American Experience: A Social and Cultural History, 1765-1997* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe), 87; and Herbert G. Lull, "The Manual Labor Movement in the United States," *Manual Training Magazine* 15, no. 5 (June 1914), 375.
[5] Albert Mock, *The Mid-Western Academy Movement: A Comprehensive Study of Indiana Academies, 1810-1900*, unpublished Ph.D (Indianapolis, IN: Butler University, 1949), 88.
[6] *The Herald*, *Volumes 5-8* (1976), 32.

seminaries. Dozens of preexisting institutions enlarged their campuses, professoriates, and student bodies through the system's adoption. Emerging at a time when as few as two percent, or some nineteen-thousand Americans, completed secondary educations annually, manual labor high schools, colleges, and theological seminaries enrolled between five- and ten-thousand students in any given year between 1830 and 1840.[7] A conservative estimate of the movement's aggregate matriculation between 1820 and 1850 exceeds one-hundred thousand individual students.[8] At the movement's apex, manual labor academies collectively commanded hundreds of productive shops, thousands of student workers, and acres of land numbering in the hundreds of thousands. Their graduate rolls featured future governors and national politicians, university presidents, economists, diplomats, poets, journalists, and clergymen. Manual laborites often acknowledged their intellectual debt to the Swiss pedagogues Emanuel von Fellenberg and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the latter of whom was once dubbed "education's most successful failure" in wry recognition of his broad influence and comparative obscurity.[9] The manual labor movement is surely a contender for the title.

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[7] See, for instance, David F. Labaree, *The Making of an American High School: The Credentials Market and the Central High School in Philadelphia, 1838-1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1988), 26-7; Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (New York: Basic, 1985), 230 n.1.; and Reed Ueda, *Avenues to Adulthood: The Origins of the High School and Social Mobility in an American Suburb* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1987).
[8] As discussed in chapter 4, manual laborites were notoriously lax record keepers, making more precise matriculation and graduation rates difficult to calculate.
[9] Ernest Bayles and Bruce Hood, *The Growth of American Educational Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 98.

How is it that a movement of such ubiquity and breadth has come to be a footnote in the history of antebellum social reforms? And how does a movement with manual laborism's catalog of quantifiable victories get remembered as a miscarriage of the radical culture that delivered abolitionism, women's rights, and trade unionism? There is an understandable magnetism to these latter traditions. In their debates over freedom and servitude, over property and labor, over race, class, and gender, we hear echoes of our own fractious disputes. Universals like these stoke in us feelings of admiration and scorn more powerful than the niceties of student tuition and school finance ordinarily inspire. Yet manual laborism played a seminal, if often subterranean role in those marquee movements. Its story is, in no small part, the story of where the antebellum period's epochal contests over privilege and power took place. More than any other single source, manual laborism supplied the physical infrastructure for antebellum radicalism. Laborite colleges hosted several of the nation's earliest anti-slavery societies, facilitated contests between gradual abolitionists and immediatists, pioneered race- and gender-blind admissions, and brought together anarchists, trade unionists, and utopian socialists. It is well documented that these heterogeneous programs overlapped on some principles.[10] Laborism summoned them to overlap in place. Yet like many institution builders, laborism's founders have tended to fade from view, outshone by the spectacles that unfolded on the stages that they built.

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[10] Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Holly Jackson, *American Radicals: How Nineteenth-Century Protest Shaped the Nation* (New York: Crown, 2019).

Manual laborism emerged in response to what has come to be known as the "market revolution," a process through which most Americans' basic survival became contingent on their successful competition in either commodity markets or labor markets, depending on their position in the chain of production. Following on the heels of a political revolution for national independence, the market revolution transitioned the adolescent United States away from the mercantilist accumulation that had characterized its colonial period and laid the groundwork for industrial capitalism. The political-economic context in which manual laborism appeared dictated its agenda, and to each major factor in the market revolution, laborism furnished a reply. In the face of an intensified division of labor, manual laborites urged the reconciliation of mind and body. As class divisions between bourgeoisie and proletariat calcified, laborites contrived to educate and acculturate the wealthy and the poor together. In an era in which new transportation and communication technologies made long-distance trade increasingly prudent, manual laborism blanketed North, West, and South with a pedagogical system that encouraged local manufacture. And in a period when cultural values shifted to accommodate material abundance and individual acquisitiveness, manual laborites upheld the paramount importance of the spiritual and championed a Spartan life of hard work and few possessions. As one historian has aptly observed, manual laborism constituted "one of the most systematic and integrated responses to the challenges posed by the market revolution."[11]

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[11] Mullins, "'In the Sweat of Thy Brow," 148. My summary of this period is informed by Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1992); Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism: Studies in Class-*

However, marveling that manual laborism articulated such an ample response to the market revolution tells us nothing of the respondent or their place in the antebellum social fabric. One interpretive scheme has situated the movement within a broader democratic cultural foment that was energized rather than satisfied by national independence. Like Shays' Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, Fries Rebellion, and other armed uprisings that pitted small producers against a debt and tax regime favoring land speculators and coastal merchants, the manual labor movement can be folded into a longer wildcat campaign for the decentralization of authority and the enshrinement of popular sovereignty. To Progressive historians, in particular, manual laborism expressed the "democratic motives" of independent farmers and craftsmen warring "to correct the aristocratic tendency wherever it existed" by erasing the educational divide between haves and have-nots.[12] This interpretation rides on its patriotic drama and crystal-clear stakes. Its implicit battle line sets the honest little guy against turncoat opportunists who conspired to betray the egalitarian principles of the Declaration of Independence while its ink was still wet.

But these tributes to grassroots republicanism have tended to stumble on the high educational attainment and social status of the manual labor movement's leadership. The preferred corrective has been undoubting faith in the beneficence of credentialed

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Structure, Economic Development and Political Conflict, 1620-1877 (Chicago: Haymarket, 2011); and Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994).

[12] Lull, "The Manual Labor Movement in the United States," 381. See also L.F. Anderson, "The Manual Labor School Movement," *Educational Review*, XLVI (Nov. 1913), 369-386; Charles Alpheus Bennett, *History of Manual and Industrial Education up to 1870* (Peoria, IL: Manual Arts Press, 1926).

intellectuals. The educational historian Robert Fletcher adopted his mentor Merle Curti's thesis that the overarching tendency in American intellectual history had been the increasing "popularization of knowledge" by civic-minded elites.[13] Fletcher cast manual laborism as the handiwork of a self-immolating intellectual aristocracy that was bent on distributing its inherited privileges to the deserving masses. The movement, in his view, salted theological training with practical activity to make abstract knowledge palatable to down-to-earth, working-class converts who were averse to scholastic theology and "impatient to be about the Lord's business."[14]

More recent scholarly analyses have multiplied their caveats but have mostly conformed to the Progressive consensus on manual laborism's democratic spirit. In his meticulous study of free labor ideology, Jonathan Glickstein has concluded that manual laborism contained "deliberate republican and anti-elitist implications," even if its supporters within academic circles sometimes fell short of advocating for "an outright abolition of the division of labor between the thinking and the working classes."[15] Paul Goodman has credited the movement's leadership for what we might now call their intersectional social analysis, arguing that manual laborites' "disinterested benevolence" extended beyond the assault on "class snobbery" to attack the panoply of racial and gendered stratifications that regulated access to authority within the "emerging bourgeois

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[13] Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, second ed. (New York: Harper, 1943/1951), viii.
[14] Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College: From its Foundation Through the Civil War, Vol. I* (Oberlin, OH: 1943), 34.
[15] Jonathan Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT.: Yale UP, 1994), 79.

order."[16] Kenneth H. Wheeler has assumed a regionalist perspective and ascribed the movement's popularity in the West to its compatibility with frontiersmen's "egalitarian and producerist mentality." While laborism was not quite "hostile to the market revolution" or "anticapitalistic," Wheeler judges that it established critical common ground between small producers and learned men from which to combat a political-economy that indiscriminately commodified both labor and ideas.[17] According to the school of thought inaugurated by Progressive historians, manual laborism was a noble if ill-starred attempt to democratize the marketplace by abrading the social barriers that limited access to knowledge and wealth. The movement's failure thereby reflects the nation's failure to make good on its revolutionary promise of egalitarian democracy.

An opposing body of scholarship has doubted the sincerity of the movement's democratic overtures. According to this school of thought, manual laborism was not so much the last gasp of the producers' republic as it was market capitalism's human face. This approach draws some of its steam from the "social control" interpretation of antebellum revivalism, which charges barnstorming moralists with gelding righteous dissent by drilling a bourgeois ethic of self-discipline, delayed gratification, and thrift into noncompliant workers.[18] In this context, manual laborism's critics have interpreted

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[16] Paul Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13: 2 (Autumn 1993), 388.
[17] Kenneth H. Wheeler, *Cultivating Regionalism*, 7, 26-7.
[18] For a paradigm-setting example, see Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978/2004). Other examples include Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the City: the New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1971) and Randoloph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987).

the movement's egalitarian rhetoric as a bourgeois swindle that masked the expansion of middle-class cultural hegemony. One social-control account has rebuked manual laborism as "an expression of contempt for uneducated circuit riders" by an urban middle class wishing to retain its monopoly on moral authority.[19] Robert Abzug has similarly noted that manual laborism emerged in a period of "heightened struggle" over public morality, when the churches of the well-connected and well-to-do competed for congregants with unlettered upstarts in the Methodist, Baptist, and other populist faiths. Abzug's manual laborism prepared "an energetic clergy" to penetrate the frontier, subdue its upwelling of folkish heresy and secular irreligion, and reclaim dominion over the popular conscience.[20] Joseph F. Kett has likewise attributed laborites' desire "to overcome the social isolation of clergymen" to their "burning sense" that the toiling majority must be made to adopt the values of shopkeepers and philanthropists through a stringent course of "moral cleansing."[21]

The most nuanced of laborism's critics, Stephen P. Rice, has also pegged manual laborites as faithful handmaidens to bourgeois ascendance. Rice saddles the movement with helping "to codify the social authority of a new middle class" by crafting "a harmonious language" that replaced "oppositional concepts of class" with sentimental claptrap about fruitful unions and interclass comity.[22] Despite Rice's vow to handle class

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[19] Dan William Butler, "Educational Aspects of the Great Revival, 1820-1840," unpublished Ph.D. (University of Southern California, Aug. 1964), 35-6.
[20] Robert Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1980), 59.
[21] Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1994), 130.
[22] Rice, *Minding the Machine*, 72.

as "a relational category"—one that marks out general social types while still registering the multiple gradations between dominated wage worker and arch-capitalist—he nevertheless concludes that manual laborism's leaders straightforwardly "worked to preserve the social relations of mechanized production."[23] Even when conceived of as a discursive community apart from factory owners and shopkeepers, the learned men who oversaw the "linguistic ordering" of labor's commodification cannot be meaningfully distinguished from a capaciously defined antebellum bourgeoisie.[24]

On both interpretative schemes, manual laborism turns out to have been a crudely functional implement, a tool of either democratization or top-down social control. Historiographical disagreements cleave simply on the question of which gray eminence wielded the movement most effectively—whether manual laborism worked, on balance, either *for* or *against* the democratic multitude. To overcome the movement's many incongruities, both the Progressive and the critical historiographies find it necessary to nominate a core set of authentic manual laborites. Nonconforming members are then jettisoned as gatecrashers who betrayed the spirit of the movement. The contributions of these epistemic trespassers are discounted as so many ideological impurities, while the movement is waved on to continue uplifting or downtrodding the toiling masses, as the historian prefers.

Yet the grounds for expelling dissidents are shaky. From its earliest appearance through its final years, manual laborism rallied a motley crew of supporters that

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[23] Rice, *Minding the Machine,* 7, 95.
[24] *Ibid*., 9.

transgressed the usual categories of antebellum society. Abolitionists, colonizationists, and proslavery Southerners participated alongside reactionary agrarians, merchant capitalists, and labor radicals. Nor did manual laborism spring from a discrete faith tradition. Although Congregationalist and Presbyterian theological seminaries sanctioned some of the earliest manual labor experiments, Methodists and Baptists came to dominate the movement in the West and the South. Manual laborism bridged intra-denominational factions, as well. Old School and New School, Old Light and New Light, Unitarian and Transcendentalist, formalist and evangelical—all seized and handed off the movement's reins at different moments and in different places. To resolve these paradoxes by appointing a single iteration for serious consideration is to sidestep the ideological flexibility that contributed to the movement's extraordinary cross-sectoral appeal and geographical scope.

Although intellectual and religious historians are responsible for much of the scholarly discourse on manual laborism, labor historians are no better equipped to make sense of it. Orthodox Marxist social analysis would require us to shoehorn the movement into the class programs of either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, but manual laborism's cross-class appeal is difficult to square with binary diagrams of class society.[25] Liberal historians have sliced the antebellum economic order a bit more thinly. Between wage workers and moneyed interests, they have inserted an intermediate layer of self-managed

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[25] Although Charles Sellers has occasionally rebuffed the notion that he pursues a strictly Marxist analysis (see "Charles Sellers's Response," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1992), 474), his *Market Revolution* remains the most overtly bifurcated rendering of antebellum class society. Charles Post, by contrast, avoids the term 'market revolution,' but his *Road to American Capitalism* adopts a self-consciously Marxist approach to the period.

producers: Jeffersonian yeoman farmers and independent artisans whose egalitarian, mutualistic "traditions" are admired for having valiantly, if vainly, "resisted a commercial orientation."[26] For example, Paul Goodman has argued that manual laborism staked out "islands of communitarian fraternalism in a sea of competitive individualism" to shelter the small producer "as the market displaced self-sufficient farming and home manufactures, creating a working class, a modern, urban middle class and a capitalist elite."[27]

Yet independent craftsmen and farmers never constituted the bulk of the movement's leadership, faculty, or student body, and small producers regularly tangled with manual laborites on questions of pay, marketability, and land management. Nor do small producers' economic incentives appear to have structured the movement's fascination with cooperative self-sufficiency. Far from chaining themselves to a hoary agrarian mutualism, many small producers of the middle antebellum period were highly responsive to commercial pressures; they intentionally streamlined production, specialized their outputs, maximized their profits, and diversified their risk.[28] By the time

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[26] Michael Merrill, "'Cash is Good to Eat': Self-Sufficiency and Exchange in the Rural Economy of the United States," *Radical History Review* III, no. 4 (Winter 1977). See also Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976/2000); Susan E. Hirsch, *Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980); Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984); and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984/2004).

[27] Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement," 370.

[28] Jeremy Atack, Fred Bateman, and William N. Parker, "The Farm, the Farmer, and the Market," in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000), 44-5; Clark, *The Roots of Rural*

manual laborism entered the scene, farmers and craftsmen who retained independent means of production did so by successfully competing for customers on commodity markets. If the behavior of small producers had indeed oriented the movement toward its goals, we should expect to see savvier market rationality than is evident in the average manual labor school's record of disorganized labor, ruined yields, indebtedness, and insolvency.

If the liberal labor historians rejected one "Manichaean world view of labour history" that straightforwardly pitted bourgeoisie against proletariat, then they have replaced it with one of their own. As Peter Way has written, characterizing the market revolution as a war on the dignified small producer "implies a false dichotomy between a better, more personal past for the laboring classes, and a hostile future in which workers are faceless cogs in the machinery."[29] Way and others have proposed a messier, more localized, and less linear model of socioeconomic stratification and market expansion. Entries in the "new history of capitalism" have underscored the ubiquity of precarious, periodic wage work as early as the late colonial period. Eloquent urban craftsmen and yeoman farmers might offer more convenient, relatable historical personalities, but, as Seth Rockman has soberly noted, the overwhelming majority of work was performed by unorganized laborers for whom "[c]lass consciousness was knowing the proper pose of

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Capitalism, 67; Post, *The American Road to Capitalism* price convergence page; Richard B. Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990), 101-4.

[29] Peter Way, *Common Labour: Workers and the Digging of North American Canals, 1780-1860* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 8.

deference to get hired."[30] Still, neither Way, Rockman, nor the other critics of liberal labor history can readily account for manual laborism. The "rough workers" whose meager circumstances they so faithfully reconstruct were virtually absent from the movement's governance. Those students who did option to pay in kind rarely received adequate work opportunities to sustain them, and many withdrew without having obtained a degree. Like small producers, wage workers neither steered the manual labor movement nor, in any consistent or calculable sense, had their needs met by it.

I have laid out in some detail who laborites were *not* because they worked so assiduously to disguise who they were. By turns, they donned "a working dress" and "a genteel dress."[31] They muddied their hands in fields only to rub their skin raw in compliance with bourgeois hygienic fashions. They took up the farmer's plow and the artisan's chisel to turn a dollar while reproving the laboring classes for capitulating to economic necessity. They coarsened their rhetoric and scoffed at elite pretensions, but they also viciously disciplined laborers who failed to keep pace with a behavioral code that seemed to be under constant revision. The world of work that manual laborism envisioned was one in which the antebellum class structure that later historians have struggled to define would melt into air. "All will be laborers; all will be students," went one laborite's incantation.[32] For all their prescience and perspicuity regarding the effects

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[30] Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2010), 11.
[31] Theodore Dwight Weld, *First annual report of the society for the promotion of manual labor in literary institutions* (1833), 64; "Manual Labor Schools," *New England Farmer & Horticultural Journal* 12, no. 2 (July 24, 1833), 11.
[32] "Manual Labor Schools," *New England Farmer*, 11.

of market expansion on the American political-economy, manual laborites propagated a mystified, equivocating model of class society in which their own material interests had a way of vanishing from view. In no small part, manual laborites were the authors of their own obscurity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the movement that contributed "one of the most systematic and integrated responses to … the market revolution" issued from people who were in the business of communicating ideas. In keeping with antebellum usage, I will refer to them as the "learned class." Members of this slim stratum of market actors were distinguished, economically and ideologically, by their relatively late entrance into a political-economy that had already integrated the majority of Americans into market dependency. A major catalyst of learned class formation was disestablishment, the haphazard process through which American states withdrew public funding and legal endorsement from Protestant denominations between 1776 and 1833. Disestablishment heralded the transfiguration of the American ministry from a public office into a private profession and forced previously established clergymen to jockey with dissenting ministers and unlicensed exhorters for lay support.[33] The learned class's distinctive position within the emerging American class structure informed their responses to marketization and, in the long run, determined the manual labor movement's course.

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[33] Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), xi.

But did the "learned class" really constitute a class? Disestablishment plunged the previously established clergy into an open spiritual marketplace that rewarded an entrepreneurial attitude toward building and maintaining one's flock. It reconfigured ministers as competitive market actors operating under a unique set of legal constraints that placed them in a common relationship to the coalescing economic order. In turn, this legally defined economic status endowed members of the learned class with similar dispositions to act and similar modes of self-conception. Under several of our most accepted definitions of 'class,' then, the learned class qualified. If we were to follow John R. Commons and reduce class to its "legal foundations," we would find that disestablishment cultivated a juridical environment that granted previously established ministers distinctive social duties and freedoms.[34] Under a Marxist-materialist rubric, we would discover that disestablished ministers occupied a unique position within socially organized configurations of production, distribution, and consumption. Despite being non-productive and semi-autonomous to an extent that differentiates it from the laboring class, the learned class lacked the financial resources that released capitalists from economic dependency.[35] The discourse analyst who stipulates that classes must self-consciously articulate themselves *as* classes could equally take solace that disestablished ministers left extensive records of attempted self-definition.[36] Moreover, the manual labor

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[34] John R. Commons, *The Legal Foundations of Capitalism* (Madison: Wisconsin UP, 1959), 344-6.
[35] See, for instance, Barbara and John Ehrenreich's Marxist conception of class in "The Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* 11, no. 2 (March-April 1977), 12.
[36] Labor historians who center consciousness and experience in their conception of class mainly work in the tradition of Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture & Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

movement elevated from within the learned class a select contingent of "plenipotentiaries," as Pierre Bourdieu called them—eloquent envoys who were "endowed with full power" by their class comrades "to speak and act in their name."[37] In brief, disestablishment fractioned off the United States' most prominent body of learned men, the previously established clergy, as a legally identifiable, materially distinct, and exceptionally self-aware class of political-economic actors.

Formalist denominations experienced disestablishment and learned class formation the most violently, and their swift, energetic responses form the basis of this study. Congregationalists and Presbyterians so accented church governance and ecclesiology that their denominational monikers referenced their internal systems of organization. To maintain consistency in thought and practice, they reserved ecclesiastical duties for an educated graduate clergy that was expensive to train and prone to indifference—and sometimes frank hostility—toward popular religious expressions. But disestablishment levied a heavy penalty for alienating the laity. Congregationalist and Presbyterian ministers struggled to compete with the more affordable training, dynamic sermonizing, and accommodating theology of the Methodist and Baptist traditions. Determined to uphold an unexpurgated theology, those clergy hemorrhaged confessors and, with them, funding for theological students.[38] Members of the previously established clergy predicted that a religion that was obliged to meet consumer demand would soon be

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[37] Pierre Bourdieu, "What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 1.

[38] The distinction between formalist and anti-formalist denominations is most clearly presented in Jay Riley Chase, *An Unpredictable Gospel, American Evangelicals and World Christianity, 1812-1920* (New York: Oxford UP, 2012).

cheapened beyond recognition or repair. "[G]ivers of money always influence the receivers," Jonathan Blanchard contended; "the wealth of the nation will always give character to its literary and religious institutions."[39] Some clergy from other denominations, like the Unitarian George Ripley, came to agree. The commercial minister "must color his own views to suit the popular taste," Ripley lamented; "he must exhibit truth, not as it appears to his own mind, but as it is supposed to appear to other minds." Disestablishment appeared to have reduced holders of a sacrosanct public office to mere "time-server[s] and ... slave[s]" whose spiritual integrity now came second to their need to earn a living.[40]

In the discussion that follows, Chapter 1, "'An Oppressive Insensibility': Disestablishment and the Creation of the Learned Class" traces the manual labor movement's origins to this moment of clerical panic. The previously established clergy's flagging lay approval stoked controversy within theological seminaries. Once a proudly cerebral breed, seminary students now considered the need for physical robustness in missionary work and the power of democratic manners to maintain friendly relations between the graduate clergy and the laity. An old-guard of formally trained clerics staged a defensive war against market dependency and loss of status by intensifying the seminary curriculum, proscribing physical exertion as a distraction from study, and

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[39] Jonathan Blanchard, "Public Men, and Public Institutions of the Church, a discourse before the Literary and Moral Society of Ripley College, Ohio, Sept. 29, 1842," reprinted in George Washington Gale, *A Brief History of Knox College, situated in Galesburgh, Knox County, Illinois; with sketches of the first settlement of the town* (Cincinnati, 1845), 19.

[40] George Ripley, *The Claims of the Age on the Work of the Evangelist* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan and Co., 1840), 24.

shielding students from popular influences. But internal critics of the seminary system, mostly hailing from a rising generation of seminarians, drew inspiration from the vigor and vernacular style of the Baptist and Methodist ministries. In a flurry of memoirs and exposés, they renounced the purported effeminacy and aloofness of the seminary-trained clergy. They proposed to reacquaint the ministry with the laity by bringing them together on the field of manual labor—where disestablishment had incidentally made it possible to operate under a shared identity as fellow workers.

Chapter 2, "'Schools of the Prophets': Coalition Building in the Frontier," follows these dissident seminarians as they exchanged academic training for an education in the field. Pioneering laborites travelled by newly constructed canals, spreading a gospel of self-sufficient production using the same channels by which manufacturing centers distributed consumer goods and encouraged market dependency. As manual laborites blanketed the West, they peddled an alternative to proletarianization to small farmers and independent craftsmen who were recoiling at their first taste of commercial society. Manual laborites claimed that the option to pay tuition in kind provided small producers with a means to erect self-supporting academies. They imagined that in these schools, mental and manual labor would remain intermingled and undistorted by the profit motive. Jeffersonian confidence in small producers' spontaneous virtue fused with former seminarians' yearning for a primitive religion shorn of strict hierarchy and cryptic dogma—a religion that would ride not on the expertise of the credentialed clergyman but on the transcendent authority of the unbought prophet who operated outside of market strictures. By uniting the learned and the laboring classes in manual labor academies,

manual laborites imagined that they could salvage a premarket ideal: a semi-fictitious romance of work before markets. Moral integrity and physical toil would once again be made mutually supportive, not balkanized into specialized employments and antagonistic classes. A critical first step toward the proposed regeneration was to travel West and amalgamate the clergy and independent frontiersmen in a unified social bloc.

Even while the learned class attempted to disappear among the frontier's small producers, their material position implied interests that could not be reconciled with laboring class demands. The learned class operated as a relatively small and strictly political class, not as an economic class, insofar as they did not have a direct hand in the productive process. Too much a minority to achieve electoral victories and incapable of leveraging either the means of production or substantial labor power to force social concessions, the learned class's ability to advance its interests hung upon cross-class alliance building. It was, in Marx and Engels's lexicon, a "supplementary" class; in Barbara Ehrenreich's terms, "a derivative class" that stood in an "interdependent yet antagonistic relationship" with both workers and bourgeoisie; or, put more bluntly, a jumble of "fence-sitters" that was haunted by an interminable question: "to which class should they adhere to serve their best interests?"[41] In the antebellum period, the obvious answer was 'the laboring class.' Disestablishment had created an undercapitalized, unproductive graduate clergy, one that required a new institutional home that it lacked

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[41] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, ed. Phil Gasper (Chicago: Haymarket, 2005), 75; Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," 15, 18; Liu Xiabo, "Making Common Laborers Out of Intellectuals," trans. M.E. Sharpe for *Chinese Law and Government* 38, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 2005), 11.

both the money and the manpower to build. Although economic development in the early republic typically required either substantial capital investment or the intensification of self-directed labor, manual laborism divulged a third way to financial security. It mobilized the labor power of small producers on behalf of the learned class by styling the learned class a subset of small producers.

Learned-class alliance building hinged on mystification—a purposive category confusion that manipulated contradictions in an embryonic class structure. Chapter 3, "'Let Us Take Hold of the Country': National Unity and Regional Variety," shows that manual laborism's maturation into a national reform movement leveraged the learned class's inconstant material allegiances and ideological flexibility. Theodore Dwight Weld's seminal 1836 report on manual laborism surpassed the movement's narrow class origins in favor of a universal moral agenda derived from the premarket ideal. The closest laborism got to producing a formal manifesto, Weld's report aligned the reintegration of a personal body divided by labor specialization with the reintegration of a body politic divided by class. Armed with this commodious message, manual laborites intervened erratically in labor disputes and economic quandaries throughout the United States, achieving successes on behalf of slaveholders and abolitionists, labor republicans and semi-feudal manor lords. In the process, laborism won adherents who were united by little besides their ability to facilitate the movement's continued expansion into the American hinterland.

Manual laborism purchased its early victories on credit, and it came up short when its lenders called. The bargain had seemed straightforward: if the laboring class

tendered their brawn and know-how to build out academic infrastructure in undeveloped regions, then the learned class would teach them how to ascend the social ladder. Once the final pediments were in place on classroom buildings and dormitories, however, learned-class resolve to uplift the average worker had a way of evaporating. Colleges that continued their manual labor programs beyond their initial construction phase struggled to deliver sufficient work hours for penurious students to offset the cost of tuition. Rather than acknowledge the structural flaw in their reform agenda, laborites shifted focus from the abolition of class to the more modest goal of propagating a common moral outlook across class lines. Chapter 4, "'All Such Expectations Must End in Disappointment': The Laborite Retreat from Class," traces the laborite turn to moralism through case studies of two of the movement's strongholds, Pennsylvania's Lafayette and Ohio's Oberlin. I interpret this retreat into tee-totaling, Sabbatarianism, hygienic fixations, and dietary proscriptions as a bid to restore legitimacy to an incoherent economic project by asserting that its ambitions had never been primarily economic.

To the extent that latter-day laborites engaged with material questions, they dismissed wealth disparity and productive function as root causes of class antagonism. No doubt, class stratification was still flagged with other social hierarchies as an intolerable threat to the American republic. But class became analogous to intemperance and impiety; it was aerosolized as a state of mind rather than treated as a social, material condition. It was now understood that laborers had been led to compromise their consciences by their desire to improve their lot, goaded on by the consumer attractions of commercial society. Labor could therefore be re-sanctified and American society

reunified merely by curbing laboring-class ambition—a procedure that could be performed without actual redistributions of wealth or political-economic power.

Chapter 5, "'Good Wages Are Not Happiness': Anti-Commercialism and the New Learned Establishment," reconstructs laborites' effort to assert themselves as an ethical teaching body that would oversee the propagation of a common morality and the chastening of laboring-class ambition. For this new moral establishment, the point of intervention was at the individual level and not at the social, systemic level.[42] Failing to acknowledge the market revolution as a thoroughgoing transformation in the basic means of subsistence and the universalization of market dependency, laborites insisted that laborers emulate the premarket ideal of self-directed subsistence production. Theirs had become an intellectualized, stylized "image of the worker," as the philosopher Jacques Rancière has called it: a romantic myth of labor against which actual laborers could be judged and found wanting.[43] Laborites assumed responsibility for leading workers, by the ear if necessary, to the moral or political programs that were deemed to have sprung organically from laboring-class consciousness. In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu seems to

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[42] It is for this reason that I characterize manual laborites' line of critique as 'anti-commercialism' rather than 'anti-capitalism.' As Ellen Meiksins Wood has observed, to confront capitalism is to confront "distinctive social-property relations" that furnish a "unique systemic logic. To assail "commercial society," on the other hand, is to regard the political-economy that developed in the middle antebellum period as merely "a bigger and better system of trade." Wood, forward to Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, xii.

[43] Jacques Rancière, *Staging the People: The Proletarian and His Double*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2011), 201; Jacques Rancière, *Staging the People, Vol. 2: The Intellectual and His People*, trans. David Fernbach (New York: Verso, 2012), 8.

have been quite right that "[i]ntellectuals … believe in the representation … more than in the things represented."[44] In the end, the myth of labor ran roughshod over its reality.

The anti-commercialism that governed laborism in its final years has led later interpreters to misapprehend the movement's overall orientation toward market capitalism. For all the scorn that anti-commercialists heaped upon the market, their vision of personal and national regeneration was fundamentally compatible with capitalist interests. By individualizing and psychologizing class as a worker's attitude toward money, anti-commercial laborites foreclosed discussion on workers' shared economic condition—precisely the grounds on which industrial laborers had begun to organize their dissent and press for real concessions from their employers. In this way, anti-commercial laborism also paved the way for the embrace of wage labor within anti-slavery politics by dissolving the classical republican connection between economic dependency and moral degradation. Early manual laborites had thrilled when a laboring-class ally like Thomas Skidmore admonished wage work as "voluntary slavery."[45] When the newly converted laborite and future Liberty Party leader James Birney emancipated his slaves less than a decade later, it was considered the zenith of enlightened abolitionism that he offered them back wages and an option to remain on his payroll.[46]

Yet it is no more accurate to depict the manual labor movement as an instrument of moneyed interests than it is to cast it as a popular mutiny against consolidated capital.

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[44] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984), 5.
[45] Thomas Skidmore, "Working Men's Meeting: Report of the Committee of Fifty" (1828), 1.
[46] William Birney, *James G. Birney and His Time: The Genesis of the Republican Party* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1890), 139.

The learned class that launched the movement and held fast to its tiller conceived of itself as a third party in the contest of rich against poor. As one laborite put it, learned men were "the material betwixt the upper and nether mill-stones of this nation's depravity"; their self-preservation depended not on befriending the bed-stone or runner but on getting out before they were ground into a product and shipped to market.[47] Any treaty with the laboring or owning classes they would claim to have signed under duress, so desperate to escape commercial society that they were willing to break bread with its most despoiled representatives.

Even in moments of apparent solidarity, the learned class could only muster what Emma Goldman once called "the sympathy of aloofness, of experiment."[48] By issuing obeisances to frontier virtue and enrolling large numbers of young people from populations that were historically denied educations, laborites supplied their upstart colleges with standing armies of low-paid workers. As student workers became potentially disruptive forces of democratization, however, they were exchanged for a more traditional, complacent student demographic. Manual labor colleges were retooled: they were no longer to be ladders out of commercial society so much as moral laboratories in which external arbiters would regulate proper behavior within such a society. When the last remaining manual labor program was discontinued in the 1860s, déclassé ministers and learned men who had toiled for half a century to stave off their

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[47] Jonathan Blanchard, "Public Men, and Public Institutions of the Church, a discourse before the Literary and Moral Society of Ripley College" (1842), repr. in George Washington Gale, *Brief History of Knox College* (Cincinnati, 1845), 22.
[48] Emma Goldman, "Intellectual Proletarians," *Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader, 3rd Edition*, ed. Alix Kates Shulman (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998), 229-30.

own proletarianization had managed to reconstitute the religious establishment as a moral establishment. As one antebellum observer of "clerical politics" remarked, the American clergy deftly "adapted themselves to [disestablishment's] new condition of circumstances" with little loss of wealth or status. On the pretense of coming down to earth, laborites abandoned the seminary only "in order to preserve their ascendancy."[49] The new moral establishment was no longer grounded in theological seminaries, prone as they were to factional disputes and esotericism. It would take root in the fresh layer of socially engaged liberal arts colleges that manual laborites had contracted the laboring class to build.

Quite deliberately, this dissertation does not advance its own image of antebellum workers. To do so would risk endorsing that same sanctification and idolization of labor that manual laborites themselves indulged. This is not a meditation on work, or on the relationship between mental and manual labor or even on the relationship between education and class. This is a study of ideas *about* work—on the people and systems that produced those ideas, and on the effects those ideas had when they came up against the people and systems to which they ostensibly referred.

That manual laborism no longer exists is indisputable. That it failed is less clear.

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[49] "Clerical Politics," *Workingman's Advocate* 3, no. 16 (Dec. 3, 1831), 4.

Chapter 1: "An Oppressive Insensibility"

Disestablishment and the Creation of the Learned Class

Beside Noah Williston's writing desk there hung a shelf on which he cut his pipe tobacco down to size. By the time his nephew, Lyman Beecher, visited Williston's West Haven, Connecticut, farm in 1791, the old preacher had nearly sawed the shelf in two. Williston was an ardent Congregationalist and an aging revolutionary who had once narrowly escaped being bayonetted when he broke his leg vaulting over a wall with Hessian mercenaries in pursuit.[1] It evidently took nicotine's chemical goading to keep him seated at his desk. Whenever possible, he preferred to escape the sedentary labors of the ministerial office. Williston preached twice on the Sabbath, officiated at funerals, and issued quarterly sacramental lectures, but he spent the lion's share of his days cultivating his fields. Among colonial ministers, such a blended work life would have been unexceptional.[2]

Lyman Beecher's days as a young preacher were of a more nineteenth-century sort. As a youth, he had discovered that he greater talent for building conceptual "castles

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[1] Noah Williston's brush with death is recounted in the *History of West Haven, Connecticut* (West Haven, CT: Church Press, 1940) that was compiled by the Writers' Program of the Works Progress Administration's Connecticut branch; see page 69.

[2] Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography of Lyman Beecher, Vol. I*, ed. Barbara M. Cross (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1864/1961), 21-2. Here and throughout, I use the terms 'preacher,' 'minister,' and 'clergyman' interchangeably—in part, to avoid wading into sectarian disagreement over the requirements for ordination, but more essentially, because the American clergy has never invited tidy classification. As E. Brooks Holifield has put it: "The clerical estate in America has always been a little rough around the edges." For a more detailed discussion of these terminological issues, see E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 2. Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1988) includes a wider survey of the economic activities in which the typical colonial pastor participated; see pages 31-2.

in the air" than he had for tilling rows. He spent the summer of his sixteenth year marveling at his uncle's prodigious pipe smoking and then devoted the next seven years to preparation for the ministry. So much close study without the ballast of physical exercise—or tobacco, which never enthralled Beecher as it had his uncle—took its toll. While roving Connecticut and upstate New York as an itinerant circuit preacher at the dawn of the nineteenth century, Beecher frequented doctors in search of a cure for the "oppressive insensibility" that dulled his senses and darkened his moods. None of the "eminent physician[s]" whom he visited in that age of medical superstitions and faddish cures agreed on the precise cause of his condition, and their prescriptions ranged from hot springs and induced vomiting to the avoidance of hot springs at all costs.[3]

Despite their differences, Beecher's doctors were certain that his ailments had their origins in his seminary days.[4] For Beecher's generation of theological students, the seminary system functioned as a centrifuge to separate the life of the mind from the labors of the body. Its architects dismissed the perceptible world as a base diversion of the unregenerate, and they doubted that knowledge of it might be meaningfully brought to bear on intellectual or spiritual pursuits. They deepened the Augustinian distinction

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[3] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 17, 54, 92; Elaine G. Breslaw, *Lotions, Potions, Pills, and Magic: Health Care in Early America* (New York: New York UP, 2012), 96-112.

[4] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 54, 92. In the following discussions of sedentary disease, I decline to diagnose the medical conditions of past actors, and I resist the competing temptation to dismiss their bodily complaints as purely psychosomatic or imaginary. Irrespective of whether they suffered from homeostatic imbalances, psychological neuroses, or divine maladies, the seminarians in question certainly seem to have *believed* that seminary training had made them ill, and they acted on the basis of their beliefs. Mine, in other words, is not what William James derisively called an "argument from origins," a "method of discrediting" undesirable ideas or experiences or other states of mind as "'nothing but' expressions of our organic disposition." Rather, mine is an argument about effects. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1902/2004), 21-8.

between "heavenly things" and "earthly things," the latter of which, John Calvin had once argued, were "of no avail for acquiring spiritual wisdom."[5]

Between 1800 and 1840, Protestant clerics founded more than fifty theological seminaries in the United States, obviating older, informal approaches to ministerial training and unbridling Protestantism's most world-denying impulses. Seminarians seeking to "walk by faith, not by sight," as the apostle Paul had counselled, soon reported that they were unable to see or walk, their eyes and legs the casualties of overstudy, neglect, and atrophy.[6] Most ministers reached for a familiar Calvinist idiom to explain their flight from embodiment, but they were participants in a trend that extended well beyond the churches. The clergy's withdrawal into the seminaries conformed to the same basic contours as other occupational groups' contemporary efforts to maintain their class status in the midst of political-economic upheaval. As the most prominent members of the learned class, seminarians desired an occupational hierarchy that rewarded knowledge-intensive, non-manual work with high prestige and generous pay. And like other professionals who boosted themselves by downgrading the status of manual labor, seminarians met with popular backlash.[7] Lay donations flagged, and in the press, a

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[5] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. I, Book II*, ed. John T. McNeill (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960/2006), 272; John Calvin *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1957), 83.

[6] Jonathan Edwards was fond of citing the 2 Corinthians 5:7 advice to "walk by faith, not by sight" in his regular calls for congregants to dissociate the spiritual from the sensual portions of their being; see, for instance, his fittingly titled *True Saints, when Absent from the Body, are Present with the Lord* (1747).

[7] Jonathan A. Glickstein pays particular attention to the disentanglement and hierarchizing of minds and bodies in the emergence of a professional middle class; for instance, see Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1991), 3-7. Enlightening studies of professionalization and middle-class formation include Stuart Blumin,

coterie of critics deplored the rise of a "*bookworm* class" that was "so wedded to abstract reflection, and … so little accustomed to be occupied or amused with the objects of the senses, that nothing but metaphysical truths and problems ha[d] power to fix [its] thoughts."[8]

The ill health and public opprobrium suffered by nineteenth-century seminarians stoked a reactionary yearning for intense feeling and uninhibited action that prompted some members of the clergy to reassess the relationship between body and soul. Beecher was one among a frustrated cadre of young religionists to craft an embodied religion that refused to treat the mind, body, and spirit as inherently separate or hierarchized faculties. Instead, they were regarded as mutually constitutive components of what one contributor to the *Quarterly Christian Spectator* termed a "compound being—an assemblage of contiguous and related organs … as the brain, lungs, stomach, muscles, nerves, [and] organs of sense."[9] No longer content to remain tucked away behind their desks, ex-seminarians honed their spiritualized conception of the body through practical reforms that incorporated physical exertion into ministerial training.[10]

The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1989); Daniel R. Coquillette and Bruce A. Kimball, *On the Battlefield of Merit: Harvard Law School, the First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015), 75-130; Jennifer R. Green, "Networks of Military Educators: Middle-Class Stability and Professionalization in the Late Antebellum South," *The Journal of Southern History* 73, no. 1 (Feb. 2007), 39-74; Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981); and Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), especially pages 30-3.

[8] "Dyspeptic Hours: A Bookish Man," *The Christian Spectator* vol. II (June 1828), 297.

[9] "Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions," *The Quarterly Christian Spectator* vol. 5, no. 3. (Sept. 1833), 383.

[10] Evangelicals' embrace of physical culture and, in some cases, traditional craft skill is part of what Michael Newbury has called "a much broader cultural anxiety about the expansion of

To be sure, "sedentary disease"—dyspepsia, myopia, melancholy, numbness, and other maladies that antebellum seminarians attributed to the scholarly life—had beset bookish types at least since Plato, who had warned in the *Timaeus* that "when the mind … applies itself too ardently to learning and research, it completely enervates and destroys the body."[11] Yet the aches and pains of desk work impressed a subset of early nineteenth-century seminarians not as ordinary occupational hazards but as symptoms of a professional crisis, the solution to which required bucking mainstream Protestant thought and erecting competing institutions. Why some members of the clergy should have so willingly estranged their peers and jeopardized their own career prospects remains mysterious so long as their transformation in ideas is analyzed apart from concurrent transformations in clerical labor. Between Noah Williston's time in the pulpit and Lyman Beecher's battles with sedentary disease, the cancellation of state patronage for churches had made the ministry materially dependent on public esteem—the patronage of the people, so to speak—precisely at the same time as seminaries' professional chauvinism and disdain for manual labor earned them popular disapproval.[12] Being a bookworm was not merely bad for one's health. It was financially unsustainable.

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nonmanual work and material nonproductivity." See Michael Newbury, "Healthful Employment: Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Middle-Class Fitness," *American Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (Dec. 1995), 681-714; and Rebecca Noel, "'No wonder they are sick, and die of study': European fears for the scholarly body and health in New England schools before Horace Mann," *Pedagogica Historica* 54, nos. 1/2 (Feb.-Apr. 2018), 134-154.

[11] Quoted in Noel, "No wonder they are sick, and die of study," 137.

[12] Literary historians have recently returned to the topic of literary patronage to better understand how fluctuations in authors' sources of financial support can apply or loosen constraints on their professional output. Such studies provide a useful template to the religious historian seeking to analyze similar dynamics in religious economies. These works include Paul J. Korshin, "Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1974), 453-473; Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge

The “oppressive insensibility” that Beecher and others endured therefore had both literal and figurative meanings. While seminarians complained, at times, of a straightforward deterioration of vision and sensation through neglect and misuse, they were also vexed by the graduate clergy’s detachment from public life. Ministers’ “insensibility” to the texture of lay experience threatened to be “oppressive” in the strictest sense: it would drive them down from a position of relative autonomy into the general population of working Americans. By placing mind and body on equal footing and imitating lay habits and manners, the seminary’s critics sought to relax the strained relationship between the educated clergy and the untutored laity, thereby stabilizing the ministry’s financial base. Even the reports of sedentary disease that seminarians included in very public memoirs and broadsides blurred the line between clergy and laity. Seminary training was hard work, they seemed to suggest—as hard as any physical employment and as deserving of just compensation. Although manual labor had yet to make its appearance on college campuses, already the distinction between the learned and laboring classes was fading from view.

The Seminary System and “the Art of Sitting Still”

Before the construction of the seminary system, a delicate compromise had balanced Protestant skepticism regarding the somatic aspects of religious experience against the practical demands of the ministerial office. Martin Luther had admonished his

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UP, 1996); Leon Jackson, *The Business of Letters: Authorial Economies in Antebellum America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2008); and David Dowling, *Capital Letters: Authorship in the Antebellum Literary Marketplace* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009).

followers to "let go of everything that the eyes and sense might present," and the New England divine Jonathan Edwards warned in 1738 that the "mass of flesh and blood" housing the earth-dwelling spirit introduced sundry "clogs and hindrances" through the senses and blocked the human being from gaining admission to the realm of the spirit.[13] In practice, however, Protestants' asceticism was milder than their rhetoric. Tasked with ministering to a laity that was embodied and sensual by nature—and saddled, as they were, with sensate bodies of their own—most Protestant clergymen contented themselves with instrumentalizing the physical body in the service of a spiritual agenda. John Calvin noted that the tongue and mouth were perfectly formed to sing God's praises, and Melanchthon made a habit of attending human dissections at the University of Wittenberg on a hunch that a record of former spiritual states would be imprinted upon the cadaver's organs like growth rings in a tree.[14] Through the end of the eighteenth century, the Protestant clergy generally regarded the body as an unavoidable locus of religious experience that, when kept in check, might furnish valuable clues about an individual's spiritual disposition and ingratiate the cultivated cleric with the average layperson.[15]

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[13] Luther quoted in Jacob M. Baum, *Reformation of the Senses: The Paradox of Religious Belief and Practice in Germany* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 106; Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits: Living in the Light of God's Love* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1738/1852), 489.

[14] Charles H. Parker, "Diseased Bodies, Defiled Souls: Corporeality and Religious Difference in the Reformation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 67:4 (Winter 2015), 1271-2.

[15] In recent decades, some historians have noted that conventional analyses of Protestant views on materiality and sensuality uncritically reproduce certain pieces of Protestant propaganda. Against Max Weber's influential view that Protestantism emerged as a rationalistic, innerworldly, and emotionally austere alternative to medieval Catholicism's rich sensorium of rosaries, incense, organs, and icons, a growing body of scholarship traces multiple lines of continuity between the Catholic and the Protestant traditions. See Baum, *Reformation of the Senses*; Jonathan Sawday,

The norms of ministerial training reinforced the synthesis of this- and otherworldliness. Formal clerical education was not required in many traditions, minimizing the separation between mental and manual employments. Methodists and Baptists consistently preferred field preachers like George Whitefield to his more learned peers, while Quakers and Anabaptists defined the church as a community of saints in which all members were ordained to preach, administer sacraments, receive confessions, excommunicate delinquents, and confer membership.[16] Even for Presbyterians and Congregationalists, who stipulated that their ministers must hold college degrees, a level of literacy and learnedness that was a hair's breadth above that of the average congregant's was sufficient to validate ministerial authority. In most cases, a general education in the liberal arts was adequate preparation. Candidates who were destined for more urbane congregations might linger at their colleges to "read divinity" for two or three years after graduation, while others secured post-graduate placements at "field schools" that senior ministers occasionally conducted from their homes.[17] Congregations also remained wary of "hireling priests," religious freelancers for whom the pulpit and the paycheck were their only links to the surrounding parish. Most selected a minister who would not only deliver sermons but also run a farm, practice a trade, or maintain

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The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture (New York: Routledge, 1995); Parker, "Diseased Bodies, Defiled Souls," 1268-73; and Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (New York: Penguin, 2016). On the matter of trust, both thick and thin, see Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 136-7.

[16] Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 25-7.

[17] *Ibid*., 76

some other immediate stake in the community.[18] "Farmer's life and farmer's fare" was dual purpose: it broke up the monotony of intellection while also thickening the bonds of trust between the clergy and the laity.[19]

Yet disestablishment revealed the extent to which the American Protestant clergy's willingness to roll up its sleeves and labor alongside the laity rested on the reassurance of state patronage. As state by American state withdrew funding from its dominant churches in the years following national independence, formerly established ministers began to regard their worldly attachments as professional liabilities. Subsistence farms that had once anchored ministers in communities now seemed to erode the distinction between the laity and the ministers, who could no longer derive their authority from state favor. Although national territorial expansion and westward migration increased overall demand for clergymen, the previously established churches were at a disadvantage in contests over frontier pulpits. Congregationalists, in particular, struggled to explain why cash-poor settlers should sponsor seminary students rather than entrusting their souls to the Methodist or Baptist ministries, which did not require their clergymen to undertake costly college training. By snapping the lines of patronage that had suspended ministers above the colonial economic fray, disestablishment plunged the

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[18] Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 34, 76

[19] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 38. For analyses of colonial clerical training, see Natalie A. Naylor, "The Theological Seminary in the Configuration of American Higher Education," *History of Education Quarterly* vol. 17, no. 1 (Spring 1977), 20-25; Michael J. Paulus, Jr., "Beyond 'Pabulum for the Undergraduates': The Development of the Princeton Theological Seminary Library in the Nineteenth Century," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* vol. 42, no. 3 (2007), 231-3; and William Warren Sweet, "The Rise of Theological Schools in America," *Church History* vo. 6, no. 3 (Sept. 1937), 260-6.

Protestant clergy into a roiling spiritual marketplace of competition and exchange that threatened their occupation's special status.[20]

When Massachusetts became the final state to disestablish its churches in 1833, it removed the last fetter on interdenominational competition. Since states had begun to disestablish their churches in 1791, ministers had scrambled to attract new converts by emphasizing their denominations' special endowments. The result was a set of highly self-conscious denominations that were separated by gulfs far wider than any colonial schism between Old and New Sides or Old and New Lights. Seminaries came to serve as denominational incubators. Church leaders used them to rally together prominent clerics and theologians on a faculty, centralize doctrinal authority, and train young religionists to reject the heresies that competing churches peddled to the untutored.[21] The clergy faced competition from the secular professions, as well. Post-graduate professional education in law, medicine, and engineering all arrived in some form by 1790, maturing these fields into lucrative, high-status employments that had the capacity to lure the sons of well-heeled families away from the ministry.[22]

To make matters worse, disestablishment was accompanied by a vigorous and occasionally violent anticlericalism. "It was a time of great depression and suffering," Lyman Beecher later recalled. "The odium thrown upon the ministry was

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[20] David F. Allmendinger, Jr., "The Strangeness of the American Education Society: Indigent Students and the New Charity, 1815-1840," *History of Education Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1971), 4-6; Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 80-3.
[21] Naylor, "The Theological Seminary," 20-1; Sweet, "The Rise of Theological Schools in America," 260-1.
[22] Coquillette and Kimball, *On the Battlefield of Merit*, 75-130; Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 116-7.

inconceivable."[23] Soon, embattled clergymen could be heard calling for the creation of institutions that would "increas[e] the number of *learned* and *able* Defenders of the gospel of Christ" who would be equipped "to unlock the treasures of divine knowledge" while guarding the laity "against religious error"—such as, for instance, throwing odium upon the ministry.[24] Benevolent organizations like the American Education Society (AES) convened to subsidize the cost of seminary training and take the shine off of Methodism, the Baptists, and, as an agent for one charitable group summarized, all "the various ways which [were] open to young men, of getting into the ministry, without a regular course of classical study."[25] Fearing that ministers would be absorbed into the commercial economy as yet another set of contenders in free-market bloodsport, the clergy erected a cloistered seminary system in which to gather their ranks while washing their hands of the outside world's grittier preoccupations.

The reordered economic composition of post-Revolutionary America also motivated the increased formalization of clerical education. Republican governance required an educated citizenry, exemplary leadership, and a reliable means of culling the latter from the former. Republican lodestars like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Rush established schools so that "the best geniuses [would] be raked from the rubbish," as Jefferson put it in his blunt formulation.[26] When Jefferson doubled the nation's size

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[23] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 344.
[24] *The Constitution and Associate Statutes of the Theological Seminary at Andover* (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1817), 27.
[25] *Fourth Report of the Directors of the American Society for Educating Pious Youth for the Gospel Ministry* (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1819), 17.
[26] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785); Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2015).

through the 1803 Louisiana Purchase, he doubled the "rubbish," too. Congress exacerbated the problem when it touched off a period of rapid infrastructural expansion and geographical mobility with the Enabling Act of 1802, which appropriated five percent of the proceeds from land sales in the Ohio Valley for internal improvements. The resulting roadways and canals whisked people away from their ancestral villages and local reputations to deposit them in a sea of anonymous faces, among whom it became impossible to distinguish genuine authorities from mere pretenders.[27]

Diplomas became important social signifiers according to which employers could rank applicants, justify differential pay grades, and distribute promotions. As the learned professions expanded their ranks and it became less possible to have personal acquaintance with all of one's peers, credentials confirmed a stranger's competence. The elaboration of graduate-level professional training eased the transition from a colonial outpost comprised of small-scale local economies and community politics to a fast-moving, disorienting market society by replacing local, reputational qualifications with transferrable degrees.[28]

Extending ministerial education to include post-graduate study also enabled the clergy to retain their intellectual edge *vis-à-vis* a population that was fast becoming better read, better travelled, and more politically expectant that earlier generations. Innovations

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[27] John Lauritz Larson, *Internal Improvement: National Public Works and the Promise of Popular Government in the Early United States* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001), 54; Howe, *What God Hath Wrought*; Lewis Perry, *Boats Against the Current: American Culture Between Revolution and Modernity, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993).
[28] Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*; William J. Reese, *The Origins of the American High School* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 1-15; John R. Thelin, *A History of American Higher Education*, 2nd edition (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011).

in print and paper-making technologies slashed the cost of reproducing written materials, and burgeoning public school systems increased the average Americans' ability to write, read, and interpret those materials without the guiding light of a local cleric. The American clergy had dominated the literary scene throughout the colonial period, producing upwards of thirty percent of the total written material published in the colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As that percentage dipped in the early republic, ministers used post-graduate seminary education to carve out areas of expertise for themselves and to maintain their preeminence in letters.[29]

At the start of the nineteenth century, American clergymen discerned a multi-frontal assault on their intellectual and moral leadership. As the young market economy leveraged new sources of labor and revenue, it entangled the ministry in a half-dozen of its tentacles: the disestablishment of churches, westward migration and the proliferation of lay exhorters to fill the frontier's leadership vacuum, the dissolution of traditional social bonds, the emergence of law and medicine as attractive professions, the spread of public education, and the formation of a robust secular literary marketplace.

