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**“A KIND PROVIDENCE” AND “THE RIGHT TO SELF PRESERVATION”:
HOW ANDREW JACKSON,
EMERSONIAN WHIGGERY, AND FRONTIER CALVINISM
SHAPED THE COURSE OF AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE**

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
In partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
Ryan Ruckel
B. A., Trinity University, 1988
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August 2006

Dedication

For Terri

In loving memory of Lillian, Barbara, Mavis, and Ford

Acknowledgments

I love my wife, Terri Smith Ruckel, who is my own special gift from Providence. To Terri I owe thanks for this entire project and for so much more. She has put up with a lot, but she never gave up on me. I recognize and hope to honor the many sacrifices she has made during our graduate journey that we began in that fateful year, 2001. I must also thank my family and friends for believing that I could and would complete this task. They always knew I would, even when I was sure they were wrong. They were right. In particular, my truly “great” Aunt Dorothy Bennett, my father, Gary Ruckel, and my brother, Taylor Ruckel, have believed and have remembered me without all the schooling attached. My father-in-law, Gary Smith, has cared for our family many, many times when the demands of graduate life prevented me from doing so, and I’m grateful. Thank you, also, Tricia, Tiffany, Taryn, Traci, and Tony, and Lauryn, Raegan, Lane, and Emili for being such great reasons to want to do well in life. None of my grandparents nor my mother have lived long enough to see me become a professor, but there has never been a day of doing this that I have not thought of them and their silent example. For being the best friends I never met and for so many good times, thank you, [Paragonian Knights](#) and the [Vanguard of War](#). The LSU History Department has encouraged my progress as a scholar by word and deed, offering more than one kind of financial support. Without the Dissertation Fellowship from the LSU Graduate School, I would not have had the freedom to read, think, and write this past year. The Colonial Dames offered me a very generous award, which helped me purchase necessary computer equipment for my work. Damaris Witherspoon Steele not only wrote her very helpful history of her church, but she personally guided Terri and me on a tour of the Hermitage. Special thanks to my committee, in particular Gaines M. Foster, who wanted me to come to LSU in the first place. My advisor, Boyd Professor William J.

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Abstract

Andrew Jackson has inspired numerous biographies and works of historical scholarship, but his religious views have attracted very little attention. Jackson may have been a giant on the political landscape, but he was also a human being, an ordinary American who experienced the same difficulties and challenges as other Americans of the early nineteenth century. Another common experience for many Americans of Jackson's day included church life, revivals, and efforts to conceptualize every day events within the context of religious experience. Finding out where Jackson stood on religion and what role religion played in his thinking helps situate him as a man of his times. Unfortunately, he so greatly influenced his generation that he has taken on larger-than-life proportions, and even historians have found it difficult to present Jackson as an ordinary person who could choose to make the same responses to religion as did his contemporaries. In sum, looking at Jackson's religious views as expressed in his correspondence regarding events both public and private helps explain him. Jackson wrote thousands of letters over the course of his lifetime, and his correspondence, especially his private letters to his friends and family, indicate that he did indeed inherit and live by a sturdy set of religious convictions, deeply rooted in the Calvinist tradition of Scottish Presbyterian Christianity. In his letters, Jackson briefly but consistently revealed his concern over his relationship to the sovereignty and providence of God. Jackson's foundational belief that a sovereign God governed the world, guiding it toward a destiny only He could fully comprehend remained unshaken, even as he experienced the death of beloved family members, the difficulties of war, and other harsh realities of early nineteenth-century American life. As he grew older, Jackson also became more evangelical in his religious outlook, an experience common to many other people of the Jacksonian period. Ralph Waldo Emerson's views on Providence serve as a foil to

more greatly reveal the subtle difference between the Jacksonian Providential optimism rooted in uncertainty and the emerging, Whiggish world view that would eventually overcome it..

Chapter One

Introduction: The Case for Jackson and God

Andrew Jackson has stirred the American imagination ever since his astonishing victory over a vastly superior force of British troops at the Battle of New Orleans. The victory, at the tag end of the War of 1812, could very nearly have been a defeat but instead gave Americans a renewed faith in the moral and spiritual superiority of their republic, confirming for many that God had prepared a special destiny for the United States. Jackson necessarily appeared at the center of that divine plan because, as many Americans saw it, Providence had used his talents and courage to bring about the vindication of American honor at New Orleans. To his supporters, Jackson seemed to be “God’s right-hand man.”¹ Ironically, in spite of the close association between Providence, Jackson, and the national sense of destiny, those who have written about Jackson have not explored Jackson’s own understanding of Providence, and Jackson’s other religious views have attracted virtually no attention at all.²

Jackson quickly became one of the best-known personages in the United States, which by the 1820s put him at the center one of the nation’s most defining political eras. Jackson’s exploits against the British, the Indians, and the Spanish endeared him to the frontier settlers, but so did his reputation as a duelist, gambler, and race horse owner. That record does not indicate that Jackson would be seen as a moral leader, much less a religious one. As a boy, Jackson had fought in the American Revolution, which left him orphaned at fourteen years old. Then his own

¹John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 101-32.

²Strictly speaking, John Calvin’s notion of predestination applied only to the problem of salvation. Calvin argued that human beings could not by their own efforts attain salvation and therefore the event could only happen through divine action and election.

efforts and frontier opportunities enabled him to become a successful lawyer and plantation operator in Tennessee, a U.S. senator, and eventually president of the United States. Of course, not all Americans saw Jackson in a positive light. His opponents deplored the very aspects of Jackson that his supporters sought to imitate. Jackson so well represented both the ambitions and the fears of so many that American politics of the mid-1820s divided around him into two political parties that were largely “for” or “against” Jackson, shaping the course of American politics and life for decades to come. The Jacksonian Era turned out to be one of the periods most critical to American national identity, rivaling even the American Revolution, for the Jacksonians were intensely interested in defining themselves as the inheritors and caretakers of the republic to which the Revolution and the ensuing Constitution had given birth.³ They succeeded, at least, in establishing a set of ideas that have influenced American politics and life even into the twenty-first century, defining American conflicts over territorial expansion, relations with the Indians, the extension of federal power, slavery, the value of religion and public morality, attitudes toward alcohol, the right relationship between wife and husband, national honor, and the definition of the just cause for America to go to war, to name only a partial list. No generation of Americans, a generation that in so many significant ways centered around Jackson, has exerted more influence over both the course of American democracy and over the everyday ways of thinking that guide that democracy.⁴

Jackson may have been a giant on the political landscape, but he was also still a human

³Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: the Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 9-11.

⁴Rush Welter, *The Mind of America, 1820-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), vii.

being, an ordinary American who experienced hardship, good luck, illness, and anxiety about the future. Finding out where Jackson stood on religion and what role religion played in his thinking helps situate him as a man of his times. He so greatly influenced his generation that he has taken on larger-than-life proportions, and even historians, who prize objectivity, have found it difficult to present Jackson as an ordinary person who could choose to make the same responses to religion as his contemporaries did. In sum, looking at Jackson's religious views helps explain him.

Jackson's generation experienced a wave of religious revival which its advocates self-consciously called the "Second Great Awakening." They were referring to the colonial-era revivals of the 1740s, and they were locating their experiences within a national historical religious drama, a contest for the soul of the nation. No one has before looked to see whether Jackson participated in revival church services or church politics, nor what he might have thought about prayer, salvation, heaven, death, conversion, or baptism. Besides the political scandal known as the "Margaret Eaton Affair" or the "Petticoat Affair," which involved a question of public morality early in Jackson's first presidential administration, very little has come to light about his relationships with members of the clergy.⁵ Even the most ardent Jackson critics might agree that relationships with ministers and ideas about death, prayer, and salvation could heavily influence the thought and action of any person, even Jackson, and ought to be explored.

Of course, a mountain of published sources await those interested in Andrew Jackson and

⁵John F. Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson's White House* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997) offers the best treatment of the Eaton scandal.

his times, and many biographers have tried to measure Jackson. The earliest, begun by John Reid and completed by John Henry Eaton, both of whom were Jackson associates, is still considered one of the most reliable for details concerning the Creek campaign and the Battle of New Orleans. Historian Frank Owsley, Jr., has edited the work to remove the inaccuracies added to it in the 1820s politicized editions, so that we now have access to it as the version Jackson originally authorized in 1817. Jackson did not compose any *memoirs*, but he did provide Reid and Eaton with his papers and did read and approve the manuscript, making their biography a nearly autobiographical, authorized biography. James Parton's three-volume *Life of Andrew Jackson* (1859) contains numerous anecdotes related to Jackson and is a fair assessment of the man, especially given the limited materials with which Parton had to work and the high level of feeling for and against Jackson that still existed in the country at that time. In addition, Parton conducted interviews with people who knew Jackson personally, and he provided a lengthy list of contemporary publications related to Jackson. James Spencer Bassett edited Jackson's correspondence and then used it to write a Progressive-era biography. Robert V. Remini, the current dean of Jackson studies, has written more than anyone else has on Jackson, and his three-volume biography (1977-1984) presents an enormous amount of detail. These biographies of Jackson provide invaluable context for his papers and correspondence.⁶

Even the most respected historical assessments of Jackson and his times show that Jackson has a tendency to bring an historian's biases and interests to the fore. Charles G.