Andover Theological Seminary was among the first institutions to comprehensively respond to the altered religious landscape, and it set the tone for many of the seminaries that would follow. Founded in 1808 by Congregationalists who were moved to act by the 1805 Unitarian "takeover" of Harvard, Andover was supposed to smooth Congregationalism's hewn edges to prevent more splinter groups from forming. The seminary offered a full suite of theological training that encompassed ancient

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[29] Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 53-4; 77.

languages, exegetics, and church doctrine.[30] In his address at Andover's opening ceremonies, Yale College President Timothy Dwight saluted the seminary for developing "a system of theological instruction more extended and complete than has been heretofore presented."[31] Not to be outdone by their rivals, Harvard's Unitarians established their own seminary in 1811. Presbyterians founded theological seminaries at the College of New Jersey and New York City's Auburn in 1812 and 1818, respectively. The Episcopal Church opened its General Seminary in New York in 1819, and in 1825, Congregationalists saw fit to found a second seminary in Newton, Massachusetts, to contain the spillover from Andover. By 1840, thirteen denominations operated more than fifty seminaries in seventeen states and the District of Columbia.[32]

Nowhere was what had happened more apparent than in the cavernous libraries of theological seminaries. Before the advent of the seminary system, college libraries had been little used and poorly stocked, housing collections that were cobbled together from whatever third-tier books that professors and trustees were willing to donate. Their inadequacy was due, in part, to the colonial book trade's dependence on costly British imports that priced many small colleges out of the market. Independence from Britain stoked a nationalistic fervor for "native manufactures," however, and the inchoate seminary system struck up a symbiotic relationship with the expanding domestic book

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[30] Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 25-7, 76; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1970).
[31] Timothy Dwight, "Introductory Address," *The Panoplist, and Missionary Magazine United* 1:10 (Mar. 1809), 459.
[32] Naylor, "The Theological Seminary in the Configuration of American Higher Education," 20; Sweet, "The Rise of Theological Schools in America," 260-6.

industry.[33] When the Princeton Theological Seminary opened at the College of New Jersey in 1812, its trustees committed themselves to developing "a complete theological library." By 1816, they had grown the seminary's handful of literary "scraps" into a collection of approximately six-hundred books; by 1820, the library's holdings exceeded one-thousand individual titles.[34] Unmatched by any secular collection of printed material in the country, seminary libraries helped to restore much of the influence that ministers feared was slipping from their grasp. Wielding ponderous ideas drawn from their private intellectual armories, clergymen reestablished themselves as literary, scientific, and pedagogical authorities. Seminaries published pacesetting quarterlies that included the *Christian Spectator* (Yale), the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* (College of New Jersey), and the *Bibliotheca Sacra and Theological Review* (Andover). They nurtured literary circles like the Transcendental Club (Harvard), politicians like the Iowa Congressman Josiah Grinnell (Auburn), and pedagogues like the pioneering educator of the deaf, Thomas Gallaudet (Newton). "So rapidly and unceasingly [advanced] the march of discovery," remarked Theodore Dwight Weld, "that one [had] to apply whip and spur to keep up with the times."[35]

Whip and spur were not long in coming. A behavioral code—or what Samuel Miller, Princeton Theological Seminary's chief intellectual architect, termed "a style of

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[33] An overview of the late colonial and early national book trade appears in James N. Green's "The Book Trades in the New Nation," in Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (eds)., *A History of the Book in American, Vol. 2: An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2010), 75-6.
[34] Paulus, "Beyond 'Pabulum for the Undergraduates,'" 235-6.
[35] Quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 60.

manners"— coalesced to help seminarians satisfy increasingly rigorous educational requirements.[36] Seasoned ministers penned and reissued etiquette manuals that transmitted to their younger colleagues "those manners which become the *Christian Gentleman;* which naturally flow from the meekness, gentleness, purity, and benevolence of our holy Religion."[37] Students were advised to read with erect posture, to refrain from propping their feet up on their desks, and to practice self-control, dutifulness, and candor. Unremitting study was especially encouraged. John Mason's *Student and Pastor* insisted that any more than six hours of sleep per night was a "luxury" and announced that "[t]he business of a student is, to be so employed, as to be continually making some valuable accessions to his own intellectual furniture."[38] Samuel Miller praised "the art of sitting still" and warned that, if his students "[would] not consent to apply [themselves] to the acquisition of knowledge, *laboriously, patiently, and indefatigably*, [then they would] never attain much." He looked forward to a rising generation of scholars who were so "addicted to a sedentary employment" that they would read and write with "UNWEARIED INDUSTRY," without requiring a crutch like Noah Williston's tobacco or developing nervous tics as seemingly innocuous as fiddling with a drawer pull as they studied. Miller compiled a list of unbecoming habits: picking one's teeth, cleaning one's nails, coughing, laughing, yawning, slouching, combing one's hair, clearing one's throat, blowing one's

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[36] Samuel Miller, *Letters on clerical manners and habits; addressed to a student of the theological seminary, at Princeton, N.J.* (New York, 1827), 31.
[37] Miller, *Letters on clerical manners and habits*, 19.
[38] The Boston bookseller and politician Samuel Turell Armstrong collected the most popular handbooks in an edited volume, *The Young Minister's Companion*, in 1813. For Mason citations, see Samuel T. Armstrong, ed., *The Young Minister's Companion* (Boston, 1813), 9-10.

nose (and then examining the contents of one's handkerchief), cracking one's knuckles, tugging at one's watch chain, placing one's elbows on one's desk. Each of the offending behaviors joined a physical dimension to otherwise intangible thought patterns and spiritual states. More than mere prudishness, Miller's prohibition of autonomic stress responses was part and parcel with his and his colleagues' desire to limit the presence of everyday "earthly things" in professional clerical training.[39]

Guides to the scholarly life were hardly the invention of nineteenth-century seminarians. Cotton Mather's *Manuductio ad ministerium*, which had been a standby of ministerial training since its 1726 publication, included a punishing list of recommended readings and urged the clerical student to "Place [him]self in the *Circumstances* of a *Dying Person*; [his] *Breath* failing, [his] *Throat* rattling, [his] *Eyes* with a dim Cloud, and [his] *Hands* with a damp Sweat upon them." By "Such a *Numbring* [*sic*] *of [his] Days*," Mather fancied that the seminarian could be terrorized into spending the remainder of his worldly existence preparing for a spiritual eternity.[40] As early as 1701, the Massachusetts Congregationalist Samuel Willard had drafted his *Brief Directions to a Young Scholar*

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[39] Miller, *Letters on clerical manners and habits*, 85, 256, 269. The philosopher Brian Massumi's work sheds light on Samuel Miller's campaign against autonomic stress responses. Massumi has observed that "[t]here is no thought that is not accompanied by a physical sensation of effort or agitation…. Reading, however cerebral it may be, does not entirely think out sensation. It is not purified of it. A knitting of the brows or pursing of the lips is a self-referential action. Its sensation is a turning in on itself of the body's activity, so that the action is not extended toward an object but knots at its point of emergence: rises and subsides into its own incipiency, in the same movement. The acts of attention performed during reading are forms of incipient action." For Miller, even incipient action misdirected seminarians' energy toward the worldly via the corporeal. See Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002), 139.

[40] Cotton Mather, *Manuductio ad ministerium: directions for a candidate of the ministry* (New York: Columbia UP, 1726/1938), 28-91, 2.

Designing the Ministry, in which he advised that would-be ministers spend a portion of each day engaged in "a careful eyeing of the Scripture," during which they were to reread a brief selection of scripture in both its original and translated versions until it was committed to memory.[41]

Still, the advice literature that early nineteenth-century seminarians issued was notable for its profusion and its popularity. Six original handbooks appeared between 1827 and 1843, and dozens more colonial texts were dusted off and republished.[42] Competition for intellectual authority from both within and beyond the clergy required that ministers acquire not only specialty knowledge, but also a new demeanor that communicated spiritual loftiness and professional expertise. "Ought the manners of a clergyman perceptibly to *differ* from those of a well-bred man of a secular profession?" one scholars' guide inquired; "I think they *ought*."[43] In a democratizing moment, when the educated clergy faced threats from untrained ministers and an emboldened laity, the spectacle of expert knowledge conveyed in an "elevated style" was to distinguish the ministers from the masses.[44]

Like seminary libraries, ministerial etiquette indexed the withdrawal of the graduate clergy from the rhythms of everyday lay life. Like apprenticeships in smithing or shoemaking, parish academies and private tutorships had given pride of place to

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[41] Samuel Willard, *Brief Directions to a Young Scholar Designing the Ministry of the Study of Divinity* (1735), 2.
[42] David F. Allmendinger, Jr., "The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life," *Journal of Social History* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1973), 77; Holifield, *God's Ambassadors*, 120.
[43] Miller, *Letters on clerical manners and habits*, 35.
[44] The phrase "elevated style" is attributed to an anonymous minister quoted in Charles G. Finney, *Autobiography* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1876/1908), 88-9.

practical experience. Their primary function was to acquaint young religionists with the daily grind of preaching the gospel: drafting sermons, paying home visits to sickly parishioners, counselling the betrothed, and presiding over baptisms, confirmations, and funerals. By the time a student entered the clerical occupation, he would have performed most of the duties that would be expected of him and developed intimate bonds with lay congregants. Increasingly, however, the previously established clergy felt itself being pulled into the material world, where it was made to compete for lay patronage against secular professionals and inexpert clergymen. Theological seminaries emerged as an attempt to salvage the clergy's dignity and authority by eliminating all resemblances between the ministerial calling and other forms of employment. In the hustle and bustle of market society, the clergy announced its intention to remain stock-still.

Sedentary Disease

Seminarians who drew inspiration from Samuel Willard might have paid closer attention to his biography. After publishing his *Brief Directions to a Young Scholar* in 1701, Willard devoted his energies to his *Compleat Body of Divinity*, perhaps the most inclusive—if not the most original—volume of systematic theology to issue from Puritan America. So much "careful eyeing" of "dark and difficult" scriptures brought unintended consequences. Willard's eyesight deteriorated precipitously after 1700, and reading became a laborious and time-consuming ordeal. In his sixties and serving as acting president of Harvard College, Willard spent hours in his study scrutinizing texts that blurred and swam in his abbreviated field of vision. In April of 1707, while taking a meal

at his desk to avoid interrupting his work, he slipped into delirium. Willard suffered through a summer of wrenching headaches, indigestion, and convulsions, once complaining to his protégé, Samuel Sewell, of "a great pain in [his] head, and sickness at his stomach." While lunching in September of the same year, he cut his finger on an oyster, retreated to his study, endured a seizure, and promptly died.[45]

In his effort to ensure that his *Body* of theology would be *Compleat*, Willard more or less completely wrecked his body. With the rise of the seminary system during the early nineteenth century, ailments of the sort that had hastened Willard to his untimely end a century earlier became the bugbears of many more aspiring ministers. After Andover's 1808 opening, unprecedented numbers of students pursued post-graduate professional training, sometimes far from the watchful eyes of their home communities and frequently in numbers too great for their health to be closely monitored by academic officials.[46] An 1830 survey estimated that overstudy had claimed the lives of more than one-hundred and twenty seminarians each year since Andover's founding—a death toll of well over two-thousand casualties in the span of just twenty-two years.[47] The Reverend John Frost calculated that "at least one fourth of those who pass through a course of

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[45] George William Dollar, "The Life and Works of Samuel Willard," unpublished Ph.D. (Boston: Boston University, 1960), 1-10, 37-42, 109-116; John Langdon Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: University Bookstore, 1881), 22-3; Ernest Benson Lowrie, *The Shape of the Puritan Mind: The Thought of Samuel Willard* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1974), 2-3, 13-5, 20-1; Seymour Van Dyken, *Samuel Willard, 1640-1707: Preacher of Orthodoxy in an Era of Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 28-9, 31-4, 181-6; Samuel Sewell, *The Diary of Samuel Sewell, 1652-1730* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1879), 193.
[46] Allmendinger, "The Strangeness of the American Education Society," 3, 19; Allmendinger, "The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life," 77-9.
[47] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," *American Annals of Education and Instruction, and Journal of Literary Institutions* vol. I, no. vi (Aug. 1830), 364.

education for the learned professions, sink into a premature grave, or drag out a miserable and comparatively useless life, under a broken constitution."[48] Thomas Gallaudet guessed that between three-fourths and nine-tenths of "diligent students impair[ed] their health by insufficient exercise."[49]

The financial arrangements that had replaced the colonial network of state-sponsored churches contributed to the sense of urgency around student health. As state patronage dried up and Protestant factions began directly competing for lay donations, popular opinion of the ministry became a deciding factor in a given denomination's ability to raise funds for clerical education. Sedentary disease made the seminarian a poor investment. In 1829, the AES conceded that at least thirty of its beneficiaries moldered in "early graves." Other scholarship recipients, the AES report continued, "fell victims of disease before their preparatory studies were completed," and "nearly as many more [failed] to enter the ministry in consequence of a loss of health." By conservative estimates, the AES had doled out more than five-thousand dollars for the education of men and boys who would never join the ministry.[50] Benevolent organizations' track record of losing on investments finally undermined their fundraising efforts and forced

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[48] John Frost, *An Oration, Delivered at Middlebury, before the Associated Alumni of the College, on the Evening of Commencement* (Utica, NY: Hastings & Tracy, 1829), 7-8.

[49] Gallaudet quoted in William Cogswell, *Letters to Young Men Preparing for the Christian Ministry* (Boston: Perkins & Marvin, 1837), 173. Rebecca Noel's article "No wonder they are sick, and die of study" assembles a genealogy of European and American medical discourses surrounding scholarly disease and notes their increased sense of urgency following school expansion on page 136.

[50] "Notice of the publication of the Thirteenth Report of the Board of Directors of the American Education Society," *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society* (Aug. 1829), 18.

groups like the AES to scale back their scholarship funds. In 1831, the Presbyterian church attributed its "paucity of beneficiaries" to "disappointed public expectation[s]" and the perception among former donors that "gratuitous aid" was being redistributed upward from cash-strapped congregants to academic loungers.[51] The Episcopal church likewise linked its reduced donations to a dip in donor confidence. Such dismal figures, the AES concluded, "afford[ed] melancholy proof that something should be done to render studious habits less injurious."[52] The less diplomatic Franceway Cossitt, a Kentucky-based Episcopalian and a survivor of New York's General Seminary, condemned the seminary as "a manufactory of invalids, and the slaughter-house of cultivated talent."[53]

Sedentary disease was an institutional problem, but, like the elevated style, it was easiest to spot on the granular level of manners, sensations, and individual maladies. When he entered Andover's preparatory department in 1819, Theodore Dwight Weld subjected himself to a stringent course of study. Each morning, he awoke before sunrise to pray in his room before hurrying to chapel at seven. After taking a meager breakfast, he studied from eight o'clock until noon and then again, after lunch, from one thirty until three. Recitations, prayers, and another two hours of study—in total, approximately seven and a half hours of reading—filled the rest of the day. As one prescient classmate of

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[51] "Report of the Board of Education, to the General Assembly, May 1831," *Missionary Reporter & Education Register of the Missionary & Education Boards of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (June 1831), 342-3.
[52] "The Fourteenth Annual Report of the Society for Educating Pious Young Men for the Ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church," *Episcopal Reader* 9, no. 40 (Dec. 31, 1831), 158.
[53] Quoted in Edward W. Knight, "Manual Labor Schools in the South," *The Southern Atlantic Quarterly* no. 16 (1917), 214.

Weld's moaned, "I have [books] around me to frighten a very timid man out of his senses." For more than a year, Weld squinted at dense treatises by candlelight until his eyes became too inflamed for him to read. Doctors recommended that Weld refrain from physical exertion, studying, and direct exposure to sunlight for a period of seven years, and even then, they feared, his eyesight might never be restored.[54]

Uninterrupted study also enfeebled younger students who were anxious to earn their places at the country's most prestigious seminaries. While acquainting himself with the day's leading theological controversies in preparation to enter into Vermont's Middlebury College, John Jay Shipherd found that his eyesight was quickly failing. At the same time, he developed the chronic dyspepsia that would plague him for the remainder of his life. Desperate for gastric relief and able to perceive only the most basic shapes and colors, he mistook a vial of saltpeter for one of Epsom salt and gulped a heaping spoonful. Instead of settling his stomach, Shipherd nearly poisoned himself.[55] When one Andover student complained that "the opportunity to kill oneself with study [was] rather too good" at theological seminaries, he scarcely could have had a more literal example in mind.[56]

Moneyed men like Weld and Shipherd had ample resources to keep them afloat while they convalesced. For indigent students, the academic program at theological seminaries was even more onerous. After graduating from Middlebury in 1819, Beriah Green matriculated at Andover's post-graduate seminary. He went broke in less than a

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[54] Quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 24-6.
[55] Finney, *Autobiography*, 230-1; Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 58-62.
[56] Quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 24.

year and accepted a tutorship at Andover's preparatory department. In another era, fusing ministerial education with paid work in the community would have been the norm, but the academic demands that seminaries placed upon their students had become so exaggerated as to require Green's undivided attention. He rose early, studied late, and paid not an iota of thought to his health. He later recalled that his "[e]very nerve was strained. [He] did not pause to inquire whether [he] was well or sick—sinking or rising." Green soon found it necessary to "[bid] adieu to [his] books" except "through the eyes of a friend" and to altogether "[give] up the labor of continuous, close thinking."[57]

The Reverend John Frost endured his own "painful experience" at Andover. The son of a farmer, Frost had grown up strong and lithe before entering the seminary at the age of eighteen. He quickly succumbed to "the injurious influence of study," experiencing "[i]ndigestion, constipation of bowels, headache, depression of spirits, indistinct vision, clouded intellect, defective memory, and general debility." The Andover graduate John Todd, who went on to accept a pulpit in Northampton, Massachusetts, was "seized with a cough, bleeding at the lungs, … and was forced to flee from books" just a few short months after arriving at the seminary. Nor was overstudy limited to Andover students. It delayed and derailed pupils at every institution that adopted Andover's model. Charleston's Thomas Grimké enrolled at Yale Divinity School in the spring of 1805. Decades later, he shuddered to think that, if he were still studying as he had as a seminary student, he "should now be a martyr to ill health and a broken, if not ruined constitution."

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[57] Quoted in Milton C. Sernett, *Abolition's Axe: Beriah Green, Oneida Institute, and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1986), 9.

Alvah Steele of Georgia suffered "a prostration of body and mind" soon after entering Yale in 1829; his doctor advised that if he did not take a break from studying to recuperate his health, he would be dead within six months.[58]

As astute seminarians pieced together the pattern of sense death, indigestion, and depression that afflicted them, they began to doubt the wisdom behind the seminary system's exclusive attendance to "heavenly things." The famed evangelist Charles Grandison Finney reported that he was "solemnly impressed with the conviction, that the schools are to a great extent spoiling the ministers."[59] Lyman Beecher maintained that "[t]he old way was healthier" insofar as informal apprenticeships and blended work lives had offset mental exertion with manual labor.[60] To their detractors, seminaries stank of curdled piety and squandered potential. The trustees of Allegheny College argued that the seminary system had revived, under the guise of Protestantism, the medieval monastery in which "literary men turned monks, divorced themselves from useful and practical life, and ended their days in cloisters, where they became sluggards and dozed away a life that might, with activity, have been rendered useful to the world."[61]

Critics of the seminary system groped about for the core of their critique. Most of them settled on the virtue of usefulness, and they charged the seminary system with roundly subverting it. 'Usefulness' was a capacious term that, with its web of sacred and

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[58] *First annual report of the society for promoting manual labor in literary institutions* (1833), 113-8.
[59] Finney, *Autobiography*, 88.
[60] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 22.
[61] *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College* (Meadville, PA: Jos. C.G. Kennedy, 1833), 4.

secular connotations, could pull together a number of critical perspectives. Republican ideologues maintained that people had a duty to be useful to their communities and their country—an obligation to act disinterestedly by turning their personal gifts to the public weal while reigning in their selfish impulses.[62] Millennialists, who expected that Christ's second coming would occur in the near future, added that the time was ripe for the establishment of a social order that was not merely just but also divine. In the spiritualized sense of 'usefulness,' then, a person also had a duty to "strive to spread a knowledge of…salvation to the ends of the earth," as the Congregationalist minister Nathan Strong phrased it.[63] In practice, the sacred and secular meanings of 'usefulness' mingled. When critics complained that students' "views of usefulness [began] to be limited" from the moment that they entered the seminary, they targeted a dereliction of duties that was both civic and spiritual.[64] In its monkish withdrawal from public life and its tendency to neutralize promising young evangelists with insensibility and injury, the seminary system chipped away at each of the many faces of usefulness.[65]

[62] As Gordon S. Wood has argued, "[r]epublics demanded far more morally from their citizens than monarchies did of their subjects." They "had to hold themselves together from the bottom up" by depending "on the moral virtue of their citizens, on their capacity for self-sacrifice and impartiality of judgment." See Wood's *Empire of Liberty: A History of the American Republic, 1789-1850* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 7-8.
[63] Strong is quoted and analyzed in terms of nineteenth-century millennialism in Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1985), 215.
[64] Quoted in a "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 365.
[65] Daniel T. Rodgers' meditation on the idea of 'utility' in American political discourse clarifies Americans' complex relationship with usefulness. See Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998), 17-44.

Usefulness was also a deeply gendered category, and it supplied critics with a ready-made line of attack on the perceived effeminacy of seminary graduates.[66] Unlike the demanding environs of farms and manufactories, where young men were thought to learn moral resolve and self-control, seminaries were all "tenderness and seclusion."[67] Students emerged with nervous dispositions, detuned senses, and delicate limbs that rendered them "utterly unfit for any manly enterprise or employment." Privacy, febricity, insensibility, daintiness—in the republican imaginary, these were traits most commonly associated with women. Seminaries struggled to refute claims that they were in the business of "*unsex[ing]*…literary men" or replacing virile Americans with "a sickly and effeminate race—the miserable abortions of physical degeneracy—the mere apologists of all that which characterizes *manhood*."[68] John Todd quipped that "a man can hardly claim to be called a student unless he wear … a lily hand, a lady-like form, a pale face, stooping shoulders, and a faultering [*sic*] gait."[69] This was the era of the "self-made man," of brawny rustics like the evangelical egalitarian Parker Pillsbury, who, according to one

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[66] Since nervous conditions were dissociated from demonic possession and medicalized in the early modern period, their description and diagnosis has been reliably gendered. For the medicalization of hysteria and the diagnosis of religious enthusiasm, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999), 28-31, 256. David G. Schuster, *Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2011) includes a thoughtful analysis of the complex gender politics surrounding Victorian neurasthenia diagnoses; see pages 85-112.
[67] Philip Lindsley, a Princeton Theological graduate and president of the University of Nashville, quoted in Knight, "Manual Labor Schools in the South," 214.
[68] *First annual report*, 32-3, 108; "Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions," 380-1.
[69] *First annual report*, 116.

admirer, had “literally hewn out his own place among men” with his “stalwart arms” and indomitable spirit.[70] A profession overrun with milksops would command little respect.

As the body came to be appreciated as the main interface between individual capacities and public needs, underdeveloped seminarians were accused of channeling their energies inward and abdicating their civic responsibilities. At some point during his seminary career, nearly every “Pious Student” was reported to have tilted toward “lonely and lofty musings over the creatures of his own imagination” that distracted from consequential public affairs. Transported “into the Utopian world of fancy,” the seminarian “waste[d] his feverish sensibilities on imaginary objects.”[71] Self-absorption sometimes seemed to take physical form. Beriah Green lamented that, whenever he settled in to read scripture, dark spots—“some of them fantastical enough”—drifted through his field of vision and diverted him from his studies.[72] The Reverend Jonathan Blanchard castigated the seminary-trained “maniac” who “[shut] up the eyes of his body and walk[ed] by those of his soul,” and who “[saw] nothing in the world to steer his course by but right doctrines and wrong; true principles and false.”[73] Charles Finney found that, when he spent his time contemplating the state of his soul instead of taking concrete steps to expand his ministry, “invariably … the day would close without any perceptible advance being made.”[74] Erudite but enervated, seminarians excelled at raising

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[70] Stacey W. Robertson, *Parker Pillsbury: Radical Abolitionist, Male Feminist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2000), 11.
[71] E.E., “The Temptations of Pious Students,” *The Christian Spectator* vol. 5, no. 11 (Nov. 1823), 562-3, 532.
[72] Quoted in Sernett, *Abolition’s Axe*, 9.
[73] Blanchard, "Public Men, and Public Institutions of the Church,” 24.
[74] Finney, *Autobiography*, 35-6.

"castles in the air."[75] The critics charged that proper republican men would have known how to build foundations under them.

Theologically, economically, and politically, the atrophy of seminarians' usefulness was intolerable. James Blythe, the president of Indiana's South Hanover College gasped that "[n]o public extravagance can be greater, than to allow a young man who is capable of eminent usefulness to church or state, to destroy the germs of life" by entering the seminary.[76] With the graduate clergy now dependent upon lay donations for its continued existence, the perception of extravagance could spell the defunding of clerical education altogether.

Embodied Religion

To the seminary system's malcontents, it appeared that the only way to resuscitate the ministry was to eliminate those barriers that separated "heavenly things" from "earthly things." This meant shrinking the distance between the habits of the clergy and those of the laity, but the gap was wider than most reformers anticipated. Even when ex-seminarians managed to avoid boring lay audiences with sententious moralizing and logic-chopping (an academic habit of mind that the normally plain-spoken Beriah Green caricatured as "*deducing consequences from premises by rigid and irresistible ratiocination*"), the elevated style was off-putting enough. Seminaries had gambled that "elegance, composition, and dignity in style" would preserve the prestige of the

[75] *First annual report*, 118.
[76] "Manual Labor Colleges," *American Annals of Education* 5:3 (Mar. 1835), 116.

ministerial office when it was no longer partnered with the state. Yet the elevated style did not go over well outside of seminary walls. Beriah Green cautioned that "[t]here is nothing common people hate more heartily than the lofty airs and imposing strut of the self-complacent student." Seminarians' presence alone had a chilling effect on congregants, as if a sedentary disease were somehow contagious: "If [the seminarian] approaches them," Green continued, "their blood flows back upon their hearts, just as if with naked feet they had trodden on a serpent."[77]

Finney shared Green's distaste for seminary slicks. "Men are not fools," he reminded his peers. "They have no solid respect for a man that will go into the pulpit and preach smooth things. They cordially despise it in their inmost souls."[78] Even Beecher, who had more fondness for the elevated style than did most critics of the seminary system, admitted that Finney's populist approach suited an age of social fluidity and democratic eloquence better than gemlike homilies. Disestablishment and democratization had, in Beecher's view, spelled the end of the clergy of "shoe-buckles, and cocked hats, and gold-headed canes." What Americans wanted now was a more down-to-earth type whom they could easily recognize as one of their own.[79]

Frequently, seminarians did not make it far enough into the missionary field to be spurned by the laity. Deskwork did not seem to promote the kind of physical wherewithal

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[77] Quoted in Sernett, *Abolition's Axe*, 11.
[78] Finney, *Autobiography*, 93.
[79] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 253. In his autobiography, George Washington Gale similarly describes "the old-fashioned clerical costume" that was in vogue among seminarians as comprising "a broad skirted coat, and vest corresponding, small clothes, with buckles on [the] shoes, and a wig as white as milk, with a cocked hat." See George Washington Gale, *Autobiography* (New York, 1853/1964), 78.

that was required to face the "vicissitudes of life."[80] Locked in competition with itinerant Methodist and Baptist preachers, seminarians in the field crisscrossed entire regions on foot or horseback, slept in barns on makeshift beds, and each day preached to multiple audiences that could range from skeptical to bluntly antagonistic.[81] The regimen wore them down quickly. Six months of unremitting barnstorming in upstate New York ruptured Finney's vocal cords and left him spitting bile and blood after each sermon. Upon joining Finney's Holy Band of revivalists, Theodore Dwight Weld spent himself within a few short months and left for a restorative vacation in Labrador.[82] On top of his parish duties, Lyman Beecher heaped additional responsibilities—political agitating, revival preaching, editorship of the *Christian Spectator*—until a roiling case of dyspepsia rendered him bedridden.[83] "The profession is loaded with labors," cried one minister who had traded the study for the stump. "Every individual in it, who is faithful, has as much as he is able to bear."[84] Not infrequently, he had a tad more.

The endless recitations of bodily trauma in the seminary had marked out some initial grounds for reconciliation. Many Americans of the early nineteenth century would have related to the notion that work exacted a physical toll on the worker, and while seminarians might have engaged in useless work, they could not be accused of laziness. Anecdotal experience also led some seminarians to question whether the material and

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[80] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 363.
[81] Beecher, *Autobiography*, 474; Finney, *Autobiography*, 148; George J. Stevenson, *Increase in Excellence: A History of Emory and Henry College* (New York: Meredith Publishing, 1963), 12; Robertson, *Parker Pillsbury*, 50.
[82] Finney, *Autobiography*, 80, 188.
[83] Beecher, *Autobiography*, 456-7, 466.
[84] "Dyspeptic Hours," 300.

immaterial realms were really as separate as Calvin and his inheritors had sometimes maintained. Beecher finally managed to banish his melancholy through such banal means as regular exercise and a healthy diet, and he came to believe that "the gloomy frames of sincerely pious men" were more often indicators of poor health, bad food, and understimulation than they were markers of some congenital sensitivity to the divine.[85] For his part, Beriah Green took solace in the chopping block, where he spent hours splitting logs, resting his eyes, and titillating his nerves.[86]

One "distinguished physician" expressed a common diagnosis when he attributed sedentary disease to an overly abrupt lifestyle change. "Most of our students in colleges and in the professions," he wrote, "are early trained to habitual exercise in the open air in agricultural labor." An otherwise active man might be able to spend a few nights hunched over his desk and suffer few ill effects, he judged, but the physical systems of idle students were too weakened to endure such abuse. According to the popular humoral theory of disease, blood and other vital fluids pooled in active muscles and drained from inactive ones. Overuse of the brain coupled with underuse of the rest of the body led to cerebral bogs and corporeal deserts. Seminarians' self-imposed isolation from "earthly things" correlated directly with their brain's physiological isolation from their bodies. "[T]he marvel is, not that there is so MUCH disease [among seminarians]," the doctor concluded, "but that there is not *more*."[87]

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[85] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 47.
[86] Sernett, *Abolition's Axe*, 8-9.
[87] "Union of Study with Labor," *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society* (Nov. 1829), 115.

Beecher's and Green's brushes with ill-health were widespread among their fellow seminarians and, in time, their recourse to physicality became common enough to require a systematic theological defense. By representing the mind, body, and soul not as strange bedfellows but as component parts of an organic, divinely created whole, ex-seminarians developed a religious justification for the program of combined mental and physical education that Beecher and Green had worked out in the wood yard. Under the new scheme, the sensate body shed its associations with animal passions and all-too-human excesses and was reanointed as a worthy tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. Neglecting the body became tantamount to neglecting the mind and soul. Critics of the seminary system distanced themselves from the Calvinist doctrine of irresistible grace and instead cautioned that a book-numbed brain and desensitized body could distract from and "may even repress or misdirect, for a time, the tendencies of grace."[88] The trustees of Maryland's Germantown Academy pilloried the "studio-sedentary habit" for blighting "modern Christianity" with "the effects of a diseased body on the mind," symptoms of which included "demureness, sickliness, gloom," and all manner of unspecified "eccentricities."[89]

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[88] "Character and Genius of Cowper," *The Quarterly Christian Spectator* vol. 5, no. 4 (Dec. 1833), 586.

[89] "Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions," 382. My analysis challenges the narrative of medical history presented in Charles E. Rosenberg's *The Cholera Years*. In characterizing the paradigm shift in American medicine that he located in the middle nineteenth century, Rosenberg has written that "[w]hereas ministers in 1832 urged morality upon their congregants as a guarantor of health, their forward-looking counterparts in 1866 endorsed sanitary reform as a necessary prerequisite to moral improvement." My research indicates that "positivistic" theories, ones that made moral rectitude a product of physical well-being, were in circulation earlier than Rosenberg indicates— and that they were quite popular among the evangelical leadership. See Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849, and 1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962/1987), 5.

The revolt against the seminary system generated a distinctively embodied religion in which spiritual and physical vitality went hand in hand. Charles Finney recalled that his own conversion experience felt "like a wave of electricity, going through and through" him, "body and soul," endowing him with the muscular fortitude required to trek across the American frontier and instigate countless revivals. At those revivals, intense spiritual episodes frequently shook the attendees' bodies, sometimes augmenting their physical strength and at other times paling it in comparison with the spirit's power. Finney remembered that an especially arthritic elderly woman had once walked three miles to his camp meeting in Evans Mills, New York. Other pilgrims "would lose all their strength and be unable to rise to their feet" once they were subjected to Finney's wild exhortations. Inviting the Holy Spirit into one's body was "like opening a battery," Finney wrote; whoever was on the receiving end might be energized—but he might also be shocked into submission.[90] In either case, the mind, spirit, and body were yoked together in codependence as they had never been under the Calvinist paradigm.

"When thought shall need no brains," scoffed the Germantown trustees, "and nearly four hundred organs of motion cease to constitute the principal portions of the human body, then may the student dispense with muscular exertion."[91] A withered frame, they went on, *"constrained"* the "*natural* and *spontaneous* action" of the "animal powers," which were believed in the nineteenth century to link spirit to flesh.[92] Critics of

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[90] Finney, *Autobiography*, 44-5, 65-6, 74-5.
[91] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 368.
[92] "Notice of publication of the Thirteenth Report of the Board of Directors of the American Education Society," 19.

the seminary system announced that the body received its vitality from such "animal spirits," without which the mind and spirit might retain "*action*, but [not] *energy*."[93] As Beecher, Green, and Finney had discovered in their personal and, increasingly, in their professional lives, the energy to do something about one's spiritual condition and the spiritual condition of one's community—the energy to be useful—was supplied precisely by the productive tension between earthly and heavenly things.

As they lit the fires of evangelicalism in magazines and on the revival circuit, critics of the seminary system burned away the foggy abstractions of cloistered scholars and popularized their image of "man as he [was]."[94] They presented the human person as "a compound being," an "assemblage" that was as "complicated in his character" as Christ had been—fully human and fully divine; in the world but not merely of it. Contributors to the *Quarterly Christian Spectator* observed that humanity had a "three-fold nature as *an animal, intellectual and affective being*," and Creed Fulton remarked on "how marvelously the Great Author of our being [had] joined matter and spirit together in the form of man."[95]

The gist of such arguments was that God had not erred when he coupled matter and spirit, human and divine. Knowledge of earthly things was something more than a

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[93] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 369-70; Sernett, *Abolition's Axe*, 15-6.

[94] The appeal to "man as he is" was a favorite rhetorical device among ex-seminarians. The phrase appears, for example, in "Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions," 382-3; Green, "Standard of Reformation," 338-40; and Beriah Green, *Four Sermons, Preached in the Chapel of the Western Reserve College, Cleveland* (1833), 13.

[95] "Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions," 382-3; Amicus, "Wake Forest Institute," *The Biblical Recorder* no 8 (1838), 172; Creed Fulton, "Address on the Subject of a Manual Labor College" (Abingdon, VA: 1836), 10.

"clog" or a "hindrance," as it had been for Jonathan Edwards.[96] Just as the saved soul and trained mind could endow the body with a holy charge, so could the body ventilate a stifled mind with fresh experiences and provide the instruments with which the soul might assess and improve the sensible world. One contributor to the *Quarterly Christian Spectator* wove together the threads. Ex-seminarians' rejection of monasticism, their aversion to useless flights of fancy and perceived effeminacy, and their craving for more energetic, sensual forms of piety came together in an ominous sketch of the two futures that lay open to the clerical profession:

> [S]hall he who makes a practical principle of such monastic dogmas, who lives as though his corporeal functions were given him only to be contemned [*sic*] and abused, or as if he were an ethereal [*sic*] and disembodied spirit;—shall he who makes such dreams his rule of conduct, escape the punishment due such exhibitions of folly and transcendentalism, and demanded by violated law? Rather, shall he not be deprived of the invigorating influence of that which he so much despises, and left to his *visions* of unearthly bliss, to quaff the nectar of imagined felicity; while the substantial realities of health and vigorous faculties are reserved for such as are contented to view things as they are, to exercise their powers according to the dictates of conscience, of reason and nature, and to act well the part which belongs to them in their *true* relations?[97]

The message was simple enough. If they were to salvage the ministry, American clergymen would have to come to terms with the "*true* relations" of the world. "The mind," Creed Fulton insisted, would remain "eased up in a material body" regardless of whether seminarians admitted as much. It was time for the clergy to face facts.[98]

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[96] Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 489.
[97] "Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions," 389.
[98] Fulton, "Address on the Subject of a Manual Labor College," 10.

The comprehensive conception of mind and body that the seminary system's critics formulated lent itself to certain political interpretations. The line of thinking went something like this: if a healthy body were a necessary condition for a healthy mind and spirit, then it stood to reason that the finest religious sentiments and moral feelings would adorn the most physically fit Americans. The suggestion that there existed a close, mutualistic connection between body and spirit inspired some of the seminary system's most prominent detractors to endorse a class-levelling populism. The minister Nathaniel Peabody Rogers extolled workers' naturally "refined and delicate taste" and their "freedom from all superciliousness and self-worship." The pariahs of Rogers social hierarchy were not those with dirty hands but those who hid "*dirtiness* of spirit" behind a veneer of "uppishness" and an elevated style. "I like washed hands—," he conceded, "but not these 'dainty fingers.'"[99] A number of ex-seminarians joined Rogers in suggesting that untutored laborers enjoyed direct access to "things as they [were]," their nerves vibrating with the sense data of "substantial realities."[100] The Rhode Island nonresistant Adin Ballou announced his intention to raise "the dignitary of the awl and lapstone" to his rightful place as "the vital relation … between faith and works, theory and practice, fundamental principles and right action, belief and life."[101] These and other calls to celebrate the lay laborer reflected the enhanced power of lay donations and the requirement that ministers cultivate popular favor in order to maintain a steady income. It

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[99] Nathaniel P. Rogers, "Aristocracy," in *A Collection from the Miscellaneous Writings of Nathaniel Peabody Rogers* (Boston: 1849), 318.
[100] "Promotion of Health in Literary Institutions," 389.
[101] Adin Ballou, *Autobiography* (Lowell, MA: 1896), 14-5, 318.

was time, Ballou and his associates believed, for the laity to receive its due as the church's main spiritual and financial engine.

Opposite the virtuous worker was the parasitic intellectual aristocracy that theological seminaries turned out. In response to one of Brown University President Francis Wayland's hand-wringing defenses of slavery, Nathaniel Rogers imagined Wayland—an Andover alumnus and a co-founder of Newton Theological Institute—shut up in his "princely abode" in Providence, "with his gown and green spectacles on," weaving together gossamer strands of "*real, sham*, university logic" into a "spider's web essay, to prove that the people of this country were under no obligation whatever to abolish slavery…, and that abolitionists were a pack of mad-caps."[102] Ballou blamed the seminaries for transforming the ministerial calling into a status-conscious career with "complicated attachments" to money that tempted clergymen to abandon their "independent convictions, principles, and aims" in the vain pursuit of "respectability and renown."[103] Time and again, it turned out that soft hands were capable of dealing the harshest blows, whereas "hard hands ma[d]e soft hearts."[104] A calloused palm came to both signify and produce an exfoliated, morally sensitive spirit.[105] Early modern

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[102] Rogers, *Miscellaneous Writings*, 317-20, 199.
[103] Ballou, *Autobiography*, 41.
[104] "Another Manual Labor School," *Religious Intelligencer* 13, no. 32 (Jan. 3, 1829), 508.
[105] The view that dirt could signify moral elevation was a variation on what Constance Classen has recognized as a bottom-up revaluation of "[t]he sensory values propagated by the dominant social group." Whereas Classen has attended to moments in which, for instance, the working class upended traditional hierarchies of sense associations to contrast "clean-living" workers with the "filthy" rich, in the case under discussion, ex-seminarians and some luminaries of the working class united to preserve existing sense-class associations—a "clean" gentry and "dirty" workers—while revising their moral value, such that filth could be a sign of virtue and cleanliness an indicator of vice. Classen quoted in David Howes, "Can These Dry Bones Live? An

Protestants had reconciled themselves with their own physicality by treating the body as an archive of sin and virtue. Ex-seminarians made the relationship bilateral by proposing that what the body did or did not sense might not only signify but also produce spiritual states, just as what virtues one's soul did or did not contain might produce physical states.

There was some biblical precedent for attributing spontaneous virtue to manual laborers. Parables that orthodox Calvinists typically read as instances of divine empowerment were just as easily interpreted as demonstrations that a muscular physique was God's favorite appliance. The trustees of the Germantown Academy acknowledged that the Hebrew King David must have possessed rare mental gifts in order to write "the finest of the Psalms."[106] But what to make of those tales in which he delivered lambs from the mouths of lions and the paws of bears, and what to make of his ability "to impart to a pebble velocity sufficient to stun a giant"? No "pale and feeble" seminarian could have served God in such trials. Christ's apostles, they went on, had not spent their days studying their master as a philosopher but rather imitating him as the circuit preaching son of a humble carpenter; they raised a church from the ground and spread the gospel to the people. Saul of Tarsus might have been blinded by the light of God, as so many seminarians were blinded by excessive absorption in His Word. But Saul forsook his privileged upbringing and the freedom from toil that it purchased him. He adopted a

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Anthropological Approach to the History of the Senses," *The Journal of American History* 95:2 (Sept. 2008), 450.

[106] Most evangelical interpreters accepted the conventional notion that David had authored most of the book of Psalms. For more on Psalmic authorship, see Nancy Declaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Laneel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge, MA: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), xxiii-xxiv.

commoner's name, Paul, and, when he was not busy planning the church, he scratched out a living sewing tents.[107]

If this retelling of church history was accurate, then it was nineteenth-century yeomen—not weakly, passive seminarians—who were the true heirs of the apostolic tradition. Among an embarrassed graduate clergy that had been charged with uselessness, effeminacy, and frivolous pretention, manual laborism would emerge as an *ad hoc* strategy to reinsert the ministry in this heroic lineage.

Conclusion

In 1823, Yale theological seminary piloted a program that would pay indigent or sickly pupils in exchange "for labor in the college wood-yards," inaugurating the nation's first formal manual labor program. The initiative scarcely got off the ground. In the course of the year, Yale paid out just $376, a sum barely sufficient to cover board for nine of the seminary's thirty odd students. The program stumbled on multiple hurdles: elite biases against manual labor and penuriousness, compensation that was below market rate, and a relative dearth of seminarians who required financial aid. What doomed the program most of all was its incongruity with the school's academic curriculum. Yale required that wood chopping and any other "methods of saving expense" would "make no encroachments upon the time allotted to study."[108] Students who chose to participate in the program shoehorned work hours into an already crowded academic course load. For

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[107] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 367-8.
[108] *Religious Intelligencer* vol. 9 no. 7 (New Haven: July 17, 1824), 168.

most Yale seminarians, the meager pay that they could earn as part-time sawyers did not outstrip the personal toll or public humiliation that they would risk by engaging in manual labor.

Andover Theological Seminary more fully incorporated manual labor into its academic curriculum when it opened admissions to its Mechanical Association in 1826. Working up to four hours per day, students fabricated and sold market goods to offset their tuition costs. Mostly they produced wooden trinkets and tools, anything from doll cradles and candle boxes to wheelbarrows and hay rakes. Coffins fetched the highest price, and for a few years it seemed as if Andover would flourish by ministering to the living and packaging the dead. Unlike at Yale, students at Andover commended the Mechanical Association for "uniting *mechanical* labor with intellectual pursuits." It was widely held that "vigorous and healthful bod[ies]" were necessary vehicles for "intense and protracted mental action." The "languor and sluggishness" that seminarians' exhibited at other colleges came to be regarded as omens of their eventual cognitive deterioration. One student who, upon enrolling at Andover, wearied after just an hour of study, went on to lead revivals and establish several churches in Indiana and Illinois. Another, having suffered shortness of breath due to a "state of great pectoral weakness" in 1828, by 1831 could be heard leading a four-month revival.[109] As quickly as it turned out coffins, Andover's Mechanical Association seemed to be furnishing proof that human

[109] "Notice of Publication of the Thirteenth Report of the Board of Directors of the American Education Society," 19-20.

beings' mental, physical, and moral natures could be joined together to form a compound instrument of the divine.

But the students were out of their depths. Moses Stuart's daughter, Sarah, would later recall venturing into the "Stone Cabin" where the coffin factory operated in search of "glorious, rounded manhood." Instead, she saw only "pale, puzzled, weary faces, bending over corners that wouldn't fit, and over boards that were too long or too short, too narrow or too wide." Entire days of work were wasted on coffins too shoddy to sell at cost price, and the toy and tool shops fared no better. The Mechanical Association hemorrhaged money, acquiring nearly one-thousand dollars of additional debt before it had paid off the $2,781.12 that it had cost Andover to erect the cabin.[110] Any student worker who depended upon the fruits of his labor to make tuition, Sarah Stuart joked, "was as solemn as if the coffin he was making were his own."[111]

Amateur production would be among the least of seminarians' concerns when they tried to reassert their place among working people. Years of isolation in the deliberately select social environment of the theological seminary had imposed a deep alienation between the graduate clergyman and the average American, and learning easy camaraderie proved to be more difficult than practicing woodworking technique. During his "darkest time," when his health was at its poorest and his dissatisfaction with

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[110] Claude M. Feuss, *An Old New England School: A History of Phillips Academy, Andover* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1917), 317-18; Frederick S. Allis, Jr., *Youth from Every Quarter: A Bicentennial History of Phillips Academy, Andover* (Andover: Phillips Academy, 1979), 132-4, 216; Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Chapters from a Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896), 131-2.
[111] Sarah Stuart Robbins, *Old Andover Days: Memories of a Puritan Childhood* (Boston: 1909), 11.

seminary education peaking, Lyman Beecher received an invitation to preach before a poor-relief society in New Haven. It presented a welcome opportunity to present himself, "in the midst of all attacks" on the clergy by a laity that had long felt itself condescended to and extorted, "before the community where [he had been] so slandered."[112]

The chasm separating the learned-class interests that motivated Beecher and those of the people whom he addressed was quick to appear. Beguiled by the moral salve of physical toil, Beecher championed forced prison labor, despite longstanding opposition to such proposals from workers' organizations that descried in them an effort to flood the labor market and suppress wages. This was hardly Beecher's only misstep. To an audience that largely existed on hourly wages, Beecher suggested prohibiting work on the Sabbath. To a laboring population that is known to have relied upon alcohol as a self-medication for work-related pains, he advocated prohibition of intoxicating substances. Anxious as he was to repair relations between the graduate clergy and the working laity, Beecher concluded his appeal with a sentiment that seems to have been almost calibrated to aggravate the conflict. "The poor will be with you always," Beecher told the poor, "and if you do not educate them, and stop the contagion of vice, they will swarm in your streets, and prowl about your dwellings, and pilfer from you ten times the amount you would need to give to render them useful and happy."[113] In one of Finney's many appeals for ministers to forsake the elevated style of the seminary and meet the laity in its own abode and on its own terms, the evangelist had urged his fellow revivalists not to "preach

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[112] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 346.
[113] *Ibid.*, 348.

about sinners" but rather "*to* them."[114] Beecher's screed against laboring-class interests and behaviors at the New Haven poor-relief society suggests that he had a different blueprint for social reconciliation in mind.

It was not the first time that Beecher had voiced contempt for the laboring class. As a student at Yale, he had chafed against the "[b]oys who dressed flax in the barn"—laboring-class radicals who "read [Thomas] Paine and believed him."[115] To be sure, plenty among his well-bred classmates had harbored a fondness for Paine's intellectual bravado, as they did for other uninhibited freethinkers like Voltaire and Rousseau.[116] But the flax-dressers' interest in Paine raised Beecher's ire in a way that his peers' dalliances had not. The incongruity came down to the usefulness that seminarians ascribed to manual laborers and the uselessness that they loathed in themselves. Beecher's classmates evinced a strictly scholastic interest in Paine as a dazzling rhetor and founding patriot; they read him, but they did not "believe him," much less act on his ideas. The flax dressers had a different relationship with him. Unlike sedentary students, the laboring class possessed the physical hardihood that was required to act upon revolutionary ideals. They could cite concrete reasons to reject the social distribution of wealth that was congealing around them, a system of unequal taxation and debt that had already stoked

[114] Finney, *Autobiography*, 80-7, 94-6, 92. Emphasis mine.
[115] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 43.
[116] Eric Foner, the most perceptive commentator on America's complex relationship with the legacy of Tom Paine, has written on the cross-class character of Paine's appeal: "Not only did Paine's republicanism have little room for distinct and divergent class interests, but his personal and political associations were limited to no single group; in both England and America they spanned the worlds of the upper-class salon and tavern political debates." See *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 98-106.

armed peasant rebellions across the northeast throughout Beecher's youth. Uprising, for the laboring class, was no abstract proposition, and Beecher shuddered at the potential implications.

His misgivings had not dissipated when he returned to New Haven years later to address the city's poor. Beecher still worried that the laboring classes would turn their superior energies toward pilfering and vice. He charged the city's poor with uselessness, but his real target was illicit usefulness—raw potency tempted toward unworthy ends by the desire to obtain more material pleasures than one could afford. As far as Beecher could tell, it was only by placing workers' consciences in the care of an impeccable—and perhaps external—moral authority that America's laboring class would accomplish the world-historic role assigned to it by scripture. Even while Beecher professed his desire to exit the seminary and embed himself among laity, he was less eager to join the working class than he was to cleanse it of its impurities and turn its physical capacity toward righteous ends.

Beecher was not unique among laborites in his ambivalence toward working people. The crystalline image of manual labor that ex-seminarians conjured in reaction to their own physical decline tended to shatter against the hard realities of work in a market society. Even those who readily threw off the tinsel and pomp of the "cultivated style" clung to the idea that a useful body required the direction of a cultivated mind to avert it from vice. Certainly it was preferable to house mind and body in the same vessel. But Beecher's sermon in New Haven suggested that this was not always necessary. Despite ex-seminarians' paeans to the hardihood and spontaneous virtue of working people, they

tended to regard the poor and laboring classes as fountains of physical resources that had been squandered on maldeveloped moral instincts. Until recently, seminarians had been ill-fitted to remedy the situation—too myopic to glimpse the laity's potential, too weakly to reach it in its far-flung settlements, and too dyspeptic to stomach its unfamiliar presence. With manual laborism poised to reverse the clergy's "oppressive insensibility," however, there opened new vistas from which the laboring class's potential came bracingly into view.

Chapter 2: "Schools of the Prophets"

Coalition Building in the Frontier

Laborism followed the canals, riding the swell of market capitalism and vying with it for the same resources: the frontier's cheap land, abundant timber, surplus labor force, and undeveloped consumer markets. But it proposed wedding East and West, seaboard and inland, with a different social contract than the one offered by Yankee financiers and manufacturers. Purveyors of the East's large-scale enterprises aimed to absorb the frontier into eastern markets through a process that Marx would later characterize as "primitive accumulation." Non-commercial subsistence production would be subjected to a growth-oriented profit incentive by disciplinary mechanisms ranging from output quotas to state-sponsored violence. Farmers would be alienated from the land and artisans from their workbenches as small, localized production gave way to consolidated, absentee ownership. Competition—between workers; between owners; between workers and owners; between the conception of a productive task and its execution, and thus between mind and body—would supersede community-level cooperation as the fundamental relation between social actors.[1]

Laborites wished to preserve an older world of work. As one of the frontier's *fin-de-siècle* eulogists recalled, in that world, "money" had been "scarce, labor plenty and cheap, and amusements few." Clearing settlements and gathering supplies had been communal affairs, not capital investments. Logging "'frolics' were frequent and

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[1] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin, 1867/1990), 775, 874-5; Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 78-102.

popular," usually drawing the attendance of "every one in the neighborhood" and draining "one or more two-gallon jugs of whiskey."[2] Ex-seminarians arriving from the East positioned themselves as stewards of this harmonious natural economy. Where the owning class saw raw materials that could be leveraged for private gain, laborites identified potential allies in the frontier's craftspeople and yeoman farmers—self-directed laborers whom the encroaching market threatened to indenture to the pursuit of someone else's profit. In these endangered small producers, laborites glimpsed rougher, more capable versions of themselves. Here was another set of economic actors who, like the previously established clergy, were being demoted from eighteenth-century autonomy to nineteenth-century market dependency. Laborites were aware that cultural differences intervened between effete men of letters and Ohioan pig farmers or Pennsylvanian tanners, but they tended to regard such diversity as an advantage. They courted small producers as strategic partners against a new economic status quo that they resented but were impotent to resist. Enough of nursing seminarians back from debility and uselessness. "We want *working men* in multitudes," John Frost declared—"trained heroes who have wisdom to plan, courage to attempt, and power to execute mighty achievements in demolishing the empire of sin."[3] Highbrow talent was on the hunt for

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[2] W.J. McKnight, *A Pioneer Outline History of Northeastern Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1905), 218.
[3] John Frost, quoted in Weld, *First annual report*, 114-5.

lowbrow horsepower.[4] If frontier laborers would supply the kinetic energy, laborites would teach them where to apply it.

The frontier in which laborites vested their hopes for an alternative to market capitalism was vaguely bounded and only partially geographical. When laborites spoke of the frontier, they most often meant the forested highlands and undulating plains of western New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. But the area could also be stretched to include sparsely settled areas in the South and even urban peripheries like Germantown, a railroad suburb of Philadelphia. What mattered more than the frontier's physical coordinates were its aesthetic and moral connotations. The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has noted that, in the course of the nineteenth century, a "gap in environmental evaluation opened and continued to grow between the farmer who struggled against the wilderness and the cultured gentleman who appraised it as scenery." Laborites who had been schooled in "formal canon[s] of beauty" and Christian ethics applied meanings to the frontier that had little to do with the lives of its inhabitants.[5] They imagined it to be a fortifying, restorative landscape that nurtured spontaneous, salt-of-the-earth republicanism in its inhabitants. The frontier supplied a foil to the over-determining, over-civilizing theological seminary; it was a wild place of wild people who were alternately to be admired, trained, tamed, and harnessed. Defining the particulars of this relationship between ex-seminarians and frontiersmen was a project that captivated early

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[4] I am indebted to Loka Ashwood for this phrasing. See Ashwood, "Rural Conservatism or Anarchism? The Pro-state, Stateless, and Anti-state Positions," *Rural Sociology* 83, no. 4 (Dec. 2018), 717-748.

[5] Yi Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia UP, 1974/1990), 63-4.

laborites, and their disagreements created ambivalences in the movement's overall attitude toward manual laborers.

Workers' physical capacity and numerical strength made them attractive candidates for membership in a coalition against the market, but laborites courted other potential allies as well. Temperance, feminism, and especially abolitionism could be grafted onto laborism to extend its appeal beyond those who had a vested interest in seminary reform or affordable schooling. Laborism's emphasis on physical wellbeing as a factor in spiritual health could, in the right hands, morph into the notion that human bodies were instruments of the divine—worldly tools that had to be kept free of contaminating liquors and unrestrained by arbitrary social hierarchies. Within a few years, some laborites would extend the argument to include non-human animals and take up vegetarianism; others would come to regard debt as a restriction on the free exercise of conscience and push for its abolition. Laborite colleges quickly distinguished themselves as incubators for every stripe of antebellum radicalism. "Such a motley company!" one manual labor alumnus exclaimed as he observed the moral ferment around him. "In that whirl there was a fascination."[6]

Beneath the bustle, however, lay a simple economic rationale. Laborism found a home among diverse reform agendas for the same reason that it found a home on the frontier: it yoked together dissimilar social classes and political factions by underscoring their shared skepticism toward market expansion, and it called on them to construct a bulwark of colleges where they were to mount their defense. This was not all that

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[6] Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, *Men and Events of Forty Years* (Boston: D. Lothrop Co., 1891), 30-1.

laborers and radical reformers had in common. They also evinced an inclination toward practical action that seminarians, to their embarrassment, seemed to congenitally lack. Ex-seminarians had identified the flaws in traditional clerical training, but—notwithstanding their fumbling reform efforts at Yale and Andover—they had done little to remedy the situation. With a corps of workers and activists at the learned class's disposal, manual labor schools went up rapidly, averaging three new colleges per year throughout the late 1820s and early 1830s. If these schools could be united behind a single ideological agenda and arrayed against market expansion, then small producers, social reformers, and their new learned-class organizers might all stand a chance at survival.

But no such agenda existed. Although Amos A. Phelps, a Yale Divinity alumnus and abolitionist, detected "a very general & deep feeling among literary men" that manual laborism ought to be systematized and expanded, the movement remained in a state of disorder.[7] The economic predicament shared across the disestablished clergy had not automatically produced a coherent politics, and differences came out most starkly in laborites' varied attitudes toward frontiersmen. The early manual laborite colleges were designed as refuges from the bitter competition of market capitalism. Yet they became tense arenas in their own right, places where the movement's future character would be debated and defined.

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[7] Amos Augustus Phelps, "The Oneida Institute," manuscript letter in the collection of the Boston Public Library, *Anti-Slavery Collection* (London: June 1843), 1.

“Good Soldiers in the Wilderness”

In 1826, two Presbyterian ministers, John McElroy Dickey and John Finley Crowe, trekked the six-hundred miles between eastern Pennsylvania and southern Indiana to stoke the flames of frontier revivalism. Like most of the western states and territories that stood at a distance from the eastern seminaries, Indiana suffered a shortage of ordained ministers. Dickey and Crowe were in high demand from the moment of their arrival. Within a year, they were juggling pastoral duties at ten churches in as many far-flung counties. They entreated their contacts at eastern seminaries to send reinforcements, but few came. Those who answered the call tended to return to the more populous, prosperous eastern states after just a few months in the wilds or else fall “victims to the fatigues and privations of a new country.”[8]

Confronted with an expanding frontier population whose want of spiritual leadership two ministers alone were inadequate to fill, Dickey and Crowe conceded that “men must be raised up on the ground” where they were to live and work, not shipped in as missionaries from abroad. Transplants from New England or the mid-Atlantic, they maintained, would never “endure hardness as good soldiers … in the wilderness” as ably as those who were countrified from birth. On January 1, 1827, they gathered six local boys in a cramped, drafty cabin and called into session the somewhat gratuitously named Indiana Theological Seminary. Within a year, the seminary had increased its enrollment to fourteen students and had outgrown its quarters. Between lessons, Dickey and Crowe

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[8] *South Hanover College and Indiana Theological Seminary; Catalogue of the Corporation, Faculty, and Students* (Cincinnati, OH: McMillan, 1833), 10.

tasked the boys with firing bricks and raising frames, and in 1832 students put the finishing touches on a commodious boarding house and an instruction hall. The student labor that had built the college was cemented as a permanent part of its curriculum. During the next few years, students constructed additional dormitories and instructional spaces as well workshops for carpentry, coopering, and wagoning.[9]

Other early laborite academies adopted a similar model of recruiting penurious locals by exchanging a free or subsidized education for help building the college. Once the colleges were operational, students were required to continue performing a share of manual labor that, at most institutions, totaled between one and four hours per day. Laborism appealed to frontier youths because it answered an unmet demand for affordable education. Unlike the common school model that would soon appear in New England, laborite schools did not rely upon a stable tax base. Instead of liquid capital, they tapped a fund that was more readily at hand in newly settled territories: the productive effort of able bodies. The system was well-suited to frontier settlements that were flush with ability, cash-poor, and desirous of an alternative to a market society that alienated workers from the fruits of their labors.[10] Schools in New York, New Jersey, Vermont, Virginia, Massachusetts, Maine, Illinois, and Ohio quickly adopted the system; within a few years, laborites had also set up shop in Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and

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[9] *South Hanover College and Indiana Theological Seminary*, 10-14.
[10] Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983), 111-4.

both Carolinas. By 1830, more than thirty colleges enrolling more than two-hundred students had embraced the system in part or in full.[11]

The plain economic incentive of leveraging unpaid student labor to construct these colleges hardly ever entered into explicit considerations. Most often, laborites conceived of their model as a return to the practices of the early Christian church. The trustees of Pennsylvania's Germantown Academy noted in 1830 that "[t]he schools of the prophets [had] contained men of muscular exertion" long before the first laborite had entered the scene. Unlike the desk-bound homunculi of the modern seminary, the leaders of the early church seemed to have been constantly "felling trees, preparing beams, carrying them to a distance, and erecting their own college edifices."[12] Laborites sought to restore the modern church to this former potency. Allegheny College's backers compared laborite academies to the fabled school founded by the prophet Elisha, at which "the sons of the prophets [had] borrowed axes, and chopped timber to build them houses."[13] They argued that the church fathers' efforts to build out the faith's ecclesiastical structures and ritual sites had kept them attuned to rigors of lay life that the modern clergy had come to ignore. The arrangement had also given laypeople a stake in the success of the church by inviting them to participate in determining its physical form. In working together to lay the foundations of the primitive church, clergy and laity had dissolved the barriers between them. Now that market capitalism had reinscribed a line

[11] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 366-7; Lull, "The Manual Labor Movement in the United States," 377-81; Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," 366-75.
[12] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 368.
[13] *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College*, 4-5.

between the learned and laboring classes, it stood to reason that the same remedy was needed.

In their ambition to rewind the church to a prior state of being, laborites overlapped considerably with the contemporary Restoration movement. Like laborites, Restorationists had responded to the esotericism of seminary theology and the escalation of sectarian infighting by looking backward toward a plainer religion stripped of dogma and hierarchy.[14] Yet laborites distinguished themselves from Restorationists by attending to the overlap between the life of the spirit, the changing world of work, and a republican political climate that abhorred social immobility. Laborites drew direct parallels between the church's corruption and a patriotic declension narrative in which the independence and civic-mindedness that "so honorably distinguished the first settlers of New England" had been superseded by indebtedness and cutthroat competition.[15] Manual laborism was to turn back clocks both sacred and secular. It was trumpeted as the nation's first "republican, … truly rational and Christian" form of education, the one that would finally raise up the independent producer to his rightful place as a moral and political exemplar.[16]

The singular nature of manual laborism's appeal to laboring-class students becomes apparent when the movement is situated among contemporary efforts to embed physical culture in an academic setting. The gymnastics program at Round Hill Academy in Northampton, Massachusetts, stood in marked contrast to laborite programs.

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[14] For perhaps the most exhaustive treatment of Restorationism, see Nathan O. Hatch, "The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People," *The Journal of American History* 67, no. 3 (Dec. 1980), 545-67.
[15] Lyman Beecher, *The Spirit of the Pilgrims* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1828), 3.
[16] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 366.

Established by two Harvard men of letters in 1823, the same year that Yale announced its voluntary wood-chopping program, Round Hill shared a number of superficial features in common with the laborite movement. Its founders, Joseph Cogswell and George Bancroft, had resigned their posts at Harvard designing to become "independent m[e]n," as Bancroft put it—the kind of "m[e]n who live[d] by [their] own labours" instead of trading in intangible concepts.[17] As Thomas Gold Appleton, the heir to a textile fortune and a Round Hill alumnus, reflected, too many "noble genius[es] [had] contracted the double habit of devotion to letters with deficient love of the outer world." In elite colleges and seminaries, one found "[s]terility, where genius should have bloomed, and not unfrequently an early death." Such were "the penalties paid for the thankless vigils of the desk."[18] Hoping to instill in their students a spirit of independence and break away from the scholarly tendency toward sedentary withdrawal, Cogswell and Bancroft promoted "vigor of constitution" by combining a thorough intellectual and moral training regimen with a course of physical exercise.[19]

Yet Round Hill's physical culture program carefully avoided productive industry beyond light "husbandry and gardening."[20] Exercise at Round Hill mostly involved purposely unproductive behaviors: strolling, skating, swimming, dancing, horseback riding, gymnastics, and the "knightly" sports of fencing and wrestling—all "innocent,

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[17] Bancroft letter to S.A. Eliot, Dec. 3, 1822; Bancroft MSS at MHS, quoted in John Spencer Bassett, "The Round Hill School," *Journal of the American Antiquarian Society* (April 1917), 25.
[18] Thomas Gold Appleton, *A Sheaf of Papers* (1875), 14.
[19] Joseph Cogswell, *Outline of the system of education at the Round Hill School: with a list of the present instructors [sic] and of the pupils from its commencement until this time, June, 1831* (1831), 3.
[20] *Ibid*., 13.

active amusements," as Cogswell put it.[21] The point was to uphold "the laws of good breeding," not to punch holes in class barriers.[22] As a venue for ratifying the authority of the ruling class, Round Hill attracted a who's who of Boston Brahmins. Its student body included members of the Channing, Higginson, Lawrence, Appleton, Dwight, Peabody, Shaw, Shurtleff, and Storrow families, among others from up and down the coast.[23]

Round Hill's departure from the laborite model came through most clearly in its cool community relations. Whereas laborites moved to abolish the separation between town and gown by trading the latter for homespun, Round Hillers adopted a distinctive and cost-prohibitive dress code consisting in a matching coat-and-trouser set in blue-gray broadcloth, complemented with a waistcoat in periwinkle twill. In the summers, students donned lighter nankeen or cotton suits, and on special occasions, they trussed up in white suits with silk jackets.[24] For all of laborites' differences of opinion on moral reform, they agreed that colleges had excessively withdrew themselves from general society. By contrast, Round Hillers gloried in playing the part of "retired scholars."[25] Their designs of "going into the country" had carried them further out of the workaday world, not, as laborites aspired, more forcefully into it. "We will live retired from the clamour and scandal and the disputes of the irresolute," Bancroft had prophesied at the school's conception. "We will delight ourselves with letters, and instead of warring against the

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[21] Bassett, "The Round Hill School," 37-8; Cogswell, *Outline of the system of education at the Round Hill School*, 13.
[22] Cogswell, *Outline of the system of education at the Round Hill School*, 16.
[23] *Ibid*., 16.
[24] From "The Account of the School" (1826), quoted in Bassett, "The Round Hill School," 37.
[25] Cogswell to Mrs. Prescott, Apr. 1, 1824, quoted in Anna E. Ticknor, *Life of Joseph Green Cogswell, as sketched in his letters* (Cambridge, MA: 1874), 153.

corporation and contending with scandalous reports, we will train up a few minds to virtue and honour."[26] The desire to maintain lines of inherited privilege and authority set them at odds with local farmers and craftspeople. At Northampton community events like the annual cattle show, Round Hillers were conspicuously absent.[27]

Bancroft and Cogswell also policed Round Hillers to ensure the maintenance of stable class lines. On a sloping hill behind the gymnasium, a group of students cobbled together bricks and boards into shanty houses, divided themselves into "families of two," and dubbed their creation Crony Village. There, the boys whiled away the summer playing games, lounging about on makeshift porches, and roasting potatoes and wild game over an open fire. Cogswell initially supported the endeavor, thinking it a wholesome experiment in self-sufficiency, but he soured on the idea when the residents of Crony Village were observed flirting with "the rosy-cheeked vendor of pies and doughnuts in a neighboring farmhouse." Crony Village came down, the boys' energies were once again turned to gentlemanly exercises and knightly amusements.[28]

Round Hill's exclusivity was to be its downfall, just as laborism's populist pose was a major factor in its ascendance. In the end, "the Empire of Round Hill," as Cogswell was fond of calling the school, peddled distinction to an egalitarian culture.[29] Its test period coincided with the rise of Jacksonian democracy, the eruption of organized labor, the fracturing of religious authority in the Second Great Awakening, and the first

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[26] Bancroft letter, Dec. 3, 1822, quoted in Bassett, "The Round Hill School," 25-6.
[27] Bassett, "The Round Hill School," 33.
[28] Appleton, *A Sheaf of Papers*, 25-6.
[29] Cogswell to G. Ticknor, Mar. 13, 1830, quoted in Ticknor, *Life of Cogswell*, 164.

murmurings of utopian socialism at Robert Owen's New Harmony. Round Hill came to be associated in the public mind with the landed gentry and "the money power," in Jackson's memorable phrase. Enrollment flagged, and Bancroft's and Cogswell's aversion to including productive labor in their physical exercise program limited their ability to compete with laborite academies on both financial and promotional grounds.[30]

Laborites, by contrast, quickly gained cross-class support. They wagered that callisthenic exercises like gymnastics would fail to hold students' attentions for long because they were limited to self-contained motions. Gymnastics improved the gymnast's physique but failed to produce material changes in his world; it "benefits *only the student*," Theodore Weld wrote, and "makes no contribution to the resources of his country, and no addition to the means of human subsistence."[31] Self-serving and unproductive, gymnastics corrupted the youth with the worst of the marketplace—the very same anti-republican uselessness that, when noticed in seminarians, had "excite[d] aversion and contempt in the public mind."[32] One laborite found "the idea … that mere child's play is better adapted to engage the attention of a reflecting mind … than what is useful to himself or others" to be "superlatively ludicrous."[33]

The practical agriculture and manufacturing activities of the laborite school, by contrast, engaged students by providing them with opportunities to make concrete

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[30] Bassett, "The Round Hill School," 52-3; Cogswell to Samuel Ward July 7, 1832, quoted in Ticknor, *Life of Cogswell,* 174.
[31] Weld, *First annual report*, 55.
[32] *Ibid*., 63.
[33] "The Pleasures of Labor," by "A Country Teacher," for the *American Annals of Education* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 1834), 14.

improvements to their communities and earn reputations for usefulness and skill. The option to offset room and board expenses enabled laboring-class youths to gain access to academic knowledge that was usually beyond their means. Well-to-do students reported none of the insensibility, dyspepsia, or superciliousness that hobbled their counterparts at conventional New England seminaries. “Their blood flows warm, and rich, and equable,” the Germantown trustees bragged of their students, “and the east winds cannot penetrate them.”[34] Manual laborism’s attractions proved irresistible. By 1832, Cogswell was bemoaning the twilight of elite physical culture. “[E]very institution in the neighborhood,” the distinguished educator grumbled, “has either sunk in the west, or been converted into some miserable *manual labor* affair.”[35]

Varieties of Laborite Experience

Despite laborism’s democratic bent, it retained its appeal for old-line seminarians. It represented a necessary compromise to ministers like George Washington Gale, who knew first-hand the debilitating effects of the seminary system and yet who disapproved of some evangelicals’ hostility toward systematic theology. Laborism, by contrast, upheld most of the rigor of seminary training while also restoring the vitality and improving the popularity of the graduate clergy.[36] The movement’s competing drives—to flatten social hierarchies while also recertifying the status of a formally trained religious leadership—

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[34] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania,” 363-4.
[35] Cogswell to Mrs. George Ticknor, Sept. 16, 1832, quoted in Ticknor, *Life of Cogswell,* 176.
[36] Earnest Elmo Calkins, *They Broke the Prairie: being some account of the settlement of the Upper Mississippi Valley by religious and educational pioneers, told in terms of one city, Galesburg, and of one college, Knox* (New York: Scribner’s, 1937), 37.

lodged a tension in its heart that was to be worked out on a local basis throughout laborism's formative years. The decentralization of laborism's early development enabled multiple competing attitudes toward the laboring class and toward practical action to congregate under the laborite mantle, resulting in a messy, fractious layer of movement leaders.

George Washington Gale nurtured laborism's most conservative iteration into being. Gale had first flirted with laborism in an effort to restrain the evangelical excesses of his former protégé, the revivalist Charles Grandison Finney. It had been at Gale's prodding that Finney had undergone his metamorphosis from an agnostic law student into a zealous barnstormer. But Finney had strayed from orthodox theology. He now spoke of salvation as a spiritual renewal that was obtainable by all who sought it, a direct challenge to the doctrines of original sin, divine election, limited atonement, and "the old school doctrine … that men were utterly unable to comply with the terms of the Gospel."[37] Hoping to shepherd the evangelist back to moderation, Gale invited Finney to an extended stay at his farm near the town of Western, New York, where six young men were already at work tilling the fields in exchange for theological training. The gambit failed, and Finney doubled down on his position that salvation, like suffering, was won by an act of will.[38] Yet Gale remained convinced that laborism could steer other young religionists away from such heresies. At the annual meeting of the Oneida, New York, Presbytery in February 1827, Gale applied to open a manual labor academy in

[37] Finney, *Autobiography*, 46.
[38] *Ibid*., 7-8, 56-8, 145-8.

neighboring Whitesboro. With the presbytery's blessing, he began collecting donations, and in April he purchased a three-hundred-acre farm near Utica and opened the Oneida Institute of Science and Industry. Donors furnished the college farm with livestock, carts, wagons, and tools; students and faculty would supply it with the labor power required to get it up and running. In May, the Institute received its first class of twenty students.[39]

Oneida retained more of the traditional seminary's academic program than most early laborite colleges. Although physical labor was a part of life at Oneida, Gale prioritized bookishness. In addition to building a stable and a two-story woodshop, the college's first class of students constructed a reading room that housed theological quarterlies and more than five-thousand scholarly monographs. Gale's placing of intensive study at Oneida's center was motivated, to some extent, by his conservative theological commitments. Unlike Finney, Gale maintained the Calvinist position that humanity's fallen state prevented direct, reverential knowledge of the divine will. Undirected by a didactic theology and properly trained spiritual leaders, human volition could be counted on to miss its mark.[40] Gale's objective was therefore to reduce the nation's "want of qualified instructors" by rescuing cash-strapped rural youths from the erratic religious environment of New York's Burned-Over District and subjecting them to a standard theological education.[41] Amends had to be made—after all, it was Gale's inadequate instruction that had failed to arrest Finney's heretical drift. "I shall be very

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[39] "Proceedings of the American Lyceum," no. 1 (July 1832), 18; "Union of Study with Labor," *Quarterly Register and Journal of the American Education Society* (Nov. 1829), 112.
[40] Ivan L. Zabilka, "Calvin's Contribution to Universal Education," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 44, no. 1 (1989).
[41] Finney, *Autobiography*, 46; Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 36-7.

much ashamed to have it known," Gale had once confessed to Finney, "that you studied theology with me."[42] The goal of Gale's laborism was not to democratize spiritual leadership but to reclaim it from Finney's revivalist voluntarism.

In other regards, however, Gale opened the gates to laborism's more radical manifestations. Intent on gathering to laborism the broadest possible constituency, he instituted a universal admissions policy that welcomed a multiracial, multi-gendered, class-diverse student body. Within a few years of opening, Oneida could be found hosting some of the region's largest and most active temperance, colonization, and missionary societies. The school's openness and affordability proved attractive to students, and in 1830 more than five-hundred hopefuls applied for just one-hundred spots. Tuition, rent, and fuel ran twenty-eight dollars per year, with an added weekly fee of one dollar for board. Those who were willing to perform three hours of agricultural labor per day stood to greatly reduce their tuition liability, and the few students who secured one of the sought-after machine-shop positions often covered all of their expenses through lucrative piece-work. Sensitive to the tendency of students' minds and hearts to become "sluggish" through extended study and static environs, Oneidans kept themselves in constant motion, mingling learning with labor, rich with poor, black with white, male with female, and mind with matter in the hope of building a model community of hearty clerics.[43]

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[42] Gale, quoted in Finney, *Autobiography*, 52.
[43] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 63; "Proceedings of the American Lyceum," 18; "Union of Study with Labor," 113-4.

Open admissions did not bring Oneida the windfall that Gale had anticipated, and the school faced bankruptcy by the end of its first year. Expenditures consistently outstripped donations and returns on student labor, saddling Gale with a two-thousand-dollar mortgage and no path to solvency. By 1830, the college's gross debt exceeded five-thousand dollars. Partly to blame was the traditional seminary curriculum into which Gale had attempted to wedge manual labor. A fully operational farm required more than a few hours of attention each day, but students scrambling to keep abreast of their academic load rarely found time to spend extra hours in the fields. Planting deadlines and harvest windows would come and pass without the requisite flurry of activity as long as manual labor continued to play a supporting role.[44] As Yale students had already learned, introducing manual labor into academic life would come with some reductions in study time or risk degrading labor and learning alike.

Oneida's financial troubles could also be traced to inexpert site selection, a side effect of Gale's preference for scholarly erudition over the wisdom of experience. Gale had selected Oneida's location because its topography mirrored ancient Mesopotamia, the rumored site of the lost garden of Eden, which had flourished between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Where better, he had reasoned, to stage the restoration of the primitive Christian faith than on such an auspicious terrain? But Oneidans soon discovered that conditions between the Mohawk River and the Sadquetta Creek were somewhat less than Edenic. The area was prone to frequent flooding that rendered the college grounds an inutile marsh for much of the planting and growing seasons. On the verge of financial

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[44] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 39.

ruin, Gale recruited a local farmer to steer the school's agricultural department back on course, and on his recommendation, Oneida transitioned from growing grain to raising dairy cattle that could better tolerate the damp. Gale's begrudging appeal to practical know-how came too late, however, and he would never manage to make Oneida self-sustaining.[45]

Gale's blunders aside, the Oneida Institute successfully demonstrated laborism's short-term viability. It had harnessed the physical capacity of laboring-class students to erect a complete campus for a pittance. It had also dispelled doubts that students of all races, sexes, and classes could coexist within a single community, held together by the sentimental glue that formed in working side by side. Finally, by framing a seedbed for moral reformism, Oneida had piqued the curiosity of radicals who had little investment in seminary reform as such. These victories would win Oneida acclaim and inspire imitation even as the college struggled to keep its doors open.

Gale's admirers did not always share his conservativism. From his post as professor of ancient languages at New York's Hamilton College, John Monteith had followed Gale's experiment in nearby Whitesboro with keen interest. Since the 1824 outbreak of revivalism in upstate New York, Hamilton's administration had arrayed itself against unschooled revivalists. According to Hamilton's president, Henry Davis, lay-ordained ministers like Finney preached "with blazing and burning zeal …, but without knowledge." For their "*utter recklessness* of facts," they bore responsibility for "the

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[45] "Union of Study with Labor," 113. When Gale surveyed locations for Knox College in 1837, he continued to prefer sites that evoked Edenic landscapes. See Gale, *A brief history of Knox College*, 8-9.

dissensions, the distractions, and the censoriousness" that had undermined clerical authority and incited one Hamilton student to deride Davis as "an old gray-headed sinner, leading his scholars down to hell!"[46]

Unlike Gale, Monteith welcomed such youthful gusto. He was an anomaly at Hamilton: a dyed-in-the-wool Finneyite whose enthusiasm for "wildfire" revivals jeopardized his professional reputation and led him to publically pray for "the faculty of Hamilton College," who, he charged, had "sinned in high places." He spied in Oneida's laborism a way to bankroll a training academy that would forego dusty orthodoxy in favor of Finney's evangelical zeal. In the spring of 1828, Monteith departed Hamilton, triggering an exodus that depleted the college's total enrollment from roughly ninety to a meager nine. He roomed at Oneida for a month to study its operations before setting out for Germantown, Pennsylvania, where he opened his own laborite academy in May 1829. Unlike Gale, for whom physical exertion was auxiliary to traditional seminary training and revivalism too hot-blooded, Monteith made the combination of "useful bodily labor" and evangelical religion Germantown's *raison d'être*. Young religionists leapt at the opportunity to immerse themselves in Finneyite emotionalism, and enrollment at Monteith's college swelled from four to nearly thirty students in fewer than six months.[47]

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[46] Henry Davis, *A Narrative of the Embarrassments and Decline of Hamilton College* (New York: 1833), 143, 146, 32, 36.
[47] Joseph Darling Ibbotson and S.N.D. North, *Documentary History of Hamilton College* (Clinton, NY: Hamilton College, 1922), 209; Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 40. Monteith's departure from Hamilton realized the worst fears of Henry Davis, who, ever since Oneida had opened down the road, had worried that the trendy manual labor system would lure students away from more traditional seminaries and that the "Oneida Academy would [thereby] be benefitted by the prostration of Hamilton College." See Davis, *A Narrative of the Embarrassments*, 84.

Manual labor at Monteith's academy was also reported to simplify seminarians' desires. The schools' trustees argued that, by pegging students' wants to their physiological needs, the school would significantly reduce its operating costs. With appetites purified through hard work, students' "thirst demand[ed] water, their hunger plain food; their limbs rejoice[d] in muscular effort, and their minds in truth." By preemptively constricting their students' desires before interstate commerce could gust into town, laborites hoped to immunize the youth against the market's temptations. The overall picture was one of disalienation, independence, and daily life made sufficient through the elemental joy of carrying a task from conception to completion. "Sleep rest[ed] them," related the Germantown trustees, "and their waking eyes beh[e]ld the light of another cheerful, useful day."[48]

Although Finney preferred to steer clear of institution building at this stage in his career, he occupied as prominent a place in the laborite imaginary as he did in the abolitionist, temperance, and feminist causes that many of his followers, Monteith included, initiated or joined. Folksy, fierce, and ramrod straight, Finney held a natural charm for laborites. When Presbyterians organized Cincinnati's Lane Theological Seminary on the laborite model in 1829, they invited Finney to assume its presidency. He declined, and Lane's trustees turned their attention to the country's second-most famous evangelical preacher: Lyman Beecher.[49] With Beecher's involvement, laborism would

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[48] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 364.

[49] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 50. Throughout his career, Finney remained more interested in converting the maximum number of souls possible than in dedicating his energies to the numerous social reform movements that his religious attitudes seemed to engender. See Finney, *Autobiography*, 322.

spin off another major variety that sought neither to quiet revivalism nor necessarily to excite it. Instead, Beecher sought to win recruits and reconcile mind and body by demonstrating the illusory nature of all divisive conflicts, including the one dividing Gale and Monteith.

For a few years, Beecher, like Finney, demurred. Still recovering from the sedentary diseases that he had endured as a young seminarian, he "considered that to take a man out of the ministry to make him a professor, without a congregation to keep him up by revival work … would run [him] down spiritually."[50] Yet Beecher's revival work was hardly aflame. In 1825, he had been called to a pulpit at the newly formed Hanover Street Church, an evangelical outpost in the heart of Unitarian Boston. Convinced that Unitarians had abandoned all standards of church membership in the vain pursuit of popularity and civic influence, Beecher railed against their efforts "to efface the distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate, and enlarge the circle of Church fellowship to include the whole congregation."[51] The "vital union among all hearts" that formed the basis of genuine Christian community depended, he believed, upon enforcing a shared set of beliefs, values, and experiences that Boston's commercial sector failed to provide. Rather than challenge market society's permissiveness and atomization, the Unitarian church, in Beecher's view, had aped it. By offering a fraternal refuge and a communal ethic, his Hanover Street Church drew "a flock of young people," many of

[50] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 297.
[51] *Ibid.*, 306.

whom had relocated from the countryside to fill out the city's middle classes of skilled tradesmen and petit bourgeoisie only to find themselves adrift in a fractured society.[52]

Under Beecher's guidance, evangelicals patched a spiritual void in Boston's social fabric, but before they could tighten down the stitching, they would face theological and circumstantial challenges that proved difficult to overcome. At the far end of Hanover Street stood the Second Unitarian Church of Boston, where Ralph Waldo Emerson received his first (and only) pastorship in 1830. There, Emerson launched his own effort to reanimate Boston's "corpse-cold Unitarianism," cutting into Beecher's constituency with a vivaciously countercultural Transcendentalism.[53] Although Transcendentalism only ever claimed a small minority of literary New Englanders, Emerson's choice of target suggested that Beecher's incursions had done little to challenge Unitarian hegemony. In a city where, by 1830, all but one Congregationalist church had converted to Unitarianism, Beecher's folkish evangelicalism did not merit even the distinction of opposition. Beecher sustained a second major blow later that year, when a fire gutted the Hanover Street Church and caused Beecher to temporarily suspend services. Still, when Lane approached him with an offer to abandon Boston to Unitarian leniency and Transcendentalist oneness, Beecher remained determined to see "the enemy driven out of the temple" and Boston brought into the evangelical fold.[54]

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[52] Mary Kupeic Cayton, *Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the Transformation of New England, 1800-1845* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1989), 83-102.
[53] Emerson, quoted in Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1950/2001), 8.
[54] Lyman Beecher to Edward Beecher, September 5, 1826, from Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. II*, 48; Cayton, *Emerson's Emergence*, 84, 108.

In late January 1832, the Lane trustees found a chink in his armor. Beecher had long emphasized that his core mission was to foster unity among the regenerate, even if it meant blurring denominational lines here and there. Accordingly, he took notice when he received a letter from Lane's board of trustees warning of a fresh schism among the faithful. The Lane trustees alerted him that "[t]he minds of many Western Christians [were] becoming alienated from their brethren at the East by the fierce and bitter controversies which … agitate[d] the public mind."[55] They insisted that only a country-born, seminary-trained minister like Beecher could represent New England thought in a Western style and thereby restore harmony among believers. Their flattery found its mark. Beecher confessed to his daughter that, since receiving the letter, he had "thought seriously of going over to Cincinnati" to minister on the frontier. "If we gain the West," he decided, "all is safe; if we lose it, all is lost." By December, Beecher was in Ohio preparing for his first semester as Lane's chief professor of theology.[56]

Prior to its implementation at Lane, laborism had consisted of a loose set of impromptu responses to bodily ills, economic pressures, and theological controversies but under Beecher's supervision, it matured into an articulable suite of propositions and techniques. Since leaving the seminary in 1798, Beecher had refined his distinctively physiological evangelicalism. He developed his "clinical theology," as he called it, to cleanse away those septic inclusions in Calvinism that had infected him and his colleagues with morbid introspectiveness, physical fragility, and spiritual paralysis. The

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[55] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 252.
[56] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 53; Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 266.

upshot was a uniquely "curative" evangelicalism that split the distance between the old-school preacher's ministrations to the soul, the physician's attendance to the body, and what laborites imagined to be the frontiersman's unselfconscious blend of moral and physical well-being. Beecher shaped his religious doctrine "for direct practical medicinal ends." He retained only those teachings that would not depress seminarians' "delicate and desponding natures" with frowning sermons on election and helplessness. Working from the assumption that spiritual maladies could be exacerbated by bodily ills, Beecher's first response upon meeting a despairing student or parishioner was to conduct a comprehensive physical exam. He would inquire after their exercise schedule and their diet; in severe cases, he would tour their living quarters to sniff the air for contaminants. Beecher surprised students who imagined that they had been abandoned by God or sentenced to inner anguish as penance for their sins by "prescrib[ing] a week or fortnight of almost entire cessation from all religious offices, with a course of gentle muscular exercise and diversion." He favored the same curatives that had once healed his own sick soul: first, recess from study, and then, mild physical exertion—preferably of a yeomanly, productive sort. Those who were close to him, like his daughter Harriet, praised the system's results but feared that the whole approach was "too closely dependent upon [her father's] own individual genius to be adequately preserved and transmitted" after his death. Lane presented an opportunity for Beecher to rivet his "clinical theology" onto an institution that might outlast him.[57]

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[57] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 74-5.

Upon Beecher's arrival, it soon became clear that the Lane trustees' letter had exaggerated Cincinnati's backwardness. The city sustained nine steam engine factories and as many cotton mills, twelve newspapers, thirty-four charities, and twenty-three churches. Its educational sector was no less robust. More than forty primary and secondary schools, two colleges, and a medical school were in operation, while a popular Mechanics Institute delivered adult learning.[58] Beecher had travelled to Ohio expecting to minister to alienated rustics, but he now watched his pews at Cincinnati's Second Church fill up with "the intellectual class of persons," who were at greater risk of lapsing into Unitarian tepidity than they were of coloring the Gospel with a country drawl.[59] To all but a few of Cincinnati's residents in the 1830s, "pioneer life was forgotten, or remembered only as a dream."[60]

Beecher made it his mission to remind them. Recalling the mixed labors of his farming, preaching uncles, he not only taught courses and delivered sermons, but he labored alongside his students as they chopped wood, grubbed stumps, built furniture, and raised classroom buildings and dormitories. "The old carryall," Harriet remarked of her father, "was perpetually vibrating between home and the city, and the excitement of going and coming rendered any thing like stagnation an impossibility." Never in her father's life, Harriet wrote, "did he wheel a greater number of heavily-laden wheel-barrows all at one and the same time." Beecher never "husbanded his energies and turned

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[58] *The Cincinnati Directory and Commercial Advertiser for the Year 1829* (Cincinnati, OH: 1829), 151.
[59] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 295-6.
[60] *Ibid*., 266.

them in a single channel," she continued. Wheelbarrows and husbandry—Harriet's remembrances of her father at Lane are saturated with the hardscrabble imagery in which laborites often cloaked themselves. Here was a compound subject of equal parts mind and body, working himself "to the *ne plus*—that is, to the utmost limit of physical and moral indurance [*sic*]."[61]

Harriet depicted her father as an ideal type: an autonomous small producer who selflessly attended to the material and spiritual needs of his community through versatile skills and virile persistence. Beecher conceived of manual laborism as a means of reminding the frontiersman what he was and restoring him to pious self-sufficiency. Equally, though, he imagined that laborism would graft eastern transplants into this frontier tradition. Delicate seminarians would come to Lane to build up their calluses against "the toils and responsibilities of a newly settled country." However timid they were upon arrival, they would graduate having acquired "the independence of character, and the originality of investigation, which belong[ed] particularly to self-made and self-educated men."[62] Beecher had traveled west in search of the last exemplars of primitive Christianity and hearty republicanism. Having found these traditions in apparent decline, he had taken it upon himself to guide them back to health.

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[61] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 308-9.
[62] "Manual Labor Department of the Lane Seminary," *American Annals of Education* 4, no. 4 (Apr. 1834), 162-3.

Oneida's State Within a State

Rusticity returned more vigorously than Beecher probably intended. Beecher's admiration for the frontier spirit was tested when Theodore Dwight Weld roared into Cincinnati in 1832. Weld was an intellectual firebrand and a compulsive iconoclast who had been among Finney's most capable opponents until he converted in 1826 to become one of his most committed disciples. By the time he arrived at Lane, Weld was studiously uncultivated: clad in a rough worsted coat and cowhide shoes, he wore his hair in a knotted "oven broom," as his mother called it with equal parts fondness and frustration. "I have always been slovenly and careless about my appearance," he once preened. His fellow reformers reproached him for his "slouching gait, … listless air, shoes slip shod, not blacked once a month, coat not brushed as *often* as that." Oppositional affections like Weld's were hardly uncommon among antebellum reformers, whose long hair, bristly beards, unshod feet, and dashikis were visual reminders of their separateness from mainstream society.[63] But Weld carried his bohemianism to an extreme. He claimed to wear his "beard till it gets so long that its chafing against my collar obliges me from pain to shave in self-defence [*sic*], or till some of my friends *beg* me to do it."[64] At best, Weld thought, personal vanity distracted from sacred duty. At worst, it quite literally enslaved one to commodities and fashions, according to his broad definition of slavery as "the reduction of persons to things."[65] Weld wore his messiness as a mark of sainthood. It was

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[63] Jackson, *American Radicals*, xiii-xiv.
[64] Weld, quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 195.
[65] Theodore Dwight Weld, *The Bible against Slavery* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 162.

his “John the Baptist attire,” he liked to say.[66] It suited the millennium’s self-styled herald.

Yet there were two sides to Weld, just as there had been two sides to John the Baptist. One was the wooly ascetic, caked in mud; the other, the baptizer whose ritual ablutions cleansed the body and spirit of worldly contaminants. Weld possessed what he called “a mortal instinctive shrinking from *all dirt*.” The aversion was so powerful that he adopted a twice-daily rinsing and scrubbing regimen that left his skin raw.[67] Weld’s fastidiousness was the one outward expression of his charmed upbringing that could not be smothered under scraggy homespun. Notwithstanding “the *show* of … apostolic self-denial” with which he became associated in the public mind, Weld was the scion of a venerable New England family that issued from Thomas Welde, a first-generation Puritan saint and the founding overseer of Harvard College.[68] Weld’s paternal grandfather had once served as John Adams’s minister. His father, Ludovicus, had grown up among the Adamses in Braintree and pilloried even the most flaccid of Jeffersonian democrats as “domestic Jacobins.”[69] On Weld’s mother’s side, he could claim such religious and political luminaries as Solomon Stoddard, Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Dwight, and Aaron Burr. From his “tornado boyhood” of reckless roughhousing until the end of his life, Weld inclined more toward unrestrained intensity than toward his ancestors’ Calvinist self-recrimination, but he would occasionally plunge into all-consuming

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[66] Catherine H. Birney, *The Grimké Sisters: Sarah and Angelina Grimké, the first American women advocates of abolition and woman’s rights* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1885), 216-17.
[67] Weld, quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator,* 195.
[68] *Ibid*., 98.
[69] Ludovicus Weld, quoted in *Ibid.,* 22.

“morbid reveries” that were not unlike Beecher’s episodes of “oppressive insensibility.” If he relaxed his muscular grip on the physical world for a moment, it seemed, his aversion to its dirt would spiral out of control. He would slip into dreamy abstractions, cease to hear things that were said to him, and mutter assenting replies to his own thoughts. Weld could never decide whether to seize the world by its scruff or to wash his hands of it. At some point, he had resolved to try both at once.[70]

Weld had taken a wandering route to Lane through the period’s most influential laborite academies. After leaving Andover, he enrolled at Hamilton College just as revivalism swept the area and John Monteith locked horns with the school’s administrators. Weld honored family tradition and sided with Henry Davis and the traditionalists in their efforts to stamp out evangelical populism. “My father,” he informed his classmates, “was a real minister of the Gospel, grave and courteous, and an honor to the profession.” Whatever Finney was, he was “not a minister,” and Weld would “never acknowledge him as such.” At the urging of an aunt whom Finney had “frightened” into conversion, Weld attended Finney’s morning services in Utica, where he expected to dazzle the congregation with his theological acumen and expose Finney as a fraud. He underestimated the revivalist. As Weld would later recall, Finney rhetorically hoisted him “up on his toasting-fork before that audience” and ridiculed his erudition. “And yes! you'll go to college,” Finney crowed, “and use all your influence against the Lord’s work.” Humiliated and bent on exacting revenge, Weld sought out Finney in a Utica shop and subjected him to an hour of verbal abuse, but an air of desperation now

[70] Theodore Weld, quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 5-19.

clung to his invective against the lay-ordained clergy. By the day's end, he was prostrate on Finney's parlor floor, "sobbing and praying and sobbing and praying." The next evening he enlisted with Finney's "holy band."[71]

Within a year of his 1826 conversion, Weld withdrew from Hamilton to join the first class of students in the Oneida Institute's manual labor program.[72] Still smarting from Finney's shakedown, in which book learning alone had turned out to be weak ammunition, he announced his intention to "catch the spirit of the gigantic enterprise, … and be thus qualified by practical skill, no less than by theological erudition, to wield the weapons of truth."[73] While training for the ministry under Gale's direction, Weld continued to champion Finneyite revivalism but soon spread himself dangerously thin. Overworked as a full-time student, full-time revivalist, and full-time reformer, he developed a case of "bilious fever" and an unshakeable sense of dread. Most of all, he feared that the initial jolt of the Holy Spirit that had turned him into an evangelist was now settling into the professional drudgery of studying and preaching. Weld still yearned "for that joy *unspeakable*, that full-of-glory joy, that would stir the sluggish spirit and trouble the dead water of [his] stagnant soul."[74] Schooling, by contrast, was stultifying stuff. Oneida's financial difficulties bought him temporary respite from his studies. Deeply in debt and too reserved to effectively court donors on his own, Gale asked Weld, his most charismatic student, to give up leadership of the milking committee, suspend his

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[71] Weld, quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 47-9.
[72] *Ibid*., 63.
[73] [Theodore Dwight Weld], *A Statement of the Reasons which Induced the Students of Lane Seminary to dissolve their connection with that institution* (Cincinnati: John J. Miter, 1834), 1.
[74] Weld, quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 58.

education, and take to the road as the Institute's foremost fundraising agent. Weld enthusiastically agreed.

He returned to Oneida in January 1831 with donations sufficient to rekindle Gale's hopes that his "system of education" would indeed "introduce the millennium," as one of Weld's backers had effused.[75] Yet Gale hesitated to credit Weld with having salvaged the Institute, worrying that any more praise heaped on the cocksure student would push Weld even further from the old-school Calvinist doctrine of helplessness than Finney had already led him. In the ensuing controversy over who or what had rescued the school—was it Weld's intervention or the Holy Spirit's that had carried the day?—the majority of Oneida's student body sided with Weld and moved to replace Gale with Nathan S. S. Beman, an associate of Finney's. When Beman declined their offer, students began to drift away from Oneida. Weld was among the first to go.[76]

A tempting alternative awaited him. Gale had recently pitched manual laborism to Arthur and Lewis Tappan, the New York merchant brothers who held the purse strings of many of the era's moral reform movements. Determined to expand laborism's scope beyond the handful of schools that had experimented with laborite ideas, the Tappans had founded the Society for the Promotion of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions in order to combat "the fearful waste of health and life produced in [the United States] by the process of liberal education, without systematic exercise."[77] The eminence of the Society's officers, which included Yale president Jeremiah Day and United States

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[75] Weld, quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 39.
[76] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 59, 66.
[77] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 313.

Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen, spoke to laborism's progress from a fringe seminary reform movement to the vital center of American reform politics. Agents of the Society would tour the nation's leading laborite schools, compile a set of best practices, develop a theological and medical rationale for the movement, and finally, initiate a systematic overhaul of American education by opening a National Manual Labor Seminary to serve as a model laborite academy.[78] There was one problem: the Society did not employ any agents. The Tappans, for their part, were moneymen, not ideologues or orators. They needed a spokesperson who possessed a powerful synthetic mind, physical fortitude, a close familiarity with laborism, and a knack for promotion. Weld was the obvious choice.[79]

On the Tappans' payroll, Weld embarked on a lecture and observation tour in July 1831. He traversed more than 4,500 miles, ranging as far north as upstate New York, south to Alabama, and west to Missouri.[80] He visited dozens of laborite schools and delivered more than two-hundred lectures on laborism, temperance, and women's education. The hot-button topics of temperance and women's education served, to an extent, as bait to lure uninterested parties to attend lectures on the benefits of manual labor, but a consistent logic also ran through Weld's agenda. Brushes with melancholy and myopia had brought Weld to share Lyman Beecher's conviction that the body and the soul reciprocally influenced the other, and such reciprocity opened multiple avenues for reform. As a teetotaler, Weld proposed to improve the moral status of the spirit by

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[78] Grimké, *Correspondence on the Principles of Peace, Manual Labor Schools &c.*, 11.
[79] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 66-7.
[80] Weld, *First annual report*, v, 10; Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 313.

altering bodily habits of consumption. As a proponent of women's education, he advised tailoring curricula to enhance the sympathy and compassion that he associated with the female anatomy. In Weld's hands, laborites' insight that physical culture regulated mental and moral activity became the common denominator running through diverse reform agendas. Whereas Gale had permitted universal admissions at Oneida to grow his college's student body and base of support, Weld was beginning to formulate a propositional case for laborism's participation in moral reforms.[81]

Weld's insistence on the mutuality of body and spirit also led him to take up abolitionism, the cause for which he is best remembered. While in Hudson, Ohio, to lecture on laborism, Weld met Beriah Green, Elizur Wright, and Charles B. Storrs. Together, the three were known as the "Hudson Garrisonians," but their brand of abolitionism was a bit rougher around the edges than that of Garrison's genteel associates in Boston. The three Ohioans derived their abolitionism from the straightforward proposition that God had fashioned all bodies into equally potent instruments for the enactment of His will.[82] Since this germinal moment of basic equality, however, "[a] thousand groundless distinctions [had] been introduced" by time, circumstance, and political expediency. Green lamented that "[b]irth, complexion, place, a thousand things which have nothing to do with constitutional character or moral worth, have had a controlling influence on public sentiment." He reserved the sharpest of his barbs for ministers and reformers who reveled in "the empty parade, the idle ceremony, the

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[81] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 67; Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 41-2, 129-32.
[82] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 84.

senseless jargon, which holds up the scholar … as a man of mysterious power, as a sort of wizard, who, in foreign tongues and unearthly sounds, holds communion with spirits which the unpracticed eye can not [*sic*] perceive!"[83] Unlike their counterparts in Boston, the Hudson Garrisonians had little patience for debating slavery's constitutionality or the philosophy of nonresistance. If abolitionists were to win mass support, the Hudsonians believed, they would have to start speaking a grittier language of material conditions, bodily stresses, and the rest of the popular sensorium. They talked about things that everyone could see in terms that everyone could understand. To Weld, this was a revelation.

The Tappans had already been urging Weld to radicalize his antislavery politics, but they, like his former tutor George Washington Gale, retained too much of what Green dismissed as "[t]he lofty pulpit, flowing robe, [and] official airs" to sway Weld to their cause.[84] Through the Hudson Garrisonians, Weld discovered that abolitionism was not exclusively a gentleman's diversion. It could be enunciated with the kind of robust, democratic eloquence to which he aspired.[85] By 1832, Weld's lectures on laborism included full-throated denunciations of the slave system as yet another violator of body and mind.

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[83] Beriah Green, "Christian Education" (1833), from *The Miscellaneous Writings of Beriah Green* (Whitestown, NY: Oneida Institute, 1841), 231, 228-9.
[84] *Ibid*., 231, 228-9.
[85] For more on the Garrisonian class profile and the politics of respectability it inspired, see W. Caleb McDaniel, "The Fourth and the First: Abolitionist Holidays, Respectability, and Radical Interracial Reform," *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Mar. 2005), 129-51.

Up to three times a day, Weld took to the stump to promote laborism and solicit donations to the National Seminary. He took care not to slip into old seminary habits by ensnaring his audiences in fine webs of syllogisms or indulging in unfamiliar jargon. "If it is not *FELT* in the very *vital tissues of the spirit*," he had decided, "all the reasoning in the world is a feather thrown against the wind."[86] By all accounts, Weld's lectures were electrifying, sensual, even erotic experiences. One woman who heard him speak in Cleveland wrote to him describing his words' visceral effects. "I have slept since you left us, but not in peace," she effused. "I am moved like the quivering touch of a lacerated limb, the convulsive throb of a crushed bosom, the sinking ebb of the life's last tide, and the bursting throe of revivification."[87] Previous laborites had framed their solicitations in terms of church history and republican virtue. From the moral reform circles in which he moved, Weld had learned to aim his appeals at the heart.

It was hardly unheard of that a Christian with flagging faith should experience "revivification" in the presence of an evangelist. In some respects, that was the whole point of revivalism. But it was just as typical for their "convulsive throb[s]" to fade and for the "vital tissues of the spirit" to harden soon after the preacher left town. Weld stood out among the period's preachers and lay lecturers by advertising an institution at which a "bursting throe of revivification" could be protracted and stabilized until it was not a climax but a new form of life. Those who had their spirits charged at Weld's lectures peppered him with letters inquiring when the National Seminary would finally open.

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[86] Weld, quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 129.
[87] *Ibid*., 132.

"[T]he rising millions of the West," one New Yorker wrote to him, badly needed a venue at which to shore up their faith.[88] Among the most fretful were Southerners who, like one Alabama slaveholder whom Weld brought around to the abolitionists' cause, feared that their children would adopt the racist attitudes of their neighbors if they were not whisked away to join a more just community.[89]

Initially, Weld had planned to establish his academy in Rochester, New York. It had remained the molten core of the Second Great Awakening since Finney had staged a six-month-long revival there, which had concluded just as Weld was planning his tour. Weld hoped to entice to the faculty the revivalists Edward Norris Kirk and Nathan S.S. Beman, on whom Weld had kept his eye fixed since he and his fellow Oneidans had failed to oust Gale and insert Beman in his place. Upon visiting Lyman Beecher's Lane Seminary, however, Weld abandoned his goal of building a laborite academy from scratch. Lane had impressed Weld when he briefly visited Cincinnati in February 1832. He returned to the college in September to confirm that it might indeed satisfy the Tappans and found that his initial impression had been right. Lane boasted fertile fields, dormitory and classroom buildings, and a small machine shop. It lacked only a large student body and a firm commitment to abolitionism, and Weld reassured his employers that he could attract a following and radicalize Beecher in short order.[90]

The readiness with which Weld scrapped the idea of constructing a new college to house the National Seminary marked a crucial transformation in laborism. For pioneering

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[88] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 320, 313.
[89] *Ibid.*, 313.
[90] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 50-3.

laborites like the Indiana Theological Seminary's John Dickey and John Crowe, raising a college up from the ground had represented an invaluable learning experience. It had generated a spiritual bond between nineteenth-century laborites and church fathers, and it had given students a direct stake in the success of their institutions. The laborites who came after Dickey and Crowe, however, had widened laborism's scope to include aesthetic standards, political agendas, homeopathic therapies, and moral reform platforms that were external to its simplest conception as a factory for a frontier clergy. Subsequent laborites had taken stances on slavery and gendered oppression, quibbled about the movement's theological justifications, and expounded its medical rationale. Raising a school from the ground had slipped from the movement's center to become one among a wide array of possible strategies for restructuring the social order. Embodied in Beecher and Weld were two more strategies that were soon to collide. Back in Oneida, Weld pooled his resources with other Lane-bound seminarians, purchased a rickety boat for six dollars, and rafted down the French Creek to the Allegheny River before docking in Pittsburgh. The group chopped wood in exchange for free deck passage to Cincinnati, where Weld and Beecher finally merged their missions to redefine how Americans thought about education and work.[91]

Theirs was not to be a happy partnership. Beecher first met Weld's and his cohort's unruliness with good humor—"a noble class of young men," he called them, "uncommonly strong, a little uncivilized, entirely radical, and terribly in earnest"—but

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[91] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 314-5; *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College,* 12.

they soon wore his patience thin. He objected that this band of "fiery and unbroken steeds" was too enthralled with "their brilliant leader" to fully integrate into Lane's existing student body. Instead, they consolidated "a kind of *imperium in imperio*," a state within a state that mired Lane in bitter factionalism.[92] Upon Weld's arrival, more than half of Lane's student body became "Oneida moved west," as one of laborism's early chroniclers put it.[93] Weld had ostensibly given up on the idea of piloting his own manual labor academy, and yet he assumed an unofficial leadership role almost as soon as he arrived at Lane. The problem was that Lane already had a leader—one whose pacific vision for the college's future clashed with Weld's increasingly unbending moral commitments.

The breaking point came when a cholera epidemic ripped through Cincinnati in the summer of 1832. The city's black quarters, located on the banks of the disease-bearing Ohio River, were the hardest hit. Weld leapt into action, nursing the afflicted in forty-eight-hour shifts for ten wearying days. But Beecher was leery of further dividing the already loosely organized evangelical diaspora and discrediting Lane by encouraging racial mingling. He urged the Weldites to break off relations with Cincinnati's black community, but Weld refused. What use was there, he reasoned, in protecting yet another seminary whose students cowered in useless indecision, unwilling to apply their learning and intervene on the world? "[T]he single object of truth," Weld countered, "is to learn *how to act*."[94] The Hudson Garrisonians had taught him one truth: that no one deserved to

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[92] Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 321-2.
[93] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 55.
[94] Weld, *A Statement of the Reasons*, 5.

bear an unequal share of the world's bodily distress. Containing the cholera outbreak in Cincinnati was therefore the only justifiable course of action. Weld and his followers became mainstays at black families' dinner tables, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and church services. In his effort to aid the black laity, Weld did not hesitate to snub the white clergy. During his eighteen months at Lane, he never again attended services at Beecher's church.[95]

Conclusion

Weld would not be laborism's lone radical for long. In 1833, the Hudson Garrisonian Beriah Green finally tired of battling with the conservative administration of the Western Reserve College. As fortune would have it, George Washington Gale was preparing to leave the Oneida Institute, with the intent of establishing a new manual labor college deeper in the frontier. Green—who had "never been known to flee or flinch," as one fellow abolitionist once marveled—seized Oneida's reins without hesitation.[96] Under his leadership, Oneida rocketed to the leading edge of abolitionism. By the year's end, Oneida's students had formed an anti-slavery society that staged regular debates on abolitionist tactics and moral reform, and Green ramped up enrollment of students of color. Oneida's incoming class of 1833 was groundbreaking in its diversity; Cubans, mulattoes, Native Americans, self-emancipated former slaves, and black sailors

[95] Weld, *First annual report*, 1; Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 95; Beecher, *Autobiography, Vol. I*, 344.
[96] Amos A. Phelps, "The Oneida Institute," 2.

descended on the college to study and work together.[97] W.E.B. DuBois would later memorialize the "bluff, kind-hearted" minister who had dared such a feat in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In the chapter that he dedicated to the Oneida graduate Alexander Crummell, DuBois imagined Oneida's move toward greater racial inclusivity as a dialogue between Green and his family: "'I'm going to bring a black boy here to educate,' said Beriah Green, as only a crank and an abolitionist would have dared to say. 'Oho!' laughed the boys. 'Ye-es,' said his wife; and Alexander came."[98]

Green had a knack for attracting other "cranks and abolitionists" to him. The rawness of Green's commitment to absolute equality that had attracted Theodore Weld continued to draw students who were unmoved by more measured appeals for abolition. As the Oneida graduate and future Iowa congressman Josiah Bushnell Grinnell remarked, "[t]he non-resistance doctrines of the Garrison and the peace party were not welcome to me whose blood leaped in warm, youthful challenge."[99] White abolitionists like Grinnell found the proximity to black scholars titillating, just as Lane's Weldites had relished the company of black Cincinnatians. Noticing the phenomenon, DuBois remarked how black students at Oneida and similar institutions of the first half of the nineteenth-century were treated as "throbbing souls whose warm pulsing life touched [students] so nearly that [they] half gasped with surprise." Yet in DuBois retelling, Oneida's black students had not been mere set dressing. They, too, had benefitted from the school's racially integrated atmosphere. While studying there, DuBois wrote, they received "a new dawn of

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[97] Grinnell, *Men and Events*, 30-1.
[98] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, 1903/1994), 167.
[99] Grinnell, *Men and Events*, 30-1.

sympathy and inspiration" that displaced "the temptation of Hate, that hovered between him and the world." Green had converted a form of education designed to eradicate the "thousand repulsions" that alienated the clergy from the laity into something grander: a hatchet with which to cut down the countless resentments that separated race from race, gender from gender, American from American. Decades later, DuBois thought he could still hear Oneidans pleading: "'O World of Worlds, how shall man make you one?"[100]

This vision of universal accord has been the usual conclusion of laborism's story. But for all the attention that racial integration and abolitionism has received from the movement's contemporaries and historians, it was a fleeting episode in laborism's history. Within a few years of Green's coming to Oneida, other laborite colleges would be serving the interests of slavers and colonizationists, gentry farmers and industrialists. Even schools that continued to practice universal admissions would adopt paternalistic policies toward their students, basking in their vitalizing presence one moment only to impose baroque behavioral rules the next. Weld himself had not discriminated when seeking support for the Tappans' National Seminary. For every faithful abolitionist whom he introduced to laborism, he had sent flattering letters to slaveholders like Thomas S. Grimké, praising his good sense and his commitment to serving "the interests of the community."[101]

Charges of hypocrisy roll easily off the tongue, but they do not explain why the accused so rarely recognize their inconsistency. What is critical to remember is that

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[100] DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 167.
[101] Grimké, *Correspondence*, 12.

laborites conceived of themselves as complex characters who had a chameleonic ability to interact with a diverse set of potential allies. Weld the abolitionist courting Grimké the slaveholder makes little sense. But a prestigiously trained clergyman finding common cause with one of the South's preeminent attorneys—that is less surprising. Weld reminded Grimké that they were both potential victims of "the march of a destroyer, which, while it spares the multitude, … deals its death-blows only among the ranks of the mighty." Grimké easily gathered his meaning. In his response, he agreed that manual labor colleges were a boon to any student, whether he were to become "a Divine or a Lawyer, a Scholar, Physician or Merchant."[102] Poor farmers, recently emancipated people of color, and moral reformers might be rallied to laborism, but the roll of primary beneficiaries remained unaltered. The autonomy of the learned class remained under threat by the market, and laborism was still dedicated to formulating a defense.