⁶John Reid and John Henry Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, ed. Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr. (1817; University: University of Alabama Press, 1974); James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols.; 1859; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1888); John Spencer Bassett, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (2 vols.; United States: Archon, 1911); Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (3 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1977-84).

Sellers, Jr., expressed the discordant state of Jacksonian scholarship as late as the mid-twentieth century by giving the title, “Andrew Jackson vs. the Historians” to his overview of works on Jackson. For Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Jackson was the champion of American liberalism, making straight the paths for Schlesinger’s own heroes, Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. In John William Ward’s view, Jackson symbolized his era’s arrogant, circular logic, whereby American successes proved that Providence had fore-ordained American success and, therefore, violent expansion. In Ward’s telling, Jackson did not make his times, but rather three themes in American thought, “nature, providence, and will,” combined to make Jackson the most appropriate symbol for his age. Ward attributed Jackson’s life story to events and ideas external to Jackson himself. Marvin Meyers saw in Jackson a man who failed to perceive the difference between the broadening of democracy and the expansion of capitalism. Jackson’s ties to the Revolution and his status as a hero made him an unsuspecting puppet of the “Jacksonian persuasion,” which Meyers called the widespread use of American Revolutionary ideals to excuse capitalist exploitation. Remini came to Jackson’s defense, generally accepting the general’s own arguments in support of his actions, a position that put Remini and Jackson scholarship more in line with Parton, the nineteenth-century biographer.

Harry L. Watson’s synthesis of that scholarship led him to see more depth and sophistication in Jacksonian political ideals than did many of his predecessors, and he saw in Jackson the great “linkage” of the “near-sacred precepts” of the American Revolution with the expanding democratic ideals of the early nineteenth century. Specifically, Watson called attention to the way Jackson’s use of a “language of republican political morality” made it possible for him to tie his political party to the American Revolutionary heritage. Michael Paul Rogin psychoanalyzed Jackson, finding that Jackson looked to the republic’s founding “fathers”

as imaginary sources of parental approval and to the Indians as symbols of a lost childhood. Rogin presents a grotesque caricature of Jackson, explaining him as a man dominated by his mother and alternating between uncontrollable rages and chronic paranoia. Similarly, Andrew Burstein has lamented Jackson's influence on American history, calling Jackson an unrepentant, dominating patriarch driven to become the father to "the national household." Burstein's version presents Jackson as a semi-tragic figure, incapable of self criticism and therefore unresponsive to reason. Burstein judged the nineteenth-century Jackson by twenty-first century standards and seemed surprised to find that Jackson did not conform to the values of the latter century. Most recently, H. W. Brands's well-written biography of Jackson has attracted some public interest but offers nothing new in terms of how historians might better understand the general.⁷

Clearly, Jackson scholarship has reflected the controversy and divisiveness that swirled about Jackson himself, and the situation differs little from that of 150 years ago: after Parton's exhaustive efforts to study all extant documents pertaining to Jackson, the biographer observed that the general "was a patriot and a traitor. He was one of the greatest of generals, and wholly ignorant of the art of war The first of statesmen, he never devised, he never framed a measure. He was the most candid of men, and was capable of the profoundest dissimulation. A most law-defying, law-obeying citizen. A stickler for discipline, he never hesitated to disobey

⁷Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "Andrew Jackson vs.the Historians," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 44 (March 1958): 615-34; Arthur M. Shlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (1945; New York: New American Library, 1959); Ward, *Andrew Jackson, Symbol for an Age*; Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Remini, *Andrew Jackson*; Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: the Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 10; Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975); Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); H. W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson* (New York: Doubleday, 2005).

his superior. A democratic autocrat. An urbane savage. An atrocious saint.”⁸ Apart from the word “saint,” which is used in a more general context, the list of contradictory assessments of Jackson’s characteristics makes no mention of religion, a trend that has continued. For some reason, Jackson’s religious views have seemed irrelevant to the many biographers and historians who have tried to understand him. More than 160 years after his death, Jackson still elicits a similar set of responses from historians and lay people, alike. “Jackson? Are you for him or against him?” has been a common response to my topic when I have tried to explain it, and, “Jackson’s religious views? Did he have any?” has been another jesting but incredulous response.

Incredulity notwithstanding, Jackson’s correspondence, especially his private letters to his friends and family, indicate that he did indeed inherit and live by a sturdy set of religious convictions, deeply rooted in the Calvinist tradition of Scottish Presbyterian Christianity. Calvinism derived from the writings of John Calvin, a sixteenth-century French Protestant theologian, who argued that God, by His very nature as the supreme being, necessarily knew in beforehand all that would happen and therefore preordained or “predestined” all beings to a fate He had determined for them in advance. Presbyterianism emphasized a more democratic, or, to be more precise, representative, “republican” form of church government centered around Calvinist beliefs. Jackson may not have mentioned Calvin in his letters to his wife, Rachel, but he did in letter after letter mention the destiny, sovereignty, and providence of God. Jackson’s foundational belief that a sovereign God governed the world, guiding it toward a destiny only He could fully comprehend remained unshaken, even as he experienced the death of beloved family

⁸James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols.; 1859; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1888), II, vii.

members, the difficulties of war, and other harsh realities of early nineteenth-century American life.

As he grew older and became president of the United States, Jackson also became more evangelical in his religious outlook. Whether it was the difficulties of life as president or his grief after the death of his beloved Rachel, Jackson gradually began to use more evangelical expressions in his letters. Close to the end of his life, he underwent a conversion experience at his home, which has received some attention in the biographies, but more as an addendum to his life than as a springboard for questions. If Jackson did become more evangelical by the end of his life, it stands to reason that he did not arrive lightly at the decision to convert, and that whatever his thoughts were on the matter, they had preoccupied his mind for some time. No study has examined the ways Jackson's religious concerns related to his thoughts and actions while he was in the White House.

On the other hand, Jackson did not present himself as an overly religious person, and even refused formally to join a church until he had retired from public life. His public statements do not appeal overmuch to religious sentiments, and Jackson carefully avoided making pronouncements about what his God, to whom he most often referred as Providence, would or would not do. Yet therein lies the central question about Jackson. He lived during one of the most actively religious times in American history, when a distinctively American brand of Christianity and most modern American denominations were being born, yet he did not appeal overtly to religion. Why did he not appeal to the evangelicals, or why not to the Scots-Irish Presbyterian heritage of his upbringing? For the colonial-era Scots-Irish who had emigrated to America, religion and politics were not matters of opinion to be avoided in polite conversation, they were cultural bread and butter. Had Jackson successfully navigated the Scots

Presbyterianism of his childhood as well as the advent of American revivalism without any of it affecting his outlook on life? If so, would his resistance to religion prove that he was the profane individual his critics charged him to be, ruthlessly persecuting his enemies and impervious to self-reflection? On the other hand, how could Jackson truly be the best example of the American common man when he himself did not share in the enthusiasm for religion then sweeping his constituents? Jackson's critics have accused him of stubborn provincialism in his fight to destroy the Second Bank of the United States, which he perceived to be a great threat to American liberty, and they have pointed to his removal of the American Indians, as well as his ownership of slaves, his reputation as a duelist, and his military career as examples of his unbridled passions. Such studies imply that Jackson had no religious views or that worse, if he did, he managed to manipulate those views so they suited his purposes. In other words, Jackson has not seemed to be a man who let the Christian ideals of brotherly love and self sacrifice inconvenience his ambitions and actions.⁹

Still, none of the works written on Jackson include a systematic account of what he did believe, and no account existed of the extent to which his beliefs might have influenced his decision making. I am simply asking, "What, if anything, did Andrew Jackson believe about God, and how might those beliefs or lack thereof help to explain his actions?" In order to find answers, chapter one points to the simple but sturdy conception of Providence upon which Jackson built his other ideas. Chapter two describes Jackson's relationship to the church, both Catholic and Protestant, conservative and evangelical, from his childhood until his death. It also includes a description of roughly a dozen ministers with whom he had significant relationships.

⁹Andrew Brustein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) is the best recent example of the view that finds Jackson lacking in introspection and self control.