Committing a movement to learned-class solidarity could be complicated in a country where that class was distributed across multiple regional economies and political persuasions. What was good for the learned class in the North or West was not always good for it in the South. In his appeals to potential backers like Grimké, Weld relied upon hints and innuendo to communicate his message without flatly contradicting the positions that he took against anti-slavery moderates like Beecher. The big-tent alliances that early laborites formed had grown the movement, but they had also sown division in its ranks and diluted its message. If laborism was to recover its singularity of purpose, it needed to speak with a unified voice. It needed a manifesto, and Weld intended to write one.

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[102] Grimké, *Correspondence*, 12.

Chapter 3: "Let Us Take Hold of the Country"

National Unity and Regional Variety

The depth of Theodore Weld's commitment to his assumed persona of a "backwoodsman untamed" became evident when he returned to the East in late 1832.[1] Decked out in his frontier attire of unruly locks and threadbare rags, he cut an outlandish figure in Eastern metropolises. "My bearish proportions have never been licked into *City Shape*," he boasted, "and are quite too uncombed and shaggy for 'Boston notions.'"[2] For a time, he delighted in the lukewarm reception that he received from urbanites. Each askance look was confirmation that he had successfully embodied the frontier spirit that he had so long admired. When his employer Lewis Tappan griped that "too many men [were] abandoning the east" and turning their backs on "the power of a multitudinous city," Weld welcomed it as a commendation for a job well done.[3]

It did not take long for the multitude to wear on his nerves. Weld loosed plenty of his barbs at the "ostentatious display" of the cosmopolitan elite, but he was no less disdainful of "the mighty host" of urban workers who seemed to be everywhere underfoot.[4] A half-century of marketization had thinned out the comfortable middle of independent yeomen and artisans whom Weld had so dutifully imitated. The same political-economy that enabled affluent industrialists to purchase other people's labor in

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[1] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 3-4.
[2] *Ibid*., 3-4.
[3] Lewis Tappan to Charles Finney, Mar. 16, 1832, quoted in William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 79.
[4] Quoted in Benjamin P. Thomas, *Theodore Weld: Crusader for Freedom* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1950), 22.

tremendous quantities also called into being a large, purchasable laboring class: a superabundance of hands for hire who pieced together irregular day jobs, seasonal work, and other forms of uncertain employment to eke out what was often a hand-to-mouth existence. Its ranks were swelled with precarious and transient wage workers, many of them uneducated young people who had left behind the regulating authority of their families and hometown communities to escape privation and unemployment.[5]

This was not the subsistence-oriented laboring class that laborites had venerated for its freedom of conscience, naïve republicanism, and natural piety. Fears of unchecked lawlessness, violence, ignorance, and licentiousness—a bogeyman that one historian has christened the antebellum "specter of social breakdown"—gripped Weld as he confronted this vast and growing "army of the intemperate."[6] Upon his return to the East, Weld no longer felt the energetic presence of small producers plying their trades. Instead, he winced as the working poor begged for relief "from the gutters and sewers, the groceries and grogshops, poor houses, prisons and asylums, … with their bloated and shocking visages, their staggering gait, their filthy and tattered habiliments, their fettered limbs, and their clanking chains."[7] Although workers lacked their employers' purchasing power, Weld found them to be nevertheless infected with the capitalist's unbridled appetite for

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[5] Allmendinger, "The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life," 77; Michael B. Katz, *Reconstructing American Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987), 14; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 2-3.

[6] Steven Mintz, *Moralists & Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 3; Weld quoted in Thomas, *Theodore Weld*, 22. In characterizing the urban poor as "intemperate," Weld drew on classical political theory's association between economic dependency and lack of self-mastery. See William Clare Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2017), 59-70.

[7] Quoted in Thomas, *Theodore Weld*, 22.

personal gain and disregard for the common weal. Rich and poor alike were "whirling in all the hustle and bustle and chaffering and purchasing" of the market, he observed, "confused and perplexed with the details and statistics of filthy lucre."[8]

There was no immediate future here for a learned class that wished to keep its work unadulterated by consumer opinion and employer demands. From the moment that he set foot in the East, Weld longed to be back "among the yeomanry" of his adopted Ohio—though, as Beecher had discovered, Ohioans, too, were quickly succumbing to market dependency.[9] Conditions in the cities had convinced Weld that "Satan's seat" in the United States would be toppled, not "by working the lever in Boston, New York, or Philadelphia," but by "[k]indl[ing] *back fires* BACK FIRES *BACK FIRES*" in places where cutthroat competition and market dependence had not so fully metastasized.[10] If no such places remained, then the solution was clear. Laborism would need to create them anew. The severity of urban social stratification crystallized laborism's purpose in Weld's mind. The movement was to foster an alternative to commercial society by erecting a bulwark of self-sufficient refuges from market forces—a national network of "free institutions" where natural economy could be revived and propagated.[11] "Let us take hold of the country," Weld urged.[12] Time was running short.

Within months of his arrival, Weld settled in at his desk in the New York office of the *Emancipator*, the abolitionist newspaper that he edited, to draft the movement's

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[8] Quoted in Thomas, *Theodore Weld*, 22.
[9] Quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 4.
[10] *Ibid*., 74.
[11] Weld, *First annual report*, 14.
[12] Quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator* 150.

formal platform.[13] The result was the *First*—and last—*Annual Report of the Society for the Promotion of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions*. Conspicuously absent from this document were the theological quarrels and experiments in coeducation and racial integration that had hitherto concerned laborites. Weld suppressed the preoccupations of the graduate clergy and moral vanguard to focus on crafting a mass line. His report addressed the problems that had troubled him upon his arrival in New York: the enmity between the rich and the poor, the acquisitive individualism of both, and the paucity of inclusive educational opportunities that might reduce strife, lubricate social mobility, and improve public morale. And it presented an alternative: a restoration of the premarket status quo of the fabled frontiersman, for whom personal union of mind and body had mirrored the broader social coherence of self-reliant communities.

Weld's report constituted the first systematic effort to enumerate laborism's major tenets, compile medical and anecdotal evidence of its successes, and advocate for the creation of a national network of laborite schools. Yet by divorcing the movement from its theoretical underpinnings, the report also articulated a laborism that could be adapted to suit the needs of learned Americans whose conception of social harmony did not require social equality. As the report circulated throughout a nation that was still riven by stark variations in its economic order, Weld's universal message of perfect union took on local meanings. More often than not, those meanings came to be defined by local elites. In the end, the vague pursuit of cohesive community, stripped of any qualifying

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[13] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College,* 43.

conception of justice, would be captured by those who equated harmony not with reconciliation so much as the quieting of dissent.

A Laborite Manifesto

For all his delight in "the everydayisms of plain common life" that ennobled the Ohio yeomanry of his imagination, Weld could be as condescending as the next seminary graduate.[14] In his judgement, what passed for thought in the minds of most Americans was "so utterly loose and rambling, prone to jump at conclusions … that [he knew] scarcely a single mind in whose results of reasoning [he had] any confidence."[15] One might reasonably surmise that the "single mind" worthy of his confidence was none other than his own. In a particularly withering letter to Angelina Grimké, the famously erudite champion of women's rights and Weld's future wife, he entreated her, "by love of Christ, to *prove*, PROVE all things" by subscribing to his maximalist mode of inquiry: "ANALYSIS at the outset, *explicit* statement, *accurate* definition, perfect explanation of terms, and nice adjustments of positions."[16] Although his report on laborism occasionally sagged under the weight of the period's usual dramatic embellishments, its overriding qualities were frank empiricism and cool reason. Stylistically, it owed more to the legal

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[14] Quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 4.
[15] Quoted in Ernest G. Bormann, *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985/2001), 159.
[16] Bormann, *The Force of Fantasy*, 158.

tracts and medical treatises of acknowledged influences like the physician Benjamin Rush than it did to the sentimental pleas of his fellow reformers.[17]

Weld was indebted to Rush for more than his empirical method. As the early republic's foremost popularizer of the theory of "sensibility," Rush had campaigned to replace the accepted mechanistic physiology—a medical paradigm that treated the body as a clockwork contrivance that housed and moved an immaterial soul—with an holistic, interactive model that understood the nerves as bridges linking a person's sensate body with their inner being.[18] Ailing seminarians like Lyman Beecher had independently concluded that the mind and body were mutually reactive, and they had, like Rush, decided that regular exercise was required to keep the physical and mental faculties in just proportion and ready communication. Unlike Rush, however, none of Weld's fellow evangelicals had convincingly connected medical prescriptions for the health of the person to political prescriptions for the health of the republic. From Rush, Weld learned to read history through the lens of the body. According to Rush, the United States' rebellion against England represented an attempt to "fix the constitution of America," a pun on 'constitution' that collapsed the difference between a corpus of written laws and the physical makeup of a living creature. The Revolution, in Rush's telling, had

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[17] Wade Williams, "Religion, Science and Rhetoric in Revolutionary America: The Case of Dr. Benjamin Rush," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (Summer 2000), 58-9, 62-4. For more on Rush's formative role in elaborating American medical culture and overall professional culture, see Colleen E. Terrell, "'Republican Machines': Franklin, Rush, and the Manufacture of Civic Virtue in the Early Republic," *Early American Studies* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2003), 100-32; and Simon Finger, *The Contagious City: The Politics of Public Health in Early Philadelphia*" (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 86-102.
[18] Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, 9-10, 73, 201-2.

succeeded insofar as it had made (white, male, propertied) Americans the masters of their own bodies. Specifically, it had liberated the American agricultural and manufacturing sectors—which Rush identified as the "true basis of national health"—from a mercantile system that had made honest American labor the servant of "European luxuries and vices."[19] Now that extremes echoing those that had once set consuming England against producing America had reemerged between American capital and labor, national health once again depended upon the restoration of self-mastery and fellow feeling. Rush had looked to the schools to invest Americans with a stock of shared experiences that would "render the mass of the people more homogeneous, and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government."[20] With a little finessing, Rush's recommendations could be made to endorse laborism. Rush had sought "to keep sensibility alive" by ensuring that the effete gained "a familiarity with scenes of distress from poverty and disease" while, on the other hand, also restoring working people to the elevating influence of "kindred and society" through a rudimentary moral education. Broadly speaking, this was not far from Weld's advocacy for class-mixed schooling that would nurture "a permanent community of feeling" between "the learned and laboring classes."[21]

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[19] Rush quoted in Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, 92-3. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., categorized such quasi-medical arguments against the Crown as the "hygienic objections" of the Revolutionary generation. Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York: Columbia UP, 1917), 276.
[20] Benjamin Rush, *Essays, Literary, Moral, and Philosophical* (Philadelphia: Thomas and William Bradford, 1806), 8.
[21] Rush quoted in Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution*, 225-6; Weld, *First annual report*, 64.

The Hudson Garrisonians of the Western Reserve College—Beriah Green, Elizur Wright, Jr., and Charles B. Storrs—also continued to exert a heavy influence on Weld's thinking. Other nineteenth-century egalitarians often campaigned for greater equality for instrumental or ethical reasons, believing social hierarchies to be politically corrosive or personally demoralizing.[22] The Hudson Garrisonians simply denied the reality of social difference. To them, taxonomies of class, race, and gender that "[broke] up large communities into petty clans," as Green wrote, served only to justify and maintain a corrupted society's unequal distributions of wealth and power.[23] As Elizur Wright added, however, "there is not really a *foundation for* [such] *prejudice in nature*."[24] Demographic frameworks that sorted human beings into unequal categories could not be reconciled with an ordained natural order in which people enjoyed perfect equality. Accordingly, Wright concluded that "[o]ur prejudices are altogether and in themselves inexpressible absurdities."[25] Green echoed the point when he wrote that "[t]he arrangements of human society are artificial," having "nothing to do with constitutional character or moral worth."[26] So how was it that Americans had come to accept social hierarchies that flew in the face of nature? According to the Hudson Garrisonians, the plausibility of social distinctions depended on mere illusions of difference that arose wherever groups or

[22] Michael J. Thompson, *The Politics of Inequality: A Political History of the Idea of Economic Inequality* (New York: Columbia UP, 2012), 64-5; Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor*, 4-6.
[23] Green, *Four Sermons*, 10-11.
[24] Elizur Wright, Jr., "Caste in the United States: A Review," *The Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine* 2, no. 2 (Jan. 1837), 24.
[25] Wright, "Caste in the United States," 24-5.
[26] Green, "Christian Education," 231.

individuals were isolated from one another, as they were in the economic classes that were every day becoming more distant.[27]

There was a self-sustaining quality to social atomization, in other words; the longer that it persisted, the more intractable and natural that it came to seem. Taking up the thread, Weld lamented in his report that the easy comradery that he believed had distinguished primitive humanity had died by a thousand cuts—what he called "[t]he thousand repulsions arising from dissimilarity of habits which have so long operated to estrange [groups] from each other." Classes, races, and genders that might otherwise have lived and worked in harmony had been "driven asunder by jealousies, and smothered animosities," he wrote.[28] The supposedly inborn disparities in virtue or capacity that were commonly invoked to explain differences in wealth and political power were, to Weld's mind, after-the-fact explanations that offended the naturally egalitarian order of things.

The Hudson Garrisonians had come down hard on seminaries for popularizing a house style among ministers that exaggerated the differences between the clergy and the laity. But this critique had, for the most part, remained tightly focused on squashing the pretensions of academics and genteel abolitionists. Weld wanted to erase the battle lines that had been drawn through American society as a whole, not just those that had set the professions against the masses. He shared a fear with many of his contemporaries that the republican institutions that Americans had established in the early years of independence were laudable but fragile achievements. If rising generations did not continually

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[27] Green, "Christian Education," 231
[28] Weld, *First annual report*, 63-4.

rededicate themselves to the collective maintenance of a virtuous community—if they instead spent their energies bickering over perceived differences and scrambling to reach the top of heap—then the republic was liable to devolve into factional squabbles and regress into feudalism.[29] Fusing Rush's medicalized interpretation of the American republican experiment with the Hudson Garrisonians' contention that social atomization inevitably led to social hierarchy, Weld proceeded from the assumption that a society that unevenly developed its people's mental and physical capacities would eventually turn against itself.

Weld targeted educational inequality as the primary cause of artificial hierarchy and community breakdown. Schools, on his analysis, had come to serve as "anti-republican" sorting mechanisms ensuring that children entered the same "castes" as their parents.[30] Deprived of basic academic training that might lubricate upward mobility, the children of "[t]he laboring classes" were fated to fill their parents' shoes and "become hewers of wood and drawers of water for the educated." The standing educational order was, in Weld's view, a breeding ground for class resentment. It pitted laboring bodies against learned minds, placing a working class that was denied the right of thinking for itself in the service of a hiring class that was impotent to act on its convictions. Try as he might, Weld could discover "no bond of companionship" or "mutual sympathies

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[29] J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1975/2016), xxv, 521-6; Rita Koganzon, "'Producing a Reconciliation of Disinterestedness and Commerce': The Political Rhetoric of Education in the Early Republic," *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (Aug. 2012), 403-408.

[30] Weld, *First annual report*, 41.

incorporating" these subgroups of American society "into one mass." If educators did not work quickly to close the gap, it would "widen into an impassable gulf," Weld cautioned—"and our free institutions, our national character, our bright visions of the future, our glory and our joy, will go down into it."[31]

Laborism was Weld's alternative to class-stratified schooling and social disaggregation, but it was too closely tied to the seminary system to be a self-evident solution to inequality as such. Weld would have to demonstrate that it was not merely clergymen or other professionals, but every American, who stood to benefit from laborism's holistic pedagogy. He tackled the problem empirically, positing that "[t]he experience of every day" would disclose the proper relationship between mind and body.[32] First-hand experience and the testimonials of other laborites had confirmed to Weld's satisfaction that physical inactivity "dim[med] intellectual perception, clog[ged] down the imagination, and load[ed] the mind with torpor."[33] As he had observed among the working class of Eastern cities, physical overexertion could be just as damaging and dissipating as lethargy. Manual laborers who sunk all of their waking hours in their work were left with little time for mental or spiritual cultivation. Incessant work and lack of access to "our institutions of learning," Weld wrote, kept labor's nose to the grindstone: "Hence," he concluded, "ignorance becomes associated with labor, cleaves fast to it, sits upon it as an incubus, and crushes it into the dust."[34]

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[31] Weld, *First annual report*, 63-3, 41.
[32] *Ibid*., 10.
[33] *Ibid*., 101-20.
[34] *Ibid*., 42.

A well-balanced physio-cognitive system, on the other hand, would steer a person between the extremes of exorbitant wealth and crushing poverty. Laborism, Weld reported, "quicken[ed] the principle of association, strengthen[ed] the memory, animate[d] the fancy, concentrate[d] all the powers of the mind, and [gave] impulse to their operations." It also steeled one against temptations of the flesh ranging from drink and gambling to sex and violence. In short, paying attention to the health of the body would save the bookish man from overstudy just as attending to the working class's mental and moral condition would rescue the laborer from thoughtless carnality.[35] Weld concluded that "the body and mind [were] endowed with such mutual susceptibilities, that each [was] alive to the slightest influence of the other."[36] The "common sense inference" to make from the certifiable reciprocity of mind and body was that they "*should be educated together*."[37] If the nation continued to divide its citizens' mental and physical components along class lines, it would have no more success in reintegrating them later than it would have in reconciling its citizens into a coherent body politic after they had been sorted into antagonistic classes. In the schools, two vital bonds—one between an individual's mind and his body, and the other between classes of workers—could either be restored or permanently severed.

Weld's advantaged upbringing and exclusive education posed a potential liability to his argument. Were either rich or poor really to accept the republican directives of a moral reformer whose professional success seemed so clearly to derive from his family's

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[35] Weld, *First annual report*, 110-11, 13, 27-8.
[36] *Ibid*., 11, 102.
[37] *Ibid*., 13.

social status? In a rhetorical sleight of hand that would, with time, become a signature laborite flourish, Weld disaffiliated himself from the seminary elite and positioned himself as a free-floating intellectual, critically appraising all groups but beholden to none. He included in his report an insider's account of learned-class habits that amounted to an exposé of aristocratic excess. "In every literary institution," Weld confided, "there are a number of hours daily, in which nothing is required of the student." Of course, during Weld's educational career, the opposite had frequently been true; as a younger man, Weld himself had often complained of the grueling academic schedule that seminarians were expected to maintain. Yet the portrait that Weld sketched in his report was that of a snickering bourgeoisie that hid its dissipation behind a smokescreen of refined manners and expensive credentials. According to him, the cognoscenti spent its leisure hours "occupied in listless reverie, or in taking lessons in the science of time-killing, or in devising and executing schemes of mischief and low tricks, or in procuring vivid sensation by making experiments upon appetite and passion." Weld catalogued his old classmates' favorite pastimes:

> To practice licentiousness, to make secret libations to Bacchus, to puff tobacco smoke, to play at games of chance, to hatch mischief, to mope from room to room, to shuffle slipshod through the halls, to slouch about, and gaze on vacuity, to drum with the fingers, to whistle, to doze, and nod, will generally be standard employments in institutions where [a student will] slug his life away like a gorged anaconda, and crawl at last into a lounger's grave.[38]

Crucial to Weld's appeal to the laboring class was the fact that his report contested a number of widespread assumptions about them. When Weld had recoiled from the "army

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[38] Weld, *First annual report*, 40.

of the intemperate" that greeted him upon his arrival in New York, he had joined in a middle-class panic that the nation's most populous cities and time-honored institutions were being overrun with rabble.[39] But the timbre of his report was different. It was now the learned classes who were intemperate and given to sex, smoking, gambling, and late nights; seminarians who might once have complained of "an oppressive insensibility" were now portrayed as thrill seekers lusting after "vivid sensation." Weld's report reassured a laboring class that had been frequently accused of harboring swindlers and thieves that the learned class was up to equally destructive "schemes of mischief and low tricks."[40] Weld dismissed the petty thievery of the laboring classes as crimes of desperation, but the bad behavior of the ruling classes was less forgivable. It staved off boredom, not hunger, and it did so by exploiting the vulnerabilities of the less fortunate.

Weld's report hinted at an alternative social arrangement. The report opened with a harrowing account, penned by the officers of the Society for the Promotion of Manual Labor, that told of an accident that Weld had survived while touring as an agent of the Tappans.[41] On a tempestuous night in 1832, his stagecoach had overturned when he attempted to ford a flooded creek some thirty miles outside of Columbus, Ohio. The carriage had shattered on the streambed, and Weld had been thrown from the wreckage

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[39] Mintz, *Moralizers and Modernists*, 6-7; Allmendinger, "The Dangers of Ante-Bellum Student Life," 79, 75, 77.
[40] Weld, *First annual report*, 40; Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1982), 1-7; Perry, *Boats Against the Current*, 174-5, 193-7.
[41] The narrative was attributed to S.V.S. Wilder, Chairman, and Joshua Leavitt, Corresponding Secretary. Weld, *First annual report,* viii.

and submerged in what would prove to be one of the century's most destructive floods.[42] He had surfaced amidst his team of horses only to be tangled in their harnesses and trammeled by their hooves. Ahead of him, a tree that had been brought down by the storm lay, by a stroke of luck, with its crown in the water. Weld had reached for it as he drifted past and, "by the most desperate efforts," managed to pull himself into its branches. Raising a shivering cry, he had managed to catch the attention of nearby farmers, and in their care he had made a swift recovery and resumed his tour.[43] The narrative's obvious thrust was that laborism had saved Weld's life and enabled him to continue his righteous work, for, the tale concluded, "nothing but a constitution invigorated by manual labor … could have survived the hardships of that night."[44]

Yet the melodrama also suggested that laborism could revitalize a sense of community that was quickly fading into the past. The local farmers who rescued Weld had not merely dressed him in a dry set of clothes; they had also invited the stranger into their home for nearly a week and tenderly nursed him back to health.[45] In the highly mobile social world of the 1830s, in which confidence men in pursuit of easy money could blend in with itinerant preachers in search of lost souls and laborers in search of work, something about Weld had earned the family's trust. As a later commentator would

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[42] Daniel Aaron, *Cincinnati, Queen City of the West: 1819-1838* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992), 43-4.
[43] Weld, *First annual report*, vi-vii.
[44] *Ibid*., vii.
[45] An account of Weld's "Narrow Escape" was submitted by an unnamed resident of Columbus, Ohio, to the *Utica Elucidator* and reprinted widely. See, for example, the *Juvenile Rambler, or, Family & School Journal* 1, no. 10 (Mar. 14, 1832), 35-6; *Sunday School Journal & Advocate of Christian Education* 2, no. 13 (Mar. 28, 1832), 50; and *Episcopal Watchman* 5, no. 47 (Apr. 3, 1832), 185.

put it, a laborite like Weld would be universally well-received "because he had learned to assimilate himself to those around him; to conform to their manners and customs …; to understand and take an interest in their employments."[46] Weld's ability to win the confidence of yeoman farmers established that his regimen of manual labor had banished "[t]he thousand repulsions" that might have otherwise estranged a person of his station from passing frontiersmen. In the story of Weld's plunge into Alum Creek, laborism was called upon to restore the mutuality that Weld believed to arise from shared experience. Under laborism, there would be no more strangers in the human community.

All told, Weld claimed that laborites had discerned the secret to sustaining a unified body politic. At its core were educational institutions that supplied every American with a common stock of experiences and values, irrespective of their backgrounds or probable futures. Weld called upon every American youth to become a student and upon students of all ages and statuses to "pour themselves into our fields and workshops, and … ply the implements of agriculture and the mechanic arts":

> Let the students put on a working dress and spend three hours a day in agricultural or mechanical employment, and they would disarm the laboring man of his prejudices, and beckon him toward them. That discontent, jealousy, envy, disgust, and those heart burnings, which keep in ferment the laboring classes in the vicinity of our higher seminaries, would give place to kindlier feelings. These classes would become approachable; a brotherhood would be established, and the student would enjoy a variety of facilities for acquiring a knowledge of men as they are.[47]

Like earlier paeans to "men as they [were]," Weld's invoked an ideal of irreducible individual complexity—of people endowed with such natural richness that they could not

[46] "A Layman," "Preaching to Preachers—No. I," *Presbyterian* 3, no. 44 (Oct. 30, 1833), 174.
[47] Weld, *First annual report*, 64.

be contained by any particular employment or class. Whether their daily occupations required the exertion of mind, body, or some combination of both, laborite subjects would remain more than the work that they performed, and they would be thereby prepared to meet one another as equals.

Weld's report found its mark when it appeared in print in January 1833. The editors of the *Connecticut Courant* confessed that the report could not "be read without … heart ache—without a thrilling sensation of horror" toward "the present system" of education.[48] Their colleagues at the *Episcopal Reporter* saluted Weld for initiating no less than a "revolution in public sentiment" that had turned the tide of public opinion in favor of establishing a national network of affordable, high-quality schools.[49] But beyond the vague sense that *some* coordinated education system was necessary to—as one Massachusetts teacher phrased it—"save our nation from impending anarchy, aristocracy, and destruction," there was little agreement on who would finance the schools' construction or administer them once complete.[50] Weld's laborite scheme supplied a partial answer to the question of funding. Although student labor had never met all expenses at existing laborite schools, it had cut costs considerably and allowed some schools to operate in areas too impoverished to support a tax-funded equivalent.[51]

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[48] *Connecticut Courant* 69, no. 3575 (Jul. 29, 1833).
[49] "Manual Labour Schools," *Episcopal Recorder* 10, no. 44 (Feb. 2, 1833), 175.
[50] "Equal Universal Education," *Workingman's Advocate* 4, no. 23 (Jan. 19, 1833)
[51] On average, those laborite schools that predated Weld's report reduced student costs by between one-fourth and one-half, frequently leaving students on the hook for roughly $60 per year and, more often than not, operating at a loss to the institution. A broad survey of laborite and traditional schools can be found in "Education and Literary Institutions," *American Quarterly Register* 5, no. 4 (May 1, 1833), 273-333.

The report offered less guidance on the matter of school administration. In a bid to attract a broad coalition of support, Weld had distanced laborism from its origins as a reaction against sedentary, formalistic seminary training, and he had downplayed its participation in divisive campaigns for abolition and women's rights. With laborism now represented as a means of generating public-minded republican citizens, not healthy ministers or moral crusaders, the evangelical clergy was no longer a shoe-in for leadership roles. Abstracted from the conditions in which it had first appeared, laborism became a vehicle that normally antagonistic groups could use to advance contradictory ambitions. Urban craftsmen and landed farmers; abolitionists, colonizationists, and Southern slavers; disestablished clergymen and state officials—at various points, each tried on the "working dress" of the laborite, sometimes stretching or hemming it beyond recognition to suit their purposes. At no other point in laborism's arc would it be so enthusiastically embraced—or so idiosyncratically applied.

Workingmen and "the Business of Struggles"

Urban craftsmen, in particular, were primed to receive Weld's report warmly. "Equal universal education," as one labor newspaper called it, had been a top agenda item for Workingmen's Parties when they appeared in New York and Philadelphia in the late 1820s. They had come together to collectively lobby against the increased competition, reduced pay, monopolized wealth, and extended working hours that would eventually supplant the eighteenth-century model of artisanal production with a modern, industrial

wage-labor system.[52] The increase in working hours was an especially volatile flash point that directly informed workingmen's demands for universal education. For example, in 1829, New York City was in the throes of an economic recession when rumors began circulating that a handful of large employers, in an effort to recover their losses, planned to extend the workday from ten to eleven hours without a commensurate increase in pay.[53] Workingmen already struggled to overcome the stereotype that their work neither offered on-the-job opportunities for mental stimulation nor left them with enough leisure time to pursue learning during off hours.[54] The more that working hours encroached on their time, the more difficult it became for them to argue that they possessed the intelligence and knowledge that had long helped to distinguish the skilled craftsman from the drudge worker. As one craftsman observed, workingmen everywhere fought to dismantle "the barbarous systems which require for labor all the time that exhausted nature can spare from food and sleep," leaving vanishingly little "time for improvement."[55] When thousands of the city's craftsmen organized to strike against the

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[52] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 17-8, 31-2, 34.
[53] *Ibid*., 189-92.
[54] Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America*, 71; Rancière, *The Philosopher and His Poor*, 4-6, 17-8. Workingmen sometimes attempted to dispel rumors of their ignorance by invoking the autodidactic mechanics who littered the American republican pantheon as proof that laborers were capable of sustained thought. It was popular to celebrate the "Eminence Attained by Men of Low Origin" and, in an almost incantatory manner, to recite the names of Benjamin Franklin, Roger Sherman, Thomas Paine, Robert Fulton, David Rittenhouse, Henry Eckford, and Eli Whitney, as well as international figures like Thomas Simpson, William Herschel, James Watt, John Smeaton, Thomas Newcomen, Richard Arkwright, Samuel Crompton, Josiah Wedgewood, and James Brindley. For examples of these litanies, see *Mechanics' Magazine and Journal of the Mechanics' Institute* 1, no. 3 (Mar. 1833), 117; Vol. 2, no. 3 (Sep. 1833), 125; Vol. 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1834), 51; Vol. 4, no. 2 (Aug. 1834), 82-3.
[55] "To the Farmers, Mechanics, and Working Men of Essex County," *Workingman's Advocate* 7, no. 7 (Sep. 26, 1835), 3.

proposed increase in working hours, it was only a matter of months before they had settled on a platform that had universal education as its central plank.[56]

Workingmen's demands for equal access to education gained credence in part because of their expanding influence in electoral politics. Between 1820 and 1840, most states repealed tax-paying and property qualifications for voting, flooding the franchise with a poor stratum of white, male voters. As the largest single workforce in many major cities, journeymen and small-time master craftsmen became the key to winning local elections.[57] Appealing to the classical republican principle of an enlightened citizenry, the Workingmen insisted that they be afforded educations—if not as workers, then as voters in whose hands the future of the republic now rested.[58] The New York Workie leader Robert Dale Owen pointed out that a workingman's formative years would inform his vote, one way or another. He could either be offered a seat in the schoolroom to learn the virtues of subordinating private ends to the public good, or he could become a student of the streets and alleys, "learning rudeness, impertinent language, vulgar manners, and vicious habits."[59] Universal free education was proposed as a check on the tyranny of the mob.

Owen was even more inclined to look favorably upon Weld's recommendations than the average workingman. When Robert Dale Owen was sixteen years old, his father,

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[56] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 189-92, 196.
[57] *Ibid*., 175. For case studies of working-class voting blocs in Philadelphia and Baltimore, see Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1980), 108-15; Rockman, *Scraping By*, 94-5.
[58] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 176-8.
[59] Owen quoted in Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 179.

the Scottish industrialist and utopian socialist Robert Owen, had sent him to study at Emanuel von Fellenberg's manual labor academy in Hofwyl, Switzerland. The younger Owen would later remember Fellenberg's school as a republic in miniature that "was, in a very small way, more of a success than the American Union" at instilling in its young citizens a sense of civic duty.[60] "It created … young Republicans," Owen recalled in his memoirs, "and awakening in them that zeal for the public good which we seek too often in vain."[61] Students at Hofwyl lived under a constitution of their own devising and operated "an independent, self-governing community, calling no man master or lord."[62] Perhaps due to his intimacy with Hofwyl, Owen articulated a vision of universal education that replicated fairly more features of Fellenberg's school than even Weld could accept. Owen, for instance, fantasized about a system of state-guardianship that would remove children from their homes, place them in government care from ages two to sixteen, and erase the final evidences of class difference by issuing them identical white smocks—a more extreme response to social hierarchy than even Weld could countenance. Still, Owen became a fierce defender of Weld's milder laborism.[63]

Taken together, workingmen's jeopardized class status, their expanded civic responsibilities, and the personal attachments that at least one of their leaders had to laborism led urban craftsmen to champion Weld's report. Writing under the pseudonym "Plebian," one workingman decided, just days after the report's publication, that the

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[60] Robert Dale Owen, *Threading My Way* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., 1874), 150.
[61] *Ibid*., 153.
[62] *Ibid*., 152.
[63] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 179.

country had more than enough "'Colleges and professional Seminaries,' for the exclusive benefit of the rich"; what it needed now were "national or state manual labor schools, that shall extend to every child of our Republic equal facilities to acquire all knowledge necessary and useful to man." Drawing on language that would have been familiar to any craftsman who had railed against capital concentration, "Plebian" maintained that "[t]he aristocracy and professional classes are opposed to [the manual labor system], because it would break down the most powerful and fatal of all monopolies, viz. that of scientific knowledge, which they possess."[64] Other craft organizations like the Philadelphia Working Men's Committee had already made similar connections between capital monopoly and professional gatekeeping when they complained that sums from "the public purse … have been appropriated exclusively for the benefit of the wealthy" in order to preserve "a monopoly of talent, which consigns the multitude to comparative ignorance, and secures the balance of knowledge on the side of the rich and the rulers." By offering education in exchange for labor power, which almost everyone possessed, and not in exchange for monopolized wealth, laborism would make knowledge "the common property of all classes."[65]

If Weld's proposal were put into practice, workingmen trusted that it would "scatter to the winds all [the upper classes'] 'nobility systems,' and reduce them, or rather … *elevate* them to the condition of being employed in some useful industry for a

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[64] "Equal Universal Education."
[65] "Report of the [Philadelphia] Working Men's Committee," *Working Man's Advocate* (Mar. 6, 1830), *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Vol. 5*, ed. John R. Commons, et al. (Cleveland, OH: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1910), 98-9.

livelihood."[66] The notion that laborite education could reverse the degradation of craft by improving artisans' minds and reducing the negative bias toward manual labor caught on quickly. When "[t]he sons of the indigent and of the wealthy meet together in the duties of the field, the gardens and the shop, and also in the labors of the study and the recitation rooms," announced the administrators of one laborite school, "[t]here is perfect equality." Where direct action and electoral campaigns had failed, laborism would succeed in "breaking down the aristocratical notion that manual labor is inconsistent with high literary attainment and refinement of manners."[67] Part of the operation involved rescuing those wasted intellects that had so unsettled Weld upon his arrival in New York. As one Connecticut craftsman lamented, "some … bright geniuses, through the want of proper education, and the misdirection of their talents, had become the curses of their age; whereas by proper culture they might and probably would have been its ornaments and greatest blessings."[68] Yet the cure also involved administering a dose of humility to the learned classes. One workingman wondered how "the sons of the rich, with the best means of education, but without the strength which results from bodily labor, [would] keep pace, in the business of struggles of this stirring age."

> Can they maintain a competition with men, who, during the whole intellectual training, have worked for health and appetite—have been content to drink water, and live on plain, perhaps coarse fare, and who before their daily meal, earn it by the labor of their own hands? And who by the same labor have opened to themselves the doors of public and scientific libraries, the halls of philosophy, and all the avenues of useful

[66] "Equal Universal Education."
[67] *Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees at Lafayette College* (Easton, PA: J.P. Hetrich, 1833), 6-7.
[68] *Connecticut Courant* 69, no. 3575 (Jul. 29, 1833), 1.

knowledge?[69]

In the supercharged class environment of the 1830s, such a statement of workingmen's superior physical strength carried a latent threat. Within months of Weld's report, nine New York trades had organized as the General Trades' Union; by the end of the following year, twenty more trades and more than eleven-thousand craftsmen had joined.[70] Similar organizations cropped up in six other Eastern cities, notably in Philadelphia, where the General Trades' Union grew into a behemoth of more than fifty member unions representing more than ten-thousand wage earners.[71] Businessmen were outgunned, as it were, in "the business of struggles" by a larger class of sturdier men. The workingmen who adopted laborism did so, in the end, as a gesture of good faith: an invitation for capitalists to either reduce class difference at the source by educating their children alongside the children of workers or else to take their chances against increasingly organized and militant adult craftsmen.

Independent Farmers and "the Good of the State"

In February 1833, Benjamin Matthias, a first-term state congressman in Pennsylvania who had been elected on a joint Whig-Workingmen ticket, brought the urban craftsman's case before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives' Committee on Education. A man "of full size" and of "intellectual … countenance," as Ralph Waldo Emerson once described him, Matthias was a natural laborite: brawny, clever, and averse

[69] *Connecticut Courant* 69, no. 3575 (Jul. 29, 1833), 2.
[70] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 220.
[71] Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 86-7.

to extremes. He opened his speech with a boiler-plate statement "[t]hat manual labor institutions tend to break down the distinctions between rich and poor which exist in society," thereby defusing the threat of class conflict. But he was mainly attracted to laborism's benefits to impoverished youths who, in his view, were inadequately prepared for republican citizenship. Matthias speculated that "pupils trained [at laborite schools] are much better fitted for active life, and better qualified to act as useful citizens, than when educated in any other mode." They exhibited unmatched "physical energy," excelled "intellectually and morally," and—not least—could be taught in public institutions for half the cost of sedentary students.[72] Although the universal education bill that Matthias endorsed narrowly failed, the Pennsylvania legislature did not dismiss laborism outright. It appointed a commission to establish a pilot manual labor school near the state capital of Harrisburg that could accommodate up to two-hundred penniless students and put Matthias's claims to the test.[73]

Two-hundred miles to the northeast, New York state legislators framed their appeals for state-sponsored laborism in less charitable terms. To them, laborism's most appealing quality was its benefit to the landed gentry, whose hereditary privileges had recently come under fire. A century earlier, Dutch colonists had snapped up large swaths of arable land in the New York backcountry and organized a manorial system of tenanted agricultural labor that proved to be one of the early republic's most enduring feudal

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[72] Benjamin Matthias, *Report of the Committee on Education, on the Subject of Manual Labor Academies, in Pursuance of a Resolution Passed by the House of Representatives, Dec. 14, 1832. Read in the House of Representatives, February 21, 1833* (Harrisburg, PA: Henry Welsh, 1833).
[73] James Pyle Wickersham, *A History of Education in Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, PA: Inquirer Publishing Co., 1886), 306.

institutions.[74] For much of the eighteenth century, this property regime was remarkably free of strife. The manorial system operated within a land-rich and labor-poor environment that enabled tenants to negotiate for decent pay and just treatment from the landlords. As one historian of the region has written, these "early years of accommodation and cooperation affirmed and validated the moral power and dignity associated with a free man's labor"; a tenant's hard work and savvy investment could reliably be counted on to raise him out of tenant status and win him a place among the independent yeomanry.[75]

As the demographic scales began to tip in the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, the relationship between labor and propertied independence became unclear and finally illegible. The encroaching market incentivized large-scale commercial production over subsistence farming, leading to a land grab and a rapid expansion in agricultural wage work. In-migration ramped up as the real-estate market contracted, leaving a swelling tenant class to compete for dwindling acres. To add salt to the wound, most of the available lands fell into the possession of one of the handful of manor lords who already controlled the majority of backcountry farmland, for they alone could afford to forego subsistence production and devote their newly acquired fields to profitable, single-crop commercial agriculture. One by one, tenant farmers and small producers

[74] Charles E. Brooks, *Frontier Settlement and the Market Revolution: The Holland Land Purchase* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), 4-5; Martin Bruegel, "Unrest: Manorial Society and the market in the Hudson Valley, 1780-1850)," *The Journal of American History* 82, no. 4 (Mar. 1996), 1393-5; Martin Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing: The Rise of a Market Society in the Hudson Valley, 1780-1860* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2002), 217, 225.
[75] Brooks, *Frontier Settlement and the Market Revolution*, 6.

became estranged from real property and the few families who had cornered it.[76] As their autonomy dwindled and their resentment grew, rural New Yorkers who felt that they had been denied the freedoms promised by the Revolution lashed out at a manorial system that had turned them into "slavish appendages" who were, as one renter snarled, "almost obliged to kneel at their [landlord's] footstool and lick the dust from their feet."[77] Landowning families watched in horror as their tenants "bound themselves by oaths to withhold the rents, to resist the sheriff, & to assert their rights with powder & Ball – they threaten violently," the account went on, "& the terms murder and bloodshed are frequently made use among them."[78]

Some landlords refused to acknowledge that the property regime had so completely deteriorated. They attributed the unrest to a disgruntled minority of tenants who had mistaken the excesses of a few decadent elites for the behavior of the entire gentry. "[I]n general," one landlord opined, "the people have no repugnance to electing the wealthiest and best educated" to political office. In the view of such optimistic proprietors, the solution was to alter the public perception that they "lived on their lands like English gentry" and "cultivated the mind" while foisting onto others the labor that paid for their leisure.[79] Laborism appeared to be a way to salvage the gentry's reputation by demonstrating that they could work as hard as any of their tenants. According to a

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[76] Brooks, *Frontier Settlement and the Market Revolution*, 6-8; Thomas S. Wermuth, "New York Farmers and the Market Revolution: Economic Behavior in the Mid-Hudson Valley, 1780-1830," *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 1 (Autumn 1998), 179, 192; Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 91, 124-5.
[77] Quoted in Bruegel, "Unrest," 1421.
[78] *Ibid.,* 1416.
[79] *Ibid*., 1412.

report submitted to the New York state legislature in April 1833, laborite education would form New Yorkers' "minds, their habits, and their tempers, to become the patrons of the noble monuments already erected"—and no monument teetered more than the manorial system.[80]

When New York landlords took up the mantle of laborism, they exposed how ideologically pliable it had become when it was detached from seminarians' specific concerns. In contrast with urban workingmen, it was often agricultural wage workers, not their employers, who advocated most vehemently for the free exchange of goods, labor, and land in rural areas. Contending with a manorial economy in which the flow of real estate was constrained by what one landlord called the "traditions and manners" of feudal inheritance, some landless farmers used instrumental market logic to undermine fixed social hierarchies by conceiving of land as a commodity.[81] When capital incentives threatened their status, landlords took up laborism as republican propaganda that portrayed them as defenders of a kin- and community-centered moral economy against the cold calculations of the marketplace. Through laborism's combination of classical training and agricultural education, they vowed to raise up a new generation of genteel farmers who would be capable of simultaneously "creating wealth," performing "the higher duties of civil life," and, as steadfast republicans, "promot[ing] [their] individual happiness and the good of the state." The legislative report gushed that "[t]he farmers of the state of New York are a class numerous, wealthy, industrious, patriotic, and, above all

[80] "Report of the Committee on the Memorial of the New York State Agricultural Society," *Workingman's Advocate* 4, no. 35 (Apr. 13, 1833), 4.
[81] Bruegel, *Farm, Shop, Landing*, 5-6, 225; Bruegel, "Unrest," 1398.

classes, from principle devoted our republican institutions."[82] Through an astonishing quick-change act, a feudal vestige had been dressed up as the last bastion of the yeoman republic.

The republican mask slipped here and there. The legislative report acknowledged that "law, divinity, and [medicine]"—popular professions for landlords' younger sons, who would be the first to lose out on an inheritance if the large estates were reallocated—"were overstocked" and could not readily absorb a displaced agrarian elite. Commercial enterprise was an unattractive alternative, as it was "laborious" and inconsistently yielded the kinds of profits that would satisfy a person who had been accustomed to "moderate fortune." But even such naked self-interest could be brought back under the republican veil. Tenants who wondered why generationally wealthy families should be first in line to attend laborite schools were reminded who had made such schools possible. "Who are they who have contributed so freely, so generously, to expenditures calculated to immortalize the state, and to establish its glory on so pure a foundation?" the report asked, and the answer was clear: "Mainly the farmers of our country, the yeomen of the land, the tillers of the soil."[83] If the state paid back genteel farmers in kind, it was only in keeping with the republican taboo against indebtedness and the dying tradition of local give and take. "[I]f it should be said that this would be a school only for the children of the opulent," the report conceded, "the unanswerable argument is, that it is the same in regard to our colleges, and must be so of necessity." Besides, wage workers could rest

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[82] "Report of the Committee on the Memorial of the New York State Agricultural Society," 4.
[83] *Ibid*., 131.

assured that the benefits would trickle down. With a stabilized gentry setting the tone for the state's less fortunate, New York would uplift her working poor and remain "first among her sisters in the Union," for "[a] good example is worth a world of mere speculation."[84]

New York's tenant farmers smelled a rat. The *Workingman's Advocate* denounced the proposed State Agricultural School as "an aristocratic production" that connived "to take money out of the state treasury … for the 'endowment' of colleges and other institutions, in the benefits of which none but the rich and least needful can participate." According to the editors, the state legislators who spoke on behalf of New York's landed gentry were coopting republic rhetoric to legitimize the manor lords' "stock jobbing" and real-estate monopolies. They pointed out that the assumption that families who were taxed more deserved more in return relied on a transactional model of citizenship that was fundamentally at odds with the republican principle of self-sacrifice. The gentry's disproportionate contributions to state institutions were appropriate consequences of their disproportionate wealth, the *Advocate* insisted—not "reasons why they should be told that they have not been *rewarded*, as if they wanted *more* than their rights." Echoing the workingmen's argument for universal free schools, the editors contended that a genuinely republican laborite school would provide equal educations for all students, "without reference to the number of dollars and cents, goods and chattels, or acres of land that the parents of each might be in possession of."[85]

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[84] "Report of the Committee on the Memorial of the New York State Agricultural Society," 4.
[85] *Ibid*.

In states and territories with less antiquated property regimes than New York's, well-to-do farmers' support for laborism was less obviously self-interested. Still, there were reasons to question the motives behind the gentry's sudden embrace of a system that, on its face, challenged their property and their wealth. In his 1833 annual address, Pennsylvania Governor George Wolf heralded "the popular and approved Fellenberg system of uniting labor and study" as the most economical model for a state-wide public school system.[86] Listeners were startled to hear such populist sentiments issue from the mouth of a public official, and they cheered the speech as "an energetic, and truly republican" statement that "exhibit[ed] in a brief, but lucid manner, the danger incident to a monopoly on intelligence."[87] Wolf's political base made his support of laborism all the more surprising. He was an openly anti-Jackson, pro-bank Democrat at a time when the National Bank—which had typically benefitted merchants and independent farmers, or those whom Wolf called "[t]he honest uncontaminated yeomanry"—was deeply unpopular among poor, rural Pennsylvanians, who blamed it for underwriting "a concentration of wealth [that] is immensely dangerous to our liberties."[88] When Wolf helped to usher through the landmark Free School Act of 1834, which extended state funding to any Pennsylvania county that established a public school, he insisted that the

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[86] George Wolf, "Governor's Message," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* XII, no. 24 (Dec. 14, 1833), 370.
[87] "To Parents," *Inciter* 1, no. 9 (Feb. 1836), 129.
[88] Wolf quoted in George Terry Madonna, "The Pennsylvania Jacksonians and the Bank War," unpublished dissertation (University of Delaware: Jun. 1975), 87. The anti-bank quotation is from *Republican Farmer* (Wilkes-Barre), May 2, 1832. Additional Democratic opposition to the National Bank can be found in *Erie Observer*, Jul. 28, Aug. 4, 1832; *Harrisburg Chronicle*, July 30, 1832; and *American Sentinel*, Jul. 31, 1832.

bill include language that specifically qualified laborite academies to receive state funds.[89]

Wolf's ploy did not pass unnoticed. Although Thaddeus Stevens—a newly elected state representative at the time of the bill's passage—found Wolf to be "guilty of many deep political sins," he collaborated with the governor to push the School Act through the legislature. Laborite rhetoric formed the backbone of his appeal. "Why," he asked, "are the colleges and literary institutions of Pennsylvania now, and ever have been, in a languishing and sickly condition?" The answer was obvious: the state lacked free schools where rich and poor alike would work for their education. "Thus devoting a portion of their time to acquiring the means of subsistence," he explained, "industrious habits are forced upon them, and their minds and bodies become disciplined to a regularity and energy which is seldom the lot of the rich."[90] Yet "The Great Commoner" also took time to chastise "[t]he industrious, thrifty, rich farmer," the kind who consistently voted for Wolf. Stevens reprimanded the wealthy farmer for his resistance to a bill that would benefit all Pennsylvanians and not merely his children, as the New York Agricultural School would.[91] "It is not wonderful," Stevens bitterly observed, "that he whose fat acres have descended to him from father to son in unbroken succession, should never have become familiar with misery, and therefore should never have sought for the

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[89] "Manual Labor Schools," *Plough-Boy* 3, no. 4 (Feb. 12, 1834), 25-6.
[90] Thaddeus Stevens, "On the School Law," delivered before the Pennsylvania House of Representatives on Apr. 11, 1835, *The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, Vol. 1: January 1814-March 1865* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 23.
[91] *Ibid*., 22.

surest means of alleviating it."[92] As in New York, Pennsylvania's major landowners were accused of pushing a transactional model of citizenship and, through a series of mental leaps, calling it republican.

On the western edge of the state, there were already manual labor colleges in operation that excused their elite clientele by suggesting that the masses would be improved by mere proximity to a laborite miracle. As Governor Wolf had done in his annual address, the trustees of Meadville's Allegheny College, the recipient of an eight-thousand dollar state grant, attacked the "anti-republican" intellectual monopoly that "confine[d] learning to [the] professions" and uniquely fitted "lawyers, doctors, and sometimes preachers" for political office.[93] It declared its intention to gather politically connected students, who "will make our pulpits, our forums, and our legislative halls resound with their powerful and persuasive eloquence," together with "farmers and mechanics," those "who are destined to be 'the bone and sinew' of our country."[94] Yet it was hard not to notice that "bone and sinew" comprised a minority at the college.[95] To make up for the absence of poor youths among the student body, the college permitted Pennsylvanian farmers who were not enrolled at the college to visit its fifty-acre model

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[92] Stevens, "On the School Law," 24.
[93] "Allegheny College," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* 12, no. 6 (Aug. 10, 1833), 134; *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College*, 13.
[94] *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College*, 7, 13.
[95] Between 1830 and 1840, roughly half of Allegheny College's thirty-two graduates were the sons of clergymen, military officers, or public officials, and three-quarters descended from families of considerable means. See *Allegheny College Alumni Register* (Meadville, PA: McCoy & Calvin, 1906).

farm and “notice the mode of its cultivation” for a fee of ten-dollars apiece.[96] There is no record of such spontaneous pilgrimages actually occurring.

Throughout the mid-Atlantic North, “fat acred” farmers employed laborism to justify their inherited wealth to a culture that “fairly deified labor,” as one early chronicler phrased it.[97] On average, the Allegheny College trustees reported, Americans gave “a greater share of credit to the young man who has genius and enterprise enough to work his way through a Literary Institution, than to one who depends entirely upon his friends for support.”[98] As Gordon Wood has noted, the republican ferment of the American Revolution had derided aristocratic leisure and treated manual labor as “a universal badge of honor.”[99] As they promoted schools where their sons would labor for a few hours each day, the gentry hoped that by proving that they *could* work, they would hide the fact that they rarely needed to.

Southern Laborites and the “Badge of Disgrace”

Like New York’s gentlemen farmers, some Southern planters recognized laborism’s potential to stabilize their unsettled regional economy. As Northern abolitionism gained momentum throughout the 1820s and ‘30s, some slaveholders in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina tried to avoid public rebuke by selling their

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[96] *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College*, 10
[97] David Demaree Banta, *History of Indiana University* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 1940), 106.
[98] *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College*, 14.
[99] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 278.

enslaved workers farther South and hiring white wage workers to take their place.[100] But a white proletariat was not forthcoming. Unlike their Northern counterparts, who could dress up poorly paying jobs by celebrating hard work as a "badge of honor," the Southern gentry was stymied by a deep cultural prejudice against manual labor. Proximity to enslaved laborers had cemented in the minds of many white workers an association between drudge work and the violence, dehumanization, and countless deprivations of slavery.[101] As early as the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the Virginian politician George Mason had observed that "[t]he poor despise labor when performed by slaves."[102] The Charleston Chamber of Commerce confirmed in 1826 that, "[f]rom the nature of our Society, menial occupations are necessarily confined to colored persons" and that "White men disdain and are unwilling to undertake them."[103] Rather than voluntarily subject themselves to what was widely understood to be loathsome, degrading work, some poor whites dropped out of the labor force entirely, preferring to lead a vagabond existence of hunting, fishing, and stealing what they could not forage.[104] Contrary to the suggestion that the republican lionization of labor was "universal" in the early nineteenth century, Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson reflected in 1864 that slavery had long made

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[100] Keri Leigh Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the American South* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2017), 3-4.
[101] L. Diane Barnes, *Artisan Workers in the Upper South: Petersburg, Virginia 1820-1865* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 2008), 8-9; Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 9-10, 23; Michael D. Thompson, *Working on the Dock of the Bay: Labor and Enterprise in an Antebellum Southern Port* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 3-4, 94-5.
[102] Quoted in James L. Huston, *Slavery, Property Rights, and the Economic Origins of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 19.
[103] Quoted in Thompson, *Working on the Dock of the Bay,* 94.
[104] Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 30; David Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy, and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South," *The Journal of Southern History* 79, no 4 (Nov. 2013), 799-840.

manual labor not a badge of honor but "a badge of disgrace," one that all but the most desperate or unfree Southerner avoided wearing.[105]

Laborism captured the attention of Southerners who wanted to enhance manual labor's reputation. It disentangled work from enslavement and reattached it to the republican ideal of voluntary, independent employment; it framed student industry not as an exchange of labor power for the means of subsistence or rock-bottom wages, but as an opportunity for intellectual improvement.[106] One contributor to a Virginia agricultural periodical neatly summarized the laborite revaluation of work when he regretted that the South had many schools "that profess to make agriculture a *practice*, but none that pretend to make it a *study*, a *paramount* study." Instead of opening more schools that merely peppered classical education with occasional gardening, the author called on Southerners to establish laborite academies that would "teach [farming] as a business." Only then would farming come to be regarded as a professional undertaking that was informed by expert knowledge and not as an unskilled task that was powered by brute force. "An agricultural school, like other professional schools," wrote the contributor, "should be devoted to a single object: It should be particularly a school for *farmers*."[107]

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[105] Wilson quoted in Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 44.
[106] On republican standards of free labor, see Barnes, *Artisan Workers in the Upper South*, 8-9; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford UP, 1970/1995), 11-8; Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor*, 11-6.
[107] "Agricultural School," *Farmer's Register* 1, no. 8 (Jan. 1834), 474-5. Emily Pawley has recently examined how nineteenth-century farmers armed themselves with scientific knowledge at agricultural schools in the North to resist the commodification of their labor and "[fight] for their own reputations and for the reputations of regions, machines, and organisms." See Pawley, *The Nature of the Future: Agriculture, Science, and Capitalism in the Antebellum North* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2020), 5-6.

The argument elegantly reframed manual labor not as punishment or evidence of inferiority, but as a form of personal and professional development.

Laborism also appealed to Southerners who recognized that the extravagance and indolence of the planter class had put their reputations at risk. Northern travelers in the South found planters to be "peculiarly hospitable," as one traveler recounted. Sumptuous meals prepared and presented by deep rosters of enslaved men and women were domestic rituals that communicated to guests key features of the Southern planter identity: the agricultural abundance produced by the slave system, the mythology of a noble "cavalier" ancestry that justified planter ascendancy, and the liberation from work that enabled the planter to cultivate what the daughter of one Mississippi slaver called "the customs and manners of the Old [World]."[108] Yet as abolitionists widened their influence, they presented planters' eating and drinking—not to mention their hyperbolic rates of gout and venereal disease—as symptoms of a decadent leisure class whose avoidance of socially valuable work left them susceptible to selfishness and cruelty.[109] In the words of one eighteenth-century Southern booster, the South contained everything that was necessary "to supply the wants or wantonness of man."[110] If the South of his day had

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[108] Quoted in Marcie Cohen Ferris, "Culinary Conversations of the Plantation South," *Writing in the Kitchen: Essays on Southern Literature and Foodways*, eds. David A. Davis and Tara Powell (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 29-33.
[109] Stanford M. Lyman, "Slavery and Sloth: A Study in Race and Morality," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1991), 51-3. Similar dynamics emerged in the British Caribbean – see Christer Petley, "Gluttony, excess, and the fall of the planter class in the British Caribbean," *Rethinking the Fall of the Planter Class*, ed. Christer Petley (New York: Routledge, 2017), 85-106; Trevor Burnard and Richard Follett, "Caribbean Slavery, British Anti-Slavery, and the Cultural Politics of Venereal Disease," *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 2 (2012), 427-51.
[110] Quoted in Lyman, "Slavery and Sloth," 52.

satisfied planters' wants, then the South that abolitionists described had become a den of wantonness.

Rumors of planters' excesses also produced rifts among white Southerners. In language that bore a striking resemblance to laborite tracts, one commentator bemoaned that "no common bond of sympathy or interest" united Southern whites. "On the contrary," he went on, "a sour, sullen suspicion on the one side, and a proud and haughty bearing on the other, are likely to widen the gulf between them."[111] Some historians have maintained that the antebellum South sustained an *herrenvolk* democracy that papered over class conflict and cultivated "a common racial bond for all southern whites" by extending basic rights and prerogatives as automatic rewards for whiteness. Given poor Southern whites' undisguised contempt and occasional violence toward planters, however, it seems more accurate to say that while racism could limit class consciousness between white workers and bound black workers, it did not produce a universal white identity that removed the friction between rich and poor.[112] Although class conflict between white Southerners would not reach its climax until the years immediately preceding the Civil War, there were already whispers of interracial class solidarity between poor white and enslaved black Southerners. As living conditions for the South's increasing population of landless, non-slaveholding whites declined, poor whites resorted to stealing from wealthy planters and illegally trading with slaves as black-market alternatives to wage work. Planters became progressively fearful that they would be

[111] Quoted in Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 19.
[112] L. Diane Barnes, *Artisan Workers in the Upper South*, 9.

caught in a two-front war against an anti-slavery North and an immiserated local population, and laborism became a popular strategy for fortifying white camaraderie.[113]

By inviting "all classes" of white Southerners to "mingle without distinction in their common labor," as one Georgia educator noted, laborism delivered what W.E.B. DuBois would later describe as a supplementary "public and psychological wage": a nonmonetary benefit that gave the illusion of racial unity by admitting poor whites youths into the company of planter heirs.[114] Laborism also demonstrated that planters were capable of performing the same work that they usually assigned to others. Just as "[w]e should scoff at the pretensions of a surgeon who had never studied anatomy," one Southern laborite explained, so should we learn to ridicule planters who had never participated in "the manly exercises of the field."[115] If, however, planters could show that they had, as schoolboys, planted a seed or harvested a crop, then they might qualify themselves to oversee those who worked all their lives.

Each of the South's major labor problems—its shortage of white wage workers, the planter class's reputation for performative leisure and practical incompetence, the simmering conflict between poor and landed whites—stemmed from the region's racialization and degradation of certain forms of work. To supporters of laborism, the key was to decouple labor from the slave economy by generating white-exclusive venues for physical exertion. Racially segregated laborite schools created low-cost opportunities for

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[113] Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 19, 30-1; Thompson, *Working on the Dock of the Bay*, 113.
[114] "Georgia Conference Manual Labor School," *American Annals of Education* (Dec. 1836), 572; W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction* 700-1.
[115] "Agricultural School," 474-5.

poor whites to obtain educations and to get used to seeing white people engaged in manual labor. In announcing the establishment of a handful of manual labor schools in Georgia, the *American Annals of Education* predicted that "[t]hese and similar institutions will do much … to remove the impression that white people cannot labor in the Southern States."[116] Segregated laborite schools would also provide the sons of the South's "wealthy citizens" a chance to cultivate "a habit of industry" "without exposing to imminent danger both their manners and morals" by "permit[ting] them to mingle with the blacks in the labors of the fields, under circumstances corrupting to both parties."[117] When Alvah Steele, a Yale seminarian who contributed a testimonial to Weld's report, launched a laborite academy in Camden City, Georgia, he proudly announced that "[s]everal very wealthy and respectable citizens have made application in behalf of their sons, with the special object of having them work."[118] Yet by removing labor from the economic realities of work in the antebellum South, laborism also guaranteed that the school years during which poor and rich whites worked together would not materially affect their social statuses. "The sons of the rich are here accustomed to industry without danger to their morals," summarized one Southern laborite, while "the sons of the poor are trained up in valuable knowledge, without learning to contemn [*sic*] the labors of the

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[116] "Education in Georgia," *American Annals of Education & Instruction* 3, no. 2 (Feb. 1833), 92. The schools in question were in Camden City, Athens, Eatonton, Clarke, Green, Liberty, and Darien. See also "Sketches of a Tour in the West and South," *Sunday School Journal & Advocate of Christian Education* 4, no. 15 (Apr. 9, 1834), 61; "Brief Sketch of a Manual Labor School," *Christian Advocate & Journal* 8, no. 21 (Jan. 17, 1834), 81.
[117] "Brief Sketch of a Manual Labor School," 81.
[118] "Education in Georgia," 92.

field or the workshop."[119] At manual labor academies, wealthy students could work without becoming workers, and poor students could have their manners and morals elevated without receiving a ticket for upward mobility.

Ironically, it was apologists of slavery who had readied the ground for the adoption of laborism in the South when they theorized the mental, moral, and physical benefits that hard labor bestowed on enslaved workers. The Louisiana-based physician Samuel A. Cartwright, a one-time protégé of Benjamin Rush, summarized a half-century of Southern mythmaking when he argued in 1851 that labor, "by making the slothful negro take active exercise, puts into active play the lungs, through whose agency the vitalized blood is sent to the brain to give liberty to the mind and to open the door to intellectual improvement."[120] If labor could be disentangled from slavery at laborite schools, then the same benefits might accrue to the criminal poor and the idle rich. "Here," confessed one Southerner, "we most need the aid of some reformation which will arouse the indolent, invigorate the feeble, and enable the indigent to get an education by their own exertions."[121]

By providing opportunities for white Southerners to enjoy the salubrious effects of manual labor and build cross-class sympathy outside of a labor market that no longer clearly distinguished between white and black, free and unfree laborers, laborism could be made into a crucible for white Southern solidarity. Northern abolitionists like the Hudson Garrisonians had speculated that social hierarchy would be annihilated when

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[119] "Brief Sketch of a Manual Labor School," 81.
[120] Quoted in Lyman, "Slavery and Sloth," 51.
[121] "Brief Sketch of a Manual Labor School," 81.

people worked side-by-side and came to view one another as equals. They could not have imagined that their brightest dreams would be used to prop up a unified white identity and reinforce racial subjugation in the South.

Abolition, Colonization, and "the Place of [Black] Attachments"

Inconsistencies in laborism abounded, but in the North, abolitionists continued to shape the movement. At its 1833 annual meeting, the New England Anti-Slavery Society announced its intention to establish an all-black National Manual Labor School. There, black Americans would enjoy access to privileges that were usually reserved for affluent whites: just pay, safe working conditions, and professional training—particularly for black educators who intended to launch laborite institutions of their own. According to the proposed school's constitution, it would "promote the virtuous and guarded education of the free colored youth in the United States, … form in them habits of industry, economy, and morality, as well as … extend to them the benefits of literature and science."[122] Just as Southern planters had seized on laborism to create work opportunities outside of a market economy that did not favor their interests, the Anti-Slavery Society imagined that laborite schools would allow black people to work without enduring the exploitation and servitude that they endured in the open market.

The Anti-Slavery Society had already raised five-thousand dollars toward the establishment of the school, but its fundraising efforts soon ran up against racial enmity.

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[122] "Manual Labor School for Colored Youth," *Genius of Universal Emancipation* 3, no. 4 (Feb. 1833), 56.

“Prejudice shuts up the bowels of compassion of many of our wealthiest citizens, in regard to these unfortunate and deeply injured people,” grumbled the Society’s president, Arnold Buffum.[123] Weeks earlier, William Lloyd Garrison had announced that the “principal object” of his first fundraising tour of England would be to procure a fifty-thousand-dollar nest egg for the National Manual Labor School.[124] He maintained “that nothing short of an improved system of education, the benefits whereof may be diffused through the entire community, can ever place [black Americans] in that rank of society to which they are justly entitled.”[125] Garrison envisioned a school where “the child of the poorest parents may be sent” to “happily combine labor and study together, and thus be healthy in body as well as intelligent in mind.”[126] Within months of his arrival in England, however, he found that laborism did not breed the same enthusiasm in a nation where the ideal of genteel leisure had not been displaced by a republican stress on hard work. To the contrary, a number of nineteenth-century British educators proposed bringing rich and poor together in shared leisure activities, not in common work, in order to build national fellow-feeling and reduce social conflict.[127] With laborism a non-starter among the English, Garrison abandoned his original fundraising goals and focused his energies toward defending immediate abolition against gradualists who advised a slower

[123] Arnold Buffum to the *Liberator* 3, no. 1 (Mar. 30, 1833), 49.
[124] “Important Mission,” *Liberator* 3, no. 10 (Mar. 9, 1833), 39.
[125] William Lloyd Garrison, "Proposals for establishing a school on the manual labor system, for the education of colored youth" (1833).
[126] William Lloyd Garrison, “Address before the Free People of Color” (New York, 1833), 20.
[127] Hugh Cunningham, *Time, Work and Leisure: Life Changes in England since 1700* (Manchester, UK: Manchester UP, 2014), 84-8.

dismantling of slavery. By August, his reports from England no longer mentioned manual labor.[128]

The National Manual Labor School more steadily won converts among the North's free black communities. Freedmen's organizations in New York City and Newark threw their support behind the plan, and in June, the third National Colored Convention raised the proposal to the top of its agenda.[129] On June 8, a committee that had been appointed at the previous year's convention to investigate laborism's potential now took the floor to stump for the Anti-Slavery Society's school.[130] The laborites in attendance were determined to put behind them the debacle of the "New Haven Excitement," an attempted black laborite school in Connecticut that, two years earlier, had been been violently opposed by a white mob. The laborites now doubled down on their commitment to launch an academy in collaboration with the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Not yet aware of Garrison's failures to secure donations, they took hope from his presence in England and happily reported that similar fundraising efforts were ongoing in Pennsylvania and New York. With initiatives to build a donor network well underway, the committee suggested that "there [was] reason to believe that [the National

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[128] Garrison's Aug. 17, 1833, letter to Nathaniel Paul, included in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Vol. I*, ed. Walter M. Merrill (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1971), 261-6.
[129] "Meeting of the People of Color in the City of New-York," *Liberator* 3, no. 19 (May 11, 1833), 74; "A Voice from Newark," 3, no. 19 (May 11, 1833), 74.
[130] Committee members were Charles Mortimer, Henry Ogden, George W. Thompson, Matthew Draper, Mason Freeman, Abner H. Francis, and William D. Jenkins, as reported in the *Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in these United States, held by adjournments in the City of Philadelphia* (New York, 1833), 14.

Manual Labor School would] shortly be carried into operation."[131] Abraham Shadd, a veteran Underground Railroad conductor, delivered the convention's keynote address, in which he reflected that, "in the vindication of the natural, civil, and political rights of the coloured people," the manual labor academy now "occup[ied] a distinguished place in the feelings and affections of our people."[132] Shadd's position that laborism "vindicated" rights rather than conferring them was consistent with the Hudson Garrisonian assumption of natural, universal equality, an assumption that distinguished the abolitionist conception of laborism from even the Workingmen's version, which demanded education for craftsmen's children on the condition that those children were not yet fitted for citizenship. Unlike paternalistic pedagogies that presupposed students' learned or innate inferiority and provided knowledge and skills to reduce the deficit, the abolitionist conception of laborism did not set out to uplift black youths. Abolitionist laborism took equality as an axiomatic assumption, and it sought to create educational and other institutional settings in which that equality could finally be realized.[133]

Beyond Shadd and the handful of committed laborites in attendance, however, the majority of conventioneers were less committed to laborism's philosophical foundations than they were impressed by its expediency. By reducing the cost of education, the laborite model stood the best chance of making free, universal schooling a reality for black Americans. Education attracted a great deal of attention at the Colored Conventions

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[131] *Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention*, 14, 29.
[132] *Ibid*., 34.
[133] Jelani M. Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm: How Black Colleges Fostered Generations of Leadership and Activism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 23.

for the same reason that it had attracted the attention of those Southern slavers who had criminalized black literacy. Both the conventioneers and the slavers whom they detested appreciated that political agency depended, in large part, on one's ability to articulate one's interests and to coordinate with others who shared those interests.[134] "[W]e must, in fact, become our own representatives in presenting our own claims," Martin Delany later urged, for only black activists could be counted on to consistently advocate for black rights.[135] Conventioneers also stressed that black educational attainment would challenge the prejudice that black Americans were insufficiently rational to assume the responsibilities of republican citizenship. "As it is reason that distinguished man from the brute creation," reflected one delegate to New York's regional convention; "it is evident, that in proportion as reason is cultivated and improved, the distance is increased between man and brute."[136] While some genteel laborites were attempting to get back in touch with the "*natural* and *spontaneous* action" of their "animal power," many attendees of the Colored Conventions saw laborism as a means to securing political efficacy and demonstrating black humanity.[137]

On the heels of the National Colored Convention in Philadelphia, a letter began circulating that warned abolitionists of how news of the proposed black manual labor

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[134] See Christopher Hager, *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2013), 31. For more on Southern anti-literacy statutes and their motivations, see Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991); Hager, *Word by Word*, 31-53; and Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7-29.
[135] Martin R. Delany to Frederick Douglass, quoted in Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm*, 22.
[136] "Meeting of the People of Color in the City of New-York," 74.
[137] "Review of the Report of the Manual Labor Academy of Pennsylvania," 368-70.

school had been received in the South. The letter intimated that those living "south of the Potomac" had become convinced "that a northern combination is forming to interfere with the system of slavery, in such a manner as to endanger the peace and safety of those sections of the country where it exists." At the center of the suspected "combination" was the National Manual Labor School and the relative financial independence that it would provide to freedmen. With "hard words and unkind actions," the letter explained, laborites had misled black Americans to believe that they could achieve degrees of material wealth and personal cultivation that would make them the equals of their white countrymen. To those who were convinced of the fixed, biological inferiority of black people, such promises were cruel jokes that succeeded only in "exasperate[ing] the colored people" and "increas[ing] the jealousy between them and the whites." Such a school, the letter concluded, "would be placing the colored people connected with it under an influence injurious to themselves, dangerous to their brethren at the south, and destructive to the harmony of the nation."[138]

The letter was the work of Cyril Pearl, a Connecticuter who had travelled extensively in the South as an agent of the American Colonization Society (ACS). Founded in 1816, the ACS codified a position on slavery and race that had existed in some form since the colonial period, a position that regarded interracial strife as "an immutable law of nature or an inviolable decree of God," as one recent historian has characterized the movement's ethos.[139] Nat Turner's 1831 slave rebellion had breathed

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[138] Cyril Pearl, "Slavery," *Religious Intelligencer* 18, no. 5 (Jun. 29, 1833), 78-9.
[139] Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008), 21-2.

new life into the colonization movement, as it seemed to confirm what colonizationists had long argued: that violence and conflict were intractable features of a multiracial society.[140] The "specter of social breakdown" had also contributed to the ACS's resurgent popularity. Routinely denied access to education and economic opportunity, the nation's growing free black population sometimes survived through extralegal and criminal activities. When these underground economies were expanded to include trade with the South's "dead peasantry" of poor whites, the prospect of an interracial and class-conscious proletariat became too much for some whites to bear, and even major planters began to wonder whether gradual abolition and colonization was the only long-term alternative to all-out race war.[141] Although fear of slave revolts and worker uprisings led many colonizationists to regard the slave system as a time bomb that would have to be carefully dismantled, the ACS's vision for America after slavery diverged sharply from the abolitionist dream of a multiracial, egalitarian republic.[142] Colonizationists tied black liberation to black emigration; to them, eliminating slavery was merely a step toward eliminating black people from the United States.[143] To that end, the ACS had established the West African colony of Liberia in 1822, and agents like Pearl worked to recruit black candidates for emigration, as well as to convince trepidatious planters that now was the

[140] Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, 19, 24; Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York UP, 2011), 4.
[141] Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents*, 4; Merritt, *Masterless Men*, 29-30.
[142] Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, 23-4; Tomek, *Colonization and its Discontents*, 4-6.
[143] Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, 1.

time to begin reducing their slaveholdings.[144] In Pearl's eyes, the establishment of a National Manual Labor School would lead planters to close their ears to any talk of slavery's end.

Yet more resourceful colonizationists than Pearl recognized that laborism could be tailored into shapes that better suited their purposes. They argued that, if Liberia and other colonies were to be successful, then their settlers would have to be trained in agricultural techniques, mechanical skills, and other subsistence knowledges prior to colonization. As the United States' free black population grew, the spectacle of black poverty deepened colonizationists' fixation on the "degraded condition" of the black community and inspired uplift efforts that included education.[145] The flagging institutional health of the ACS at the time of Weld's report indicates other possible motivations for the ACS's endorsement of laborism. Resettlement was a costly undertaking, and the ACS's debt burden was beginning to limit its ability to settle black Americans in Liberia.[146] By some calculations, laborism could cut the costs of providing such an education by up to half. Also hampering the ACS's ability to carry out its mission was its wretched reputation among black people. Although colonization had always faced skepticism from the black community, it could hardly compete with a newly ascendant abolitionist movement that did not make freedom conditional on

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[144] Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, 16-19; Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York UP, 2014), 16.
[145] Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents*, 12.
[146] Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Institution*, 24-5.

intercontinental migration.[147] By taking up laborism, colonizationists hoped to extend an olive branch to a black population that was hungry for educational opportunities.

In April 1833, Chester Wright, the secretary of the Vermont Colonization Society, stated his intention to open a manual labor school in Montpelier. Abolitionists condemned the plan as an attempt to siphon support away from the Anti-Slavery Society's National Manual Labor School, though they doubted how successful a colonizationist would be in winning the favor of black people, among whom Wright's "principles and measures … are held in utter abhorrence." The colonizationist "cannot serve two masters," read a typical abolitionist response; "and while he is leagued with slaveholders in prosecuting a plan for banishing the free people of color from their native land, he must not think it strange if only a small number can be induced to place themselves under his influence."[148] Wright brushed off the prediction, but his abolitionist rivals proved to be right; his school folded for lack of enrollment and funding before it had even broken ground.[149] When the future abolitionist Gerrit Smith, then a major financial backer of the ACS, proposed opening a manual labor school in Peterboro, New York, the following year, he drew similar accusations of distorting laborism in order to advance the "atrocious conspiracy" that united colonizationists with slaveholders in the pursuit of a future white ethnostate.[150]

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[147] Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution*, 16-9; Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 2-3.
[148] "Meeting of Colored People," *Liberator* 3, no. 15 (Apr. 13, 1833), 59.
[149] Chester Wright to the *Liberator* 3, no. 18 (May 4, 1833), 71.
[150] "A Question," *Liberator* 4, no. 7 (Feb. 15, 1834), 27.

In late May, as competition between the New England Anti-Slavery Society and the American Colonization Society came to a head, organizers staged a public debate between the Hudson Garrisonian and abolitionist Elizur Wright and R.S. Finley of the Colonization Society. New Englanders crowded into Boston's Park Street Church on two successive evenings to hear the men tangle over the viability of forging a multiracial nation where racialized slavery was currently in full force. Leaving aside the usual abolitionist charges that colonization was a bait-and-switch scheme orchestrated by slaveholders, Wright questioned how the virtuous self-sufficiency that laborism revered would fare when it was dropped into a colonial setting. Even such a noble undertaking as the Puritan settlement of the Massachusetts Bay had strayed from its godly mission and succumbed to a material greed that "had resulted only in the extermination of the poor Indians," Wright exclaimed. If it followed the same course, the ACS's outpost in Liberia was destined to become "a commercial, not agricultural colony"—a colony that would abandon its stated goal of black independence and end up engaging in resource extraction and the subjugation of the local population. In his rebuttal, Finley pointed to the Colonization Society's success in establishing manual labor schools as evidence that its primary commitment was to the education and improvement of the formerly enslaved—not, as Wright had charged, to the long-term stability of the Southern economy. By Finley's estimation, in fact, the Colonization Society had far outpaced the Anti-Slavery Society in the sheer number of black Americans that it had educated. The ACS had sponsored manual labor schools across the South, and one of its vice presidents, a successful planter, had adopted the laborite model in order to "educat[e] all his two

hundred Slaves, with a view to emigration."[151] How laborism on a plantation was not simply slavery with the occasional reading assignment, Finley could not say.

Laborism could also be manipulated to advance colonizationists' missionary ambitions. The ACS entertained the fantasy of a semi-autonomous black utopia in Liberia—a city on a hill in its own right that, once completed, would broadcast a Christian ethic across Africa. "There is not in the wide world a field that promises to the sincere efforts of a Christian community a richer harvest," reported the missionary Melville B. Cox on his visit to the Liberian capital of Monrovia. From Cox's account, it is clear that colonizationists interpreted the laborite project to reunite mind and body as a way of paying back intergenerational debts. Through its captured and enslaved people, Africa "has toiled for our comfort," Cox wrote; "she has borne a galling yoke for our ease and indulgence; she has driven our plough, has tilled our soil, and gathered our harvests, while our children have lived in ease, and been educated with the fruits thereof." A race of people had been reduced to mechanical implements, and Cox suggested that their generations of unremunerated bodily labor now be repaid through free education. "If she has given to us 'carnal things,'" he asked, "can we do less than return her intellectual and spiritual things?" As the laborite schools operating in Liberia at Millsburg, Monrovia, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, and Sego testified, colonizationists believed that the time had come to pay back in mind what Africa had furnished in labor power.[152]

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[151] "Colonization Debate," *Colonizationist & Journal of Freedom* (Jun. 1833), 81-9.
[152] "Latest from Liberia," *African Repository & Colonial Journal* 9, no. 8 (Oct. 1833), 241-53.

Colonizationism was widely denounced by black Americans and white abolitionists as a plot to reduce free black competition to white labor, to eliminate the possibility that slave insurrections would draw support from the free black middle class, and to dilute the popularity of abolitionism.[153] Arnold Buffum dismissed colonization as "wholly a scheme of slaveholders, designed only to drain the country of its free colored population."[154] Intimately tied to the abolitionist conception of laborism was a sense of rootedness, a bond between person and place, that was at odds not only with the dislocating labor market, but also with the Colonization Society's segregationist brand of globalism. As James Loughhead, a Pittsburgh delegate to the inaugural convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society, testified, "efforts to educate the colored man *on the spot*, in the place of his attachments and interests were beginning to be generously put forth" and should be roundly endorsed.[155] Attendees at the National Colored Convention resolved that "those who may be obliged to exchange a cultivated region for a howling wilderness" should forget about Liberia and instead turn westward: "to retire back into the western wilds, and fell the *native forests of America*, where the *plough-share* of prejudice has as yet been unable to penetrate the soil—and where they can dwell in peaceful retirement, under their own vine and under their own fig tree."[156] Broadly speaking, colonizationists operated according to the same assumption that animated slavers and capitalists: that workers, especially those of African descent, were infinitely

[153] Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 2, 10-3.
[154] Buffum to the *Liberator*, 49.
[155] "Anti-Slavery Convention," *Liberator* 3, no. 52 (Dec. 27, 1833), 206.
[156] *Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention*, 27-8.

movable goods that could be shuttled from continent to continent, city to city, industry to industry, as markets demanded. In the hands of black abolitionists, laborism stood for an alternative economic relationship in which free black Americans would neither be property nor have their labor traded as property, but in which they could stake their claim to the lands that their labor had so profoundly improved.

Conclusion

Theodore Weld's report opened laborism's floodgates and sent it rushing out across the country. Between the report's publication in January 1833 and the end of that year, nearly a dozen new laborite academies commenced operations, with many more under development. State legislatures in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania heard testimony in favor of tax-funded laborite schools, and teachers' organizations in Georgia and Alabama readily threw their support behind the system.[157] The Georgia Teachers' Society issued an especially passionate endorsement. "No subject relating to the general, and highest interest of our nation," the Society resolved, "has more completely secured public feeling, and public confidence, than the principle of *self-education* and *self-support*, as the foundation of literary institutions."[158] Laborites scored

[157] "Massachusetts Legislature," *Zion's Herald* 5, no. 8 (Feb. 19, 1834), 3; "Report of the Committee on the Memorial of the New York State Agricultural Society," 4; "Report on Manual Labor Academies," *Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania* 11, no. 19 (May 11, 1833), 1; "Education in Georgia," 92; "Manual Labor Colleges," *Maine Farmer & Journal of the Useful Arts* 2, no. 34 (Sep. 5, 1834), 5.
[158] *County Lyceums; designed to promote Manual Labor Schools and the General Advancement of Education* (Savannah: 1833), 3-6.

another major victory in the fall, when the Methodist Episcopal Church, the most extensive single denomination in the United States, endorsed the system with the confidence that it would "form vigorous minds, exerting that power in vigorous bodies."[159] Within a few months, Methodists were running the co-educational Troy Conference Academy on the manual labor system in the foothills of Vermont's Green Mountains, and they would continue to expand their laborite portfolio in subsequent years.[160]

While laborism's surge in popularity indicated its broad appeal, it also drew out how closely the movement remained tied to the experiences and objectives of learned Americans. For the graduate clergy who had originated the movement, schooling was the only conceivable foundation of political and economic agency. It was to learning that they had sacrificed their time and health, and it was to learning that they had pegged their aspirations for elevated social status and economic security. Class, as they understood it, was largely a function of knowledge, and their class status had only been imperiled when the value of their knowledge had been called into question. When applied to the broader American social order, however, the reduction of class to education lost its purchase. Genteel farmers, colonizationists, and slavers recognized in laborism a strategy for derailing class conflict by using equal educational access to blur lines between employers

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[159] Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," *Church History* 63, no. 2 (June 1994), 178; Ben Wright, *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2013), 55; "Manual Labor Schools," *American Annals of Education and Instruction* 3, no. 10 (Oct. 1833), 488.
[160] "Troy Conference Seminary & Wesleyan University," *Christian Advocate & Journal* 8, no. 8 (Oct. 18, 1833), 1.

and employees, professionals and laborers, owners and owned, rich and poor. Elites who donned "a working dress" for a few years at a laborite school could claim that youthful memories of toiling alongside working people had rendered them lifelong workers.[161] "The student is now like other men," wrote one of laborism's admirers; he "breathes the same air, tastes the same food, and enjoys the same undisturbed slumbers, as the rest of the busy moving throng around him." By a similar logic, enabling laboring-class youths to wear "a genteel dress" while trading work for schooling at a laborite college was regarded as a sufficient springboard to upward mobility.[162] In both cases, the transient experience of roughing it or hobnobbing for a few years of schooling was admitted as evidence that economic determinism had been averted and social fluidity restored.

The shortcomings of this glib reduction of class to education were most evident to those who lived on the fringes of the labor market: the underclass who subsisted at the lowest socioeconomic rung. No matter how freely laborites like Theodore Weld flitted between the classes and the masses, those who were most cemented to their social positions came to recognize that laborism's vision of social fluidity and a nationwide "identity of interests" was, for most Americans, a dubious fiction.[163] When laborite colleges became unable to fulfill their barest obligation to education laboring-class students, a reckoning was at hand.

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[161] Weld, *First annual report*, 64.
[162] "Manual Labor Schools," *New England Farmer & Horticultural Journal*, 11.
[163] Weld, *First annual report*, 64.

Chapter 4: "All Such Expectations Must End in Disappointment"

The Laborite Retreat from Class

At the peak of laborism's celebrity, some spectators predicted "that the popularity of manual labor schools" would soon be "on the wane." One critic observed that, among those who wished to see Americans improve their health, intellects, and social mobility, there remained "a lurking scepticism respecting the practicability of the thing."[1] Even sympathetic onlookers like Amos Eton, a cofounder of New York's Rensselaer School and an advocate of universal education and agricultural training, could find little evidence that "the laboring plan of education … ever did, or ever will succeed."[2] Laborism's detractors cited a host of reasons for suspecting that the movement's swift expansion had formed a bubble that was soon to burst. Some of them dusted off the timeworn notion that mental and manual capacities were fundamentally incompatible and could not be proportionately cultivated in the same person. Others maintained that the market economy's division of manual and mental labor was merely the most efficient way to administer a workforce in which talents were unevenly distributed. Still others noted that most sedentary thinkers and impoverished youths—those who stood to benefit the most from physical exercise and tuition subsidies—lived in large towns and cities, where arable land was too scarce and too costly to accommodate large, school-affiliated farms.[3]

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[1] "Manual Labor Schools," *American Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (Aug. 1833), 31.
[2] "Manual Labor Schools," *Plough-Boy* 3, no. 4 (Feb. 12, 1834), 30.
[3] "Manual Labor Schools," *American Quarterly*, 32-3; "Agricultural School," *Farmer's Register* 1, no. 8 (Jan. 1834), 474-5; "Rural Embellishments at Literary Institutions," *Plough-Boy* 3, no. 6 (Feb. 26, 1834), 47-8; X., "Manual Labor System," *Harvardiana* no. 1 (Sep. 1, 1834), 5-9; *Connecticut Courant* 69, no. 3575 (Jul. 29, 1833).

The most potent explanations acknowledged that laborite schools were, above all, experiments in an alternative economy. These schools' most characteristic feature was neither their fusion of mental and manual training nor their integration of farms and workshops into the academic landscape. Throughout the nineteenth century, similar innovations would appear at romantic and technical schools that were clearly outside the movement and sometimes opposed to it. What distinguished the manual labor academy was its internal system of exchange: in return for work, it doled out learning—particularly the learned ability to influence political and economic life. Laborism's success or failure hinged on that internal economy's capacity to perform as advertised. From this point of view, its future looked bleak. There was a latent contradiction in its funding structure that, time and again, drained colleges' cash flows. The typical laborite school was a low-cost seller with bloated overheads and little means for improving its rate of return. Students who arrived expecting to allay most or all of their expenses by their labor were disheartened to learn that there was rarely enough work to go around. Poor returns on amateurish student products and operational costs that were unique to the laborite predicament also limited students' earning potential. Onto the ordinary farm's recurring expenses of maintaining barns, stables, livestock, and equipment, laborite schools piled dormitories, dining halls, classroom buildings, and faculty payroll. Many of them also erected mechanics' shops on their grounds and bore the cost of shuttling manufactured goods from their rural campuses to distant urban markets that were already flush with higher-quality, more locally produced commodities.[4]

[4] "Report of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions," *Educator* no. 1 (Jan. 14, 1839), 121-3.

While Weld and his supporters trumpeted laborism's victory, the average student at a laborite college remained liable for between one-fourth and one-half of the usual cost of a higher education—an outstanding annual debt of $60 to $120 that was not easily settled by cash-strapped youths.[5] A few colleges provided sufficient work opportunities and adequate pay to subsidize their students' educations. But these manual labor programs generally operated at a loss and purchased their short-term success on credit. Within a few years, most of them collapsed under the mountainous debts that they incurred by paying students more than the returns on their labor. Those colleges that survived often found it necessary to walk back their funding guarantees and to begin requiring partial tuition payments from their students.[6] In the decade following the publication of Weld's report in 1833, nearly one-half of the country's manual labor programs permanently closed, having operated, on average, for fewer than five years. "[M]any regard the manual labor system as a very lucrative concern," warned the board of one imperiled school in 1833. "All such expectations must end in disappointment."[7]

Whether laborism could have been brought out of the red and shaped into a viable business model must be left to speculation. By and large, laborites did not acknowledge or amend the program's unsustainability. Nor did they sustain their efforts to kick-start an

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[5] *American Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (May 1, 1833), 273-333.
[6] For example, Lafayette College's manual labor program folded in 1839, seven years after its implementation. The Wake Forest Institute scuttled its manual labor option in 1837, after a five-year run, as did the Fellenberg Manual Labor Institution in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. See "La Fayette College, Easton, Pa.," *American Annals of Education & Instruction* 3, no. 2 (Feb. 1833), 91-2; David Xavier Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin, A Historical Biography* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1871), 91-2, 140-5; "Fellenberg School," *Pittsfield Sun* 33, no. 1698 (Apr. 4, 1833); Amicus, "Wake Forest Institute," *The North-Carolina Standard* (Apr. 18, 1838), 172.
[7] *South Hanover College and Indiana Theological Seminary*, 14.

alternative economy in which education, political agency, and economic opportunity would be available to all who were willing to work. Leading laborites hedged and narrowed their movement's goals until they encompassed little more than the reforms in manners, morals, and aesthetics that laborism had already proven itself capable of achieving. Although productive labor remained at the center of the movement's ideological universe, laborites increasingly saw work as a moral rather than remunerative activity. "Too great *pecuniary* advantage has been expected from [manual labor schools]," suggested one of laborism's defenders. The system's less tangible benefits—the intellectual and spiritual payouts of physical exertion, or the sense of fellowship that was strengthened through cooperative industry—these pneumatic rewards had been unfairly ignored. It was only through an undue fixation on the "pecuniary" that laborism could be written off as a failed system.[8] Restoring laborism's reputation therefore became a matter of reorienting it toward something other than money.

With fading confidence that these ostensibly "self-supporting schools" could resist or subdue market forces to which they remained so nakedly vulnerable, laborites pivoted to treat ideology, not economics, as the wedge that produced social conflict.[9] One

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[8] Manual Labor Schools," *American Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (Aug. 1833), 32.
[9] References to laborism as the "self-supporting system" abound in laborite literature, particularly in the years immediately surrounding Weld's report. See, for instance, "Mental and Manual Labour United," *American Sunday School Magazine* 7, no. 1 (Jan. 1830), 17; "The Manual Labor System," *Journal of Humanity & Herald of the American Temperance Society* 3, no. 45 (Mar. 29, 1832), 177; "Self-Supporting Schools," *Episcopal Watchman* 5, no. 47 (Apr. 3, 1832), 187; "Manual Labor System," *Episcopal Watchman* 5, no. 48 (Apr. 10, 1832), 192; "Manual Labor System," *Co-Operator* 1, no. 4 (Apr. 17, 1832), 21-2; "Manual Labor School," *Plough-Boy* 2, no. 23 (Dec. 25, 1833), 179; "Manual Labor School," *Mechanics' Magazine & Register of Inventions & Improvements* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1834), 11; "Manual Labor School," *Liberator* 4, no. 29 (July 19, 1834), 113.

by one, they concluded that it was poor manners and mores that had kept workers down and set them at odds with the more educated and moneyed classes. This refiguring of the class problem altered the relationship of the learned class *vis-à-vis* the owning and laboring classes. As the previous two chapters have explored, conceptualizing social discord as an economic dispute required the unproductive, economically neutered learned class to ally with those who wielded direct influence on productive processes: first, the frontier's independent small producers; and second, a more variegated, regionalized assortment of workingmen, landowners, planters, and freedmen. Recasting class as a moral category shifted authority back into learned hands. Upon the completion of a national network of laborite colleges, the previously established clergy would begin to assert itself as an autonomous moral establishment that would restore equilibrium to the American republic by setting new ground rules for economic and social interaction. In short, the laborite retreat from economic reform into moralism was overdetermined. It leveraged laborism's institutional footholds to evade accusations of financial mismanagement and ideological opportunism while reasserting the primacy of credentialed moral authorities in setting the norms of social intercourse. In isolation, any one of these factors—laborism's rapid infrastructural expansion, the unsustainability of its financial model, the mutual incompatibility of its regional alliances, and the persistent learned-class interest in reclaiming intellectual autonomy—might have been enough to compel a retreat from economics to morality. Taken together, these catalysts of change were irresistible.

To be sure, the movement's leaders rarely conceded that they had revised their diagnosis of social unrest. Laborites could still be found in 1840 who were determined to "narrow down the distance between the learned and laboring classes."[10] But they had quietly relocated that distance from the world of things to the realm of ideas. No longer did class differentiation have to do with what one laborite had described in 1830 as "a monopoly of talent" and learning that "place[d] knowledge, the chief element of power, in the hands of the privileged few."[11] By 1840, the "*main* cause" of conflict had been redefined as a "total dissimilarity in habits and mode of life" between rich and poor, educated and uneducated. This was a source of friction that the embryonic moral establishment could oil with adjustments to laboring people's manners, prejudices, tastes, and values—a thoroughgoing moral cleansing that could "[excite] a feeling of mutual interest" between classes without actually expanding access to knowledge or wealth.[12]

Lafayette College and the Pursuit of "Union in the Truth"

Before laborism could be reoriented away from the dismantling of class and toward the standardization of morals across classes, it was sometimes necessary to clear away the old guard. After resigning his post at Hamilton College to open a manual labor academy in Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1829, John Monteith served as the school's principal for less than a year when he confessed to its trustees that it was nearly bankrupt.

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[10] "Report of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions," 122-3.
[11] "Public Education," *Workingman's Advocate* 1, no. 19 (Mar. 6, 1830).
[12] "Report of Manual Labor in Literary Institutions," 122-3.

Determined to prove that students could fully defray their educational expenses with manual labor, he had paid his pupils a fixed hourly wage instead of the variable profit share that students received at most manual labor schools. Returns on student products were too low to meet expenses, however, and for months, the school had operated at a loss.[13] With the academy on the brink of closure, Monteith submitted his resignation, and the school's trustees appointed the Reverend George Junkin as his replacement.

Junkin had arrived at laborism through the same personal, informal channels as many of its earliest endorsers. The sixth child of a Pennsylvanian farming family, he had been a classmate of Monteith's at Jefferson College before undertaking seminary training in New York and finally returning to Pennsylvania as an ordained Presbyterian minister.[14] Throughout his career, Junkin was preoccupied with what he would later label "the Question of Time." People were fundamentally social beings, he proposed, and the most essential precondition of sociability was the segmentation and organization of units of time when cooperative activities occurred. In worship and in work—the two most elemental social behaviors, in Junkin's view—"[t]he operators must begin, and continue and cease at the same time." Without agreed-upon intervals of praise and production, humanity would regress into a primal state: organized religion would fragment into the anarchy of individual spirituality, and industry would grind to a halt. At its core, civilization was an elaborate scheduling system, and different social orders could be

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[13] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 142-4.

[14] *Ibid.,* 17. Jefferson College would later adopt laborism but not until fifteen years after Monteith's and Junkin's departures. See Joseph Smith, *History of Jefferson College: Including an Account of the Early "Log-Cabin" Schools, and the Canonsburg Academy* (Pittsburgh, PA: J.T. Shryock, 1857), 126-7.

distinguished from one another by what they prioritized in "the *cutting* up of time into *sections*." Profane societies were those that privileged economic activities over religious observance, requiring unrelenting productivity and "crush[ing] out all knowledge of the holy day." Moral societies, on the other hand, subordinated commercial interests to "religious principle." The vital Question of Time, as Junkin posed it, was how to allocate a society's days and hours such that necessary work could be completed without swallowing up restful moments of worship. Throughout his career as a publisher, an educator, and a leading Sabbatarian who advocated for the mandatory, nationwide observance of the Sabbath, Junkin racked his mind for the solution to a single problem: "Can *time* be clothed with moral purity?"[15]

Junkin tested a few possible answers to the Question of Time before settling on laborism. In January 1828, he launched the *Religious Farmer*, a bimonthly publication that sprinkled brief homilies among reports on soil conditions and scientific agriculture in a bid to lure eastern Pennsylvanian farmers into the church.[16] Concerned that farmers' daily chores were distracting them from their faith, Junkin also used the *Religious Farmer* to challenge the rural bias against domestic manufacturing. In its pages, he contended that with industry would come labor-saving technologies that would free up time for worship. Manufacturing operations would also people the countryside with thousands of factory workers, creating a local and "most sure market" for farmers'

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[15] George Junkin, *Sabbatismos; a Discussion and Defense of the Lord's Day of Sacred Rest* (Philadelphia, 1866), 108, 34-7, 13, 36, 9.
[16] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 111-2.

produce and eliminating the need to waste precious hours transporting goods to distant urban buyers.[17]

Junkin drew moral purity more tightly around work when he was called to a Germantown pulpit in 1830. Shortly after his arrival, he purchased a farm on the edge of town and erected a carpentry shop where he employed local boys in making cradles, chairs, and other simple woodcrafts. While the boys sawed and joined, Junkin entreated them with impromptu sermons and excerpts from scripture. He had come to believe that the boundary between religious and mundane activities was more porous than he had once recognized, and he no longer scheduled them separately. He reminded his wards that, by working, they were walking in the footsteps of Jesus—once another young carpenter whose work can hardly be said to have interfered with his piety. Junkin was evidently pleased with the results of his experiment, and laborism soon "got possession of [his] mind" as a way of scaling up the model.[18] When he was asked to assume the presidency of Monteith's nearby Germantown academy, he agreed without hesitation.

Yet when the extent of the academy's financial troubles became clear to him, it seemed that, in this peculiar case, the religious impulse to educate the poor had impinged

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[17] Richard W. Pointer, "Philadelphia Presbyterians, Capitalism, and the Morality of Economic Success," in *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford UP, 2001), 175. Laborites and other defenders of agrarian virtue did not always oppose improved farming implements and horticultural science as rationalistic incursions on "traditional" rural values, as has sometimes been supposed. On the contrary, many agricultural reformers like Junkin appreciated that improved technology was essential to the preservation of a productive life in which the pursuit of profit was not allowed to impair the exercise of virtue. For recent challenges to the romantic view that farmers were simple pastoralists who rejected scientific and technical improvements, see Pawley, *The Nature of the Future*, 5-6, 19; and Ariel Ron, *Grassroots Leviathan: Agricultural Reform and the Rural North in the Slaveholding Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2020), 2-4, 15-6.
[18] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 112.

too much on the workaday need to turn a profit. In addition to Monteith's underfunded commitment to paying students a flat rate for their labor, the college's location also cut into its earnings. At once, the academy was too close to Philadelphia and too far from it. The city was home to the nearest dealers in tools, building supplies, and those raw materials that could not be sourced on the college grounds. Monteith had paid dearly for these supplies: he bought his "staples of subsistence" at city prices and transported them to the college across the heavily tolled turnpike. Once students had transformed those raw materials into salable goods, the finished products had to be returned to Philadelphia by the same turnpike and subjected to the same tolls. Back in the city, the academy's wares were marked up to cover expenses and forced to compete with commodities for sale by urban craftsmen, who reliably offered higher-quality products at lower prices.[19]

Junkin reported these findings to the academy's trustees shortly after his installation as president, and he urged them to relocate the college to either an urban or a rural setting—anywhere but the costly limbo that it presently occupied. Although his proposal was favorably received, a sectarian schism weakened Junkin's leverage before he could set his plan in motion. Unlike most prominent laborites before him, Junkin was an "Old Schooler"—a theological traditionalist who defended the orthodox Calvinist doctrine of natural depravity and spiritual helplessness against the "New School" position that free will was a necessary, if insufficient, catalyst of conversion. New School revivalists contended that sinners could choose to do good or evil—that human beings were not fully compelled by their nature or by the structure of society to sin but instead

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[19] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 143-4; "La Fayette College, Easton, Pa.," 91-2.

could be held responsible for their actions. To Junkin, this was a gross exaggeration of human capacity and a capitulation to a profane market culture that rewarded self-starting workers and valorized the self-made man.[20] Junkin countered that it was such an indulgence of "self-will," not its suppression, that was "the enemy of all that is good."[21] Dismissive of the New School suggestion that virtue and vice were matters of choice, he maintained that individual actions were predetermined, "compelled by the … fatal necessity of [one's] nature."[22] As an Old Schooler who believed that a person's natural impulse toward impiety could only be restrained by a strictly regimented code of conduct, Junkin's reform strategy was to deemphasize free will and to regulate the behavior of the masses through a kind of righteous time management.

There was a class dimension to the controversy between the Old and New Schools, and it informed Junkin's efforts to craft a moralistic laborism. Rejecting the New School idea that every person was equally capable of self-discipline, Old Schoolers like Junkin tended to prefer top-down methods of social control. Whereas a New Schooler might encourage workers to find it within themselves to abstain from liquor, Junkin recommended that employers set an example of "rigid temperance" and fire any employees who succumbed to drink. Similarly, many New Schoolers regarded poverty as

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[20] Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 114-9; Bradley J. Longfield, *Presbyterians and American Culture: A History* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 94; Pointer, "Philadelphia Presbyterians," 172-7.
[21] George Junkin, *Two Addresses Delivered at Oxford, Ohio, on the Occasion of the Inauguration of Rev. Geo. Junkin, D.D., as President of Miami University* (Cincinnati, OH: Western Church Press, 1841), 27.
[22] George Junkin, *The Vindication, Containing a History of the Trial of the Rev. Albert Barnes* (Philadelphia: W.S. Martin, 1836), xvii.

an obstacle to conversion, a source of temptation to steal and swindle, and a bridle on the free will of individuals who might otherwise choose a straighter path. Old Schoolers, on the other hand, treated economic disparity as an inextricable part of the naturally hierarchical social order in which the less fortunate had best defer to their betters.[23] At best, reducing this disparity would leave untouched the graver rift between the regenerate and the unregenerate. At worst, it would arm sinners with the means to exercise their misdirected wills on American society.

As a case in point, Junkin attributed the schism between the Old and New Schools to the elevation of the poor and uneducated above their station. The Presbyterian church had been unsettled, he contended, by "the rash and hasty admission of men into her ministry," among them "illiterate men, and men ill grounded in the great doctrines of the Confession." Such interlopers, he believed, had rationalized their rapid ascent from the social margins to religious authority by introducing the self-affirming doctrine of voluntary regeneration.[24] Atonement and the possibility of salvation, once reserved for the predestined elect, was extended by New Schoolers to include reprobates. Securing salvation became partially the responsibility of the unsaved, who through the exercise of free will could suppress their depravity and choose to behave morally.[25] New-School thought had shaped the work programs at many laborite colleges, where social status was regarded as a mutable state and poor students were invited to improve their situations through self-effort. Junkin reintroduced Old-School determinism to the mix. While he

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[23] Pointer, "Philadelphia Presbyterians," 177-8.
[24] Junkin, *The Vindication*, 145.
[25] *Dorrien*, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 114-22.

strategized to keep the Germantown school afloat, he did not share Monteith's commitment to paying students for their labor or otherwise helping them change their social position. It was laborism's structured harmony of work and worship, not its hypothetical benefits to individuals, that Junkin dedicated himself to preserving.

Junkin concentrated his frustrations with the New School on Albert Barnes, an up-and-coming, reform-minded minister who had accepted a Philadelphia pulpit in 1830. As one of the major complainants in Barnes's heresy trial of 1830-31, Junkin accused the young minister of teaching "that [people] are voluntary agents in the commission of sin."[26] Barnes's accusers quarreled with his belief that the unregenerate were able to act in accordance with divine law without having to be wrangled into compliance by their spiritual superiors.[27] Junkin's case against Barnes was brought before the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1831, but it crumbled when New Schoolers rallied to elect their ally Nathan Beman to moderate the trial. Barnes was exonerated, and Junkin was, for the moment, cowed. Sensing that the presence of a prominent Old Schooler might depress enrollment numbers—for New Schoolers like Beman had always been popular among young laborites like Theodore Weld—the Germantown Academy's trustees scrapped Junkin's plan to relocate the school and opened a search to replace him as principal.[28]

Having been outflanked in the Philadelphia Presbytery, Junkin left Germantown in 1832 to assume the presidency of Lafayette College, an upstart school in the village of

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[26] Pointer, "Philadelphia Presbyterians," 172-3; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 302-3; Junkin, *The Vindication*, xvii.
[27] Junkin, *The Vindication*, 39.
[28] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 144; Noll, *America's God*, 303.

Easton, located fifty miles north of Philadelphia. Although it had been chartered for six years, Lafayette was a college in name only. Its constitution avowed that it would be a non-sectarian institution, but this commitment to doctrinal neutrality had cost the college the denominational support that had subsidized other fledgling religious schools. At the time of Junkin's arrival, Lafayette had failed to procure an endowment, a campus, students, or professors. Junkin accepted the post on the condition that he could eliminate one of the school's few existing features; military drill, he insisted, would have to be replaced by manual labor. Many of the Germantown academy's students evidently saw the same signs of decline as Junkin had documented, and a majority of them, as well as a portion of Germantown's faculty, followed Junkin to Easton and went to work constructing dormitory and classroom buildings.[29] Resolving to banish from his students' minds "the un-American idea, that labor is dishonorable," Junkin toiled alongside them to set frames, till fields, and midwife Lafayette College into being.[30]

Stirring as it must have been to glimpse the imperious cleric sweating side by side with his students, no democratic display could hide the fact that Junkin oversaw Lafayette with almost unchecked authority. "[E]very good school is a monarchy," Junkin would later opine, and at exemplary institutions, presidents approximated kings.[31] His purpose at Lafayatte was not to redistribute intellectual or economic agency outright but to regulate access to it. Junkin sought to make his students worthy of taking command of their own economic and spiritual lives by instilling in them a system of regulating beliefs and

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[29] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 149-51, 156; "La Fayette College, Easton, Pa.," 91-2.
[30] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 162.
[31] Junkin, *Two Addresses*, 26.

morals. Such programming would guarantee that, if the poor were ever granted access to the mechanisms of power, their expressions of economic or political will would remain within acceptable bounds.

Junkin fancied that the spirit of the Commonwealth cried out for his moral stewardship: "Take these," the spirit of Pennsylvania pleaded, "my orphan boys, sons of noble sires, tho' not born to princely fortunes—take them under your care." Some among the poor had "powers worth cultivating," but they had blemishes on their characters, too. "[D]raw out every good quality," the Commonwealth directed, but "repress every evil disposition: fit them by such evolution of intellect and heart, for … high and responsible stations."[32] Junkin had already watched as one institution dear to him, the Presbyterian church, was brought low, and his career was derailed by what he judged to have been "the rash and hasty admission" of unqualified men like Albert Barnes to positions of influence. Under his guidance, Lafayette would ensure that it did not happen again.

In his second annual report to the college trustees, Junkin committed Lafayette to the task of making higher education universally affordable. Yet he immediately qualified its mission, admitting that the college had only rarely provided students with the three daily hours of work that they had been promised upon admission. As a result, working students were only able to offset up to one-fourth of their overall expenses, resulting in many of them placing their educations on hold to work or abandoning their degrees altogether.[33] This was not a failure of the institution, as Junkin understood it, for the

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[32] *Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees at Lafayette College*, 4-5.
[33] *Ibid*.

college's "main business [was] not to produce," much less offer a leg up to producers.[34] Even as Junkin mouthed laborite dreams of "opening the halls of science to those in the middle and lower walks of life" and "throw[ing] open the door of competition in the learned professions," he explained that Lafayette's primary responsibility was to instill not economic opportunity but "[v]irtue in the mass of the people." He regarded moral rectitude, not wealth or occupation, as "the basis" of public life and the main determinant of social status. "Let religion, intelligence and virtue pass away from the body of the people," he wrote, "and the walls of the temple of our freedom … must crumble to the ground."[35]

Lest his readers come away with the impression that Lafayette's emphasis on moral cultivation distracted from the cultivation of its crops, Junkin pointed out that improved character and fecund fields went hand in hand. "[W]e invite the public, and especially the strong armed yeomanry of the country … to examine" the college's fields, he proposed. "If there be an error let it be pointed out. If not, then come;—seize with a firm and manly grasp, the La Fayette Plough; drive a deep furrow; let the virgin soil, which has slept for ages in darkness, see the sun." Resolving the Question of Time in favor of religious observance did not necessarily mean neglecting economic enterprise. Moving beyond the usual laborite assertion that mental and manual labor were compatible and complimentary, Junkin implied that academic training was a prerequisite for a successful agricultural operation. However "strong armed" local farmers might have

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[34] Junkin, *The Reverend George Junkin*, 152.
[35] *Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees at Lafayette College*, 5.

been, Easton's fields nonetheless remained untilled "virgin soil." If Junkin was to be believed, only scholar-farmers who had bathed in the light of reason could make Easton's dirt finally "see the sun."[36]

Almost without fail, Junkin invoked economic tensions between the laboring and learned classes only to reframe them as moral discrepancies. He regretted that manual laborers were generally denigrated, even though "[t]he humble agency of the wash-woman is … as necessary as the signature of the Governor to an important bill" and "the patient labor of the wood-cutter as indispensable as the sedentary, care-worn toils and spirit-exhausting vigils of the professor." The solution, however, lay not in better compensation for the wash-woman or wood-cutter, but in the cultivation of a shared moral sensibility and "mutual understanding" with politicians and professors.[37] In an 1835 tract on Fellenberg's Hofwyl, Junkin identified "the peculiar principle of Manual Labour Colleges" with the belief that health-preserving physical industry could be put "to *profitable use*" and reduce educational costs. And yet his elaboration on the theme focused almost entirely on the moral dividends of the laborite model, barely touching on budgetary concerns:

> Instead of putting a youth to the ignoble service of beating the air, we put a hammer into his hand and teach him "to hit the nail on the head[.]" [I]nstead of allowing him to shake the dice box, we instruct him in the art of shaking the saw. Instead of idly strolling over the fields, we teach him to turn up their soil with the plough, the spade, the hoe, and extract from the bosom of mother earth nourishment of his own.[38]

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[36] *Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees at Lafayette College*, 9.
[37] George Junkin, *Two Addresses*, 25.
[38] George Junkin, *Fellenberg, or An Appeal to the Friends of Education on Behalf of Lafayette College* (Easton, PA: J.P. Hetrich, 1835), 139.