Chapter three explores a broader range of Jackson's religious world view, including such concepts as prayer, faith, heaven, and death. Specifically, the chapter presents the way Jackson's views governed his relations with his family, both white and black, and his friends. Chapter four suggests some ways Jackson's religious thinking, especially his concerns over Providence and the preservation of personal and national virtue, guided his political behavior. For Jackson, there were no seams in the fabric that cloaked his private and public morality with the purposes of a sovereign God whose essential goodness ought never to be questioned. Chapter four also highlights Jackson's humanity, showing that the formal profession of faith he made during his retirement was the culmination of a process that began earlier and intensified while he was in the White House. Chapter five returns to Jackson's idea of Providence, sharpening it against the version of Providence put forward by unorthodox Americans such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. Jackson's views were more in line with the views held by the majority of Americans of his day, even through the Civil War. Emerson's views suggested the developing trend, however, to replace the Calvinist idea of a sovereign, benign, but also fearsomely just God with self governance.

More and more Americans since Jackson's time might be willing to agree with Emerson's famous essay, "Self-Reliance": "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles." To Jackson, nothing could have been more foreign. For him, the only way to find peace was to acknowledge first that many, many of life's events were out of his control. Health and prosperity, both for him and for his family and nation, depended on the workings of what he frequently referred to as "a kind providence." Jackson's Providence governed the world for the good, and individuals had a "right to self preservation," but in the end, the principle duty of man was to express faith in the justness of God by refusing

to question His dealings, no matter how harsh or disappointing they might seem at the moment. Jackson's optimism did not derive from the kind of Providential thinking that Emerson described, whereby "A political victory, a rise of rents, the recovery of your sick, or the return of your absent friend, or some other favorable event, raises your spirits, and you think good days are preparing for you."¹⁰ Instead, Jackson hoped for a future precisely because he saw the difficulties of the day. His belief helped him understand the harshness of early nineteenth-century life, and it inspired him to find and do what he believed was right in order to do all he could to stay on the right side of Providence. Jackson feared God, whom he called the "All-ruling power," and he had faith in God, for whom he also used the phrase, "the fountain of all good."¹¹ Holy fear and determined faith made Andrew Jackson, and they are the keys to understanding him.

¹⁰Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, centenary ed. (12 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-04), http://www.rwe.org/comm/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=125&Itemid=141. The Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute has made available in searchable, digital format the entire, unedited text of the authoritative, centenary edition of Emerson's *Complete Works*. All subsequent references to essays contained in the *Complete Works* will reference the Institute's website, where the material may easily be located: www.rwe.org.

¹¹AJ to Rachel Jackson, 6 Apr. 1804, in *PAJ*, II, 13; AJ to Rachel Jackson, 11 Dec. 1823, *Ibid.*, V, 324.

Chapter Two The Right Side of Providence

Andrew Jackson described the moments after the Battle of New Orleans: “I never had so grand and awful an idea of the resurrection as on that day. After the smoke of the battle had cleared off somewhat, I saw in the distance more than five hundred Britons emerging from the heaps of their dead comrades, all over the plain, rising up, and still more distinctly visible as the field became clearer, coming forward and surrendering as prisoners of war to our soldiers. They had fallen at our first fire upon them, without having received so much as a scratch, and lay prostrate, as if dead, until the close of the action.”¹ In less than twenty-five minutes, the “dirty shirt” American defenders had laid waste to the British assault force, killing or wounding more than 1,500 of them on the muddy field at Chalmette, Louisiana, just below New Orleans, on the eighth of January, 1815, while suffering only thirteen casualties of their own.² Many Americans, including Jackson, saw the hand of Providence at work in the convincing victory over the British. “The unerring hand of Providence shielded my men,” wrote Jackson.³

For Jackson to think of himself and his endeavors as favored by Providence hardly surprises most Jacksonian historians, many of whom fault Jackson for that very quality of seeing in his successes the vindication of his actions and motives. To his critics, Jackson appears as a man not sufficiently interested in self-reflection. Instead of worrying over whether his motives

¹ James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols.; 1859; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1888), II, 208.

²Robert V. Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans* (New York: Viking, 1999), 167-68.

³Andrew Jackson to Robert Hays, 26 Jan. 1815, in Sam B. Smith, *et al*, eds, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, (6 vols. to date; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975–), III 258. Hereafter, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* will be abbreviated *PAJ*.

were pure or whether an alternative viewpoint might be helpful, he charged ahead and painted all who disagreed with him as enemies. Jackson's understanding of Providence, and by extension his religious life in general, holds little mystery for his critics because of the alleged lack of self-reflection. "Providence," "God," and "religion," all become instruments by which Jackson confirmed his own preconceptions about the world and his actions in it. Even for biographers more friendly to Jackson, such as James Parton and Robert V. Remini, Jackson's sense of religion and Providence played only a bit part in the larger drama of his eventful life. Views both "for" and "against" tend to agree that religion was, for Jackson, a cultural affair that had little bearing on his decision-making. To understand Jackson, these biographers have looked to his childhood, his economic situation, his frontier experiences, and other aspects, but in nearly two centuries of writing about Jackson, few, if any, have explored the role his Christianity might have played in his thinking.

For example, Parton and Remini both make a point of including Jackson's statement about the resurrection in their respective accounts of the Battle of New Orleans, but both the nineteenth-century Parton and his twentieth-century counterpart used the statement as a way to paint the scene without asking what role religion played in the way Jackson framed the event. In addition to likening the British soldiers' rise from the Plains of Chalmette to the resurrection of the saints at the second coming of Jesus Christ, Jackson also commented on the providential nature of that victory. In a letter thanking David Holmes for his support in procuring the supplies critical to the army at New Orleans, Jackson observed that "If ever there was an occasion on which Providence interfered, immediately, in the affairs of men it seems to have been on this. What but such an interposition could have saved this Country? Let us mingle our

joys & our thanksgivings together.”⁴ When Jackson wrote to the Abbé Guillaume Dubourg, who presided over St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, he referred to the British defeat as “The signal interposition of heaven” and went on to “entreat that you will cause the service of public thanksgiving to be performed in the Cathedral in token at once of the great assistance we have recd. from the *ruler of all Events* and of our humble sense of it.”⁵

Even taken at their face value, Jackson’s statements may not mean much. Jackson may have thought it polite or even politic to give Providence credit, and he may even have been jousting a little with the Abbé in order to show that he knew well enough on his own to thank God and needed no prodding from the Church. On the other hand, both statements on Providence also reveal a critical aspect of Jackson’s thinking. Instead of boasting that he and his army had done something to merit the favor of the “ruler of all Events,” Jackson was taken by surprise and almost superstitiously asked for a thanksgiving service. Saying that Providence “interfered” suggests that Providence might not have done so, that the affairs of men generally went without such “interference.” “Heaven” had not just “interposed” itself to arrest the formidable British force, it had done so in a “signal,” or obvious way, as opposed to the usual way, which might be to let events seem to be driven by individuals’ actions.

The Abbé apparently agreed with Jackson, for on the appointed day for the ceremony he met Jackson at the cathedral’s steps and in front of the large crowd that was gathered “intreated him to remember, that his splendid achievements, which were echoed from every tongue, were

⁴AJ to David Holmes, 18 Jan. 1815, *PAJ* 3 249.

⁵AJ to Abbé Guillaume Dubourg, 19 Jan. 1815, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (6 vols.; Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926-33) 2 150 [emphasis original]. Cited hereafter as Bassett.

to be ascribed to Him, to whom all praise was due.” Throwing down the gauntlet to the atheists, the Abbé declared, “Let the votary of blind chance deride our credulous simplicity. Let the cold-hearted atheist look for an explanation of important events, to the mere concatenation of human causes; to us, the whole world is loud in proclaiming a Supreme Ruler, who, as he holds the destiny of man in his hands, holds also the thread of all contingent occurrences”⁶ Jackson and his biographers thought the procession and ceremony sufficiently important to describe in detail, yet they were careful to frame the account with the disclaimer that “amidst the expression of thanks, and honours, and congratulations heaped upon him, he was not unmindful, that to an energy above his own, and to a wisdom which controls the destiny of nations, he was indebted for the glorious triumph of his arms His first concern was to draw the minds of all, in thankfulness and adoration, to that sovereign mercy, without whose aid, and inspiring counsel, vain are all earthly efforts.”⁷

Jackson’s assessment of his Tennessee volunteers shows the unexpected, practical ways in which religious metaphor shaped his thoughts and actions. Gravely disappointed by the men’s eagerness to return to their homes before the war against the Creek Indians had come to an end, Jackson famously turned the men back to their camp by threatening to shoot them. He was on horseback and had a broken arm in a sling at the time. The men were convinced their enlistments had expired, and they could not wait to get back home. As Jackson wrote to his minister and friend, the well-known revival preacher Gideon Blackburn, “I left Tennessee with an army, brave, I believe, as any general ever commanded. I have seen them in battle, and my

⁶Reid, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, 369-70.

⁷*Ibid.*, 369.

opinion of their bravery is not changed. But their fortitude—on this too I relied—has been too severely tested privations have rendered them discontented.” Though he may have cursed and fumed a great deal at the time, Jackson did not pronounce holy judgement on the men but instead couched his relationship with them in New Testament terms, saying “Gladly would I save these men from themselves, and insure them a harvest which they have sown; but if they will abandon it to others, it must be so.”⁸

Reaping and sowing refers to early Christian evangelism as explained by Jesus to his disciples in the Gospel of John: “And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereupon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.”⁹ Here, Jackson easily combined evangelism and frontier Indian warfare in a statement reminiscent of the famous speech from William Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, as he suggests the men had the chance to become great by staying with his campaign in spite of the difficulties or legalities of their enlistment periods.¹⁰ Not coincidentally, Jackson also places

⁸*Ibid.*, 75.

⁹*John* 4: 37-38.

¹⁰William Shakespeare, *The Life of King Henry V*. [1599] 1993 (2 Feb. 2006) <http://www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/henryv/full.html>. In the play, Henry V delivers the famous "St. Crispin's Day" or "Band of Brothers" speech to encourage his soldiers to fight against impossible odds:

"This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,

himself as the one who understood the men's best interest.

For early nineteenth-century Americans, no one stood taller nor loomed more threateningly, depending on one's perspective than did Andrew Jackson. Profane, violent, and hardened to the suffering he could inflict on others, Jackson also represented the golden combination of incorruptible republican patriotism and the way a white man could make himself into a success in America and in the American West. As one contemporary eulogized, remembering Jackson meant thinking in spiritual terms about American history: "The Spirit of God descended upon the Savior of the world in the form of a dove The spirit of an age sometimes descends to future generations in the form of a man . . . Because his countrymen saw their image and spirit in Andrew Jackson, they bestowed their honor and admiration upon him." For many, thinking of Jackson meant thinking of an America populated by Christ and the common man.¹¹

Religious-minded Americans of the early nineteenth century sensed an impending crisis. The years after the American Revolution had turned the new nation's attention to politics, and much of that political language derived from the now-godless French Revolution. As one historian described the situation, "judging from some orthodox estimates, Thomas Jefferson was running strong as chief candidate—against Voltaire and the Pope—for the title of Antichrist." Most alarming were the colleges, such as Yale. French Enlightenment skepticism was undermining the Christian heritage of such schools, whose potent combination of Protestantism

And hold their manhoods cheap while any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

¹¹Washington McCartney, "Eulogy . . ." cited in John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), front matter.

and republicanism had so invigorated American revolutionary ideas. Lyman Beecher, one of the most formidable spokesmen for the Great Revival that would dramatically reshape the American religious, political, and intellectual landscape by the 1840s, had himself entered Yale as a student in 1793, just before the advent of revivalism. He said, “That was the day of the infidelity of the Tom Paine school most were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D’Alembert, etc., etc.”¹²

American clergy of every denomination were concerned at the immorality, doctrinal ignorance, and, worse still, general religious apathy among the ordinary American citizenry. As vast numbers of these people began moving westward across the Appalachian Mountains into Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee, religious leaders feared the very soul of the Republic might be in jeopardy. As Protestant leaders of every major denomination sought to organize a response to the impending disaster, they searched around for a way to communicate their message to the large numbers of people who seemed to be indifferent to the church traditions of the colonial era. Although unchurched Americans might have had little patience at the time for theology, they did have a great deal of energy for pursuing the new opportunities that the new republic held out to them, and they were restlessly moving, building, farming, making business deals, and buying slaves.

Clergy who were concerned about the nation’s soul recognized that to reach their restless

¹²George M. Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: a Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 9. In addition to Marsden’s work, I have found the following very helpful in understanding the Great Revival: Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

generation they would need to overcome the traditions that had become obstacles, limiting the general population's ability to hear and choose to adhere to Protestant doctrines. Church leaders of every denomination cast about for ways to attract larger numbers of people to hear their message, leading to church gatherings being held in accessible, often outdoor, areas and to those gathered there being approached more as an audience than as a "congregation." Ironically, the word "congregation" literally means "gathered together," but as a sign of the ossification of American church life, the word meant something very specific—a group of people who were members of a particular church, understanding and adhering to its doctrines. The message itself had to be changed, or at least reoriented, to meet Americans at their point of interest and understanding. In response, Protestant leaders began organizing their ministers to center their messages on the life and teachings of Jesus, overlook formerly divisive doctrinal differences, form cross-denominational alliances, and emphasize individuals' emotional and physical as well as intellectual response to preaching. Thus, the American evangelical movement began anew in the last decade of the eighteenth century, some sixty years after the Great Awakening series of revivals that marked its first appearance.

Evangelical leaders such as Beecher looked to that past glory, the Great Awakening, for a model of how to proceed. In doing so, they recognized that the established colonial churches, with their state financial and political support, were good examples of what had gone wrong. Even before the Revolution, the Great Awakening had revealed that Americans responded better to the opportunity to respond freely to an idea than to have it imposed on them by an authority. Protestant preachers would have to go to the people and contend against the other ideas that had captured their attention, persuading them to follow Christ and a particular church. Even the wildly successful, emotionalist preacher of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards, had

observed that the strong emotions that welled up during a personal religious experience could be dangerous if not controlled, however. After the mighty Cane Ridge, Kentucky, revival of 1800, frontier evangelism began to produce massive emotional outpourings and physical responses such as “barking” and “running” that frightened some observers and provoked at least the Presbyterian leadership in the East to try to limit revival “extravagance.”¹³

As a result, a division developed along lines similar to those brought on by the Great Awakening in the 1740s. Then, the Congregationalist churches split into factions known as “Old Light” and “New Light” (also somewhat confusingly but correspondingly referred to as “Old Side” and “New Side”). The “Old Light” Scots-Irish Presbyterians held firmly to their Calvinist traditions, rejected revivalism and appeals to the emotions, and formed an Old Side synod at Philadelphia. Though the two feuding branches had a rapprochement by 1760, the hard adherence to Calvinism on the Old Side still gave way, inexorably, to the American penchant for being able to choose one’s fate, as represented in the doctrine known as Arminianism. The Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius, argued that God’s salvation was not merely for a select few chosen solely at the pleasure of the Deity but rather salvation was open for those who responded to Christ’s teachings and accepted forgiveness for their sins. Old Lights such as Charles Chauncy of New England eventually moved from their hardened Calvinist positions through Arminianism to a new, American Christianity of the mind known as Unitarianism. The line from Puritan Calvinism to Unitarianism must thus be drawn through the revivals of the Great Awakening and a failed attempt to hold to church authority and tradition. Enter Ralph Waldo Emerson, who would become the best representative of a way of thinking diametrically opposed

¹³Marsden, *The Evangelical Mind*, 13-15.

to Jackson's.

For their part, the New Light/New Side ministers, led by Edwards, made peace with their traditions and accepted emotional responses as part of a new tradition. They went on to found the Presbyterian seminary that would become Princeton University and become very influential among the Revolutionary War generation. Through them, the Presbyterian Church would become the principal organizing force behind the revivalism of the late 1790s that would lead to the Great Revival which vastly exceeded the Great Awakening in size and scope. The great Cumberland revivals that began in Kentucky were the result of this New Light Presbyterian willingness to combine with Methodist and even Baptist ministers in an effort to bring their message to the people of the frontier. Success brought its own troubles, however, and as the doctrinal soup thickened with alternate versions of ideas, the inevitable conflicts arose but broke along the same now-traditional lines: the New Lights in the East worried about the “extravagance” of their frontier counterparts’ emotional “camp meeting” revivals, which led them to question their doctrinal purity.

Soon, errant ministers were called before their presbyteries and even put on trial for offenses that even then were archaic and now are obscure to most Americans, namely “Pelagianism” and “antinomianism.” Pelagians rejected the doctrine of original sin, claiming that Adam had misled humanity by what amounted to a bad example rather than through a disobedience that caused all subsequent human beings to be incapable of true obedience. They therefore believed that individuals could, with discipline, unlearn Adam's descendants' unhappy ways and attain a higher moral state through these their own efforts. The Jacksons' long-time minister, friend, and neighbor was accused of Pelagianism, put on trial by Presbyterian

authorities more than once for his views, and was defrocked.¹⁴

Antinomianism (literally, “against law”) had to do with the workings of God’s favor or “grace” in conjunction with sin. A person with antinomian views might believe that God’s forgiveness not having been earned at all but given freely by God, set him free from obligations to behave morally and honorably. Since he had done nothing to earn God’s favor, what could he do to lose it, so long as he believed in Christ’s salvation? Further, since, as the Apostle Paul had argued, even sin added to God’s glory by making His forgiveness seem even greater, the antinomian might excuse themselves from traditional moral requirements. The Puritans had accused Anne Hutchinson of antinomianism for claiming she followed her “inner light” rather than rules laid down by church authorities.¹⁵

Arguments over original sin and the nature of conscience may seem far removed from Andrew Jackson, but that very appearance of separation only serves to point out that Jackson’s religious life ought to be more closely examined. In the first place, Jackson and his family were deeply affected by the religious trends of his day. By all accounts, Jackson deeply loved his wife, Rachel, for whom he had a Presbyterian church built on the grounds of their plantation home, The Hermitage. After their minister friend who had performed Andrew and Rachel’s marriage ceremony was discredited for being a Pelagian, Jackson wrote to the Presbyterian leadership in Philadelphia to try to have the old man’s reputation restored. Jackson himself attended at least one revival service in the Nashville area, and it is likely that Rachel regularly attended. The

¹⁴“Pelagianism,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia Online Edition* Oct. 2005 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen> (25 January, 2006); Hugh Walker, “The Apostacy of Craighead,” *Nashville Tennessean*, 27 Feb. 1977, 6-B.