By Junkin's account, the only "pecuniary loss" that laborism needed to address was the money pit of educating men for "the learned professions" who were not physically fit enough to perform their jobs. For all other workers, there was "no arithmetic by which the amount can appear on the leger, or the details be spread on the pages of the journal" to quantify laborism's benefit. As long as the laboring-class student expected that his efforts would bring him material gains, he was bound to be disappointed. Only a moral math that counted profits in numbers of souls rescued could measure the movement's worth.

In March of 1835, as he was entering his third year as president of Lafayette, Junkin renewed his effort to remove Albert Barnes from his Philadelphia pulpit. With little warning, he entered fresh charges of heresy against Barnes, but this time, he penned a letter to the accused explaining his hostility toward the New School. He bore no ill will toward Barnes or his followers, Junkin clarified. "The object" of the heresy charges, he wrote, "is peace through union in the truth."[39] It was a phrase that he would repeat often in letters and in his testimony against Barnes at the 1836 General Assembly, and it captured his final diagnosis of the cause of social discord. Junkin's peace consisted in a moral consensus, decided by a small assembly of the spiritually excellent and imposed on society, by way of colleges, as a standard of behavior that was less important to understand than to obey. "No difficulty can well arise where the end is plainly pointed out, the means specifically arranged, and all concerned perfectly acquiesce in their

[39] Junkin, *The Vindication*, iv.

application," he reflected.[40] The Question of Time had only one answer. Junkin, like the laborite moralizers who would come after him, seized on manual labor colleges as the way to disseminate it.

Oberlin College and the Reformation of "Wolfish Men"

When John Monteith was forced to resign the Germantown academy's presidency, he, like so many laborites, sought renewal in the West. Upon learning of his old associate's dismissal, Theodore Dwight Weld encouraged Monteith to expand laborism's presence in the frontier by founding an outpost in Ohio's Western Reserve region. The next year, Monteith opened a manual labor high school in Elyria, twenty-five miles west of Cleveland. The school would distinguish itself as a laborite hothouse by training future movement leaders including James H. Fairchild, a professor and eventual president of Oberlin College; and his brother, Edward Henry Fairchild, a long-serving principal of Oberlin and, later, president of Berea College. Monteith's Elyria school does not appear to have been the financial morass that his Germantown academy had been, and certain expenditures suggest that both the high school and a number of its students enjoyed considerable wealth. Its year-end examinations were conducted with fanfare and accompanied by a live band at the Elyria courthouse. Students were "not expected" to wear fine suits or "expensive white dresses" to the proceedings—but neither was it

[40] Junkin, *Two Addresses*, 27.

uncommon to catch sight of a young laborite clad in black silk or in “French calico, costing fifty cents a yard.”[41]

Elyria was an inauspicious colony in a sparsely populated county on the stony shore of Lake Erie, but it was soon to host a second formative laborite school. In late 1832, the Reverend John Jay Shipherd announced his intention to open a manual labor college near Elyria that would retain to the area graduates of Monteith’s high school like the Fairchilds while also attracting promising students from the East. The school’s mission was standard laborite fare: Shipherd intended to produce more ministers to match the rate of population expansion in the West; to encourage the church to repent from its pomp and circumstance and be “restored to gospel simplicity & devotion”; to simplify minsters’ habits by whisking students away from the artificial attractions of urban markets; and to promulgate a “*Practical* Theology” that joined religious precepts with physical labor in the pursuit of “muscular, mental & moral vigor.”[42] Yet Shipherd’s ambitions extended well beyond those of many of his predecessors. The earliest laborites had pledged to defend the frontier’s homegrown republicanism against the incursions of the market, but Shipherd had come to believe that there was little Western virtue that was worth preserving. He found Elyrians to be too indifferent to organized religion to revitalize the church, too business-savvy to curtail the market, and too personally ambitious to offset the rapacious consumption of eastern urbanites. Like George Junkin, Shipherd wielded his college not primarily as a tool to democratize education, reign in

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[41] Mary Beebe Hall, *Reminisces of Elyria, Ohio* (Elyria, OH: Lorain County Historical Society, 1900), 33.
[42] Shipherd, quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 89-90.

church elites, or prepare hardy ministers for frontier pulpits. It served him as an institutional cudgel with which he could force the surrounding community into compliance with the college's stringent moral code.

Although Shipherd never indulged in the same degree of metaphysical speculation as Junkin, he was similarly vexed by the Question of Time. After his promising clerical career was cut short by chronic sedentary disease, Shipherd had groped about for a steady job. His father purchased a marble factory for his son to operate in Vegennes, Vermont, but Shipherd quickly proved to be a guileless businessman. His thoughts were preoccupied with matters of salvation, and marble production struck him as a tedious, demeaning affair. "My mind now necessarily be employed in planning machinery etc. and cannot be employed at the same time in serious contemplation," he lamented to his brother in 1824. "I have reason to fear that through strict attention to my business which requires the closest attention *now*, I shall neglect my soul & my Savior."[43] Under his distracted care, the factory became insolvent within a few years. Shipherd seized the opportunity to dedicate himself to godlier ends, and he launched into reform activity on the assumption that Vermont's workers were as neglectful of their souls as were one-time factory owners like himself. Throughout the late 1820s, he established charity Sabbath schools across Vermont to promote religious observance among the state's laboring-class children. In 1830, he moved to bring not just children but the entire national economy

[43] Shipherd, quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 61.

under the church's mantle by campaigning for the nationwide suspension of work on the holy day.[44]

Sabbatarianism attracted the support of laborites like George Junkin, John Jay Shipherd, Lyman Beecher, and Lewis Tappan because it enlisted the coercive power of the government to enforce an appropriate distribution of time between labor and piety in a period when market values were broadly ascendant.[45] Yet, in the short term, Sabbatarianism appeared to answer a question that no one had yet asked. Legislated Sabbath observance would have parceled off a weekly block of time for the cessation of work and the contemplation of the gospel, but the market was hardly poised to swallow up the holy day. Prior to the Civil War, only a small minority of workers, consisting mostly of farmers and enslaved black people in the South, regularly labored on Sundays. But Sabbatarians predicted that commercial actors had left Sunday untouched not out of respect for "religious principle," as Junkin had put it, but merely because the other days of the week were more easily designated for work, since no preexisting cultural tradition reserved them as days of rest. Eventually, Sabbatarians supposed, business would come for the holy day as well. They hoped that by mandating greater Sabbath observance in the present, they might avert its perversion in the future.[46] Sabbatarianism was, in this regard, more a preventative measure than it was a cure.

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[44] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 73.

[45] On early nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism's core principles, see Tim Verhoeven, "In Defense of Civil and Religious Liberty: Anti-Sabbatarianism in the United States before the Civil War," *Church History* 82, no. 2 (June 2013), 294.

[46] Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2000), 12-3.

Immediate concerns were also at play. Lyman Beecher had once lauded defenders of the Sabbath as a "moral militia" that would stand by to "repel every encroachment upon the liberties and morals of the State."[47] Beecher's portrayal of religious reformers as guardians of a morally vulnerable government pointed to another major driver of Sabbatarianism: the fear that disestablishment had unmoored the political state from a stable spiritual foundation. Now that religious controls could no longer be enforced through traditional politics, some clergymen attempted to forge new backchannels between church and state, replacing legal establishment with what one historian has called a "moral establishment" that would install Christian authorities as unofficial arbiters of public policy.[48] From the perspective of the aspiring moral establishment, it was immaterial that a minority of workers actually violated the Sabbath. Sabbatarianism was designed not to alter or disrupt productive relations but to visibly subordinate them to a higher law. Such a conspicuous affirmation of religion's primacy would confirm that the clergy continued to hold sway over public life while also demonstrating the church's compatibility with the rational calculations of the market. After all, the market had its own Question of Time, one that it answered with public clocks, pocket watches, and

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[47] Lyman Beecher, "The Practicality of Suppressing Vice by Means of Societies Instituted for that Purpose" (1803), 27; McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday*, 12, 23.

[48] David Sehat, *The Myth of American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 5, 8, 287; Verhoeven, "In Defense of Civil and Religious Liberty," 294. Robert Abzug has linked the formation of an extra-legal network of religious reforms to the doctrine of "higher law," which brought national politics under the government of God: "Reform," Abzug has written, "was nothing if not a system of moral law created to augment and at times supersede the laws of the state." Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford UP, 1994), 52.

penalties for tardiness.[49] Sectioning off a day for rest and recovery was fully consistent with commercial enterprises' efforts to supplant the casual rhythms of craft production with standardized, enforceable work hours. Far from being an anti-market ideology, Sabbatarianism served to reconcile the ongoing routinization of work with the clerical ambition to clothe time with moral purity.

In the summer of 1832, the reform circuit carried Shipherd to Elyria. His early impressions of the town were mixed, at best. In letters home, he praised the verdure of the region, commending its fertile meadows, its limpid well water, and its temperate climate. In a particularly effusive moment, he rattled off the tree species that timbered Ohio's forests: chestnut, oak, white pine, hickory, maple, and beech. Here, it seemed, was a restorative landscape that furnished all the resources, space, and labor power that were needed to rededicate the nation to moral ends. But earthly paradise was not without its antagonists. A few wolves were known to stalk the area, though Shipherd comforted his mother that they had never been known to attack a person. "Wolfish men are much more to be dreaded," he explained, and everywhere he looked in Elyria, he found men to be wolfish. "Our moral condition is deplorable."[50]

The county hosted only one ordained minister besides Shipherd and Monteith, and the resident laity was lax in its churchgoing and disinclined to pay to bring additional clergymen from the East. Shipherd regularly rode across thirty miles of hard country to preach before mostly empty pews. When an audience did materialize, it was often bitterly

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[49] Sellers, *The Market Revolution*, 152-4; Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 3-5.
[50] Quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 76.

opposed to his message of moral reform. His temperance advocacy, in particular, attracted Ohioans' animosity. After one six-day stint of preaching in Huron County, Shipherd wrote to his brother that he had survived "one of the hardest fought battles between the powers of light & darkness that I ever witnessed, and," he concluded, "poor I was obliged to stand at the forefront." Twice the people of Huron County had dry-fired muskets outside the meeting house in hopes of scaring off Shipherd and his fellow teetotalers. When bluster failed to intimidate the ministers, locals had loaded their muskets with shot and blown the latch off the meeting-house door—an invitation to leave, if there had ever been one.[51] As his profile as a moral reformer grew in Elyria, Shipherd's ability to secure conversions dipped. Soon there was "a state of feeling towards [him], which so curtailed [his] usefulness" that he asked his backers at the Presbyterian Society of Elyria if "had better retire" than continue his fool's errand to Christianize the backwoods. The bracing frontier that was meant to reinvigorate his spirit had drained him of his purpose. Instead of starting a new life, Shipherd struggled to raise his "drooping spirit in this valley of dry bones."[52]

Like others before him, Shipherd became convinced that more systematic efforts were required, "or a millennium will never cheer our benighted world." At his invitation, his childhood friend, the mechanic and inventor Philo Stewart, joined him in Elyria. Together, they devised a strategy for sanctifying the "valley of dry bones"—although Stewart, less the poet, preferred to simply call it the "Valley of Moral Death." In autumn

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[51] Quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 81.
[52] *Ibid*., 84, 78.

1832, Shipherd and Stewart sketched their plan for a covenanted colony and adjoining academy that would combine seminary education with a daily dose of farm and workshop labor, a simple diet, and plain dress. Mindful that his brief turn in commercial industry had been an unmitigated disaster, Shipherd intended to "plant … mechanics" like Stewart around the school from whom students "may learn trades while gathering their education."[53] Shipherd spent the following spring touring the manual labor academies of the East, soliciting funds, gathering faculty and staff, and ingratiating himself with leading laborites. He met with Oneida's former president, George Washington Gale; with the editor of the *Annals of Education*; and with several Andover instructors. In New York, Shipherd recruited a carpenter, mechanic, and other skilled craftsmen that he could "plant" around his college. On his return trip to Elyria, he stopped in Cleveland, where he contracted Charles G. Finney's brother-in-law to build a sawmill that was meant to jumpstart the college's economy.[54]

In September 1833, Shipherd and Stewart announced their plans to the public. Shipherd and Stewart named their colony and school Oberlin, after the recently deceased Alsatian educator J.F. Oberlin, with whom they evidently felt some kinship. As a young man in 1767, Oberlin had been called not to the "Valley of Dry Bones" or "Moral Death" but to the *Steinthal*—the "Valley of Stone"—where he was tasked with improving the lot of peasants who were reportedly "still far from a state of complete civilization." According to the account of Oberlin's life that Shipherd and Stewart received, the

[53] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 86, 88-90.
[54] *Ibid*., 97-8, 108, 117.

inhabitants of the *Steinthal* had been practically prehistoric: squatting in caves, living off wild potatoes, and having no money, masons, blacksmiths, bridges, domesticated animals, or agriculture. "By his well-directed labour they flourished rapidly," recounted one glowing eulogy of Oberlin, "and in the place of poverty and misery, the villages and their inhabitants assumed an air of rural happiness."[55] By invoking Oberlin's name in Elyria, Shipherd and Stewart committed themselves to a civilizing mission to bring the Western Reserve up to speed with contemporary society's most reformist elements.

The first thirty-four students arrived in the middle of December and immediately went to work chopping wood, casting skillets, and milking cows. Enrollment increased steadily, exceeding one hundred fifty by 1837 and two hundred by 1838.[56] The most encouraging early development at Oberlin came when the fifty-three "Lane Rebels," led by Theodore Weld, selected the college as their new base of operations in late 1834.[57] Weld and the Rebels were, in most respects, New Schoolers who just months earlier might have denounced Shipherd's model of top-down moral reform as an elitist check on popular religion. But the setbacks that they had endured at Lane—the local community's outbreaks of anti-abolitionist mob violence and the faculty's stonewalling of the Rebel's antislavery agenda—had convinced them that the bulk of Americans were not yet prepared to choose righteousness. By the time that they arrived at Oberlin, the Lane Rebels were animated by what one historian has called "a latter-day Puritan

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[55] *The Life of John Frederic Oberlin, Pastor of Waldbach, in the Ban de la Roche* (Philadelphia: American Sunday School Union, 1830), 7, 27-33.
[56] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 508.
[57] Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 183; Harriet Martineau, *The Martyr Age of the United States of America* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan & Co.), vi.

determination to moralize the public"—a willingness to strong-arm the laboring class into compliance that made the Rebels amenable to Shipherd's paternalism.[58]

In preparation for the Rebels' arrival, Shipherd and the Reverend Asa Mahan, the only Lane trustee to depart in solidarity with the Rebels, travelled to Cincinnati to offer Charles G. Finney a position at Oberlin. Finney had observed Lane's failure with interest, and he agreed to join Oberlin's faculty on two conditions: first, that Shipherd promised not to interfere with the internal operations of the college as Lyman Beecher had in suppressing calls from Lane's faculty to bring slavery to debate; and second, that students of color should be admitted on the same terms as white students.[59] By 1836, Finney was installed as director of Oberlin's First Church and president of the college's school of theology, and Mahan had been appointed college president. Although the college struggled to build accommodations in time for the Rebels' arrival, the combined presence of Finney and the Weldites convinced many evangelicals and radical reformers that Oberlin was the manual labor experiment to watch.[60]

Social frictions roiled Oberlin from the start. A few youths who could not afford a traditional higher education enrolled, but the majority of Oberlin's students were scions of influential families. Like other affluent youths who gravitated toward manual labor schools, these students "sympathize[d] with the Oppressed" but were often disconcerted by them.[61] One Yale seminarian who transferred to Oberlin in 1836 reported that his

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[58] Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 119.
[59] Finney, *Autobiography*, 333; Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology*, 183.
[60] Finney, *Autobiography*, 337
[61] Silas R. Badeau to R.E. Gillett, Feb. 6, 1837, quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 514-5.

rustic classmates were a bit "coarse & green" for his liking—"but," he allowed, they were nonetheless "noble, good hearted, [and] pious." If nothing else, they were "far different from those at New Haven." John Morgan, Oberlin's professor of biblical literature, marveled that the inhabitants of Elyria were "genuine Yankees of the best class of plain farmers" and that their sons who enrolled at Oberlin, "though many of them are crude, are a fine set of young men."[62] Yet such ambivalent remarks failed to capture the undercurrent of class snobbery that plagued the college. One Easterner admired the stamina and strength of his "rugged & healthy" rural classmates, but he was disheartened that he "did not see that their clothing appeared inferior … to what is ordinarily found in society." Although there were no "fops & dandies" at Oberlin, laboring-class students still preferred outfits that were too "rich & elegant" to meet the apostolic standard that he had expected from frontiersmen. More often than not, the students who donned "coarse & patched clothes" were those who had ample means to afford better.[63]

Oberlin's female, black, and laboring-class students were no less disappointed by what awaited them in Ohio. When women like Antoinette Brown—a farmer's daughter who, from the age of nine, had testified and preached in camp meetings across her native New York—arrived at Oberlin, she was silenced for the first time in her life.[64] "Oberlin's attitude," she later described, "was that women's high calling was to be the mothers of

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[62] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 508; Eliza Capen Stewart, *A Worker, and Workers' Friend: P.P. Stewart, as Mechanic, Teacher, and Missionary; as Inventor, Educationalist, Reformer, and Philanthropist* (New York, 1873), 93.
[63] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 508.
[64] Ted A. Smith, "Existing Democracy," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2007), 145.

the race, and that they should stay within that special sphere." Oberlin's female students could most often be found "[w]ashing the men's clothes, caring for their rooms, serving them at table, listening to their orations, but themselves remaining respectfully silent in public assemblages."[65] Despite Shipherd's overtures to inclusivity, Oberlin's curriculum and ethos endorsed conventionally repressive attitudes toward gender. At the college's inception, only male students were admitted to the "classics course" and conferred bachelor's degrees upon graduation. Until 1841, female students were confined to a non-degree "ladies' course."[66]

Black Oberliners were similarly ostracized. Although the arrival of a new student of color was met with enthusiasm, "so great [was Oberliners'] anxiety to see another of their colored brethren," this initial excitement usually settled into racial exclusion.[67] Black students sat at separate dining tables, boarded in separate rooms, and worked separate shifts. Fear of miscegenation hung thick in the air. One white Oberliner penned a letter imploring her family to "tell anybody that asks that we dont [*sic*] have to kiss" black students, "nor speak to them without we are a mind to."[68] In 1835, the college's financial agent warned Shipherd that the unrestricted admission of black applicants would result in white students withdrawing, "and at length your Institute will change colour."[69] No official policy limiting black enrollment was ever instituted, but either

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[65] Brown quoted in Eleanor Flexner and Ellen Frances Fitzpatrick, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1996), 28-9.
[66] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 531; and Sernett, *Abolition's Axe*, 50-1.
[67] Quoted in Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 525-6.
[68] *Ibid*., 524.
[69] *Ibid*., 523.

social pressure or discriminatory admission appears to have addressed the agent's concerns. Between the time of Oberlin's founding and the Civil War, the college's black students never comprised more than five percent of the total student population.[70]

Laborites had the most to lose by alienating the laboring classes. In the spring of 1834, the man who would do the most to tarnish Oberlin's reputation among the laboring class enrolled as a student at the college. A native New Yorker of prominent lineage but small means, Delazon Smith was an inquisitive, penniless seventeen year old when he heard of Oberlin's manual labor program.[71] By the time he withdrew from the college two years later, his excitement had faded to scorn. He had come to believe that he had been the victim of an elaborate con. In 1836, Smith shined a spotlight on the college's alleged fraud in his *History of Oberlin, or New Lights of the West*, a widely circulated broadside that became better known as *Oberlin Unmasked*. In it, Smith denounced Shipherd and his faculty as "*bankrupt knaves*" who had conspired to weasel hard-earned dollars from "the pockets of poor indigent young men, who were honestly and anxiously wishing and striving to acquire an education."[72]

In Smith's retelling, the scheme had preyed upon Eastern laborers' feeling that their talents were being wasted on repetitive drudgework. In his calls for applications, Shipherd had lamented that "the extent, beauty, and promising prospects of the great valley of the Mississippi" was lost on its inhabitants, who, in their "ignorance,

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[70] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 524-31.
[71] *Portrait and Biographical Record of the Willamette Valley, Oregon* (Chicago: Chapman, 1903), 920.
[72] Delazon Smith, *A History of Oberlin, or New Lights of the West* (Cleveland, OH: 1837), 8.

immorality, and depravity," seemed content to let even the richest fields lie fallow. Smith claimed that as a means of "luring and gulling" impressionable Easterners, Shipherd had pledged to make the West's cornucopia of resources available to the East's backlog of frustrated ambition, granting poor youths the long-awaited opportunity to prove their mettle. Yet arriving students soon learned that Oberlin's grounds encompassed no more than "three miles square of a low, wet, clayey soil" that could be farmed only during the dry summer months. Locals who had tangled with Shipherd over teetotalism and tax code delighted in referring to the college as a "mud-hole, frog-pond, morter-bed," or simply as a "swamp"—an agricultural and financial quagmire into which aspiring youths had been unsuspectingly drawn. When Smith had enrolled, students who could not afford to pay their tuition outright were required to submit a one-hundred-fifty-dollar down payment to secure shifts on the college farm, with the assurance that they would, in time, recoup their losses and cover the costs of their educations. By 1835, however, it had become clear that Oberlin would never provide enough work opportunities to fully support its penurious students. Shipherd responded by suspending Oberlin's jobs guarantee, forcing many of those students who relied on tuition remission to withdraw from the institution and forfeit their money down.[73]

Disputes between the college and the settlers in the covenanted colony indicated that a more far-reaching fight between laborites and the laboring class was brewing. Incoming colonists had been required to sign a covenant pledging that they would uphold what laborites had once celebrated as spontaneous frontier virtues. The colonists affirmed

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[73] Smith, *A History of Oberlin*, 7-8, 5.

that they would abstain from tobacco, alcohol, and all but "plain and wholesome food"; that they would avoid "the world's expensive and unwholesome fashions of dress"; and that they would donate their surplus wealth and land to the church.[74] Once they arrived, however, colonists who had travelled to the frontier in search of cheap land and economic independence rather than the dawn of the millennium were frequently unwilling to keep up their end of the bargain. Worried that the colonists would break ranks and join the legions of wolfish men, Shipherd attempted to push a heavy real estate tax through the local legislature that would have compelled colonists to donate their surplus acres to the church in order to finance the expansion of the local ministry. Colonists rejected the bill nearly unanimously, but the legislative battle revealed laborites' willingness to bolster their reform agenda with the force of law.[75]

The "Popular Violence" of Dissent

Laborites remained remarkably silent in response to allegations that they were self-dealers who had parasitically attached themselves to movements for social equality and the plight of workers. As they reoriented their movement around a moral imperative to graft right thinking and good behavior onto a nation of "wolfish men," they came to regard opposition to their agenda as yet another symptom of depravity rather than as authentic critique. Their most frequently prescribed cure for hostility toward laborism was subjection to laborism, as if the movement's critics suffered from a phobia that could

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[74] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 110; Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," 382.
[75] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 115-6.

be eradicated through exposure therapy. A report by the *Quarterly Christian Spectator* attributed attacks like Delazon Smith's to "the vast amount of ignorance in the lower classes in society." The *Spectator*'s editors maintained that, although laborism's reputation was deteriorating among one of its target demographics, it remained the reform movement that was most capable of raising the "degraded portion of our community" out of ignorance and squalor by teaching working people the values of hard work, abstinence from intoxicating substances, and daily piety. Impressed with the truth of their convictions, laborites employed increasingly coercive methods to bring students under their sway. The *Spectator*'s report encouraged anyone who still questioned "how conducive productive labor is to virtue" to consider how successfully the model had been implemented in correction houses by the Prison Discipline Society. Inspired by the example of laborite "Colleges and Theological Seminaries," penitentiaries in Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut had put inmates to work for up to five hours per day producing all manner of consumer goods including nails, shoes, barrels, scarves, candle boxes, hats, baskets, and wicker chairs. When "systematically introduced, and industriously prosecuted, under a vigilant inspection," manual labor was believed to considerably reduce the amount of "moral evil" among convicts.[76]

Outside of jails, the existence of "moral evil" could require elaborate proofs. In 1840, Horace Norton, a teenager in Oberlin College's preparatory academy, penned a handful of sexually suggestive letters to a female peer, triggering a chain reaction of outrage and offense that would culminate in his brutal beating. The unwilling recipient

[76] "Union of Study with Labor," 115-6.

turned Norton's letters over to Alice Welch Cowles, the principal of the girls' division, who passed them on to her husband, Henry Cowles, Oberlin's professor of Latin and Greek. Uncertain as to how he should proceed, Professor Cowles attempted to mail the letters to his department chair, Timothy B. Hudson, but the package was intercepted at Oberlin's post office by H.C. Taylor, a theological student and Oberlin's postmaster. Incensed by his classmate's indiscretions, Taylor adopted a feminine hand and forged a response to Norton in which he proposed that they rendezvous in a wooded area outside of town. Norton arrived to find Taylor waiting with Hudson and a posse of fifteen male students. The group demanded that Norton repent. When he refused, they bared his back, pinned him to a log, and lashed him.[77]

Moral feeling was evidently high. "The whole operation was most fearfully romantic from beginning to end," recalled one of the participants the next morning. Norton later sued, and the offenders were fined between fifty and one hundred dollars each for "Assault & Battery with clubs, rawhides, teeth, nails, fists, feet & ropes." The "Oberlin Lynching," as the episode came to be called, horrified locals and prompted a number of students to withdraw from the college for fear of similar retribution.[78] According to steadfast Oberliners, however, Norton's punishment had been well deserved. Like workers who attempted to labor outside of the movement, Norton's actions had undermined the administration of higher law. "[U]nrestrained intimacy" was a variety of unregulated production, or, in Norton's case, reproduction.[79] But "union in

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[77] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 444-5.
[78] *Ibid.*, 444-5.
[79] "Union of Study with Labor," 117.

the truth" required that all productive activities be coordinated in pursuit of a singular moral vision—not steered by the needs of self-interested craftsmen or the urges of young men.[80]

Behind laborites' unyielding prosecution of bad behavior was a commitment to what Beriah Green once called "the immutable standard of obligation set up in the law of God"—a moral requirement to not merely condemn deviant behavior in the abstract, but to actively confront people with their misdeeds.[81] Green's associate Stephen Foster adopted the principle in his pamphlet, *The Brotherhood of Thieves; or, a True Picture of the American Church and Clergy* (1843), in which he accused his fellow ministers in the North of complicity with the slave system for prizing church unity over justice and refusing to advocate for the abolition of slavery.[82] Yet when all sins were regarded as equal barriers to the millennium, some interventions became so banal as to verge on the ridiculous. No misdeed was too small to escape notice, for, as Green wrote, "[a] single action may give birth to stupendous events, which lie far beyond the limits of our vision."[83] Laborites endlessly tweaked their diets, now preferring unsweetened tea for breakfast, now coffee, and now water tinctured with vegetable acid, as if Christ would delay his return until he could count on receiving the proper morning beverage. They

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[80] Junkin, *The Vindication*, iv.
[81] Beriah Green, "Standard of Reformation," *The Miscellaneous Writings of Beriah Green* (Whitesboro, NY: Oneida Institute, 1841), 342-50.
[82] Stephen S. Foster, *The Brotherhood of Thieves; or, a True Picture of the American Church and Clergy* (Boston: 1844). Green endorsed such attacks on irenic Northern ministers and lampooned their calls for church harmony: "The universal cry of … apologists is, 'hush, hush.' Keep silence. You will exasperate our dear friends at the south. Better let our colored brethren perish than disturb the beloved prejudices of their masters." See Green, "Standard of Reformation," 332 n1.
[83] Green, *Four Sermons*, 337-8.

tossed and turned in beds of straw and muslin and condemned the extravagance of those who preferred feather mattresses and flannel sheets. Students were disciplined or expelled for attending the circus, a "Sunday School of the Devil, and his travelling missionaries." Novels were banned for inflaming passions. A flavorless vegetarian diet was promoted to prevent masturbation.[84]

Physical labor was more fundamental than bed linens and pantry contents to the reconstruction of a degenerate nation, and so it drew particular scrutiny. Laborites attempted to bring work into compliance with their moral standards by abolishing the informal, customary work relationships and hereditary skills that had traditionally patterned work at small farms and craft workshops. The traditional mode of work had left production in the control of producers, but craft unions' hostility toward laborism was, to laborites, proof enough of their moral infancy. Hoping to minimize the havoc that workers could introduce into the production line, laborites standardized student labor by imposing discrete classes of specialized workers, fixed schedules, production quotas, and other quantifiable standards of production. Students at the Southern and Western Theological Seminary in Maryville, Tennessee, were organized into ten platoons that rotated through tasks to ensure that learning and laboring were always in simultaneous operation.[85]

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[84] "Union of Study with Labor," 109, 115-6; T. Walter Johnson, "Peter Akers: Methodist Circuit Rider and Educator (1790-1886), *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 32, no. 4 (Dec. 1939), 436). A Country Teacher, "The Pleasures of Labor," 16. As Robert Abzug has put it, religious reformers viewed even petty misdeeds as potential catalysts of complete moral breakdown. "Unenforced laws tended to delegitimize all laws," went the general line of reasoning. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 83.
[85] "Union of Study with Labor," 108.

At Oberlin, Shipherd circulated an exacting set of "Rules for cutting cordwood *on the Institution Farm*." "The wood shall be four feet long; & split as small as four inches in its greatest diameter," he specified; "No round wood over four inches in diameter will be received. Limbs must be trimmed close." Moisture was as much an enemy to God as were other transgressions: "The wood must be closely piled on poles which shall raise it a little from the ground," Shipherd insisted. Lest there be any confusion as to which students, rich or poor, the guidelines were meant to discipline, the penalty for violating the woodcutting rules was reduced tuition assistance. For Oberlin's laboring-class students, as for many factory workers, falling short of production standards could mean losing one's sole source of income.[86]

Shipherd extended his efforts to regulate work beyond the college. In 1835, Oberlin's leadership went on record as disapproving "of permitting swine to run at large" in the colony. Their circulars on the street-hog controversy describe a town that had been ruined by its townspeople. Oberliners complained of "75 Hogs Turned loose in the beautiful Village of Oberlin—to ravage, waste & discomfort & Destroy the fairest portions of our gardens, vex the peaceful inhabitants, and in particular to war against the most defenceless [*sic*], *Ladies & children*."[87] Street hogs became a wedge issue that separated college officials from the colonists. "[N]o good Citizens, no sincere Christian will suffere [*sic*] his hogs to run at Large," declared Oberlin's Special Committee on Hens and Hogs. The committee demanded that any colonist who neglected to pen his

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[86] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 636.
[87] *Ibid*., 555.

livestock should be reported to the Oberlin Society, and "[i]f no repentance after a suitable Labour is performed his association with the Church Should be Cut Off—and he or she permitted to Continue their association unmolested with the Animals they so Democratically Cherish."[88] Other ordinances issued by the Oberlin Society included a prohibition on the sale of intoxicating spirits and a fifty-dollar fine for playing marbles in the streets.[89] The mismatch between the will of college officials and that of the colonists continued to grow until 1837, when the administration resolved that the college's faculty, staff, and students would no longer patronize inn keepers and merchants who sold coffee, liquor, tea, tobacco, or other substances that might lower inhibitions and interfere with the exercise of virtue.[90] To those who regarded the merest indiscretions as blows to the foundation of moral order, the boycott was still too accommodating of sin. Some members of the Oberlin Society maintained that only perfect self-sufficiency and complete abstention from community life would "safeguard [the college] against popular violence."[91]

This impulse to withdraw from flawed social and economic arrangements and to force their reformation through consumer boycotts drew inspiration from the contemporary free produce movement. Although manual laborism and free produce emphasized different economic functions—with laborites more attuned to production and free producers to consumption—both aspired to harness the power of the market to drive

[88] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 555.
[89] *Ibid*., 587
[90] *Ibid*., 115.
[91] Martineau, *The Martyr Age of the United States*, xiii.

national reform. Emerging as a coherent set of reformers in the 1820s and reaching their peak influence in the mid-1830s, free producers observed that the rise of a national consumer market had linked immediate consumption to distant oppression. Even abolitionist consumers were now "partners in the wrong inflicted on our brother" when they purchased products made with slave-produced cotton, sugar, or other materials.[92] Yet this expanded sense of the market's reach and its capacity to uphold slavery also suggested that, through consumer boycotts, abolitionists might be able to extend their sphere of influence and cripple the slave system from afar. If a critical mass of American consumers could be persuaded to demand that the products they purchased were made under free conditions, free producers maintained, then slavery would be disincentivized and eventually dismantled.[93]

As the free produce movement gained momentum, prominent laborite sympathizers became involved, including William Lloyd Garrison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Gerrit Smith of the abortive Peterboro Manual Labor School, who served as the American Free Produce Association's first vice president.[94] Much attention and ingenuity was given to developing an alternative to Caribbean sugarcane, and beets and

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[92] *Minutes of Proceedings of the Requited Labor Convention* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838), 36.
[93] Julie L. Holcomb, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2016), 3-4, 10; Lawrence B. Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (Dec. 2004), 890, 895-7; Carol Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2007), 378-87. Beginning in the late-1820s, movement vegetarianism similarly tapped into the market as a means of stimulating mass moral conscience and enacting social change from a distance. See Adam D. Shprintzen, *The Vegetarian Crusade: The Rise of an American Reform Movement, 1817-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 4, 67-9.
[94] Glickman, "Buy for the Sake of the Slave," 890-5.

butternut trees won favor as laborites' preferred sweeteners.[95] At the 1838 wedding of Theodore Dwight Weld and Angelina Grimké, guests savored free-sugar desserts prepared by a black baker, though one suspects that they savored the feeling of moral superiority more than its flavor.[96] With a child's terrible honesty, the granddaughter of one free producer decried the newlyweds' free-sugar dessert as an "abomination" that defied good taste.[97]

Oberlin swung at the foundation of the slave system when it attempted to replace slave-produced cotton with freely produced silk as the main raw material in the international textile trade. Shipherd had been swept up in the ongoing "silk craze" in the spring of 1836, during a fundraising tour of the Northeast.[98] Silk cultivation, or sericulture, struck him as a panacea for manual laborism's many troubles. The numerous guides to silk cultivation published during the 1830s encouraged towns and cities to invest in the industry to "enable the poor to *support themselves*" through their own exertions instead of continuing to depend upon charity.[99] Both reliable patronage and financial independence had eluded manual labor colleges from the movement's beginning, and the prospect of finally achieving it at Oberlin caught Shipherd's attention.

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[95] *The Genesee Farmer* 7, no. 13 (1 Apr. 1837), 98.
[96] *Minutes of Proceedings of the Requited Labor Convention*, 13; Holcomb, *Moral Commerce*, 124, 133.
[97] Quoted in Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil," 381.
[98] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 649. For an overview of sericulture in the United States, see Jacqueline Field, Marjorie Senechal, and Madelyn Shaw, *American Silk, 1830-1930: Entrepreneurs and Artifacts* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech UP, 2007), 89, 13. For its *longue durée*, see Ben Marsh, *Unraveled Dreams: Silk and the Atlantic World, 1500-1840* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2020), 2-3.
[99] Samuel Whitmarsh, *Eight Years Experience and Observation in the Culture of the Mulberry Tree, and in the Care of the Silk Worm* (Northampton, MA: J.H. Butler, 1839), 110.

Sericulture was also appealingly skilled and diversified work, and its promoters advertised it as a check on the industrial degradation of labor. The entire process of rearing silkworms from eggs to their larval stage, encouraging them to weave their cocoons on human-prepared hay or twig scaffolding, and plucking the cocoons to soften them in hot water before unravelling or "reeling" each one to reveal up to a half mile of raw silk involved a wide variety of proficiencies but a minimal level of physical exertion.[100] The mulberry bushes that silk worms devoured in the four-month feeding frenzy that preceded their metamorphosis grew to a convenient height that rarely required a worker to stoop or stretch to tend to the worms or harvest their cocoons. Sericulture invited the intelligent participation of workers of all classes, genders, and ages without overtaxing fragile scholars or subjecting female students to masculinizing heavy labor.[101]

"Grave doctors of medicine and doctors of divinity, men learned in the law, agriculturalists, mechanics, and merchants and women as well as men, seemed to be infected with a strange frenzy in regard to this mulberry tree," marveled one resident of Springfield, Massachusetts.[102] Shipherd was no exception. "All my reading & conversation since I left home confirms my opinion that there is no branch of Manual

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[100] Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 3-4.
[101] After admitting its first female students in 1841, Oberlin was dogged by the charge that women would be masculinized through proximity to male students and manual labor. College President James Harris Fairchild answered the charges in his 1866 inaugural address: "The thought that young women must become masculine and strong-minded by meeting with young men in the class-room and in social life, is an impeachment of divine wisdom. Strength and manliness on one side," he delineated, "and delicacy and gentleness and good sense on the other." See James Harris Fairchild, *Educational Arrangements and College Life at Oberlin* (New York: E.O. Jenkins, 1866), 15.
[102] Linus Brocket quoted in Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 25.

labor that can be carried on half so profitable as the culture of silk," he wrote to Oberlin's corresponding secretary, Levi Burnell, in 1836. Shipherd busied himself consulting with mulberry growers, stocking Oberlin's library with sericulture manuals, and reallocating funds to launch a complete silkworks where thread could be reeled, spun, twisted, and dyed year-round. Privately, he worried about the poor soil quality of the college's fields—after all, these were the same low-slung swales that Delazon Smith had once laughed off as "mud-bogs." In a letter to Burrell, Shipherd doubted "the propriety of planting 50 [acres]" of mulberry saplings when the college was so close to bankruptcy, and there was no guarantee that the trees would reach maturity. But his enthusiasm over sericulture's moral boons led him to brush off mundane questions about growing conditions and overhead expenses. By Shipherd's own admission, he "like[d] grand movements" more than half measures.[103] At a time when King Cotton comprised more than half of the United States' entire export market, a plot to render slavery unprofitable was nothing if not grand.

In May, Shipherd arranged to have nearly forty-thousand mulberries shipped to Oberlin. They arrived packaged in twenty boxes, each a bit larger than a coffin, and they required ten horse-and-cart teams to carry them the twelve miles from the docks in the city of Lorain to Oberlin's grounds. Packing and transport alone cost the college more than two-hundred dollars, not including the price of the berries, which the silk craze inflated from roughly five dollars per one-hundred in 1835 to as much as five-hundred dollars for the same number in 1839. Even if the berries sprouted into saplings and

[103] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 653.

thrived on Oberlin's muddy grounds, returns on Shipherd's investment would not be forthcoming; the trees would take several years to mature and produce enough leaves to match the worms' outsized appetites.[104] Still, Shipherd predicted a windfall. One of his associates supposed that, within a decade, Oberlin silk would net at least fourteen-thousand dollars and perhaps as much as eighty-thousand dollars in profit per year.[105] Oberliners spent the next month planting twenty-thousand of the berries around the college, while another seventeen-thousand went into the ground at the nearby Sheffield Manual Labor Institute, an Oberlin branch campus that had recently welcomed its first forty students. By the time winter struck, more than fifty-thousand berries had been planted, and students picked up where they had left off the following spring.[106]

Ruin stalked the venture from the beginning. Sericulture is an extraordinarily delicate process that one historian has likened to "an intensive care unit," with "the silkworm" as "an impossible patient." The worms demand a set of just-right balances; if conditions are too hot or cold, drafty or still, bright or dark, moist or dry, or if the worms are subjected to loud noises or strong smells, they spin lower quality silk and, sometimes, none at all. The techniques that silk-growing cultures of Asia and Europe had refined over centuries to care for their fickle wards could hardly be summarized in a grower's guide or learned in the summer that Shipherd had allocated to the task.[107] Errors of inexperience would, in the end, be the downfall of sericulture at Oberlin. Although the

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[104] Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 27.
[105] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 653
[106] *Ibid.*, 654.
[107] Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 3-4

summer of 1836 brought very little rain, Oberliners tried to preserve the young mulberry trees' few precious leaves, even though a vigorous pruning would have made them more drought resistant. Many of the trees that survived the dry season withered in Elyria's clayey soil or failed to produce enough foliage to feed the hundreds of silkworms that the Oberliners had prematurely introduced. With Oberlin's sericulture in shambles, the college's Silk Department recorded a deficit of $1,564.69 for the 1836-37 growing season. In a moment of sardonic precision, the department's bookkeeper listed $2.50 on the credit side of the account.[108] Oberlin's general agent, R.E. Gillett, somewhat understated the catastrophic scale of the loss when he observed that "Labour on the Farm" had been generally "unproffitable [*sic*]."[109] After a few more years of setbacks, Oberlin effectively abandoned silk cultivation in 1838.[110]

When the national silk industry collapsed the following year, its proponents remained as determined to minimize their financial failures as laborites were theirs.[111] "Difficulties, discouragements—name them not," urged one sericulturalist at the 1842 New England Silk Growers' Convention. "No enterprise, large in its inception, comprehensive of its designs, wide spreading, far reaching, and beneficent in its results, can claim an exemption from difficulties, in the infancy of its movements."[112] What united the 1830s' and 1840s' rash of reform movements was the conviction that individuals, social clusters, and even the non-human natural environment could be

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[108] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 655.
[109] *Ibid*., 647.
[110] Lull, "The Manual Labor Movement in the United States," 385.
[111] Field, Senechal, and Shaw, *American Silk*, 28.
[112] Quoted in *Ibid*., 30.

cajoled into compliance with a higher law. What ought to happen could be made to happen, these reformers believed, if only authority were concentrated in the right persons and doled out selectively. When rogue individuals or recalcitrant realities pushed back—when, for instance, laboring people withheld their support from laborite institutions and let their hogs run loose, or when boggy fields failed to sustain tens of thousands of mulberry trees—they were rebuked for prioritizing practical needs over moral consensus.

Sericulture was Oberlin's most costly and spectacular misstep, but laborites' tendency to regard the dissenting opinions of working people as "popular violence" against "union in the truth" doomed them to committing a series of avoidable mistakes. When Shipherd had contracted Finney's brother-in-law, P.B. Andrews, to build a sawmill on campus, had hoped that the mill would lower the expense of erecting new college buildings by eliminating the need to buy pre-worked planks. Against the advice of Philo Stewart and other craftsmen whom he had "planted" around the college and who urged him to invest in a high-powered steam engine, however, Shipherd had attempted to further cut costs by outfitting the mill with a tiny, eight-horsepower engine. Underpowered and operated by novice students, the mill failed to keep pace with the college's demand for lumber, and Shipherd was forced to purchase the majority of the construction materials outright. Shipherd had also pushed for the installation of a corn cracker and a flour mill, neither of which ever met their projected production quotas. Oberlin sold both in 1836, purchased back the corn cracker the following year, and then periodically rented it to colonists until it was finally lost in a fire.[113]

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[113] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 108-9.

Even as Shipherd's financial mismanagement forced Oberlin officials to reduce tuition subsidies, college administrators discouraged students from seeking supplemental funding from charity organizations, fearing that "able bodied young men" would become lazy if they learned that they could receive money without working for it.[114] When the Western Reserve Education Society charged in April 1837 that the college offered inadequate work opportunities for poor students to cover their expenses, one Oberlin professor responded that he and his colleagues had never intended to give students "the impression that, without any other resource than the daily labor of three hours, they can fully support themselves and will have no need of the assistance of friends or of any society."[115] Like the related reform movements from which they sometimes drew inspiration, Oberliners brought production and consumption under the mantle of morality, replacing the usual gauges of economic performance—profit, loss, growth, decline—with a two-way toggle that indicated only virtue or vice.[116]

According to this moral metric, enduring financial ruin in the name of a just cause became a kind of martyrdom. Students' unremunerated labor was reimagined as an apostolic withdrawal from the commercial world of artificial wants and slave-made luxuries. "Many of [Oberlin's] original members … have sacrificed their possessions and prospects by the very act of joining the Oberlin," the British abolitionist Harriet Martineau wrote admiringly in her impassioned *Appeal on Behalf of the Oberlin Institute*

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[114] Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 434.
[115] *Ibid.*, 108-9.
[116] Glickman, "Buy for the Sake of the Slave," 893, 899-900; Faulkner, "The Root of the Evil," 386.

(1840). "Oberlin," she continued, "has stood prominent for its Christian firmness, self-denial, and devotion to the principles acknowledged in the abstract by all, but acted upon, in every-day life, by too few."[117] As laborism completed its transformation from a program for class abolition into an effort to standardize morality across classes, financial struggle finally ceased to augur the movement's imminent decline. Instead, the collapse of laborism's internal system of exchange became proof of the movement's spiritual success.

Organized Labor's "Political Ghost"

Learned-class students balked at the suggestion that they should incur debt as a mark of distinction. Each manual labor school that folded or abruptly reversed its guarantee to provide learning in exchange for work left in its wake a disgruntled mass of former students who had paid admission costs and contributed their labor for little or no compensation. "Our families want our money, our poor want it," one laborer reminded his fellow workingmen, and yet he had watched as families with little to spare were duped into donating their savings to the maintenance of vogueish institutions on the false promise of social mobility.[118] Workers took little comfort in the usual reply that, even when they did not open new economic opportunities for their students, laborite schools facilitated what Weld called "the interchange of mutual offices of courtesy and kindness" between classes. Laborites insisted that such interclass comity was as necessary to the

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[117] Martineau, *The Martyr Age of the United States of America*, xiii-xiv.
[118] "Candor," *Workingman's Advocate* 2, no. 45 (Jun. 25, 1831).

dissolution of class hierarchy as was the actual redistribution of wealth or knowledge.[119] In the mouths of well-fixed presidents and trustees of newly minted colleges, however, such reassurances could sound dismissive, even contemptuous, of laboring-class concerns. "You *common* people must give a portion of your hard earnings to further enrich our Colleges," one workingman imagined he could hear them say—"and if you will not grumble about it we will condescend to talk kindly to you."[120] In the world that manual labor schools were making, it seemed, workers would still be misled, exploited, and finally sent packing—but they would now be shown the door with dignity.

Many workers similarly rejected the notion that—as supporters of a proposed state-funded laborite school in Genesee, New York, phrased it—"the feelings and habits of [the] working population" would have to be elevated by "the advantages of a cultivated mind" before workers could be entrusted with political or economic agency.[121] When laborites characterized manual labor outside the academy as a mindless slog, they omitted the knowledge, creativity, and skill that was involved in agriculture or in the production of high-quality finished goods. "[I]t would seem that the advocates of this institution suppose that the ordinary business of the farmer and mechanic can be performed without the mind," remarked one opponent of the Genesee school. Yet the nighttime activities of the average worker suggested that the opposite was frequently

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[119] Weld, *First annual report*, 64.
[120] "Who Are Aristocrats?," *New London Political Observer*, reprinted in *Workingman's Advocate* 2, no. 45 (Jun. 25, 1831).
[121] "An act to incorporate the Genesee manual labor seminary (Mar. 27, 1834)," Chapter 53, *Laws of the State of New-York, passed at the Fifty-Seventh Session* (Albany: E. Croswell, 1834), 53.

true—that manual labor was as mentally stimulating and draining as any of "the abstruse propositions of Euclid":

> Look at the laborer when he comes in from work; does he seek study to engage his mind, which has been rambling at ease during his labors? Does he not rather take up a newspaper and read the passing events of the day, and if he sees an article on finance or political economy, postpone the reading until he is refreshed from his labors.[122]

Other workingmen pointed out that a number of the low-born intellectuals whom laborites trotted out as proofs of the compatibility of mental and manual exertion—figures ranging from the Stoic philosopher Epictetus to American stalwarts like Roger Sherman and Benjamin Franklin—were autodidacts who had managed to improve their minds while working the awl or the printing press.[123] "It is a settled point that some of the wisest men who have adorned our country were self-educated," wrote Solon Robinson, a journalist and chronicler of antebellum poverty. "Mechanics and farmers *have* 'found time' to acquire a useful education," he insisted—and they had done it without having to be spurred along by a moral establishment.[124]

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[122] O.P.Q., "Manual Labor Institutions," *Genesee Farmer & Gardener's Journal* 4, no. 13 (Mar. 29, 1834), 99.
[123] One particularly lengthy laborite pantheon listed the following names: Gifford, Metastacis, the Milner brothers, Epictetus, Ferguson, Murray, Brown, Pope Adrian, Terence, Benjamin Franklin, Robert and Henry Stephens, Brindley, Humphrey Davey, Columbus, Ben Jonson, Roger Sherman, Herschel, Shakespeare, Samuel lee, Adam Clark, and Rittenhouse. See *Report of a Committee of the Trustees of Allegheny College*, 6-7.
[124] Solon Robinson, "Where did he get his Education?" *Cultivator* 5, no. 7 (Sep. 1838), 124. In spite of his reservations, Robinson still held manual labor schools in higher esteem than the "flower daub education" that genteel students received at many private academies, an education that, in his estimation, prepared them to do little beyond hold polite conversation and fritter away positions of power.

Others rejected laborism as an insidious effort to undermine laboring-class solidarity. Throughout the 1830s and 1840s, workingmen's unions won a hard-fought series of legal battles that culminated in the 1842 opinion *Commonwealth v. Hunt*, in which a Massachusetts Superior Court judge ruled that trade unions did not automatically constitute a criminal conspiracy.[125] One workingman in Massachusetts denounced laborism as a "chimerical scheme" to replace the country's few remaining independent craftsmen and farmers with a hand-picked labor aristocracy that would fabricate finished goods without identifying or organizing with the class-conscious, militant wing of the laboring class.[126] When Duff Green—a fair-weather Jacksonian whom Abraham Lincoln later derided as a "political hyena"—called for the establishment of a laborite school in the nation's capital, he met with fierce opposition.[127] Journeymen printers across the eastern seaboard attacked the proposed school as an attempt to form "an odious monopoly, the successful termination of which will be the exclusion of all regularly bred journeymen from employment."[128] From this perspective, laborism served to supply capital with an obedient workforce that preferred to maintain its educational and cultural ties to the elite rather than find common cause with fellow laborers.

The most searing criticisms came from those who, like Delazon Smith, viewed laborism as a bid to smuggle wealth and power from working people to an imperiled

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[125] Quoted in Christopher L. Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993), 213.
[126] *Pittsfield Sun* 35, no. 1778 (Oct. 16, 1834), 3.
[127] Quoted in David Dixon Porter, *The Naval History of the Civil War* (New York: Sherman, 1886), 800.
[128] *Pittsfield Sun* 35, no. 1778 (Oct. 16, 1834), 3.

clerisy while claiming to do the opposite. In 1833, the editor of the *New-Hampshire Observer* tried to mollify complaints that all of the most strident proponents of state-sponsored manual labor schools seemed to be highly cultivated ministers. "[W]ho are better able to provide for this expense than the Clergy," he pleaded; "Who have more control over the purse strings of the community than they?" Readers seized on his gaffe. "We are sorry," one workingmen's publication responded, "to see it admitted, that the Clergy have the 'control of the purse strings of the community'!!!" Here was one of laborism's defenders conceding that "[t]he funds exclusively managed by the Clergy in this country, are rapidly accumulating," while craft unions were battling for fair pay.[129] Other workers denounced manual labor schools as "pseudo institution[s]" that had executed "an extensive and prosperous fraud on the public," exceeding "in barefaced imposition and bold swindling any other device of the kind in the Union." Laborites were cast as "clerical missionaries" who crisscrossed the country to "beg" for donations in order to pay "their own individual debts" and to purchase farms, cattle, and other assets on the workingman's dime. "We find that we have been paying taxes, to build colleges, to educate rich men's sons to be doctors, and lawyers," wrote the carpenter and trade unionist Seth Luther, "to enable them to grind our own faces on the grindstone of monopolies and monied corporations of all kinds."[130] Accusations of clerical self-dealing were never fully corroborated by any school's financial records, but the lack of hard

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[129] "A Bold Avowal," *New-Hampshire Sentinel* 35, no. 49 (Dec. 5, 1833).

[130] Seth Luther, *An Address on the Origin and Progress of Avarice, and Its Deleterious Effects on Human Happiness, with a Proposed Remedy for the Countless Evils Resulting from an Inordinate Desire for Wealth*, delivered before the Union Association of Working Men, Charlestown, Mass., Jan. 30, 1834 (Boston: Seth Luther, 1834), 13.

evidence only fueled speculation. Workingmen pointed to laborite colleges' erratic bookkeeping and financial mismanagement as further indicators that a sweeping fraud was underway.[131]

Skepticism regarding laborites' murky accounting tapped into a longer history of mistrusting the clergy. From almost the moment that states began to disestablish their churches, clergymen had been accused of trying to furtively recover prestige and power through political opportunism and embezzlement. In a particularly high-profile scandal, the Tappan brothers had thrown their substantial financial resources behind the New York Antimasonic Party's moderate wing in 1830. With the Tappans' support, the moderates had conspired to pry Antimasonry away from its exclusive focus on the machinations of the Freemasons and to redirect the Party's energy toward moral reforms like mandatory Sabbath observance.[132] Already fearful that the Party was slipping from their control, radical Antimasons construed the Tappans' involvement as evidence that their Party had been coopted by a designing clerisy. The rising moral establishment appeared to have appropriated Antimasonry as an institutional lever to catapult into into positions of political authority. The Antimasonic Party was "neither more nor less than a Church and State intrigue," reported the *Workingman's Advocate*, a major organ of the more radical, old-guard Antimasons. "Ashamed to come out under their true colors," the *Advocate* continued, financiers like the Tappans "skulk under every flag that promises to

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[131] "Marion College, MO," *Workingman's Advocate* 6, no. 15 (Nov. 22, 1834), 2.
[132] William Preston Vaughn, *The Anti-Masonic Party in the United States, 1826-1843* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1983), 35-9.

be popular."[133] Another article claimed that Tappan and his associates "care as little about the *principle* of Anti-Masonry as the Khan of Tartary does. But," the writer clarified, "they care a great deal about the Anti-Masonic *excitement*. It is an excellent tool: and they have shown that they know how to use it."[134]

Under the pretext of combatting the illegitimate influence of secret societies and shadowy elites on the American republic, these "Church and State men" had surreptitiously pursued their own shadowy interests, "as completely disguised as any harlequin at a masquerade." To those who regarded Arthur Tappan's foray into New York's Antimasonic politics as the work of "an ambitious hierarchy" that conspired "to put up clerical influence," the Tappans' support of laborism suggested that Church and State men had now stripped off the Antimasons' guise, dirtied their hands, and begun calling themselves laborers. If the accusations were true, members of an injured learned class had gutted Antimasonry so that they could cloak themselves in a skinsuit of its popularity, leaving behind a politically inviable wreck of the party's former power. Now that organized labor was on the rise, it seemed that the Church and State men were keen to hitch their wagons to class strife and hide their elite ambitions behind the sham populism of labor's "political ghost."[135]

A common thread ran through each of these lines of attack. Laborism had been charged with reifying the division of labor, facilitating upward transfers of wealth, and creating sinecures for the learned class in a half-hidden moral establishment. The core

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[133] "Plots and Masks," *Workingman's Advocate* 2, no. 11 (Oct. 30, 1830), 3.
[134] "Church and State Masquerade," *Workingman's Advocate* 2, no. 11 (Oct. 30, 1830), 1.
[135] *Ibid*.

contention, however, was that laborism had created a corps of well-situated experts on labor who were not themselves laborers. Laborism appeared to have resurrected the established clergy as an administrative layer of arbiters between laborers and the social relations of production. When and how working people worked, what they wore and consumed, who they consorted with, what they produced, the totality of the conditions in which they lived and labored had been removed from their control and held accountable to moral standards that were remote from subsistence needs or social mobility. In an anonymous 1838 poem, a Yale undergraduate described the manual labor school as a deliciously engineered "*Pons Asinorum*"—a "bridge of asses" that neither working brutes nor monsters of erudition could cross. The system was a protracted qualifying exam ensuring that elite aspirants could manage the laboring masses while still exhibiting the democratic manners and habits that, they hoped, would avert popular backlash.[136]

Yet popular backlash had only been delayed. The more that laborism appeared to be an elite contrivance, the fewer indigent students it managed to attract. The manual labor school's class composition was in flux. Take, for instance, Lafayette College. In 1836, the third year of George Junkin's presidency, forty-three students withdrew for lack of funds. Only seventeen of them later earned college degrees, and a plurality took up farming. In 1841, Junkin's final year as president, overall enrollment was up, but just thirteen students withdrew. Eight of them later earned college degrees, and most became lawyers.[137] During a five-year period in which opportunities to exchange work for

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[136] L., "Clairvoyance," *Yale Literary Magazine* 3, no. 4 (Feb. 1838), 136.
[137] John Franklin Stonecipher, *Biographical Catalogue of Lafayette College, 1832-1912* (Easton, PA: Chemical Publishing, 1913), 29-57.

knowledge had quickly vanished, Lafayette's students had become more capable of meeting their expenses and more likely to find work in the learned professions. When manual labor eventually disappeared from colleges, it did not prompt an exodus of indigent students. The children of the laboring class had long since left.

Observers like the Yale poet could not help but admire early laborites' resourcefulness. Grasping that the tide of public opinion had turned against cloistered scholars, they had developed manual labor schools as controlled environments in which they could mingle with average people and acquire democratic manners without actually passing over the reins of moral leadership. These schools had also served as training camps in which farmers and workingmen could be molded into virtuous, independent yeomen and artisans—the semi-mythical republican citizens after whom laborites had modelled their new public personae. Now that laboring-class enrollment at schools like Lafayette was declining, however, it seemed that the jig was up. "The 'March of Mind,' in sooth, is very flattering," waxed the Yale poet; "Would that the proofs of it were not so scattering."[138]

Conclusion

Near the end of his life, Philo Stewart tended to recall Oberlin College as a genuine endeavor to improve the condition of the laboring class that had been commandeered and discredited by self-interested clerics. A "Worker, and Workers' Friend," as his wife and earliest biographer characterized him, the elderly Stewart

[138] L., "Clairvoyance," 136.

regretted that Oberliners had abandoned the college's founding principles and the principles of laborism when they began to reverse their work guarantees, lynch pubescent students, persecute neighboring farmers, and sink their resources in imprudent get-rich-quick schemes. Most of these deviations he traced to his former collaborator, John Jay Shipherd. In Stewart's telling, his primary role at Oberlin had been to keep Shipherd from tilting at windmills. His first intervention had been to convince Shipherd to discard his plans to create a teetotaling utopian community in Elyria based around "common property" and cooperative labor. As a more feasible alternative, Stewart had introduced his friend to manual laborism—a contribution to Oberlin that, he claimed, was "solely [his] own" until Shipherd seized on it as a vehicle for moral reform.[139]

But Shipherd was not the stranger to laborism that his friend remembered, and his commitment to absolute moral observance was not outside of the laborite mainstream. Like so many laborites, he had been a vigorous youth who had been brought low by intensive seminary training and come to desire a less wasting means of receiving an education. As early as 1830, two years before Stewart arrived in Elyria, Shipherd had pored over favorable reviews of Fellenberg's school at Hofwyl in the *Annals of Education*, and he had watched admiringly as John Monteith made inroads among brambly Elyrians with his manual labor high school.[140] As much as Stewart wished to

[139] Stewart, *A Worker, and Workers' Friend*, 49-50; 131. In Stewart's retelling, Oberlin's colony and college were conceived apart and only later reconciled: "[Shipherd] needed my school to grace his colony," Stewart wrote, "and I needed his colony to sustain my school." Quoted in Stewart, *A Worker, and Workers' Friend*, 131.
[140] Shipherd's personal correspondence hold some clues as to where he might have first stumbled upon manual laborism. In a letter dated Aug. 9, 1833, he made reference to an 1830 series about Fellenberg's Hofwyl that ran in Woodbridge's *Annals of Education*. Shipherd was also an

disassociate the impractical, patriarchal Shipherd from a movement that he still held in fair esteem, the fact remained: Shipherd had not been an interloper in the movement so much as a fellow maker of it.

George Washington Gale likewise cosigned laborism's increasing emphasis on improving the moral fiber of working people. Observing the frontier in 1836, he inquired, "Who that loves the institutions of his country can look upon it without alarm when he reflects that in a few, a *very* few years, they will be in the hands of a population reared in this field?"[141] By establishing the Illinois colony of Galesburg and opening his "Prairie College"—later renamed Knox College—he set into motion a plan to stock the frontier with "self-denying and arduous" ministers who would enforce piety among frontiersmen, bringing about "the conversion of the world."[142] As he had done with Oneida, Gale situated Knox between two "mighty rivers" to link it by analogy with the rumored location of the lost Garden of Eden. The site was also far from urban markets so that it would remain "free from the rivalships of an active commercial interest, commercial luxuries, and commercial vices."[143] Here in "the Mesopotamia of the West," Gale fantasized, "the seeds of salvation" would finally be sown. Despite the region's providential charge, Gale feared that the area's inhabitants had already been branded with

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occasional reader of the *Quarterly Christian Spectator*, a frequent—if less consistently sympathetic—reporter of laborite ideals. Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College*, 346.

[141] George Washington Gale, "Circular and Plan" (1836), 9.

[142] *Ibid*., 9-10; George Washington Gale, *A Brief History of Knox College* (Cincinnati, OH: C. Clark, 1845), 3-5.

[143] Gale, *A Brief History of Knox College*, 8-10; Charles J. Sellon, *A Review of the Commerce, Manufactures, and the Public & Private Improvements of Galesburg* (Galesburg, IL: J. Sherman, 1857), 11-12.

"the Apocalyptic Beast's mark in their intellect and actions—that is to say, 'in their foreheads and hands.'" It would take an empowered moral authority to purge their minds of corrupted thoughts and to regulate their physical labors, and Knox was to be this authority's training ground.[144] In some sense, Gale's plan worked. The "vast inequalities" that bred indolence and vice in commercial society never afflicted Knox. When the first class enrolled in 1841, they were almost uniformly the children of affluent river merchants.[145]

Few could boast sturdier laborite credentials than Jonathan Blanchard, who assumed Knox's presidency in 1845. The Vermont native had survived sedentary disease at Andover Seminary, joined the "Band of Seventy" that Theodore Dwight Weld recruited as agents for the American Anti-Slavery Society, and graduated from Lane Seminary.[146] And yet Blanchard had become as convinced as Junkin, Shipherd, or Gale that popular feeling and action should be steered "by comparatively few leading minds." "[T]o teach a land is to govern it," he had declared in 1842, continuing that "the men who direct and control [schools], may be said almost to *make* the public sentiment as to what is evil, and what is good." For too long, however, the learned class had ignored its calling in the vain pursuit of popular acclaim. Fearful that by publically "opposing sin," they would "forfeit [the] patronage" of laboring people or wealthy benefactors, the clergy had

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[144] Gale, *A Brief History of Knox College*, 8-10.
[145] Sellon, *A Review*, 18-24.
[146] Richard S. Taylor, "Beyond Immediate Emancipation: Jonathan Blanchard, Abolitionism, and the Emergence of American Fundamentalism," *Civil War History* 27 (1981), 260-74.

become impotent—"hulks sunk in the stream of public opinion, serving only to show how fast the current flows by them."[147]

Blanchard took his comfortable appointment at Knox as a sign that manual laborism had restored the clergy to its proper place. By selectively adopting the vocabulary, dress, and habits of workers, laborites had deployed the productive power of the laboring class to erect a physical architecture for the moral elite. With their colleges complete and laboring-class students largely gone, laborites were relieved of the duty to keep up democratic appearances. The Panic of 1837 has generally been invoked as the movement's death knell, but just as significant was the diminishing need to extract student labor. By 1840, Andover Seminary, Phillips Academy, Lafayette College, Indiana Theological Institute, Wake Forest College, Granville Institute, Mercer College, and Donaldson Academy, would no longer offer manual labor opportunities to their students. Programs at Knox College, Waterville College, the Western Theological Seminary, the Western Reserve College, Davidson College, and the Oneida Institute limped along into the early 1840s but soon folded for lack of interest. Seminary training resumed its old patterns with the force of long habit. When Blanchard was called upon to resign after a thirteen-year tenure, it was over a spat between Congregationalists and Presbyterians.[148] After years of laborite peacemaking between learned factions facing down a common threat, the return of theological infighting was a subtle indication that the danger had finally passed.

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[147] Blanchard, "Public Men, and Public Institutions of the Church," 18-22.
[148] J.W. Bailey, *Knox College, by Whom Founded and Endowed* (Chicago: Press & Tribune, 1860), 52-7.

Chapter 5: "Good Wages Are Not Happiness"

Anti-Commercialism and the New Learned Establishment

By 1840, most public conversations about manual laborism assumed the tone of a postmortem. "All the failures real or supposed, total or partial, of manual labor schools" were the topic of one elegiac exchange between the colonizationist Cyril Pearl and Josiah Holbrook, the founder of the lyceum movement.[1] Both men had previously defended manual laborism against its critics, but manual labor colleges' finances had so unraveled and their reputations so declined that there seemed to be little left to do but locate the source of rot. Pearl conjectured that the movement's leadership had lacked the requisite "business habits and talents" to ensure that student labor was "skilfully [*sic*] and economically conducted." Manual laborites had blithely pressed on despite their colleges' deficits of natural resources, labor-saving machinery, fertile soil, irrigation systems, skilled producers, permanent labor forces, or reliable buyers. Shrewder managers, Pearl suggested, might have safely navigated such hazards. But the time to course correct had passed. Ramshackle production, reckless borrowing, and fuzzy bookkeeping had discredited manual laborism in the eyes of social reformers and rendered it broadly "unpopular" among the nation's college-bound young people. Laborite schools were left overleveraged and under-enrolled. The few manual labor programs still in operation were, as far as Pearl was concerned, dead on their feet.[2]

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[1] Cyril Pearl and Josiah Holbrook, "The Visitor," *Maine Farmer & Journal of the Arts* 8, no. 29 (Jul 25, 1840), 229.

[2] Cyril Pearl and Josiah Holbrook, "Manual Labor Schools," *Christian Advocate & Journal* 14, no. 51 (Aug 7, 1840), 204.

Holbrook was less prepared to inter the movement. Although he agreed that the typical manual labor school had been "[a] business establishment" that had almost studiously neglected "business principles," he insisted that the movement could be revived.[3] Leading manual laborites had erred, Holbrook argued, when they had imagined "business" to be an optional, avoidable undertaking that was neither "a part of education" nor a necessary factor in manual labor. Quite to the contrary, he observed that the rapid expansion of the market in recent decades had made commercial activity an inescapable article of American life. Holbrook predicted that, in short order, financial management would become as imperative a field of study for learned men as biblical languages and natural philosophy had been to earlier generations of scholars. With the partial exception of slave labor, precious little physical toil was any longer performed outside of labor markets or for subsistence or barter. The frontier beyond commercial society was quickly shrinking. In Holbrook's view, manual laborites would stand a chance at survival only if they surrendered their losing battle against the market, accepted the reality that they were commercial actors, and incorporated a general business education into their curriculums. If manual laborism could be emptied of its utopian impulse to deny the real conditions of productive life, Holbrook maintained, then the movement could still be salvaged.[4]

Holbrook's proposition was not strictly theoretical. Three years earlier, he had helped to launch the colony of Lyceum Village in Berea, Ohio, as a pilot-run for his

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[3] Pearl and Holbrook, "Manual Labor Schools," 204.
[4] *Ibid.*

proposed fusion of labor, learning, and commerce.[5] While Oberliners frittered away their energies on their misbegotten silk venture twenty miles to the west, students at Berea's manual labor seminary had absorbed "a thorough scientific and business education" that, Holbrook crowed, molded them into "men of business" with "business habits."[6] Some of them found employment in the tabletop-globe manufactory that Holbrook's son Dwight operated in Berea, turning a handsome profit by uniting the scholar's knowledge of geography and the craftsman's dexterity with a brush to produce a salable commodity.[7] Holbrook considered a student's future commercial success to be as much a concern of the seminary as were academic performance and work ethic, and he made preparations to improve his graduates' professional fortunes. Should students struggle to find appropriate positions upon graduation, Holbrook offered them stopgap employment on the national teaching and lecture circuit that had sprung up around his lyceums.[8]

Enthusiasm for the Lyceum Village had evaporated when the Ohio legislature established a common school fund, effectively eliminating the demand for affordable private schools and ultimately precipitating the community's disbandment in 1844. Still,

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[5] David Lindsey, "Backwoods Utopia: The Berea Community of 1836-1837," *Ohio Historical Quarterly* LXV, no. 3 (July 1956); Henry O. Sheldon, *History of Berea, or the Origin and Failure of the Attempted Community with an Account of the Lyceum Village and Berea Seminary, and Notices of Other Schools, the Quarries, etc*. (Berea, OH: Republican Printing Company, 1877).

[6] Holbrook quoted in A.W. Cummings, *Early Schools of Methodism* (New York: Cranston & Stowe, 1886), 311; Pearl and Holbrook, "The Visitor," 269.

[7] Lindsey, "Backwoods Utopia," 284. For more on Holbrook's educational apparatus business and the craftsmanship involved in the production of globes, see Edward Stevens, *The Grammar of the Machine: Technical Literacy and Early Industrial Expansion in the United States* New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 75.

[8] "Village Lyceum," *The Family Lyceum* 1, no. 9 (Oct. 13, 1832), 34; Pearl and Holbrook, "The Visitor," 269.

Holbrook was convinced that the village's financial stability, however fleeting, had proven that a viable future existed for manual laborism. By embracing commercial know-how, laborites could begin providing "for the pecuniary, no less than the intellectual and moral prosperity" of their students.[9] Money—the very thing that had pitted rich against poor and opened the social rifts that laborites were eager to close—was to be the secret to laborism's late-blooming success.

Yet tucked within manual laborism was a revulsion against commercial activity that inclined the movement's leading proponents against Holbrook's pocketbook pragmatism. If Holbrook was a harbinger of the American middle-class—with its tendency to interpret commercial achievement as an index of personal cultivation—then manual laborites represented an independent petite bourgeois formation, one that was characterized by an arch disdain for transactional relationships.[10] The clergy who launched the movement had coveted the noncompetitive offices of established religion, believing that ministers who attended to their bottom lines would sacrifice good morals, right belief, and just action. As laborites blurred distinctions between the learned and laboring classes, this occupational preference to steer clear of money matters had swelled into a universal maxim that all workers should avoid financial entanglements whenever

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[9] "Village Lyceum," 34.

[10] For illuminating discussions of the lyceum movement's role in creating a middle-class "public culture" and private "moral life," see Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum, and Public Culture in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005); Thomas Augst, *The Clerk's Tale: Young Men and Moral Life in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); and Donald Scott, "The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of American History* 66 (1980), 791-809.

possible. Of course, laborites had continued to welcome seed capital from financiers like the Tappan brothers. Yet they typically claimed independence from the market by inserting a superficial buffer between outside investors and school administrators, who suspected an "atrocious conspiracy" to be afoot when a land speculator like Gerrit Smith personally directed his short-lived manual labor academy.[11]

Laborites' anti-commercial attitudes intensified throughout the 1830s, as they faced accusations of wage theft and self-dealing from impecunious students who felt that they had been dispossessed of their labor. The schools' defenders interpreted these attacks as further evidence that the want of money had deformed poor students' moral sensibilities and blinded them to laborism's more profound, if less tangible, proceeds. Market dependency appeared to damage commercial actors' capacity for independent thought by forcing them to remain on the sweet side of employers and customers, answering to the desires of others instead of deciding for themselves what was good and worthwhile. To the journalist William Channing Woodbridge, those who faulted manual labor schools for low revenues revealed themselves to be mouthpieces for a commercial society "which deems everything lost whose value cannot be estimated in money."[12] The utopian socialist Robert Owen went so far as to suggest that, until market actors could be "disabused of this insane money-mystery," they could not be expected to "think or act

[11] "A Question," 27.
[12] "Progress of Education in Germany and Switzerland," *American Annals of Education and Instruction, and Journal of Literary Institutions* 1, no. 6 (August 1830), 336-7.

like rational beings."[13] Manual laborites were therefore at liberty to dismiss calls to compensate student-workers or turn a profit as the false consciousness of captive minds.

Dispelling that false consciousness and shepherding Americans to more right-minded attitudes toward work and pay became laborites' primary objective by the late 1830s. The network of schools that laborism constructed had, for all the movement's financial missteps, successfully exempted a portion of the learned class from the labor market. Laborites now claimed that their relative autonomy from market incentives endowed them with a unique clarity of perspective on the pneumatics of commercial society. When they intervened in the tense class environment of the late 1830s and 1840s, they presented themselves as disinterested arbiters—moral moderators outside the chain of production who possessed the unique ability to reconcile producers with their employers. More often than not, they called on productive workers, not owners, to make concessions. "Good wages are not happiness," William Ellery Channing reminded a crowd of disgruntled mechanics. "Our minds may triumph over our lot."[14] To be sure, the learned class had required two decades and an entirely reconstructed academic infrastructure to triumph of its lot and regain its vaunted independence of thought, but laborers now had the benefit of example. Guided to reason by the new moral establishment, laborers were to transcend their circumstances without altering them in the least.

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[13] Robert Owen, *The Revolution in the Mind and Practice of the Human Race; Or the Coming Change from Irrationality to Rationality* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1850), 27.
[14] Channing to the Mechanic Institute of Slaithwaite, March 1, 1841, repr. in William Henry Channing, *The Life of William Ellery Channing* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1880), 484-5.

Laborites' attacks on money and trade belied their overall acquiescence to capitalist social relations. If workers' vulnerability to the influence of employers and demagogues could be reduced by cultivating their non-commercial, moral sensibilities, then the wage-labor system could be expanded without social harm. All that was required to keep commercial contaminants in check was an independent ethical teaching body to nurture workers' consciences. Laborites heartily embraced the role. In 1840, Orestes Brownson—once a supporter of laborism who had come to regard it as a make-work program for an imperiled learned class—reminded the laboring classes that "[t]he only way to get rid of [the present social system's] evils is to change the system, not its managers."[15] Yet a change in moral management was precisely what would occur.

"All Companionship with Money"

Manual laborites derived much of their anti-commercial critique from the classical republican position that extreme inequality was incompatible with public virtue.[16] As George Washington Gale argued, stockpiles of "over-grown wealth" removed natural limits on pleasure-seeking and made it possible for affluent Americans to indulge

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[15] Brownson, "The Laboring Classes," 14.

[16] Of course, there existed an influential, market-friendly republican tradition that was associated most strongly with Adam Smith and the British political economists. But equally foundational republicans like Jean-Jacques Rousseau had been unapologetic in their "contempt for commerce," and many laborites heavily imbibed in these ideas. For more on the historical diversity of republican attitudes toward commercial society, see Eric MacGilvray, *The Invention of Market Freedom* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2011); Ryan Hanley, "Commerce and Corruption: Rousseau's Diagnosis and Adam Smith's Cure," *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no. 2 (2008), 137-58; and Dennis Rasmussen, *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith's Response to Rousseau* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2008).

their most hedonistic appetites.[17] Confronted by such decadence, some laborers were driven by envy to cheat and pilfer their way to wealth, while virtuous workers were forced to ignore their consciences and follow the orders of corrupt employers lest they lose their jobs.[18] To laborites, commercial society transformed multifaceted human beings into a lopsided species of conniving moneybags and hired hands. "The laws of nature are too well established to permit us to destroy the balance [of mind and body] without mischief," the manual laborite John Todd observed. Money might have caused the problem, but "[n]o money," Todd had decided, "can make this loss … fully up."[19]

For manual laborism's abolitionist wing, money was also delegitimized by its critical role in the slave trade. Only through such an abstracted medium of exchange as money could human beings, each endowed with singular qualities and talents, be bought and sold as fungible goods. Weld had regarded the notion of a slave market as a moral outrage: "Compute the value of a MAN in *money!*" he had scoffed.[20] Money's role in facilitating slavery also informed a parallel analysis of the wage-labor system. Ostensibly free labor markets were found to violate human integrity almost as frequently as the slave trade did. Intact laborers were partitioned into detachable minds and bodies, only to be further subdivided and rented by the hour as commodified hands, arms, legs, and feet. Life spans were parceled into salable units of work-time. The total effect was to reduce

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[17] Gale, *A Brief History of Knox College*, 8.
[18] Blanchard, "Public Men, and Public Institutions of the Church, 20.
[19] Weld, *First annual report*, 116. Rousseau's economic thought is examined in detail in Bertil Fridén, *Rousseau's Economic Philosophy: Beyond the Market of Innocents* (Dordrecth: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998).
[20] Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery,* 13.

human beings into assortments of mere tools that could be taken up, worn out, and discarded at will. The operation of the labor market for both free and unfree work "seems based upon the fallacy," Weld marveled, "that whatever *costs* money *is* money; that whatever or whoever you pay money *for*, is an article of property, and the fact of your paying for it *proves* it property."[21] Adin Ballou sounded a similar alarm, announcing that "any attempt to determine the precise worth of labor and to discriminate between that of different persons would be burdensome, vexatious and mischievous to all concerned."[22] Money's power to dice working people up into vendible tranches offended manual laborites' sense that individuals were irreducibly complex wholes.

The republican critique of money's schismatic energy blended with a religious unease that money was displacing the divine as the primary font of creative power. As Marx observed in 1844, money possessed a "visible divinity."[23] Its universality, its omnipotence, its capacity to effortlessly transubstantiate one man's will into another's motion—these potencies had lodged it in corners of the human mind that had previously belonged to God alone. Of particular alarm to manual laborites was the ease with which money riveted together ill-fitting parts. Money transgressed intuitive, natural boundaries between individuals by converting tangible people into abstract representations of value.[24] Weld noted that a laborer could, through a perfectly conventional financial transaction, find his body changed into a commodity, separated from his will, and placed in the

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[21] Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, 18.
[22] "Constitution of the Fraternal Communion," 14-5.
[23] Karl Marx, "The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society," *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2007), 139.
[24] Roberts, *Marx's Inferno*, 70-4.

service of another mind. A listless factory owner could, by purchasing his employees' labor power, become a productive powerhouse; a slaveholder who scarcely raised a finger could, with sufficient capital, exert the force of a hundred bound workers.[25]

To the critics of commercial society, money's ability to work miracles undermined manual laborism, Sabbatarianism, and other efforts to spiritualize labor. Attempts to dignify work by drawing out its spiritually enlarging qualities seemed to be inevitably out-shouted by demands for higher wages. Among Ralph Waldo Emerson's reasons for declining membership in the Transcendentalist utopia at Brook Farm was his suspicion that the colony's manual labor school and joint ownership model would attract profit mongers rather than truth seekers.[26] Elsewhere, he wryly noted that financial best practices had become new liturgies. "The counting-room maxims liberally expounded are laws of the universe," Emerson quipped. "The merchant's economy is a coarse symbol of the soul's economy."[27] Money's power to lure men and women away from contemplation and pitch them headlong into market competition was a strong temptation to apostasy. As Jonathan Blanchard reflected, the unrelenting pressure to realize a return on investments led even the most pious property owners to schedule their employees to work on the Sabbath.[28] Henry David Thoreau was grimmer: "This world is a place of business," he commented in 1854. "There is no sabbath. It is nothing but work, work, work."[29]

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[25] Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery*, 8-9.
[26] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "New England Reformers," *The Prose Works, Vol. I* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1870), 555.
[27] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1863), 108-9.
[28] Blanchard, "Public Men, and Public Institutions of the Church," 20.
[29] Henry David Thoreau, *Life Without Principle* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford UP, 1946), 24.

To a manual labor movement that had attempted to broker the reconciliation of mind and body through a carefully balanced combination of worship and work, money posed a troublesome problem. In a sense, money accomplished precisely the reunion of mind and body that manual laborites had pursued. But rather than upholding personal integrity and community cohesion, money joined the worker's body to the owner's mind, violating the integrity of both and sentencing them, as partial entities, to permanent dependency on the market that supplied them with their missing pieces. Never fastidious bookkeepers, laborites like Weld aspired to make membership in the movement contingent on the denunciation of moneymaking altogether. By any honest metric, Weld argued, the manual labor movement had been a runaway success. Those who pointed to the movement's balance sheets as proof of its failure only revealed themselves to be enemies to the cause:

> [L]et those talk of failure, whose sole definition of *success* is money making; who are ravished by no music but the jingle of pence; with whom nothing is merit but skill in handling the 'muck-rake;' whose eyes are enlightened by nothing but the reflection of coin; and to whom the dimensions of a bank note are the circumference of the universe.

The cool accountings of those like Cyril Pearl and Josiah Holbrook, who took stock of laborism's moral victories as well as its financial disappointments, were relegated to the movement's fringe. Weld did not mince words in setting a standard for their readmission: "The main arguments upon which the manual labor system rests its claims, disavow all companionship with money."[30]

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[30] Weld, *First annual report*, 82-3.

Reformers who attended too carefully to laborism's balance sheets were not the sole targets of anti-commercial invectives. Laborites also lashed out at the laboring-class students who had borne the brunt of manual labor schools' financial mismanagement. Weld accused students who criticized manual labor academies of having fallen under the sway of "filthy lucre" and parroting opinions that would earn them favor among prospective employers.[31] Manual labor schools' chronic inability to turn a profit could now be understood not merely as insignificant—as George Junkin and others had argued—but as part of a conscious effort by laborites to train students out of their desire to accumulate wealth. "We *can* get money," one laborite assured the movement's critics. But as Emerson had warned the Brook Farmers, this laborite cautioned that to seek profit would cheapen the movement by attracting students who enrolled only for financial gain. More desirable were those students who exhibited "self-denial"—those who took all the satisfaction they needed in labor's "triumphant prosecution" and were little interested in haggling over wages. Holbrook could keep his "business principles." Manual labor schools ought to welcome only those whose "souls are absorbed in the business of converting the world."[32]

Conceptually structuring this discourse was a tacit distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic incentives to work. Laborites weighed in decisively that workers should respond exclusively to intrinsic motivations: the intangible, internal rewards of answering one's calling with eagerness and skill. Work's extrinsic motivations, which encompassed

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[31] Weld, *First annual report*, 82.
[32] Frost quoted in *ibid.*, 123. Emphasis mine.

not only the compensation that a worker received for his time but also the ability to financially support family and community with those wages, were regarded as sidelining moral reasoning and perverting the worker's will. Extrinsic incentives hypnotized workers with the jangling of coins, whereas intrinsic benefits ennobled physical toil by attaching it to the pursuit of things "infinitely higher."[33] When work was not performed solely in the expectation of a paycheck, it was believed to sharpen the wits, provide moments for contemplation, develop a sense of comradery between atomized demographic groups, and outfit the mind and body for service to God.[34]

This emphasis on the intrinsic rewards of work expanded the notion that ministerial work was a self-justified "calling" until it applied to all vocations. According to this template, communities were arranged according to a "divine economy" in which individuals had been providentially slated to serve a particular role in maintaining the standing social order. A person's calling encompassed the sum of his public obligations—the tasks that he had been specially designed to perform. To attend to one's calling meant accepting one's station in life as an equally valuable contribution to the collective lives of the faithful, no matter the disparities in material rewards or social esteem that different tasks might accrue.[35] "The aim of the laborer," Thoreau had once

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[33] Weld, *First annual report*, 82.
[34] Jonathan Glickstein has written extensively on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic labor incentives in the early and middle nineteenth century. See, for instance, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America*, 3-16.
[35] Scott, *From Office to Profession*, 6-7. As Eric Foner has pointed out, the belief that workers had a divine duty to excel in their employments could lead to the idea that "the pursuit of wealth" was "a way of serving God on earth." Yet Foner overstates the degree of uniformity with which antebellum Americans, and particularly Northerners, rejected the notion a "static economy … with more or less fixed classes." Manual laborites most fervently opposed class antagonism, not

sermonized, "should be, not to get his living, to get 'a good job,' but to perform well a certain work. … You must get your living by loving."[36] The moral establishment would take it upon itself to teach wayward laborers how to love their work.

William Ellery Channing, Orestes Brownson, and the "Habits of Providence"

The Panic of 1837 brought these long-simmering anti-commercial sentiments to a rolling boil. As the nation's financial institutions trembled, laborites brooded over the effect that the approaching economic downturn would have on workers' ability to resist commercial temptations. They reasoned that the financial crisis would further impoverish the laboring class and amplify its dependency on wages and credit lines, making it all the more difficult for workers to refuse unscrupulous employers or pass up opportunities to turn a quick profit by morally questionable means. If the laboring class could not be taught to value work's intrinsic rewards, then it seemed that the Panic would inevitably bring wage riots, class violence, and the permanent subordination of moral reason to market rationality.

In Boston, William Ellery Channing was determined to fortify laboring-class virtue against the impending crunch. As speculative markets began to falter during the summer of 1836, "the influence of the credit system on the poor and the laboring class" became a matter of anxious concern to Channing and fellow members of the Boston

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economic immobility. It was striving for the highest possible attainment within one's sphere of activity that was equated with worship—not striving for the highest possible level of economic success that the society had to offer. See Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 12-3.

[36] Thoreau, *Life Without Principle*, 26-7.

Unitarian clergy. The city's lenders insisted that they promoted goodness in working people by extending credit lines on the basis of favorable character recommendations, but Channing was unconvinced. He worried that credit, by stretching the laboring class's purchasing power beyond its means, would stoke in workers a libidinal urge "to purchase luxuries which they would forego, were they obliged to earn before they spend." Channing feared that the ability to access luxury goods through unrestricted borrowing would prevent workers from developing "habits of providence"—reflexes of self-mastery and temperance that would place a moral yoke on wayward desires.[37] As the Panic unfolded, Channing took it upon himself to teach such habits.

Channing became increasingly convinced of money's moral corrosiveness as a winter of fluctuating wages, prices, and interest rates fed into a politically agitated spring of riots and protests. Commercial society had "exposed" the laboring classes "to peculiar temptations," he observed, cultivating in otherwise contented workers an envious "hatred of the rich."[38] That hatred had recently erupted in violent, destructive uprisings. In February, discontent over food scarcity and price inflation had sparked raids on private flour and wheat storehouses; months later, hundreds of native-born Boston firefighters assaulted immigrant laborers whom they blamed for driving down wages. In response to the mounting unrest, businessmen and their allied politicians had pushed for a swift

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[37] Channing to Joseph Tuckerman, August 10, 1836, repr. in William Ellery Channing, *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, Vol. III* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee, & Co., 1860), 52.
[38] *Ibid*., 53.

expansion in local and state police departments to keep the popular mobs at bay.[39] But in Channing's view, this brazen "array of force" tended only to the symptoms of class antagonism. It left untreated the runaway desire for material gain that had motivated the poor to take up arms in the first place.[40] Redistributing wealth, as far as Channing was concerned, would only further capitulate to materialistic drives. The only way to rehabilitate laboring-class character was to instill in workers "a right religious impulse" that prioritized a moral disposition over material rewards.[41]

In July 1836, Channing enlisted Orestes Brownson to help. Brownson was an oddity among the Transcendentalist upswell that had formed within Boston Unitarianism. In a largely genteel literary and philosophical movement, Brownson was the orphaned son of modest farmers.[42] His lowly origins and pathological frankness had earned him a reputation as a laboring-class whisperer among his more patrician peers. "His history … presents a cheering example of the influence of our institutions to bring forward the man rather than the scholar," was how the inaugural issue of the *Dial*, a major

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[39] On the deployment of police as "civic armies," see Alasdair Roberts, *America's First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder After the Panic of 1837* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 170-4.

[40] William Ellery Channing, *A Selection from the Works of William E. Channing* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1855), 21. It is worth noting that when Channing reflected on the use of police and military force in 1841, he considered his agenda to be largely accomplished: "The social order of New England," he cheerily announced, was maintained without "a soldier and almost without a police."

[41] Channing to Tuckerman, March 6, 1837, repr. Channing, *Memoir of William Ellery Channing, Vol. III* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, Lee, & Co., 1860), 53. Glickstein, *American Exceptionalism, American Anxiety*, 74.

[42] Patrick W. Carey characterizes Brownson as "a Yankee religious outsider" who gained his heterodox social and religious views through "a process of osmosis" in the course of his geographically, economically, and denominationally unstable early years. See Carey, *Orestes A. Brownson: American Religious Weathervane* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 5, 1-29.

Transcendentalist organ, rather delicately introduced Brownson. Barbed though his prose might have been, the *Dial* continued, Brownson's essays nonetheless did "justice to the sincere expression of the human voice, while the foppery of learning meets with nothing but contempt."[43] Channing hoped that Brownson would serve as an ambassador to carry Channing's message of peace to the agitated laboring class. "I wish … that your people would begin to employ means seriously for their own elevation," Channing implored him. Manual labor schools struck Channing as the most workable route to such elevation, and yet he could locate just one brief reference to them in the *Boston Reformer*, the newspaper that Brownson edited. Before class enmity got entirely out of hand, Channing encouraged Brownson to investigate and publicize manual laborism as a possible path toward reconciliation.[44]

Channing's appeal fell on receptive ears. Once a supporter of the Workingmen's Party's efforts to implement state-run universal schooling, Brownson had grown disillusioned with the authoritarian overtones present in Robert Dale Owen's scheme to place school-aged children in the care of the state. Fanny Wright's plan to prepare slaves for freedom by requiring them to toil under enlightened supervision at her labor colony in Nashoba, Tennessee, likewise raised Brownson's ire.[45] As he saw it, systems that authorized learned elites to dole out autonomy as a reward for good behavior transformed self-willed human beings into "well-trained animals—a sort of learned pigs" that were

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[43] "Brownson's Writings," *The Dial* 1, no. 1 (Boston: July 1840), 23.
[44] Channing to Brownson, July 19, 1836, repr. in Henry F. Brownson, *Orestes Brownson's Early Life: From 1803 to 1844* (Detroit: H.F. Brownson, 1898), 191-2.
[45] Orestes Brownson, *The Convert, or, Leaves from My Experience* (New York: Edward Dunigan & Brothers, 1857), 101-2, 104, 90-1.

only granted independence when they had demonstrated that they would not exercise it.[46] Although manual laborism shared some superficial features with both Owen's and Wright's plans, Brownson commended it for making students' educational advancement and economic independence a product of self-effort.[47] In such a system, whoever was willing to work would readily get ahead.

Brownson invited readers of the *Reformer* to submit their opinions on manual laborism, and, in subsequent months, he received generally favorable reports. Brownson also floated the plan past Massachusetts's governor, Edward Everett, who was optimistic that public funds could be allocated for the establishment of a pilot manual labor school in Boston. Yet Brownson possessed a lifelong knack for estranging even the most forthcoming of allies. When he suggested that Boston's poor youths would particularly benefit from the opening of a public manual school, Everett flinched. The governor preferred to believe that a manual labor school would equally improve the educations of *all* the city's children. He could not bear the idea "that there are different classes of our youth, requiring different kinds of education."[48] To admit disproportionate benefits would be to admit the existence of unequal and inflexible socioeconomic classes, a notion that offended Everett's republican sensibilities.

Everett's resistance to viewing Boston through the lens of class pointed to a deeper rift between Brownson and more traditional laborites like Everett and Channing. Brownson maintained that social ills were caused by "the constitution of society as it is,"

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[46] Brownson, *The Convert*, 96-7, 104.
[47] *Ibid.*, 98.
[48] Everett to Brownson, repr. in Brownson, *Orestes Brownson's Early Life*, 193-6.

not by individual misdeeds. The proper target of social reform was therefore the "systems and institutions upheld by society … of which individuals are the slaves."[49] Brownson declined to blame the average person for succumbing to commercial temptations. Instead, he called for the annihilation of banks, corporations, the credit system, and paper money—the entire apparatus of unequal exchange that forced laborers to ignore their better angels in order to make a living.[50] Although he had been enlisted by Channing to provide a laboring-class endorsement of individual moral hygiene, Brownson took an obstinately structural approach to erasing social discord. No one—from laborers to sinners and even to slaveholders—could be faulted for pursuing their self-interest within the economic order in which they had been deposited. Brownson's solution was not to police individual behavior but to adjust the parameters in which individuals operated so as to align self-interest with moral rectitude.[51]

In the span of a few months in mid-1840, both Channing and Brownson issued seminal statements of their respective positions. Invited to deliver the inaugural lecture series at the Franklin Institute, a newly constructed venue for adult education in Boston, Channing selected as his theme "The Elevation of the Laboring Portion of the Population." But the "elevation" on offer had nothing to do with upward mobility. What Channing proposed, instead, was that workers guard themselves against commercial

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[49] Brownson, *The Labouring Classes*, 23.
[50] Brownson, *The Convert*, 178-9, 171; After his later conversion to Catholicism, Brownson would retract his derogatory comments about priests. See *The Convert*, 172, 176-7.
[51] *Ibid.*, 178-9, 171. For a summary of Brownson's "very difficult, and ultimately impossible, balancing act," in which he attempted to condemn slavery as a moral evil while indemnifying individual slaveholders, see Carey, *Orestes A. Brownson*, 224-6.

temptations by acquiring an enlightened indifference to material gain. On this view, the Panic and subsequent credit crunch might actually have blessed the working man when they deprived him of the means to chase fashions and indulge his appetites. The average laborer's limited resources had restricted him to a commendable "simplicity of taste and habits," Channing explained.[52] Wage loss and joblessness had thereofre prepared workers to realize that the "inward improvements" that labor enacted on their souls had "a worth and dignity in themselves," one that far exceeded any extrinsic returns on labor.[53] The laboring classes' "own true elevation" lay in its capacity for sustained "self-denial" and its unconditional duty to its "vocation," no matter how great or small the financial return.[54] One must learn to love one's work, Channing proposed—to revel in the humble pleasures of sore muscles and clear directives, and to put far from one's mind whom one was working for or why.

Channing's sense that the dignity of labor was corroded by financial incentives to work led him to regard most wage workers with bitter disappointment. As with many manual laborites, Channing harbored nostalgia for a partly fictitious premarket society of independent artisans and yeomen farmers, and he measured commercial society against this standard. "Among common people," he predicted, "will be found more of hardship borne manfully, more of unvarnished truth, more of religious trust, more of that generosity which gives what the giver needs himself, and more of a wise estimate of life

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[52] Channing, *Lectures on the Elevation of the Laboring Portion of the Community*, 95.
[53] *Ibid.,* 45-6.
[54] *Ibid.,* 95, 101.

and death, than among the more prosperous."[55] So impressed was Channing by the reformatory power of work that he came close to declaring manual laborism obsolete. "Manual labor *is* a school," he explained, and it would instill "energy and purpose of character" in whomever performed it conscientiously and without regard to extrinsic rewards.[56]

Yet actual "common people," in contrast with those ideal specimens of Channing's imagination, were largely dependent upon wages and could not afford to forego pay and live on conviction alone. Labor organizations emphasized the bread-and-butter issues of pay rates and work hours, not lessons in right-mindedness at the workbench. In Channing's eyes, this misguided stress on material conditions led laborers to regard their "elevation" as "something outward and foreign to themselves"—a prize package of creature comforts and ephemeral pleasures that had to be tracked down and purchased, rather than something already inherent in them.[57]

By Channing's reckoning, workers' simplicity of living should have banished "wages, purchase-money, … contracts, [and] bargains" from his mind and made him think only of "the greatest principles of morality and religion" while at work.[58] When laborers did not arrive at this conclusion on their own, it would fall to the learned class to make workers "interested in labor" for labor's sake.[59] This was the advice that he offered to Brownson: stay out of labor politics and instead attend to the reformation of laborers'

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[55] Channing, *Lectures on the Elevation of the Laboring Portion of the Community,* 15
[56] *Ibid*., 12. Emphasis mine.
[57] *Ibid.,* 45.
[58] *Ibid*., 61-2.
[59] *Ibid*., 89.

consciences. Moral reformers would most “benefit the working class, not by doing everything for them,” he argued, “but by stirring them up to do much for themselves.”[60] To Brownson, however, Channing too easily separated spiritual and material self-sufficiency. Shortly after Channing debuted his lectures, Brownson published his own tract on *The Laboring Classes*. In direct challenge to Channing, Brownson anchored his discussion of class firmly in disparities of wealth:

> [O]ne fact is certain, no man born poor has ever by his wages, as a simple operative, risen to the class of the wealthy. Rich he may have become, but it has not been by his own manual labor. He has in some way contrived to tax for his benefit the labor of others. … The simple market wages for ordinary labor has never been adequate to raise him from poverty to wealth.[61]

As in Channing’s lecture series, manual laborism hung in the background of Brownson’s analysis. Yet Brownson found that laborites had overestimated the power of education and willpower to overcome the rigidity of class. As manual labor colleges had repeatedly demonstrated, laboring-class youths were not unshackled from the circumstances of their birth by a few years of schooling. To liberally educate the laboring classes without having first implemented systemic economic reforms was, Brownson noted, merely to attune the poor child more keenly to the hopelessness of his position. “Educate the working classes,” he wrote, “and what then? Will they require less food and less clothing when educated than they do now?” To the extent that either manual labor schools or Channing’s more diffuse school of labor were expedient for the laboring class, it was

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[60] Channing, *Lectures on the Elevation of the Laboring Portion of the Community,* 192

[61] Brownson, *The Laboring Classes*, 13.

only as a means of militating workers against a political-economy that denied them any genuine opportunities for advancement.[62]

To Brownson, laborite's "undue estimate … on education" and the capacity of schooling to effect social change laid bare the movement's captivity to learned-class interests.[63] That class's moral authority and financial privileges accrued to them, after all, because of their exceptionally high educational attainment; it was only natural that they should think that learning offered everyone a ladder to success. A tendency to overgeneralize their experience was the least of the learned class's offenses. Brownson also questioned the sincerity of their commitment to democratizing education. He traced learned-class formation to the consolidation of "sacerdotal corporations" in the early modern period, and he doubted whether the class would so willingly break up the epistemic monopoly that had, for centuries, lined their pockets.[64] No—for Brownson, the actions of the learned class were as fixed by their material circumstances as anyone else's. They would maintain their monopoly on knowledge by any means. This explained the formation of the seminary system following disestablishment, just as it explained Robert Dale Owen's ambitions to separate children from their families and turn their care and training over to an "army" of educated "nurses, teachers, governors, etc." It explained why Fanny Wright had assembled a panel of credentialed intellectuals to determine whether the residents of Nashoba were fit for freedom. And, despite manual laborism's claims to have exploded the barrier between the learned and laboring classes,

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[62] Brownson, *The Laboring Classes,* 14.
[63] Brownson, *The Convert*, 99.
[64] Brownson, *The Laboring Classes,* 17.

the class interests of the movement's learned leadership explained its ultimately meager benefits to working students.[65]

Although reformers like Channing occasionally lashed out against the decadence of capitalists, Brownson appreciated that common enemies do not always make genuine allies.[66] "[T]his class" of learned men, Brownson seethed, "has done nothing for the laboring population, the real *proletarii*." He predicted that the more closely the working conditions of the learned classes approximated those of manual laborers—the more accountable ministers were to their congregations, or the more workers elevated themselves with better wages and higher status—the less disposed learned men would be to champion laboring-class interests. "From its near relation to the workingmen, its kindred pursuits with them," Brownson explained, the learned class "is altogether more hostile to them than the nobility ever were or ever can be."[67] Missing was a shared set of material interests and constraints, a common sensibility growing out of a common plight that could organically bind the learned and laboring classes into a coherent political unit. Laborite propaganda notwithstanding, it turned out that those "powers of thought and feeling" that workers gained at manual labor schools and "which ally [workers] by bonds of brotherhood to their betters" did not always inspire their "betters" to take up the cause of the less fortunate.[68]

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[65] Brownson, *The Convert*, 104.
[66] Brownson, *The Laboring Classes*, 16-8, 8.
[67] *Ibid.,* 9.
[68] *Ibid*.

The force of Brownson's analysis lay in its treatment of learned men as a distinct socioeconomic class whose primary ambition was to avoid its own proletarianization. It was not by chance that Channing's call for workers to content themselves with low wages and attend to the conditions of their souls created demand for an ethical teaching body to guide the transformation. Although Channing insisted that his psychological rendering of class would develop workers' higher faculties, it was, Brownson charged, more effective at alleviating the "struggles" of "professional and mercantile men" than it was at sparking the intellectual emancipation of working people.[69] "Reformers … would have all men wise, good, and happy," Brownson sneered; "but in order to make them so, they tell us that they want no external changes, but internal":

> [A]nd therefore instead of declaiming against society and seeking to disturb existing social arrangements, we should confine ourselves to the individual reason and conscience; seek merely to lead the individual to repentance, and to reformation of life; make the individual a practical, a truly religious man, and all evil will either disappear, or be sanctified to the spiritual growth of the soul.[70]

To learned-class laborites, the point was not to redistribute property or knowledge, but to prod workers into contentedness with their lot. Behind Channing's turn from upward mobility to a thinner, intangible "elevation," Brownson discerned a fundamental shift in laborite strategy. The laboring class had satisfied its purpose when it built the learned class its colleges. Now, those schools needed wealthy benefactors to stay afloat, and the learned class was willing to suppress labor on behalf of capitalist interests if it meant

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[69] Channing quoted in Glickstein, *American Exceptionalism, American Anxiety*, 75.
[70] Brownson, *The Labouring Classes*, 13.

earning a plum donation. “If you will only allow me to keep thousands toiling for my pleasure or my profit,” Brownson imagined the learned class’s prospective financial backers to say, “I will even aid you in your pious efforts to convert their souls.”[71] If Brownson was right, urging laborers to work for a pittance would pay laborites back in dividends.

The “Cheerful Sweat” of Anti-Commercial Utopians

Brownson was not alone in distrusting learned reformers who substituted moral hygiene for better pay. Josiah Holbrook had reassured prospective Lyceum Village residents that his settlements would promote the elevation of “*the community*” as a whole and not fall captive to the professional ambitions of “the literary class.”[72] Yet skepticism toward learned-class interests remained a minority position in moral reform circles. Brownson’s report on *The Laboring Classes* elicited fierce opposition from reformers as well as from his fellow operatives in the Democratic Party. His former allies feared that his full-throated endorsement of violent wealth redistribution would split movements, sink political campaigns, and poison the average worker against their better-educated and wealthier compatriots. Brownson had uncompromisingly declared laboring-class interests

[71] Brownson, *The Labouring Classes,* 13.
[72] Pearl and Holbrook, “The Visitor,” 269. As Christopher Clark points out, some of the period’s widespread animosity toward lawyers is attributable to the wave of debt-collections litigation that followed the Panic. See Christopher Clark, *The Communitarian Moment: The Radical Challenge of the Northampton Association* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995), 85.

to be incompatible with those of the well-educated and the well-heeled. The response, as he later recalled it, had been "one universal scream of horror."[73]

Channing's model of moral "elevation" received a warmer reception from the learned class, and its appeal consisted in the expanded social authority that it attached to higher learning. The learned classes sprung at the opportunity to reframe the ongoing economic crisis as a cataclysm of character in which their expertise was indispensable. Clergymen like the Unitarian George Ripley cautioned their congregations that "[t]he great danger of our country" was not wealth itself but "the inordinate pursuit, the extravagant worship of wealth." With the nation beset by a debt crisis, Ripley recommended turning away from financial woes and meditating instead on the "bankruptcy of the soul." This was economistic language made moral. Ripley lamented the "profitable wisdom" that had been sacrificed, "the inward resources of [the] soul" that had been squandered, the "integrity" that workers had "barter[ed] … for gain." These losses had been extraordinary, but they had gone unremarked upon by businessmen and workers alike because they did not register "on the exchange."[74] It would therefore fall to the learned class to pay them due attention.

National reeducation required a grander stage than the pulpit. In the course of the 1840s, Ripley and his associates established more than sixty utopian societies to demonstrate righteous living to a debased market society.[75] Adin Ballou, an abolitionist

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[73] Brownson, *The Convert*, 170-1.
[74] George Ripley, *The Temptations of the Times* (Boston: Hillard, Gray, and Co., 1837), 13, 7.
[75] Sterling F. Delano, *Brook Farm: The Dark Side of Utopia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2004), xiv.

clergyman who founded one such community in Hopedale, Massachusetts, expressed a widely shared discontent with the constraints that commercial society placed on intellectual pursuits. With each passing year, he discovered that his mind became more tightly "bound hand and foot in the frame work of society," another victim of "disadvantageous economies." Moral liberation was virtually unimaginable within "the disorders of the present social state," leading Ballou and others to seek refuge in fraternal community.[76] Communitarians who detested the Panic's intangible causes and faceless culprits sought to recover the local, highly personal forms of exchange that they imagined had characterized premarket life. They also attempted to revive subsistence farming and artisanal production as demonetized alternatives to degraded commercial agriculture and manufacturing. More recalcitrant features of commercial society that could not be eradicated entirely would, at least, be subordinated to moral ends. Lending would be confined to local networks, forcing creditors to register the human cost of calling in debts. Pastoral living might not spell the abolition of all divisions of labor, but it would restore bonds of mutual dependency, encouraging workers and owners to band together for the community instead of organizing along class lines.[77] Communitarians moved ahead with the assurance that the laboring and business classes would eagerly follow their example. Ballou looked forward to a day when "[t]he establishment of one Community will succeed another, till whole countries, and perhaps … the whole face of

[76] "Constitution of the Fraternal Communion," 8.
[77] Clark, *Communitarian Moment*, 32-3, 85.

the globe, will be dotted with peaceful and happy habitations." Within the decade, he guessed, scarcely a dollar would remain in sight.[78]

Founding documents for communities including Massachusetts's Hopedale and Brook Farm as well as New York's Skaneateles made explicit reference to manual laborism and laid plans for the establishment of community schools on the system.[79] The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, which operated eight intentional communities in the period, had its origins in a botched attempt to replicate Oberlin's model in southwestern Ohio.[80] Manual laborism was also baked into the organizational philosophy of the dozens of communities that subscribed to the kaleidoscopic visions of the French utopian Charles Fourier, who had borrowed heavily from manual laborism's Swiss originator, Philipp Emanual von Fellenberg. American Fourierists were quick to trace parallels between Fellenberg's defense of individual complexity against industrial divisions of labor and Fourier's exhaustive catalogue of unique personality types. In short order, laborite schools were established at a handful of Fourierist colonies in the United States.[81] To learned men wishing to distance themselves from petty scrimping and saving,

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[78] "Constitution of the Fraternal Communion," 10.
[79] *Ibid*., 4; "Constitution of the Brook Farm Association for Industry and Education, West Roxbury, Mass. with an Introductory Statement" (Boston: I.R. Butts, 1844); John A. Collins, et al., *The Social Pioneer* (Boston, 1844), 89; Albert Brisbane, *Association; or, a Concise Exposition of the Practical Part of Fourier's Social Science* (New York: Greeley & McElrath, 1843), 52. Also see Thomas D. Hamm, *God's Government Begun: The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, 1842-1846* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995), 195.
[80] Hamm, *God's Government Begun*, 59-61, 177.
[81] Marc Vuilleumier, "Philipp Emmanuel von Fellenberg, Fourier et l'Ecole sociétaire," *Cahiers Charles Fourier* 1995, no. 6 (September 2017). Significant differences between Fellenberg's and Fourier's educational philosophies should not be overlooked and are documented in David Zeldin, *The Educational Ideas of Charles Fourier, 1772-1837* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 33-4.

manual laborism furnished an appealing critique of commercial society and a cost-efficient means of constructing an asylum beyond it.

Some community members arrived having already imbibed manual labor principles as students, teachers, and administrators at laborite schools. John A. Collins, a cofounder of the Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, had studied at Middlebury College and Andover Seminary while their manual labor programs remained in operation. Another Society cofounder, John O. Wattles, had attended the Oneida Institute, taught at a manual labor school near Cincinnati, and coordinated efforts to found two additional laborite schools.[82] William Adam, Northampton's first director of education, came to the community from Bengal, where he had helped to implement manual labor programs at several mission schools.[83] Even the names of some utopian colonies bore a debt to manual laborism. Although the Northampton Association of Education and Industry and the Brook Farm Association for Industry and Education quibbled over the proper order of labor and learning, they, like many contemporary utopian experiments, promised to facilitate "a more natural union between intellectual and manual labor," as Brook Farm's founder, George Ripley, put it—"to combine the thinker and the worker, as far as possible, in the same individual."[84]

Yet by making the reunion of thinking and working contingent on members' voluntary withdrawal from markets, these communities reproduced unequal class

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[82] Hamm, *God's Government Begun*, 2-10, 177.
[83] William Adam, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal*, ed. Anathnath Basu (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1835/1941), lix, 298-9.
[84] Quoted in Joel Myerson, ed., *The Brook Farm Book: A Collection of First-Hand Accounts of the Community* (New York: Garland, 1987), ix.

relations within their borders. The injunction that community members should work for little or no pay selected for a milieu that had been largely untouched by the Panic. The learned class remained particularly well-positioned to afford a dignified indifference to money. Although the Panic's effects insinuated into all strata of American society, the consequences for credentialed professionals were rather less severe than they had been for manual laborers. Under the spoils system, men of letters like Orestes Brownson and Nathaniel Hawthorne continued to receive appointments to state sinecures. The flourishing lecture circuit provided a means of subsistence to professional lecturers like Emerson, while the burgeoning literary periodical market supplied writers and poets with steady work.[85] Even the poor-relief measures that followed on the heels of the Panic brought employment opportunities for the learned class. The short-lived Bankruptcy Act of 1841 afforded some relief to the laboring classes by lightening restrictions on declarations of insolvency and discharging debt. But it also generated a thick administrative layer of clerks, court officials, attorneys, judges, and newspaper editors.[86] The Panic undoubtedly drew the learned classes more fully into market society. But they

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[85] On antebellum civil service, see William E. Nelson, *The Roots of American Bureaucracy, 1830-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982), 9-40; and Brian J. Cook, *Bureaucracy and Self-Government: Reconsidering the Role of Public Administration in American Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996), 49-64. Peter S. Field's *Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Making of a Democratic Intellectual* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003) elegantly reinterprets Emerson as a public intellectual and professional lecturer.