¹⁵“Arminianism,” *Ibid.*; “Antinomianism,” *Ibid.*

famous Methodist preacher, Peter Cartwright, preached directly to Jackson at a revival service and had been a guest in the Jackson home. Another well-known revival preacher and missionary to the Cherokee, Gideon Blackburn, brought recruits all the way to the vicinity of Huntsville, Alabama, during the winter of 1814 in an effort to aid Jackson's struggling campaign against the Red Stick Creek Indians. Jackson also regularly contributed to a missionary society that provided bibles and teachers to the Cherokee. Jackson's relationship to the churches, ministers, and lay people that he knew, as well as Jackson's own religious views, have not been examined, and neither, consequently, have their relationship to his decision-making in political life. Finally, though biographies of Jackson abound and even the unfavorable ones usually credit Jackson's humble origins for part of his mass appeal, none have portrayed Jackson as an ordinary man, experiencing the same events as other men of his time and place. Ironically, as the American icon who best represents the experiences and aspirations of his generation, Jackson remains to be imagined as a normal citizen who made his own choices as to how he would respond to the intense religious arguments swirling all about him and people he cared for deeply. He could not have gone without thinking about such things, not through the religious tumult of the early nineteenth century. Judgement, salvation, death, free will, and God's role in human affairs, among other things, circulated about as topics for every day conversation.

As a national political figure, Jackson attracted Beecher's political support as well as that of the prominent Philadelphia Presbyterian minister, Ezra Stiles Ely, whose family visited Rachel at The Hermitage and who urged Jackson to make a then-fashionable public profession of faith. Beecher and Ely also sought Jackson's sponsorship of their campaign to make Sunday an official day of rest to commemorate the Sabbath. Jackson's beloved Rachel had just suddenly died, and he was preparing for the long journey from Nashville to Washington to be inaugurated

as president of the United States, when Beecher and Ely sent him a joint letter asking him to make a public statement in support of their cause by refusing to travel on the Sabbath: “I feel confident that both your sense of duty and your desire to gratify a numerous class of your firm supporters, would prevent you from publicly travelling on the Lord’s day, *except in a case of mercy or necessity*,” which the divines followed by offering some helpful guidelines on how best to make use of land and water travel while avoiding the sabbath. Ely went on to put a finer, if back-handed, point on the matter by exclaiming, “I rejoice to know that New England will yet be as well pleased with the Patriarch of the Hermitage, as with any former President We are not bigots, but believe ‘the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.’ I have travelled on that day, and expect to do it again, when duty calls; It was lately published that Mr. Calhoun arrived, for instance, in Washington on the sabbath, and it created a prejudice against him immediately in many of our citizens.”¹⁶ At about the same time, the wealthy Albany, New York, temperance reformer, Edward Delavan, requested and, incredibly, received Jackson’s signature on a pledge to abstain from hard liquor. Former presidents James Madison and John Quincy Adams had also signed the pledge.¹⁷

While Jackson's views on the Second Bank of the United States, his actions against the Indians, and his republicanism have received a great deal of scholarly attention, Jackson's personal religious views and their impact on American politics have not been explored. I seek to uncover and interpret Jackson's religious views in order to understand the role that Christian symbols played in his thought and action. Although Jackson may not have lived an overtly

¹⁶Ely to AJ, 28 Jan. 1829, Bassett 4 3-4.

¹⁷W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: an American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 196.

reflective Christian life, his religious convictions may have been as deeply *held* as his many other ideas. A person might turn things over in his mind, ruminating on them quite a while without taking the time to write down in a letter the process of his thinking. In Jackson's day, travel times were so long that a person could easily have thought through a number of issues and arrived at a settled opinion without being able to retrace all the meandering ways of the mind that got him there and without feeling the need to explain.

On the other hand, a careful survey of forty-five years' worth of Jackson's correspondence shows that he remained preoccupied with the notion of Providence and where he stood in relation to it, that he applied his understanding of God and religion to try to make sense of difficult and painful circumstances, and that he fully incorporated this understanding into the pattern of ideas that guided his decision-making. Jackson's larger-than-life stature obscured his humanity, even while he was alive, and has made it challenging to think of him as a person with his own doubts, fears, and spiritual imagination. Looking at Jackson as a person who did not only live during a time of great religious ferment in American history but also experienced and chose his responses to the revivalism and excitement of the Great Revival means relocating Jackson to his status as "common man." Further, studying Jackson's religious thinking makes it possible to see the ways Christian symbolism and metaphor worked with Jacksonian politics to create a political language of great endurance in American history.

To the present day, credible American political discourse must include the right words. Stock phrases such as "the founding fathers," "liberty," "freedom," "American character," "opportunity," and their opposites, such as "slavery," "corruption," and "special interests," have had currency in American politics since colonial days. Over the long run of American political thinking, metaphor and symbol have served to join word to image and thereby motivate people

to action. More than two hundred and twenty-five years after the creation of that first great chapter of American political scripture, the *Declaration of Independence*, American voters still demand that participants in public life show a right relationship between their proposals and the political symbols that carry the most potent images associated with American citizenship.

At times, political actors are so successful at this transaction that they themselves become a powerful "American" symbol, with Andrew Jackson perhaps the most convincing example of this process. One of America's earliest popular historians, George Bancroft, drew a straight line from the Constitution's framers to Jackson, saying that Jackson was "the last great name, which gathers round itself all the associations that form the glory of America." As the American second party system emerged during the 1820s, Jackson's supporters contrasted him with the "corruption" of the officeholders from the Era of Good Feelings, and Jackson's opponents scurried to derail his political progress by proposing their own interpretations. Both Whig and Democrat owed their existence to Jackson's power as an icon, and Jackson's image still has its associative power, conjuring phrases such as "democracy," "the frontier," "Manifest Destiny," "slavery," and "Indian removal." Taken together, these phrases themselves could suggest the image of a white, Protestant, slave-holding, Old Southwesterner, an image that American politicians since the 1970s have found ever more difficult to reconcile with the cherished language of the *Declaration of Independence* and the Constitution. For example, Will Rogers, himself a symbol of American amiability, broke into a rage at the mention of Jackson's name, and some Indians reportedly refuse to carry a twenty-dollar bill with Jackson's picture on it.¹⁸

¹⁸Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: 2003), xiv and note; Daniel Walker Howe has identified three Whig principles that tended to unite this otherwise diverse group: a belief that "improvements" would only take place if change were carefully planned, an emphasis corporate responsibility for the upholding of moral obligations so that the community

In spite of nearly two centuries of commentary on his life, however, Jackson's religious views have never seriously been considered as an important element of his politics, in part because his arguments depended on his articulation of America's republican heritage and his concept of what was right, not on any carefully presented theological issue. Understandably, scholars have seen well-articulated religious thought as more reflective and therefore more legitimate than the far more commonplace kind of religious thinking that fills the space between the inner life and outward life every person lives every day. Further, one of the greatest problems of writing the history of ideas is that the story of the logic of sermons and manifestos is in no way the same thing as the story of how individuals made ideas work for themselves or dealt with ideological inconsistencies in every day life. Therefore, looking closely at Jackson's everyday, off-hand references to faith and religion means seeing the way Christian symbols carried meaning into and out of Jackson's other frames of identity—as Westerner, republican, Indian fighter, slave holder, defender of the Union, expansionist, and even as devoted husband since Jackson's home life may have inspired the famous "cult of true womanhood." In sum, excavating Jackson's Christian world view means articulating a common American Christian vision that might have been so thorough-going in the minds of Jackson's constituents as to *need no articulation* at that time.