[86] Edward Balleisen, "Vulture Capitalism in Antebellum America: The 1841 Federal Bankruptcy Act and the Exploitation of Financial Distress," *Business History Review* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 473-516; Edward Belleisen, *Navigating Failure: Bankruptcy and Commercial Society in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

were less often dumped into the swollen underclass of precarious workers than they were slotted into the professional stratum that was created to manage popular discontent.

This is not to say that anti-commercial communities were socially homogeneous. Scores of out of work laborers applied for admission to communal utopias, lured by the prospect of pooling resources and collectivizing risk to weather an unforgiving market. Ebullient young laborers like Stephen Young, who bounced between a number of utopian colonies throughout the 1840s, shared the learned-class judgment that "competition … [was] repugnant" and "cooperation attractive."[87] But men like Young did not find common cause with the learned-class founders and administrators of these communities, who tended to receive their laboring-class neighbors less warmly than the original manual laborites had theirs. Pioneering laborites had imagined themselves to be the beneficiaries and defenders of a virtuous frontier society that was under assault by credit lines and speculative bubbles. Many communitarians, by contrast, had come to believe that premarket virtue had already been obliterated and would need to made anew. "[T]he wizard Trade has swept her wand of sorceries, and on these shepherds and swineherds are visited the sordid and debasing vices of the distant towns they feed," intoned Bronson Alcott, whose short-lived utopian venture Fruitlands enacted an idealized, vegetarian version of rural life.[88] Amasa Sessions, a resident of Skaneateles and scion of a prominent landholding family, reimagined his father's generation of landed aristocrats as salt-of-the-earth yeomen who had performed "vast manual labors … making roads and bridges, and

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[87] Young quoted in Clark, *The Communitarian Moment*, 76.
[88] A. Bronson Alcott, "Days from a Diary," *The Dial* 5, no. 4 (April 1842), 430.

erecting buildings and planting orchards" to tame a wild country. To drive the point home, Sessions underscored that these distinguished forebears had performed their labors without the conveniences of modern commodity markets. Accelerated rates of migration from the countryside to urban manufacturing centers was all the proof that Sessions needed to conclude that the rising generation of farmers, in contrast with their elders, was beset by "effeminacy." The "dread of dirty fingers, and hard work" was leading young people to abandon their families and native farmlands and to either pursue industrial work in cities or, if they could afford it, to enroll at colleges in the hopes of finding work in the professions.[89]

The resuscitation of small-town community life was therefore deemed unlikely to be carried out by those who had been "bred to the knowledge and arts of agriculture" but were now fleeing stagnant rural economies in search of brisker markets. Instead, the resurrection of the premarket ideal fell to the disaffected learned classes: those who had been "bred to some profession" yet had tired of being "a mere drone in the community, to be sustained by the hard earnings of others." While laboring-class youths drifted further under money's spell, Sessions reported, educated people increasingly longed to learn a trade or run a farm. Adin Ballou likewise identified himself with a disenchanted learned class that, in virtue of being neither rich nor poor, was the only class that was not in the grip of money. "We cannot go with a multitude to do evil," he declared, "nor take part with the mighty against the feeble, nor excite enmity between the rich and the poor."[90]

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[89] "Manual Labor Schools," *The Genesee Farmer* 7, no. 13 (April 1, 1837) 97-9.
[90] Adin Ballou, "Standard of Practical Christianity" (1839).

The remaining option was for the learned class to seek autonomy in self-sufficient production and attempt to work the levers of social reform from a healthy remove.

At once, then, communitarians claimed that the path to national redemption lay in manual labor and that manual laborers were those who were most in need of redemption. Communitarians' treatment of the workers who arrived on their doorsteps was most often a kind of punitive praise. The communards were enamored of a fanciful premarket ideal of enlightened yeomen and craftsmen—an ideal that actually existing laborers, beholden to market pressures, could not help but disappoint. When laboring-class arrivals at Northampton and Hopedale worried that silk and sugar beet cultivation would fail to keep the communities financially afloat, they were accused of a fondness for slave-grown cotton and sugarcane that betrayed the proud independence of their Yankee forebears.[91] As one agricultural journal sympathetic to communitarianism remarked, the silk industry's chronic insolvency would only trouble those who had been "humbugged by men who care more about making money" than they did the spiritual derivatives of honest industry.[92] Celebrations of what farmers might have been served to condemn what farmers really were; odes to artisanal independence became rebukes of the piece worker who was dependent upon his employer for his pay. Rather than be "content with the slow and regular, but almost certain gains of thrifty enterprise and persevering industry," Ripley remarked that the average worker was consumed by a vain wish to swaddle himself in "huge fabrics of wealth."[93]

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[91] Clark references; "Constitution of the Fraternal Communion," 14.
[92] *The Genesee Farmer* 7, no. 13 (April 1, 1837), 97.
[93] Ripley, *The Temptations of the Times*, 14.

Learned communitarians, for their part, styled themselves as a vanguard, chiding and goading "[t]he mass" to live up to its own myth.[94] Communities employed both informal and formal systems of screening, oversight, and shunning to force compliance. Enmity toward commerce left many of them undercapitalized, driving down wages and leaving the most grueling tasks to those laborers who were most in need of money.[95] Workers' demands for more equitable distributions of labor and better pay were met with denunciations of materialism and commerciality. Ripley was hardly alone among communitarians when he reprimanded agitating workers for introducing avarice to his anti-commercial refuge at Brook Farm:

> Let us not think so much of making an external show, as of promoting the inward peace of our households; not so much of living in luxury and splendor ourselves, as of advancing the intelligence and refinement of our country; not so much of heaping up riches, … as of providing our souls with the treasures of modest contentedness, self-denying temperance and frugality, peaceful affections and the beauty of holiness.[96]

The Hopedale Community implemented more explicit mechanisms of control. Ballou subjected applicants for membership to "a religious and moral test" to gauge their commitment to pacifism, temperance, and non-involvement in civil government, lest the

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[94] "Constitution of the Fraternal Communion," 16. To conflict-averse romantics, this leading by what Channing called "the silent influence of example" was a preferred disciplinary technique. Channing, "Self-Culture," *The Works of William E. Channing*, New and Complete ed. (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1898), 21. For other examples, see Lance Newman, *Our Common Dwelling: Henry Thoreau, Transcendentalism and the Class Politics of Nature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 151-4; Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), 1-3.
[95] For detailed descriptions of life in communal utopias, see Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP), 187-96.
[96] Ripley, *The Temptations of the Times*, 14.

community be converted into "*an avaricious corporation*" that chased profits through warmongering, liquor sales, or politics.[97] Hopedale's members labored eight to ten hours per day and maintained factory discipline, following a fixed work schedule and reporting to "a general time-keeper" in the community's Finance Department. Ballou cheerily noted that "[a] public clock and bell, kept always in order, will facilitate the matter." Productive activities were divided between five general departments, each with an exclusive set of by-laws and regulations, and each organizing "a strong force of workmen under intelligent managers."[98] In communal utopias, workers were promised the real, spiritual fruits of their labor. First, they had to satisfy the criteria of the learned class who laid claim to those fruits.

At the heart of the communal withdrawal from commercial society was the pursuit of what some communards called "attractive industry." The phrase had particular significance in Fourierist communities, though Brook Farm, Hopedale, and Northampton all derived a measure of their agendas from Fourier's principles as well.[99] In a series of logorrheic volumes, Fourier had advanced a proto-Freudian view of human civilization as an ungainly, repressive apparatus that foiled self-expression and wasted individual talents on ill-suited jobs and mismanaged industry. Proceeding from the supposition that human beings were irreducibly complex assemblages of desires, proclivities, aversions, and needs—manifold selves that could not be fitted into specialized functions without enormous sacrifice—Fourier detailed a social system that would solve the sprawling

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[97] "Constitution of the Fraternal Union," 10, 2, 13.
[98] *Ibid*., 14-5.
[99] Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 2-4, 57; "Constitution of the Fraternal Union," 2.

"industrial anarchy" of the present by identifying the laws underlying the small, well-oiled cooperative communities of the past. Each resultant community would make full use of individual idiosyncrasies by pairing members with jobs that were adapted to their "genius and taste," as Ballou imagined.[100] Such an arrangement would override the market's individual acquisitiveness by making individual wish fulfillment coextensive with the common weal. Industry would be made "attractive" in a magnetic sense: community members would be miraculously drawn toward the tasks for which they were suited, and boundaries between work and play, exertion and enjoyment, would at last melt away.[101] Industry, Ballou argued, would be rendered "honorable and agreeable" not by adequate pay but by the "cheerful sweat" that resulted from labor carried out for its own sake.[102]

The notion that all work should be an outlet for individual genius failed to gain purchase on the workaday exigencies of market society. Just as quickly as communal utopias filled up with laborers seeking relief from commercial depravations and indignities, they emptied out as workers sought their fortunes in better compensated, if less "attractive" industries. In many cases, learned communards were left on their own as micro-nations of managers deprived of subordinates. Some communities dissolved, while others ran themselves to failure with a bravado and incompetence that recalled earlier laborites' attempts at sericulture. The failure of the communal utopias to convince even a

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[100] "Constitution of the Fraternal Union," 3.
[101] Chris Jennings, *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism* (New York: Random House, 2016), 157-8; Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative*, 2-3.
[102] "Constitution of the Fraternal Union," 10.

minority of American workers of the "noble endeavor" that was unpaid industry shattered learned-class laborites' remaining faith in laborers' capacity for independent thought within a market society. To the extent that the learned class any longer performed systematic manual labor, it would be as a strictly individual exercise in personal health and piety. When they engaged with the more moderate, grounded varieties of manual laborism that remained, it would be as gadflies harassing a movement whose usefulness, for the learned class, had finally expired.

"Lords of the Immovable Acres": Manual Laborism at the Colored Conventions

When Fruitland's scrubby fields failed to meet the community's needs, Alcott began chopping wood for a dollar per day. But even such a meager tie to a market "whose root is selfishness" was too great an indignity for the Transcendentalist to bear. He renounced drawing wages and leaned instead upon the charity of his friends and relatives, reasoning that, by presenting them with an occasion for self-sacrifice, he was helping them to overcome their own commercial manias. To answer to the lash of necessity by performing labor for the sake of a dollar was, Alcott avowed, a short path to spiritual enslavement.[103]

To those who had endured actual enslavement, the equivalence of remunerated labor and slavery was less obvious. Although there remained free black supporters of manual laborism throughout the 1840s, few of them endorsed the association between

[103] Amos Bronson Alcott, *The Letters of A. Bronson Alcott*, ed. Richard L. Herrnstadt (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1969), 53, 57.

money-making and bondage. Rather, opportunities to accrue wealth and property were most often conceived of as critical preconditions of substantial freedom. This perspective was most forcibly expressed at the local and national Colored Conventions that sporadically convened from 1830 through the early years of the Civil War. Delegates to the conventions met to address shared grievances, coordinate demands for abolition and for social equality, and develop strategies to promote black political autonomy on the basis of economic self-sufficiency.[104] To a sizable and influential cluster of delegates, manual laborism represented the primary means of underwriting these efforts through the acquisition of property and marketable knowledge.

Conventioneers regularly invoked the Wilberforce Colony as a model for building propertied independence around a laborite education.[105] An all-black settlement in Ontario, Canada, Wilberforce had been founded in 1829 after Ohio politicians had publicized their intention to redouble enforcement of the state's "black laws," which had been erratically observed in the twenty years since their passage. In cities like Cincinnati, a burgeoning black middle class had sprung up in the interregnum. When reactivated, the black laws would effectively regress black Ohioans to a servile role in commercial

[104] Penetrating interpretations of the movement, its aims, and its practices are in P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Black Organizing, Print Advocacy, and Collective Authorship: The Long History of the Colored Conventions Movement" and Erica L. Ball, "Performing Politics, Creating Community: Antebellum Black Convenitons as Political Rituals," *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Patterson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 21-71, 154-166.

[105] *Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for improving their condition in the United States; for purchasing lands; and for the establishment of a settlement in Upper Canada, also the Proceedings of the Convention, with their address to the free persons of colour in the United States* (Philadelphia: J.W. Allen, 1831), 10; "Colony of 20,000 Blacks in Canada," *Semi-Weekly Eagle* I, no. 35 (Dec 10, 1847).

society by requiring hard-to-come-by proofs of freedom and exorbitant sureties from white character references as prerequisites to property ownership and lawful employment. With their pecuniary ambitions no longer realizable in Ohio's cities and racial violence erupting between black laborers and the Irish immigrants with whom they now competed for informal work, more than half of Cincinnati's black population had abandoned the city in the summer of 1829.[106]

Although the majority of those who left resettled in smaller towns or in more tolerant Eastern cities like Philadelphia, some had seized the opportunity to implement a long-standing plan to emigrate to Canada. Wilberforce had offered more than a refuge from social persecution and economic repression; it had also enacted a positive political project that grounded black political freedom in landed independence.[107] As one colonist observed, black Americans who bucked the trend toward urban migration and withdrew to rural settings like Ontario discovered that they could suddenly "purchase a piece of land, cultivate and improve it." In the end, he reported that Wilberforce supplied the material basis for a life that was "far richer and happier" than was achievable "in a crowded city" like Cincinnati, where black economic potential suffocated in a noxious legal, political, and social morass.[108]

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[106] Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2005), 50-8.
[107] *Ibid.,* 58-63.
[108] Austin Stewart quoted in Nikki Taylor, "Reconsidering the 'Forced' Exodus of 1829: Free Black Emigration from Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada," *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Summer 2002), 290.

Years of exploitative employment and legal constraints on black purchasing and investing power had limited black wealth formation in Cincinnati, even among the city's black middle class. As a result, Wilberforce remained deeply undercapitalized throughout its early years. Colonists sought a solution in the manual labor system, which had already proven itself capable of rallying low- or no-cost labor to build infrastructure and manufacture salable goods without relying on markets that prevented black wealth accumulation. Although Wilberforce's planned manual labor school failed to attract sufficient donations and never came to be, the dream that black settlements might achieve a degree of self-sufficiency through rural resettlement and laborism inspired several delegates to the Colored Conventions to press for a wider embrace of the system.[109]

The conventioneers who looked most favorably upon the system could often attribute their professional successes to the educations that they had received at laborite schools. Charles B. Ray, chairman of the New York state convention and a member of the national convention's committee on agriculture, had been fully convinced of laborism's benefits while enrolled at Methodist-run manual labor schools in Massachusetts and Connecticut.[110] Also from the New York delegation was Alexander Crummell, the first black student to have joined the Oneida Institute.[111] To some conventioneers, Crummell had pioneered a dawning age of racially integrated education. While Crummell was still a student at Oneida, delegates to the 1834 national convention

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[109] Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, 69-70.
[110] M.N. Work, "The Life of Charles B. Ray," *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no. 4 (Oct. 1919), 361.
[111] W.E.B. DuBois dedicated a chapter of his *Souls of Black Folk* to Crummell. See *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), 145-53.

had inferred from his presence at the school that "the friends of the coloured man are evidently increasing." Integrated admissions at schools like Oneida indicated that black abolitionists were winning powerful and well-connected white allies. This critical development increased the odds that future schools, unlike Wilberforce's, would meet their initial funding thresholds.[112]

Other conventioneers were less impressed by the opportunities that laborite institutions had opened to black Americans. At Pennsylvania's 1835 state convention, one attendee, Augustus H. Price, questioned how many prominent white manual laborites would risk ostracization by making good on their promises to deliver interracial education. By Price's count, just one manual labor school had educated a sizable number of black youths, and this was Gerritt Smith's short-lived venture in Peterborough, New York—a school that most manual laborites had refused to support due to Smith's ties to the colonizationist movement.[113] Rather than gamble that white laborites' consciences would triumph over their self-interest, Price proposed that conventioneers take up collections to establish a black manual labor school outside of the mainstream laborite movement.[114] Price's supporters contended that it was only at a school under black leadership that students would not be forced into the unskilled, low-waged agricultural and mechanical work that was already available to uneducated black laborers. Instead,

[112] *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour, in the United States, held by Adjournments in the Asbury Church, New York* (New York, 1834), 25.
[113] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in the United States, held by Adjournments, in the Wesley Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: William P. Gibbons, 1835), 10.
[114] *Ibid.*, 5, 10.

they might be taught "important, lucrative arts" like jewelry making, watchmaking, and machining—skilled trades that would not simply reproduce black students' economic position but also lay a foundation for intergenerational black affluence.[115] The mere spectacle of black students engaged in artisanal production would serve as visual proof that black Americans' could become independent proprietors, subverting racial stereotypes and inspiring other black workers to buck the limits that were usually imposed on their social mobility.[116]

Despite the attractions of opening a manual labor school outside of the movement's existing networks, most attendees hesitated to alienate their white allies. Price's opponents doubted whether an autonomous black manual labor school would be permitted to survive, given how swiftly earlier attempts to assert political and economic independence had been derailed. Conventioneers were keenly aware that training black students for highly competitive trades was likely to excite enmity among white craftsmen. Memories of the violent opposition that Simeon Jocelyn had faced when trying to establish a black manual labor academy in New Haven also remained raw.[117] Charles Ray had been personally threatened with bodily harm for pursuing his education, even when he had enrolled at integrated laborite schools that remained under white leadership.[118] The chances that a black-run school would endure without backing from

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[115] *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention* (1834), 16, 31.
[116] *Ibid.,* 16.
[117] *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention* (1834), 26-7.
[118] Cordelia H. and Florence Ray, *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray* (New York: J. J. Little, 1887), 8.

white laborites seemed marginal, at best. Rather than see his proposal defeated, Price retracted it before it went to a vote.[119]

Delegates who doubted the feasibility of a black-operated manual labor school hailed the 1841 opening of the Emlen Institution for the Benefit of Children of African and Indian Descent as a more viable path forward. The school was the creation of Augustus Wattles, a white abolitionist and well-connected member of the laborite mainstream. Wattles had studied at Oneida before decamping in 1833 to help Theodore Weld fashion Lane into a laborite stronghold. Although he had thrown in with the Lane Rebels in 1835, Wattles had elected to remain in Cincinnati rather than resume his studies at Oberlin. In Cincinnati, he had guided self-emancipated slaves North to Wilberforce and operated the manual labor school where his brother, John, had briefly taught before cofounding the Society for Universal Reform.[120] Convinced that an urban setting was unconducive to black education, Wattles purchased one-hundred sixty acres of land in the Ohio backcountry and announced his intention of constructing a manual labor school.[121] Interest in the settlement mounted. Land was cheap in the thinly populated woodland of Mercer County, and racial restrictions on property ownership were enforced loosely, if at all. Two years before Wattles relocated his school there in 1842, the mere promise of a settlement had attracted enough settlers that the town of Carthagena was surveyed. As the *Liberator* acidly observed, the greatest expense that many black Carthageneans incurred

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[119] *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention* (1834), 5.
[120] Swift, *Black Prophets*, 162; Hamm, *God's Government Begun*, 6-7.
[121] "Our Coloured Population," *Friend: A Religious & Literary Journal* 14, no. 13 (Dec 26, 1840), 100.

was the ten-thousand dollars that some of them had paid to purchase their own freedom.[122] Between 1830 and 1840, Mercer County's population had increased eight-fold, with free black people accounting for the majority of the new residents.[123]

When Wattles convened Carthagena's St. Mary's Manual Labor School—later renamed Emlen to honor a Quaker benefactor—more than one-hundred scholars enrolled, and dozens more were turned away for lack of space.[124] Carthageneans praised the school as a "truly democratic" undertaking that made "no distinction on account of age, colour, sex, or clime" in the admission of its students. One Mercer County official was amazed to learn that every student—white, black, male, female, rich, or poor—had agreed to be placed "on the same level." Even wealthy students and female students had consented "to work out [their] board with [their] own hands, thus putting it in the power of every person of enterprise to become a good scholar."[125] Social equality through equal work was the bounty that laborites had pursued for nearly twenty years. Carthagena's supporters believed that they had finally bagged it.

Through Wattles, the Emlen Institute maintained close institutional bonds with the broader manual labor movement as well as with the derivatives that had cropped up in romantic utopian communities. Arthur Tappan provided for the travel expenses and salaries of the four female teachers who travelled from New York to Carthagena to helm

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[122] "Colored Settlements in Ohio," *Liberator* IX, no. 19 (May 10, 1839), 33.
[123] "Our Coloured Population," 100. See also, Jill E. Rowe, *Invisible in Plain Sight: Self-Determination Strategies of Free Blacks in the Old Northwest* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 69-70.
[124] "From the Emancipator, from Mr. Wattles," *The Philanthropist* (Oct. 13, 1837); "Colored Settlements in Ohio," 33.
[125] "Our Coloured Population," 100-1.

Emlen's women's department.[126] Before departing on a fundraising tour of Philadelphia, Wattles obtained letters of introduction from prominent abolitionists and supporters of manual laborism including James G. Birney, the Liberty Party's perennial nominee for the presidency and an associate of Theodore Weld.[127] Wattles's brother, John, was a frequent guest at Carthagena, forming a tie to Skaneateles and other utopian experiments that had incorporated laborism into their community plans.[128]

Perhaps as a result of these connections, anti-commercial sentiment pervaded discussion of Carthagena. Many Carthageneans, weary of urban markets' relentless competition and unpredictable outcomes, had "resolved to save our money, and move into the country, and try by labor, and economy, and honesty, and temperance, to earn for our people a better name than they had heretofore enjoyed."[129] Fatigue with hypercompetitive urban markets incited a generalized pastoral bias against cities and energized a call for free black Americans to seek their futures in the countryside.[130] In "the big cities, and large towns," argued delegates to the 1842 Convention, black people had "nothing permanently to depend upon for a support; their occupations are precarious, as fluctuating as the wind, subject to all the changes of fortune and of circumstances to

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[126] Donald E. Williams, Jr., *Prudence Crandall's Legacy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2014), 170.
[127] James Gillespie Birney, *Letters, 1831-1857, Vol. 2* (New York: D. Appleton, 1938), 628.
[128] John O. Wattles, *Annual Report on the Educational Condition of the Colored People of Cincinnati Including the Sentiment in Mercer County, Ohio* (Cincinnati, OH: John White, 1847), 6.
[129] "Colored Settlements in Ohio," 32.
[130] *Proceedings of the State Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania, held in Pittsburgh, on the 23rd, 24th and 25th of August, 1841, for the purpose of considering their condition, and the means of its improvement* (Pittsburgh: Matthew M. Grant, 1841), 8.

which those who employ them are subjected, as well as to all the vexatious change in the business affairs of the country."[131] Representatives at the New York state Colored Convention of 1840 had expressed a similar agrarian preference. For all but the select few capitalists who dictated the terms of exchange, they observed, markets plunged workers into "a state of restlessness" and scattered "all those settled habits which would otherwise attach us to the soil."[132] At conventions throughout the Northeast, delegates championed property ownership, subsistence farming, and education in the skilled trades as bulwarks against the winner-take-all commodity market in which black workers were rarely permitted to prevail.[133] In terse prose, one Carthagenean limned the simple pleasures that awaited black urbanites in the country:

> We have built comfortable houses to live in. Our land is cleared. We raise our own provisions and manufacture most of our own clothing. We have horses, and hogs, and cattle, and sheep. We have meeting houses and a school house. … Our children have learned to read, and write, and cypher. We have Sunday schools where they are taught the principles of morality and religion. We have a saw mill and a grist mill. We are striving to lead a quiet and orderly life. We wish to have our character plead for us.[134]

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[131] *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens: Held at Buffalo, on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1842* (New York: Piercy & Reed, 1843), 34

[132] *Minutes of the State Convention of Colored Citizens, held at Albany, on the 18th, 19th, and 20th of August, 1840, for the purpose of considering their political condition* (New York: Piercy & Reed, 1840), 4-5, 24.

[133] *Minutes of the First Colored Convention, held in the City of Portland, October 6, 1841* (Portland, 1842), 15; *Proceedings of the State Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania* (1841), 8; *Minutes of the fifth annual convention of the colored citizens of the state of New York: held in the city of Schenectady, on the 18th, 19th, and 20th of September, 1844* (Troy, NY: JC Kneeland & Co, 1844), 16-7.

[134] "Colored Settlements in Ohio," 32.

In a commercial society that was busy unbridling desire, such testimonials exuded a rare sense of contentment. The quotidian satisfactions of subsistence living and communality were “infinitely better than silver and gold,” reflected one Pennsylvania delegate, “because it can neither be squandered nor lost.”[135]

Yet this appearance of a total escape from market discipline belied the degree of commercial participation that was needed to subsidize Carthagena’s extra-pecuniary ends. Despite aspirations to achieve autonomy by producing their own subsistence, Carthageneans were compelled to drive down production costs by specializing their output to just a few commodity crops and keeping wages low through manual laborism.[136] Moreover, Carthageneans’ flight from expropriating urban markets and purchase of “many thousands of acres of land” was made possible by years of black middle-class formation in Cincinnati. Cities were castigated as “strong holds of caste” that brooked “[n]o possibility of black wealth.”[137] But Carthagena did not so much represent a denial of wealth and its pursuit as it did an opportunity to reinvest wealth in more favorable circumstances than Cincinnati any longer offered.[138]

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[135] *Proceedings of the State Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania* (1841), 13.
[136] “Our Coloured Population,” 100-1. As Charles Post has argued, family farms throughout the North typically followed a similar course: ambitions toward subsistence gave way to specialization and other cost-saving measures as farmers competed with other small producers for market shares. See Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 17-25, 42-61; Christopher Clark’s *The Roots of Rural Capitalism* is a notable example of the opposing view that small production constituted a genuine alternative and obstacle to the “market-process.”
[137] “Anchoring in the Soil, *Massachusetts Abolitionist* 1, no. 15 (May 30, 1839), 1. On the role of merchant capital and credit in driving the expansion of independent farms and the intensification of agricultural production in this period, see Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 28-32.
[138] “Colored Settlements in Ohio,” 32.

Wilberforce's failure to establish a sustainable manual labor school suggested that even the availability of black wealth was not always enough; merchant capital from financiers like the Tappans or Gerrit Smith was sometimes required to implement certain cost-saving measures. Manual laborism, in this regard, offered black communities protection against labor exploitation not by holding the market at bay but by arming them with the means to more competitively participate in it. "Let our colored brethren as fast as possible desert the cities, and spread themselves over the country, *anchoring in its free soil*," went one typical salvo. "Don't let them settle in large masses or colonies," it continued, "but scatter over the length and breadth of the horizon, and wherever they find prejudice unborn, dead, or sufficiently sleepy, become lords of the immovable acres."[139] The settlers in Carthagena did not seek to avoid money and wealth, as Channing had urged and romantic utopias had performatively enacted. Instead, the settlers acquired and leveraged unrestricted and previously uncommodified real estate to secure not only freedom of conscience, but also the material resources necessary to protect it.

Following on Carthegena's successes, comparable black communities cropped up throughout the Northern states, with most of them featuring laborite schools as centerpieces of their development models. In 1842, delegates to the National Convention of Colored Citizens enthusiastically reported that black laborite communities were "in a flourishing state, and the people living within their own resources—independently, respectably, and usefully."[140] The material basis of success for each of these experiments

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[139] "Anchoring in the Soil," 1.
[140] *Minutes of National Convention of Colored Citizens* (1843), 34.

was the principle of "anchoring in the soil": leveraging land ownership to provide black workers with a layer of financial security against the winds of the market. When disentangled from an anti-commercial utopianism, manual laborism proved to be an effective mechanism for property and wealth acquisition. Within three years of Carthagena's establishment, black landowning in Ohio alone had swelled from virtually nothing to nearly thirty-thousand acres.[141] Although increased population density in Mercer County disrupted Carthagena's idyll and forced Emlen to close in 1857 under threats of racial violence, the experiment was among the few in manual laborism to secure tangible material benefits for hundreds of needful youths.[142]

By the late antebellum period, markets had come to function as the primary site of social reproduction in the North and the West. Agricultural communities like Carthagena, while affording residents a higher degree of autonomy than fully stratified urban economies, were nonetheless dependent upon commercial transactions. Autonomous black communities could no more afford to seal themselves away in separatist enclaves than white workers could afford to undertake labor for its own sake. "Commerce is the great lever by which modern Europe has been elevated from a state of barbarism and social degradation," acknowledge the 1847 National Colored Convention's Committee on Commerce. "To Commerce, America owes her present importance, and we, too, if we would acquire any very great influence for good, must join in the march of

[141] Henry Howe, *Historical Collection of Ohio, Vol. II* (Cincinnati, OH: C.J. Krehbiel & Co., 1907), 241.
[142] Rowe, *Invisible in Plain Sight*, 72.

Commerce."[143] Despite the appearance of a pastoral withdrawal from market society into agrarian self-sufficiency, residents of Carthagena and other black homesteading operations acknowledged an unsavory truth that neither laborites nor many of their later commentators have stomached: that one most quickly and permanently ceased to be owned by joining the ranks of the owning.

This is not to say that those associated with the Colored Conventions were entirely insensitive to manual labor's intrinsic rewards. When a committee on agriculture headed by Charles B. Ray advised free black workers to take up farming, they noted that agriculture was "adapted to [man's] whole nature, mental and physical, as well as moral." In Emersonian tones, the committee extolled farming for teaching people to see in "the waving grass and grain" evidence of "the order, the variety, the beauty, and the wonders of nature … and the power of God."[144] Yet work's intrinsic benefits remained secondary to its material returns. What mattered most, to Ray, was that arable land was "adapted to [black Americans'] pecuniary circumstances and condition." His logic was, in the end, strictly transactional. Outside of cities, black people could more easily acquire land that they could commodify in lieu of commodifying themselves or their labor. Ray rejected the development of a black merchant class as a pathway to "equality of rights, interests and privileges" not because commerce was morally corrosive but because success in

[143] *Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People and their Friends, held in Troy, N.Y., on the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th October, 1847* (Troy, NY: Steam Press of JC Kneeland and Co., 1847), 23.
[144] *Ibid.,* 27-8.

business "would require a capital much larger than the most of us possess."[145] To the manual laborites of the Colored Conventions movement, the anti-commercial supposition that money was incompatible with freedom was a *prima facie* absurdity. Whether purchasing freedom from bondage or buying landed independence from prejudicial laws, it was only with money that, in a commercial society, abstract freedom had any meaning at all.

Conclusion

The pragmatic orientation toward manual laborism and market participation that characterized segments of the Colored Conventions movement crystallized in an 1848 Declaration of Sentiments. The Declaration demanded that work be judged chiefly by its extrinsic benefit to black workers and not by the nature of the work or the conditions under which it was performed. Agriculture and skilled crafts were recommended as the readiest available means for black uplift, while "mercantile business, [and] the learned professions" were regarded as desirable, if less universally accessible, pathways. Although domestic servitude and bonded labor reinforced the impression of black subservience and were therefore discouraged, the Declaration stipulated that no bound worker should be derided or thought undignified "where necessity compels the person to resort [to servitude] as a means of livelihood."[146] Given the choice, self-organized

[145] *Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People and their Friends, held in Troy* (1847), 29, 28.
[146] *Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848* (Rochester: Printed at the *North Star* office, 1848), 13.

production was obviously preferable to answering the demands of indifferent employers. But this was precisely the issue at hand. Most black workers, like most laborers regardless of their race, could not often afford to choose.

Members of "the learned professions" constituted a smaller bloc within the Colored Conventions movement than they had among white abolitionists, but they mounted a fierce defense of anti-commercial principles that was in keeping with their more rarified class position. The Pittsburgh-based physician Martin Delany courted controversy when he remarked during deliberations on the Declaration of Sentiments that he would prefer to learn that his children had perished from "a loathsome disease" than to discover "that they had become the servants of any man."[147] Although Delany later claimed that his remarks had been misconstrued, conventioneers like John L. Watson, a delegate from Cleveland, charged the doctor with caring too much about the intellectual content in boot-blacking and too little about the difference that a day's pay could make in the lives of the destitute.[148] Other delegates took personal offense. New York's Abner H. Francis pointed out that he had launched his lucrative mercantile business with capital he had accrued by serving as a waiter; David Jenkins of Ohio described how, after arriving in Columbus penniless and jobless, he had graduated from day laborer to self-employed painter who had recently won competitive contracts with state and county agencies. Had they degraded themselves, they wanted to know, by drawing a wage, saving their earnings, and winning for their children the opportunity to avoid servitude altogether? In

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[147] *Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention* (1848), 5.
[148] *Ibid.,* 5.

navigating their narrow roads out of bondage and to the dais of the largest organization of free black Americans, had they truly forfeited their freedom of conscience?[149]

As president of the convention, Frederick Douglass intervened on the debate to urge comity—but not before issuing his own barbed response to Delany. Long before achieving fame as an orator, Douglass reminded the delegates, he had worked as a chimney sweep and a wood sawyer. Although he longed to see black Americans enjoy the comfort and prestige of the learned professions, he also recognized that "menial employments" were an intractable burden of human life. Douglass simply wished that socially necessary work would be shared equally among all laborers, irrespective of race.[150] He rendered it mathematically: "[I]t should stand thus: White Lawyer, Black Lawyer, …; White Domestic, Black Domestic."[151] His vision of dignity in black labor did not traffic in anti-commercial preferences for voluntariness, individual expression, or moral purity. Instead, the dignity of work sprung from the workers' resolve—from his capacity to set aside his preferences to answer necessity, meet his duty, and sink mind and body in labors that would sustain and improve the life of his community. Douglass condensed his argument into a maxim: "Let us say what is necessary to be done, is honorable to do."[152]

In the explosive economic climate of the late antebellum period, manual laborers and manual laborites both sought refuge from unforgiving markets, but they sought it on

[149] *Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention* (1848)*,* 6.
[150] *Ibid.,* 19.
[151] *Ibid*., 6.
[152] *Ibid*.

different terms. While radicalized laborers aspired to get out at *any* cost, laborites, who were often shielded from the profoundest exploitations and anxious to demonstrate the value of their non-productive labor, organized themselves as managers of laboring-class ambition. The only moral exit, they insisted, was to get out of the market at *no* cost—an operation that required one to already possess wealth or, in the case of the learned class, to attract the patronage of the wealthy. They would be largely successful in finding patrons. Manual laborites had generated a moral case against upward mobility and a justification of wage stagnation at precisely the moment that plantation slavery, the last major obstacle to consolidating capitalist hegemony at the level of the state, began to topple. Within twenty years, slavery would be abolished, injecting nearly four million new workers into the domestic labor market.[153] Laborites had ensured that the learned class would not be among them.

Douglass himself was all too aware of how learned-class anti-commercialism could bleed into pro-capitalist apologetics. Years earlier, he had sat before an audience in Syracuse, New York, primed to rally support for abolitionism and fair wages after an introduction by John A. Collins, cofounder of the Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform. As the minutes wore on, however, it became apparent that Collins distinguished free labor not from *un*free labor but from un*paid* labor. He condemned the pursuit of material gain and solicited donations to his anti-commercial colony in Skaneateles. The campaign to eradicate slavery and extend to all Americans the right and means to hold property was, as Douglass phrased it in a formal complaint to Boston's Anti-Slavery

[153] Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 28-35.

Society, perverted into "a mere stepping stone" for Collins to deny the "the right of property holding." Having fallen on the wrong side of the renowned abolitionist, Collins denounced the Anti-Slavery Society as another stooge of commercial society and retreated to his moneyless, property-less utopia of work without pay. Pointedly, he declined to take his annual salary with him.[154]

[154] Douglass quoted in Mark S. Ferrara, *American Community: Radical Experiments in Intentional Living* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2020), 53-4.

Conclusion: Free People

Theodore Dwight Weld departed from manual laborism having developed a bristling contempt for the laboring class. "No matter though [the manual labor school] preserve from vice, and establish in virtue," he had once fumed, "though it draw out into prominence every manlier feature of character, and though its influence upon the community be powerfully republican"—still, his laboring-class critics cared not a whit for manual laborism's "*redeeming principle*" so long as their work went unremunerated. "*[M]oney, money!*," Weld heard them cry: "it failed to *make money*."[1]

What had begun as a movement to impart laboring-class virtue, manliness, and civic-minded republicanism to a cossetted and tremulous learned class had undergone a dramatic inversion. The laboring class, as far as Weld was concerned, had proved itself to be less susceptible to democratic precepts and social regeneration than it was to crude material gain. When a popular "mob" interrupted his lecture in Painesville, Ohio, in the fall of 1835 with concerns that laborite schools would attract formerly enslaved black workers to the local labor market and depress wages, Weld retorted that he had "assumed he was speaking to the FREE PEOPLE of Painesville."[2] Economic dependency, in his eyes, had made Painesville's ostensibly free laborers the unwitting pawns of Southern slaveholders. The protestors had disqualified their claims from serious consideration when they applied instrumental reasoning to what Weld regarded as the strictly moral

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[1] Weld, *First annual report*, 82-3, 81-2.

[2] Weld, quoted in Curtis, *Free Speech, the People's Darling Privilege*, 14. Similar anti-abolition arguments were advanced by a popular mob in Cincinnati; see *Narrative of the Late Riotous Proceedings Against the Liberty of the Press*, 33.

imperative to abolish slavery. Theirs was not a legitimate dissent, he decided. It was the ventriloquized objection of a distant moneyed interests, speaking through workers whose compromised consciences would adopt any perspective that kept wages high.[3]

Confrontations like these led Weld to reconsider the central role that he had accorded to the laboring class in ushering in the millennium. The coalition-building at which he had so excelled now seemed to be a dead-end. After 1838, Weld withdrew from social reformism and dedicated himself to the pursuit of personal perfection through perfect independence.[4] He purchased a fifty-acre spread on the Passaic River near Belleville, New Jersey, and immersed himself in subsistence farming: sowing broad fields of oats, corn, potatoes, beans, squash, and pumpkins; spending twelve hours per day "ploughing, hoeing, felling trees, splitting rails, digging post holes, making fence, digging and hauling rocks, etc., etc."[5] Communication with the outside world interested Weld as little as commerce did, and he severed those discursive bonds that had once tied him to public life. He neglected to answer correspondence or to entertain guests. "All his old opinions and principles began to loosen and scale off," recalled a former associate. "He threw aside books, newspapers, everything, and for ten years found there was nothing on earth for him to do but to dig ditches and work upon the farm."[6] When, in 1847, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier asked Lewis Tappan what had become of their old comrade-in-arms, Tappan grumbled that Weld was likely "in a ditch opposite his

[3] Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor*, 2-3.
[4] Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 241; for background, see Abzug 221-4
[5] Weld quoted *ibid*., 225.
[6] Henry Blackwell quoted Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 201-2.

house, doing the work any Irishman could do for seventy-five cents a day."[7] Weld, needless to say, was doing it for free.

At times, Weld's determination to escape the influence of an unsalvageable society prevailed over his most democratic ideals. In 1846, he refused to board two West Indian youths on the grounds that "[t]he contact of children brought up in slavery is, almost of necessity, *pollution*."[8] Here was a puzzling contrast with his response to the Painesville protests. Intensified labor competition, wage reductions, and increased unemployment were quantifiable, if often hyperbolized, consequences of including large numbers of formerly enslaved workers in the general labor market.[9] For such strictly economic anxieties, however, Weld had little patience. As a moral proposition, abolition could only be met with a moral challenge. It was enslavement's *spiritual* residuum, an unmeasurable haze of faults and impurities, that, to Weld's mind, was the only admissible defense of racial segregation.

There was a profound tension between Weld's dismissal of economic arguments against integration and his enforcement of racialized moral segregation in his household. That tension registered a broader shift in who held the authority to weigh in on social conflicts, how that authority was conferred, and how it had to be justified. The questions of who should work with whom and why were still up for debate, as they are when any productive order is in transition. But laborites like Weld had redefined intellectual

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[7] Tappan quoted *ibid*., 245.
[8] Weld quoted in Abzug, *Passionate Liberator*, 256-7.
[9] Matthew E. Stanley, *Grand Army of Labor: Workers, Veterans, and the Meaning of the Civil War* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2021).

freedom and moral integrity in ways that confiscated from the laboring class its right to intervene on social questions. Working people whom laborites had once heralded for their independence of conscience were now discarded as garden-variety reactionaries, too caught up in private needs and wants to impartially manage population flows, distributions of labor, and other matters of public concern. When Weld opened his final school at the New Jersey utopian colony of Raritan Bay, he and the colony's cofounders specified that it would serve "a select society of literary people, artists and people of means and leisure."[10] It was rarified company, indeed. The twice-unsuccessful Liberty Party presidential candidate and former slaveholder James Birney placed his children under Weld's tutelage, as did the suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the colonizationist-turned-abolitionist Gerrit Smith, whose son, Green, had been named in honor of Weld's mentor, the radical abolitionist Beriah Green.[11] In this reconstituted learned class, differences of opinion peeled away, revealing stabilized, selective, "free institutions" geared to the production of financially and cognitively "free people."[12]

The manual labor model expanded the American academy system to accommodate the scale and complexity of a rapidly expanding nation and its resident learned class. Although it would not be until the end of the nineteenth century that undergraduate degrees or academic employment became *de facto* prerequisites for most

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[10] Quotes in Charles Sears, *The North American Phalanx: An Interpretive and Descriptive Sketch* (Prescott, WI: John M. Pryse, 1896), 12; David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), 84-5.
[11] Sernett, *North Star*, 301.
[12] Grimké, *Correspondence on the Principles of Peace, Manual Labor Schools, &c*, 11; Weld, quoted in Curtis, *Free Speech, the People's Darling Privilege*, 14.

forms of social authority, manual laborism laid the groundwork for a coming age of credentialism.[13] Remote frontier lands where few educated persons had lived in the first quarter of the century now boasted colleges that produced a national layer of educated leadership. By laborism's end, the refurbished American world of work was for the established learned class to evaluate, debate, and understand. Laborers were just working in it.

Of the fifty-odd manual labor academies that were founded between 1820 and 1860, more than half still exist—albeit without their manual labor programs. They remain, by and large, prestigious liberal arts academies. Oberlin, Kenyon, Lafayette, Wake Forest, Hanover, Middlebury, Davidson, Knox, Emory and Henry, and Centre continue under their original names. Mercer Institute is now Mercer University, alma mater of two Rhodes scholars, four United States senators, twenty-one United States representatives, twelve governors, and a United States attorney general. Maine Wesleyan Seminary survives as Kents Hill School, a college preparatory academy that, in 2013, was voted the best private school in Maine, and which boasts among its graduates Pulitzer Prize winners, esteemed inventors, and the founder of L.L. Bean. Other manual labor schools underwent similar name changes. Waterville became Colby; Western Theological, Pittsburgh Seminary; Western Reserve, Case Western; Granville, Denison;

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[13] Roger L. Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2014), 315-63.

Genesee Wesleyan, Syracuse; Lebanon Seminary, McKendree; Burr Seminary, Burr and Burton Academy; Illinois Institute, Wheaton; Jefferson, Washington and Jefferson.

Manual labor school alumni were also prolific institution-builders, and many of their schools, while lacking a manual labor component, imitated their forebears' racial and gender inclusivity and social reformism. Oberliners alone were involved in the foundation of Kentucky's Berea, Michigan's Olivet and Hillsdale, Iowa's Tabor and Grinnell, Wisconsin's Ripon, Montana's Drury, Minnesota's Carleton, and California's Deep Springs. Laborites were also among the architects of the 1862 Morrill Act, which dispensed more than seven million acres of public land for the purpose of establishing colleges of agriculture and engineering, resulting in seventy-six institutions that revolutionized education in the practical arts.[14] Evan Pugh, the president of the Pennsylvania Farmers' High School, was an Oneida alumnus, while People's College founder Harrison Howard had conceived of his school after reading Weld's *First annual report*.[15]

Some schools still pay homage to manual laborism. Kentucky's Berea College is perhaps the only laborite school to have achieved the economic parity that the movement promised. Founded in 1855 by a Lane graduate and originally staffed by several Oberlin instructors, today Berea employs all of its students in work-study jobs in exchange for

[14] Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education*, 281-314.
[15] Jim Weeks, "A New Race of Farmers: The Labor Rule, the Farmers' High School, and the Origins of the Pennsylvania State University," *Pennsylvania History* 62, no. 1 (Jan. 1996); Harrison Howard, "Sketch of the Origin of the 'Mechanics Mutual Protection' organization and of the establishment of the People's College" (1886).

tuition-free admission.[16] California's Deep Springs invites its students to exchange the "working dress" of the Ohio yeoman for a cowpuncher's chaps and ropers. Its founder, L.L. Nunn, an Oberlin graduate, conceived of Deep Springs in 1917 after a tumultuous but trendsetting career in electrical infrastructure. Like the laborite academies that preceded it, Deep Springs is designed to produce a minority moral establishment. With a lower than eight-percent acceptance rate, just twelve to fifteen students gain admittance each year. All receive free tuition, room, and board. "In exchange," the college's website explains, "Deep Springs students are expected to dedicate themselves to lives of service to humanity." The "manual labor" that comprises one of the college's three pillars—along with "academics" and "self-governance"—encompasses ranch work, domestic chores, and vehicle maintenance.[17]

Yet like the manual labor colleges of the nineteenth century, Deep Springs does not aspire to train manual laborers. Eighty percent of graduates proceed to prestigious universities like Harvard, Yale, and Oxford, and most come to Deep Springs from distinguished high schools and private academies. "I'm driven by elitism," one Deep Springer crowed in 2004.[18] The college's founder liked to say that he was cultivating "the blacksmith with heart."[19] The more typical Deep Springer manages a Silicon Valley startup and contracts with the Department for Homeland Security.[20] Some Deep Spring

[16] Adam Harris, "The Little College Where Tuition Is Free and Every Student Is Given a Job," *The Atlantic* (Oct. 11, 2018).
[17] "Home." Deep Springs College, September 18, 2021. https://www.deepsprings.edu/.
[18] Evgenia Peretz, "Cowboy Scholars," *Vanity Fair* (June 8, 2009).
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] *Ibid*.

alumni, like the author Chris Jennings, now write paeans to the antebellum radical tradition that included manual laborism, a legacy of moral valor and utopian ambition that "the salt of American society" has, in his reckoning, swapped for a pinched, unimaginative resignation to the sordid present.[21]

Memories of the manual labor movement are now far from us, but its motivations are familiar, even startlingly modern. Pop psychology takes it as a truism that a healthy body makes a healthy mind. Since the publication of Robert Pirsig's provocative roman à clef *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* in 1974, a cottage industry has emerged to promote handcrafts as a remedy to the sedentary, solitary work that is so abundant in our increasingly postindustrial economy.[22] Academic research on embodied cognition—a research program investigating ways in which states of the body influence, condition, and possibly amount to states of the mind—continues to unsettle the age-old Cartesian ontologies of cognitive science, philosophy, and psychology. On a more mundane level, physical education is now ubiquitous in American primary and secondary schools, and gymnasia constitute the grandest buildings on not a few university campuses.

The demand for affordable options in higher education is even more to the point. With outstanding student debt in excess of $1.7 trillion, work-study jobs are no more

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[21] Lindsay Whalen, "Interview with Chris Jennings," *The Rumpus* (Feb. 15, 2016); Chris Jennings, *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism* (New York: Random House, 2016).
[22] Robert Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values* (New York: Harper Collins, 1974); Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin, 2009); David Goodhart, *Head, Hand, Heart: Why Intelligence Is Over-Rewarded, Manual Workers Matter, and Caregivers Deserve More Respect* (New York: Free Press, 2020).

adequate to the cost of college than gathering silk at a laborite farm was in 1840. Intensified competition for high-paid professional careers has undermined college graduates' ability to pay down their debts, exposing many to the real possibility of downward economic mobility. This has stoked a curious revival in the laborite impulse to trace parallels between the learned and laboring classes—to combine, as one commentator has put it, "low-wage workers and high-debt workers" in a new social bloc.[23] Occupy Wall Street's popularity in 2011 owed much to the fuzzy rhetoric of "The 99% vs. the 1%," a political language that appears to frame class conflict but which, in retrospect, forced working people into asymmetrical allegiances with upper-middle class professionals. For Occupiers like Malcom Harris, terminal-degree holders who "work with their feelings and ideas" doing "affective labor" are practically indistinguishable from industrial union members.[24] "We're still on an assembly line of sorts," Harris has written, "but instead of connecting workers' hands, the line connects brains, mouths, and ears."[25] The payout of this new cross-class alliance was to arrogate everyman credibility from "unprosperous and resentful white men" who, unremarkably, did not share the politics of affective laborers like Harris, a senior editor at the boutique leftist publication *The New Inquiry*.[26]

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[23] Gabriel Winant, "We Live in a Society," *n+1* (Dec. 12, 2020).
[24] Malcolm Harris, *Kids These Days: Human Capital and the Making of Millennials* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2017), 76-7, 91-5
[25] *Ibid*., 77.
[26] Malcolm Harris, "It really can happen here: the novel that foreshadowed Donald Trump's authoritarian appeal," *Salon* (Sep. 29, 2015).

As a Yale graduate student, the historian Gabriel Winant likewise claimed the competency to speak on behalf of the working class not by pulling flax, as Lyman Beecher once did, but by standing "cheek-to-jowl" with "lunch ladies, AT&T employees, steelworkers, high school kids, leather-jacketed Teamsters, [and] clerical workers" at a 2011 protest. To be sure, Winant has acknowledged the "extraordinary privilege" of Ivy-League graduate students relative to Yale's service and maintenance workers. Yet he has also remained adamant that "the people of [New Haven]—workers (public and private), students and the employed, at Yale and in the communities around it—are in the same fight."[27]

Winant has since extended his analysis of the New Haven demonstrations into a general-purpose guide for the resurgent political left to build and maintain influence. With the proliferation of student debt and the casualization of professional employment, Winant theorizes, "professional-class activists have found something in their own indignities on the job to connect them to the broader working class."[28] But it is critical to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Professional sensibilities—high-minded virtues like "the impulse to create and disseminate knowledge, to care for the sick, or to defend the rights and dignity of the democratic subject"—must be guarded against the debasing market imperatives that frame and shape working-class motives. If it is to remain unadulterated by material interests, the new alliance of working and learned people will have to be negotiated "on [the professional-managerial class's] terms." The

[27] Gabriel Winant, "Forget the Tea Party: The Left is waking up," *Salon* (Apr. 4, 2011).
[28] Gabriel Winant, "Professional-Managerial Chasm," *n+1* (Oct. 10, 2019).

working class will furnish the numbers and leverage at the point of production. But it is "professional labor" that will supply the "utopian seed" that attaches the productive capacity of working people to ends higher than the daily business of scraping by.[29] For workers who refuse to submit, the consequences will be severe; "the next shift" of the labor movement, as Winant has aptly titled his recent monograph, will dislodge industrial workers and install educated healthcare professionals and teachers as the chief organizers of the labor movement.[30]

A rising generation of learned-class aspirants continues to don a "working dress" to stabilize their economic positions and advance learned-class interests. In her introductory remarks at a panel on "Class Warfare: The Future of Left Politics" hosted by students at Harvard University, undergraduate organizer Piper Winkler urged solidarity between "Harvard elites" and "the working class."[31] Yet Winkler has no intentions of accepting a rank-and-file position in the cross-class coalition that she envisions. Instead, she tells us that "campus activists" and "student workers" possess valuable "organizing skills" that they "can contribute to the working-class movement."[32] Witness a unionization drive at one former laborite academy, Kenyon College. There we find

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[29] Winant, "Professional-Managerial Chasm."
[30] Gabriel Winant, *The Next Shift: The Fall of Industry and the Rise of Health Care in Rust Belt America* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2021).
[31] Piper Winkler, "Harvard's Progress Is Not Our Progress," *Jacobin* (Feb. 15, 2020).
[32] Piper Winkler, "Bernie's Campaign Is Over, but Student Organizers Like Me Are Just Getting Started," *Jacobin* (Jul. 19, 2020).

"student workers" who are "like all workers"—despite seventy-five percent of Kenyon's student population hailing from families in the top quintile of household incomes.[33]

For all the bluster about solidarity and common cause, learned-class interests still carry the day. The "ideals" and "terms" of today's learned class are redolent of laborite tastes. Still prevalent is a tendency to trumpet the world-historical potential of the working class while, in the same breath, bemoaning the "antidemocratic culture" that has arisen "from below" in the absence of sufficient oversight by the "anticapitalist intellectual milieu."[34] It is a call to take charge, directed at those whose liberal educations and academic posts have allegedly inoculated them against the siren song of a fat paycheck. It is a call, that is, to those who Theodore Weld called the "free people," those of conscience and mind, to herd the unenlightened laboring class toward its destiny. Perhaps Emma Goldman had it right about these "intellectual proletarians":

> Even in their sympathies for labor—and some of them have genuine sympathies—the intellectual proletarians do not cease to be middle-class, respectable and aloof. … Always they have deceived themselves and the workers with the notion that they must give the strike respectable prestige, to help the cause.[35]

Manual laborism's brief moment of popularity is now far from us. But the movement's traces are nearby, in large and small outposts of liberal thought, many of them still tensely planted in working-class communities, and many of them still impressed by the tremendous historical burden that they believe their position in the

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[33] Piper Winkler, "'Without Us, the School Would Fall Apart': An Interview with Nick Becker, John Ortiz Vargas, and Sigal Felber," *Jacobin* (Sep. 12, 2020).
[34] Winant, "We Live in a Society," *n+1* (Dec. 12, 2020); Winant, "A New Political Identity," *Dissent* (Sep. 17, 2021).
[35] Goldman, "Intellectual Proletarians," 227.

hinterland implies. The 2016 election once again revealed these fissures. Whereas residents of Oberlin, Ohio, favored Hillary Clinton to Donald Trump eleven to one, the surrounding Lorain County elected Clinton by scarcely one-hundred votes, and many of the county's rural tracts strongly favored Trump. Colleges like Lafayette, Syracuse, and Kenyon similarly skew more liberal than their conservative counties.[36]

Yet the past is never reproduced in the present. American production enjoyed sustained growth throughout the antebellum period, but it is now locked in relentless decline, winnowing the pool of laborers that a twenty-first century learned class could possibly call to arms. While manual laborism's learned and laboring coalition quickly formed and just as soon deteriorated, an alliance of intellectual culture producers and working-class Americans has yet to materialize in our own time. Whether this new laborite alliance will come to pass and whether it will pay working people in cash, kind, or not at all—that remains to be seen.

[36] Eugene Tauber, "How Donald Trump won Northampton County, a Pa. bellwether in 2016, and what it means for 2020," *The Morning Call* (Oct. 28, 2020); Chris Baker, "Trump flipped Upstate NY with help from frustrated voters who picked Obama in 2012," *Syracuse.com* (Nov. 11, 2016); Alex Ashlock, "Kenyon College, in Rural Ohio, Considers State's Politics As Republicans Descend on Cleveland," *WBUR* (Jul. 18, 2016).

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