Jackson's Christianity aside, some of America's best historians have made their reputations by examining the interplay of symbols and personalities in Jacksonian America. For instance, Frederick Jackson Turner had his namesake, Jackson, in mind when he composed his

also “set an example for virtue” instead of merely demanding its rights, and an “organic” view of society that stressed the ways diverse social elements depended on one another rather than competed against each other. *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 21.

influential "frontier thesis" entitled "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893). In his later works Turner continued to elaborate on Jackson's symbolic power, saying that "Of this frontier democracy which now took possession of the nation, Andrew Jackson was the very personification." For Turner, the transformation of Jackson's democratic West into the South of land speculation and cotton culture meant the end of that section's influence on American democracy.¹⁹

Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., wrote the next major interpretation that used Jackson as a vehicle to interpret national political history. His landmark work, *Age of Jackson* (1945), remain in print and was released in a popular, abridged version as well. Schlesinger's label, "the Age of Jackson," helped him define the period in ways more common to European or Western history. According to Schlesinger, America's "Age of Jackson" was similar to Europe's "Age of Democratic Revolutions," complete with European-style class conflict, "liberals," and "conservatives." Schlesinger cast Jackson as the agent of "American liberalism," which he defined as "the movement on the part of the other sections of society to restrain the power of the business community." Schlesinger called attention to this telling passage from Jackson's 1834 "Protest to the Senate," as an example of the "Jeffersonian myth" of radical democracy: "it is not in a splendid government supported by powerful monopolies and aristocratical establishments that they will find happiness or their liberties protection, but in a plain system . . . dispensing its blessings, like the dews of Heaven" Schlesinger found that the Jeffersonian myth led its believers to see American society as divided into sets of choices such as "democracy vs. aristocracy" or "State rights vs. huge federal power," similar to those I outlined earlier. He

¹⁹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1921), <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TURNER/>>.

argued that those choices were part of a "body of values and images" that "animated and deepened" the politics of Jackson, Van Buren, and others and brought them many followers. Jacksonian "antistatist" political symbols depended on a sense of the sacredness of Jeffersonian democracy that in turn gave the elements of Jacksonian democracy "a strong and almost sacred status."²⁰

Two other scholars, Marvin Meyers in *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* and John William Ward in *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*, pointed specifically to the ways Jackson represented the stock symbols of American political life. As Meyers put it, "the substance and the mode of Jacksonian politics have been persistent qualities of the democratic order in America." Meyers also pointed out the unimportance of having "intellectuals" to use as subjects for an intellectual history, stating flatly that "the party spokesmen were not masters of the principles that they assumed. This [condition] was due essentially to a limitation of mind in the speakers and their audience." The "Jacksonian persuasion," then, consisted of Jackson's supporters' attempt to reconcile themselves to the "rewards of capitalism" without losing their grip on the values of the past. This attempt, when translated into political rhetoric, did not produce an ideology, as such, but rather a set of commonly used statements that were agreed upon as true and used to assess other political propositions.²¹

Meyers also offered a precedent for finding what Jacksonian rhetoric might have owed

²⁰Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson (Abridged)* (New York: Mentor, 1959); Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 505, 511-12. Also helpful, if dated, for a starting place on Jacksonian historiography is Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., "Andrew Jackson versus the Historians," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 (1957): 615-634.

²¹Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (1957; New York: Vintage Books, 1960), vi-ii.

Calvinism. In the example of a tract by Theodore Sedgwick, an erstwhile Puritan who had converted to the party of Jackson, the two world views share the conviction that property is the bedrock on which other freedoms are established, so long as the property is useful and acquired legitimately. They also agree that unwarranted privilege is a perversion of the natural social order, share a positive view of economic production as opposed to consumption or manipulation, maintain an aversion to cunning, uphold an interest in reestablishing the morals of a less decadent past, and more. However, Meyers did not attempt to show Jackson's Calvinism, merely that Jacksonianism and "late Puritanism" had so many things in common.²²

Ward developed Jacksonian rhetoric even further by describing three kinds of symbols commonly attributed to Jackson. His categories, "Nature," "Providence," and "Will," combined to make Jackson the perfect symbol for his "age." For Ward, "the symbolic Andrew Jackson is the creation of his time." I am especially interested in Ward's description of the concept of Providence:

Man in America could commit himself violently to a course of action because in the final analysis he was not responsible; God was in control. Because it was believed that America had a glorious destiny, a mission, which had been ordained by divine Providence, the immensity of the task facing the nation and each citizen was bathed in a glorious optimism.

Here Ward brought Providence, American destiny, and American optimism together into a cause-effect relationship. I would like to explore this idea by looking at Jackson's use of the specific word, "Providence," and see whether it can indeed be drawn together with expansion and optimism as Ward suggested.²³

²²*Ibid.*, 163-84.

²³Ward, *Andrew Jackson*, 208, 212-13.

Ironically, in spite of the ways editorial broadsides and Fourth of July celebratory oratory easily flow together into a consistent, persuasive narrative filled with boasting about Providence and America's special place in God's good graces, such a Providence differed greatly from that to which Jackson referred. Rightly, scholars have been quick to point out the flaws in the formal versions of the American appropriations of Providence, showing how historically inaccurate and one-sided they were. Perhaps Americans, lacking a "usable past," sought to create one by looking backward, using the improved vision afforded by hindsight to "prove" that God had watched over America. Past victories and even defeats could all be made to seem "providential" because the United States had survived and was, of course, a prosperous land of opportunity in which freedom, God's best plan for human government, could thrive.

Informed by anthropological and psychological analyses, historians have seen "Providence" as a self-comforting way for nineteenth-century Americans to apply the Judeo-Christian "myth" of Israel to themselves. Not having a "usable past," Americans followed the time-honored way of ancient societies in creating their own myth of justification, the best of which for their purposes was unquestionably that of God's special plan and protection for Israel. America had succeeded because God had blessed it. God had predestined America for the blessing because He knew the versions of Christianity and of human government most pleasing to Him would be implemented here. Thus did Providence become an instrument, a tool for shameless promotion and progress at the expense of nature, tradition, other settlers such as the Spanish and Mexicans, and certainly the Indian.²⁴

On the other hand, the common person's Providence bore only a superficial resemblance

²⁴Robert P. Hay, "Providence and the American Past," *Indiana Magazine of History* 65 (1969): 79-101, 83.

to such high-handed prognostications. Well acquainted with trial, disappointment, disease, hard work, and sudden, even violent death, in sum, with the raw unpredictability of events on the street and on the frontier, many ordinary Americans felt they could not say what God's plans and purposes might be. Further, they ought not to try, for doing so might invite disaster. Jackson's references to Providence, scattered throughout his correspondence for the length of his life, fall much more into this latter category than the former. Far from boasting, Jackson frequently used the expression, "I trust in a kind Providence" that whatever he was worried over or hoping for would come to pass. He used just this expression after Rachel suddenly fell ill and was fighting for her life just as they should have been preparing to depart for the White House in 1828. Rachel died, but Jackson did not complain nor begin to doubt the kindness of Providence, apparently. In part, this study explores how this older, earthier understanding of Providence might have strengthened a man like Jackson. Far from optimism and bright, knowing predictions for the future, Jackson's common-man approach to the vagaries of life seemed pessimistic and wary, with the location for hope being affixed somewhere beyond the time allotted for one person's life. Jackson derived hope and inspiration from a pessimistic view of Providence that included in the equation the unquantifiable actions of God.²⁵

One way to establish the communicative values of words such as "Providence" and "destiny" is to compare the way they are used by people at the opposite end of the political spectrum. Ralph Waldo Emerson became one of the voices raised against Jacksonian rhetoric. Although he remained aloof from direct political action, Emerson traveled, spoke, and wrote extensively, becoming an enormously popular American icon in his own right just as Jackson

²⁵Lewis O. Saum, "Providence in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XX (1920): 315-346.

entered the presidency. Perhaps because of his reluctance to join the antislavery cause or perhaps because of his persistence at remaining above and beyond the ordinary forms of political language and action, historians have not credited Emerson for the breadth and depth of his effort to fashion a uniquely American rhetoric, which he called a "poetics". He made the West an integral part of his vision for the United States and laid out a rhetorical line of symbols that have come to rival those associated with Jackson precisely because they offered another route to the same goal, American expansion and prosperity via the West. Indeed, Emerson's lifelong work was to exercise his imagination for the shaping of American destiny; one of Emerson's most representative but lesser-known essays, originally a lecture and entitled "The Young American," serves to make the point. The essay offers a window into the ways that early Emersonian thinking helped to define American identity by articulating a patriotic, forward-looking, optimistic vision heavily dependant on the cultural opportunities afforded by new lands. Literary scholars have generally not paid much attention to Emerson's way of weaving the West into his discourse.²⁶

In addition, a few works that outline the development and function of the lyceum lecture circuit, so that one begins to get a picture of how the circuit became a vehicle for Emerson to communicate with and receive communication from the public. Since intellectual history often tells the story of ideas that had little popularity in their own time and therefore do not show the ways ideas motivated large segments of a population, the ability to examine Emerson's relation

²⁶Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Young American" in *Nature: Addresses and Lectures* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1903; AMS Press, 1968); Michael H. Cowan, *City of the West: Emerson, America, and Urban Metaphor* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1967); Kris Fresonke, *West of Emerson: the Design of Manifest Destiny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

to his audiences becomes increasingly significant. The ideas of writers like Emerson, especially in American history, often have little immediate impact on society, so that the history of their ideas is more about what could have been than what actually *happened* because of those ideas. With Emerson and the lyceum we have an example of the powerful interaction between the intellectual, the popular imagination, and their shared ideas.²⁷

Another deeply held, essentially religious understanding also prevented Jackson and his political enemies from being able to look at an issue and be able to agree on how to define it or what to do about it. Jackson's Whig opponents, such as Adams and Emerson, framed their views in terms of what I call "polite Christian sacrifice." The solution to the conflict over Indian lands was to sacrifice white settlers' interests in the lands in order to treat the Indians as one might like to be treated. Jackson's solution was to consider the Indians as defeated foes who posed a danger and must assimilate or be removed. Jackson's political opponents made much of his reputation as a duelist. Few more un-Christian acts could be imagined than to insist on taking someone's life in order to extract an apology. From Jackson's point of view, establishing a reputation as a duelist might have been the quickest route to avoiding having to fight in very many of them, and life without honor differed little from being dead, anyway. After the Battle of New Orleans, Jackson wrote to members of the Orleans Volunteers, "an elite corps," who praised Jackson's handling of Battle of New Orleans and administration of the city during the battle, thanking them for their support and offering a glimpse into his thinking on the justification for war and for martial law in language that seems to prefigure the present-day logic of the "War on Terror":

²⁷Carl Bode, *The American Lyceum: Town Meeting of the Mind*, 2nd edition (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968); David Mead, *Yankee Eloquence in the Middle West: the Ohio Lyceum, 1850-1870* (Westport, Conn.:Greenwood Press: 1973).

Whenever the invaluable rights which we enjoy under our own happy constitution are threatened by invasion, privileges the most dear, and which, in ordinary times, ought to be regarded as the most sacred, may be required to be infringed for their security. At such a crisis, we have only to determine whether we will suspend, for a time, the exercise of the latter, that we may secure the permanent enjoyment of the former. Is it wise, in such a moment, to sacrifice the spirit of the laws to the letter, and by adhering too strictly to the letter, lose the *substance* forever, in order that we may, for an instant, preserve the *shadow*? It is not to be imagined that the express provisions of any written law can fully embrace emergencies which suppose and occasion the suspension of all law, but the highest and the last, which is *self preservation* [emphasis mine]. No right is more precious to a freeman than that of suffrage, but had your election taken place on the 8th of January, would your declaimers have advised you to abandon the defence of your country in order to exercise this inestimable privilege of the polls?²⁸

For Jackson, who had clearly thought about the matter, the “highest and the last” law of them all was “self preservation.” The “law” that gave individuals the mandate to defend themselves sat atop the entire body of written law. The law of self preservation could never be suspended and needed no explanation in writing. Jackson’s intellectual opposites, best exemplified by Emerson, could not understand him because they came at life’s problems without this settled opinion. Emerson did not believe, or at least would not have admitted to believing, that the capstone of moral and legal order had chiseled into it, “self preservation.” Understanding the differences between Jackson and his opponents means picking out the ways each side reconciled their notions of Providence, self preservation, and religious propriety, and becomes a significant thread of inquiry in the remainder of this discourse.

Finally, I wish to use Jackson and Emerson to understand the political shift that Schlesinger described as happening after the Civil War. In his telling, Jacksonian liberalism

²⁸AJ to Jean Baptiste Plauché, et al., 16 March 1815, *PAJ*, 313.

proposed the use of state power to protect democracy from the rising powers of the commercial elite. After the Civil War, those elites became Republican party supporters and used Jackson's rhetoric to attack the intrusion of government into their affairs. I would like to see whether that transfer of symbolism happened so late and so simply as Schlesinger suggested. It began far earlier and involved public morality and Christian faith as much as it involved commerce and class. In other words, I agree with Louis Menand, who locates Emerson at the head of America's relativistic philosophy, pragmatism, that emerged after the Civil War, but perhaps the cultural support for an iconoclast such as Emerson represents a fracturing of American public consensus on Christianity and morals long before the war.²⁹

Historian Rush Welter contended that Americans living between 1820 and 1850 laid the foundation for the rest of American history, political and otherwise. Welter conceived his work as an effort to understand "social attitudes" by way of the symbolic language employed by common people who often gave little thought to the deeper meanings of their words.³⁰ Those same unexamined beliefs gave Jackson strength as a representative of the people, a representative who thereby seemed genuinely to share their views without having to think about it or play to the crowd. Perhaps through the combination of the people's faith and the validating successes of "the Hero of New Orleans," a powerful bond formed that left a set of cultural convictions still held by many Americans today.

²⁹Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: a Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001).

³⁰Rush Welter, *The Mind of America, 1820-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975)

Chapter Three The Jacksonian Christian Context

Andrew Jackson maintained a life-long relationship with the Presbyterian Church and with individual Presbyterian clergy. Even when he grew alienated from the social circle that dominated the First Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C., he continued to pay his pew rents.¹ When he returned to The Hermitage after he retired from public life, Jackson publicly joined the First Presbyterian Church of Nashville. The public displays of religious duty amounted to just that, public displays. On the other hand, Jackson's Scots-Irish, Presbyterian heritage remained with him from his earliest days, shaping the way he saw things. In this chapter I try to understand Jackson's relationships with his lesser-known minister friends from the Nashville area and suggest some ways they may have appealed to his interests. I try to put Jackson's Tennessee church experience in context with the national and regional movements taking place, most importantly the event known as the Second Great Awakening. Jackson and his wife, Rachel, experienced the same winds of religious change as other settlers in Tennessee, so I look at Jackson as an ordinary person who had to make the same choices as his neighbors in responding to revivalism.

“Often she would spend the winter's night, in recounting to them the sufferings of their grandfather, at the siege of Carrickfergus, and the oppressions exercised by the nobility of Ireland, over the labouring poor; impressing it upon them, as their first duty, to expend their lives . . . in defending and supporting the natural rights of man.” The woman, Elizabeth Jackson, and her sons, one of whom was Andrew Jackson, may have sat before a fire in their relatives' home

¹Fifteen checks or receipts for payment exchanged between Jackson and the First Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C., lend support for this statement. The dates range from 7 Oct. 1831 to 3 Jan. 1837 and frequently include the notation, “pew rent.” *Andrew Jackson Papers*, LC Division of Manuscripts (microfilm).

in South Carolina. Perhaps romanticized and probably told to Jackson's first authorized biographer and friend, John Reid, many times over by Jackson himself, the story also shows how one generation can pass deeply held convictions and the memory of past wrongs from one generation to another. Jackson's beleaguered family differed little from their Scots-Irish brethren who came to America prior to the American Revolution, and it is no surprise that Andrew and his brothers and cousins grew up hearing such stories. Reid goes on to mention another element of the young Jackson's upbringing, however. Andrew's older brothers were sent to "a common country school" where they were "only taught the rudiments of their mother tongue" because their deceased father's meager estate did not include sufficient funds to send all the boys to school. Whether in spite of or because of their poverty, the boys' mother willingly sacrificed to provide them as much education as possible. Perhaps Elizabeth doted on young Andrew, but for whatever reason, he was "intended by his mother for the ministry" and sent to "a flourishing academy in the Waxsaw meeting house . . . " where he studied "the dead languages."²

Although the "flourishing academy" may have been no more than a "log cabin" as one historian snidely referred to it, it would have been the cultural hub of that frontier Presbyterian community. The minister, Robert Miller, had himself given the land for the building, which he intended to be used for "attending upon divine worship. . . comfortable to the practice of the Church of Scotland." Built in 1755, Waxhaw Presbyterian was likely the first Presbyterian church in that part of South Carolina and would have been well-established by the time Jackson

²John Reid and John Henry Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, ed. Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr. (1817; University: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 10. Even though Reid was a Jackson associate, his biography offers a valuable early attempt to provide an honest look at Jackson. Reid died before he could finish the book, which Eaton, a long-time Jackson partisan, subsequently finished.

attended school there. The British army understood the importance of the building and burned it in 1781.³ The policy of harassing Presbyterian church congregations left the region's congregations "sadly scattered" at the end of the war, according to one early assessment. "A meeting for religious purposes would have been accounted treason, and, while the country was in the hands of the British troops, would but too surely have invited a visit of the Dragoons." The British troops and their loyalist allies known as "Tories" regularly burned Presbyterian ministers' homes, and at least one minister had a bounty of two hundred pounds on his head. Later ministers to the revivals that would sweep Kentucky and Tennessee had ties to the churches that had been targets of British and Tory retribution in Virginia and the Carolinas: James McGready, William Hodge, Hezekiah Balch, James Balch, Samuel Houston, Charles Cummings, and John Cossan, at least. Many of these men or their descendants, including the Balch brothers, would soon establish the Presbytery of Abingdon, in East Tennessee.⁴

Although other biographers have agreed with James Parton's assessment that Jackson's early education simply "did not take," the Reid account points to some significant and generally overlooked details. First, Jackson's mother saw it as her duty to pass on to her children the historical reasons for their resistance to aristocracy and authority, and her reasons were not abstract. She could point to specific family members, presumably loved and respected, who had suffered because of unfair privilege and government-sponsored oppression. The blanket of her beliefs bore the notion that an American opportunity and a better life required at least a

³"Waxhaw Presbyterian Church records, 1754 and 1807," *University South Caroliniana Society Manuscripts Collections*, <http://www.sc.edu/library/socar/uscs/1997/waxhaw97.html>.

⁴Ezra Hall Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America . . .*, revised (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-school Work, 1864-65), I, 234-36.

minimum of education. She also felt the traditional pull to establish her youngest son in the ministry. The “flourishing academy” Andrew attended existed both in and because of the Presbyterian Church’s traditional emphasis on education, and the transitions between Scots-Irish family history, politics, and religion would have been seamless. Presbyterian churches and academies were themselves part of the tradition Elizabeth Jackson sought to preserve. His mother’s desire for Andrew to become a minister might seem amusing in light of his raucous youth and famously irascible temperament, but it leads to another question. Why did she intend her youngest son for the ministry instead of encouraging him to become a lawyer, the profession Andrew eventually chose? Although we cannot know the answer for certain, perhaps she turned a dotting mother’s blind eye to Andrew’s renowned cursing and bullying and simply hoped he would be a good boy. On the other hand, having the ministry as her first choice suggests at least the possibility that she put church above law, ministry and tradition above making money. Her efforts indicate at the minimum a nostalgic bond to her traditional church community and no disrespect for the clergy, sentiments that Andrew himself adopted and carried with him the rest of his life.

By contrast, religious sentiment in the region receded to a low mark after the Revolutionary War. One observer said of North Carolina in 1796 that “The state appears to be swarming with lawyers. It is almost the only profession for which parents educate their children. Religion is so little in vogue, and in such a state of depression, that it affords no prospects sufficient to tempt people to undertake its cause.” The Reverend Eli Caruthers claimed that “men of education and especially the young men of the country thought it a mark of independence to scoff at the Bible and the professors of religion,” and another observer said of

Virginia that “the clergy, for the most part, were a laughing-stock or objects of disgust.”⁵ After the war left Jackson without immediate family, he apparently caroused his way through what remained of his inheritance, possibly in Charleston, South Carolina. By 1785 he had left the Charleston area for Salisbury, North Carolina, where he contributed to that “swarm” by becoming a lawyer instead of a minister. Whether he was “haphazardly pursuing a legal career” or whether he “applied himself” as different biographers have argued, it was also during this time that he inspired one of the most often-quoted and memorable characterizations of his youth: In Parton’s words, “Andrew Jackson was the most roaring, rollicking, game-cocking, horse-racing, card-playing, mischievous fellow that ever lived in Salisbury.”⁶

Even so, the old ties helped determine where he went, what he did, and with whom he associated. His mentor in Salisbury, the well-respected lawyer named Spruce McCay, had also trained William R. Davie, Jackson’s idol. Davie commanded the cavalry unit in which Jackson’s older brother, Hugh, had been serving when he died. Jackson also served under Davie, and may have kept Davie in his mind as his example of the ideal military commander.⁷ Significantly, upon his death in 1820 Davie was buried at the Old Waxhaw Presbyterian Churchyard in northern Lancaster County, South Carolina, the same plot of land on which had stood the

⁵In Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (3 vols.; Richmond: John Knox, 1963-73), I, 126-27.

⁶Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 10-11; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (3 vols.; New York: Harper and Row, 1977-84), I, 29; 29-30 (quotation).

⁷Remini, *Andrew Jackson*, I, 10.

“meeting house” in which Jackson attended school.⁸

A humble log meeting house symbolized the powerful mix of history and religion for frontier communities such as the Waxhaw area, but for many Americans, religious traditions had lost much of their compelling power. At about the same time as church attendance was falling to new lows in the 1790s, especially among the people of the more established towns to the East, the first ten amendments were added to the Constitution. The First Amendment guarantees to religious freedom signaled both the end of colonial-era, state-sponsored churches and the beginning of new kinds of churches whose leaders agilely adapted their methods and message to the people who continued to move farther and farther west, away from the restrictive, established societies of the East. Congregationalism and Anglicanism did not travel well or at least did not much appeal to those outside the communities into which they were so well integrated. Moving west either weakened the bonds that bound community and church together, or the bonds were so strong that some decided not to leave.

The Presbyterians alone of the early denominations managed to make the move west in significant numbers, and consequently led the revivalist movement that came to be called the Second Great Awakening or Great Western Revival. The massive “camp meeting” held at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801 marked the beginning of the movement’s camp meeting trend. A massive gathering, primarily of Scots-Irish settlers and estimated to number between ten and twenty thousand, responded exuberantly to three days of revival preaching delivered by Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist clergy. Outdistancing and outnumbering the eighteenth-

⁸“William Richardson Davie, North Carolina,” *America’s Founding Fathers: Delegates to the Constitutional Convention* NARA (Internet), http://www.archives.gov/national-archives-experience/charters/constitution_founding_fathers_north_carolina.html#Davie.

century Great Awakening, the revival movement of the early nineteenth century cracked open American traditional religious landscape, making room for Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists to become the most populous and influential denominations in subsequent American history.⁹

The differences between Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian revivalist varieties of Christian faith differed more in the emphasis of the message or on the particulars of church government than in hard-line matters of doctrine. In search of a straightforward, effective message that they could successfully preach in the frontier, the denominations' preachers often approached broad agreement on a variety of significant themes and methods that eventually became the foundation for most American Protestants. For example, they all, including a significant element of the Presbyterians, de-emphasized the need for a well-educated clergy, stressing skill in presentation over intellectual preparation. They sought public conversion or at least public display as proof of effective preaching, which rewarded "preachers" rather than ministers. Traditional rituals gave way to more free-form services, or perhaps to the new kinds of performance rituals whereby individuals were "moved" to tears or to other extravagant demonstrations of deep religious conviction, such as "the jerks," "the barks," or "speaking in tongues." Instead of carefully crafted hermeneutics, frontier audiences were treated to gripping stories, dreams, prophecies, and visions. In place of ministerial authority, frontier congregations increasingly recognized themselves as the "priesthood of the believer," whereby they could gain

⁹The following have proved helpful in composing this sketch of revivalism and denominationalism on the frontier: Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

their own insights into the scriptures. In terms of church governance, the three denominations pursued divergent tracks. The Methodists, under Bishop Francis Asbury, adhered to a “prelatical” model that used church officials (bishops) to oversee a number of congregations that “circuit-riding” preachers planted and tended. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Baptist congregations formed around a revival or independent Baptist preacher, then freely associated with or even competed against other Baptist congregations in spreading the gospel and administering church affairs.

For about five years after Cane Ridge, so many people attended camp meetings that the denominations had their hands full just trying to keep up with demand and did not pursue their arguments against each other’s teachings. Even the exigencies of the frontier could not remove long-standing biases, jealousies, and doctrinal differences, however, and as historian Walter Brownlow Posey forcefully explained, the “era of the camp meeting” represented one of the few times that frontier denominations cooperated. Despite their broad agreement on modes of religious behavior so similar to present-day church life, the rest of the story “provides no basis for the ecumenical movement that distinguishes the present era of the Christian religion. The denominations which dominated the scene in American life of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sharpened their dissimilarities, assumed attitudes of extreme antagonism toward each other, and shunned cooperation among themselves” As frontier communities developed, frontier churches offered a binding cultural tie. The church an individual attended indicated other things about their prosperity, cultural inheritance, and place in society. Association with a denomination offered an anchor of identity in a wilderness of change: “They found strength in

exclusiveness, individualism, and eventually in divisiveness.”¹⁰ In addition to competition among the denominations, the results of the camp meetings and revivalism would force Presbyterians to confront issues that would lead to denominational split among the Presbyterians in Tennessee and Kentucky. For the Presbyterians, disagreements over ministerial preparation and licensure, church governance, and adherence to the Calvinist tenets of the Westminster Confession represented more than doctrinal disputes. They showed the ways the frontier could overwhelm the force of tradition.

In addition to providing connections to other members of the same traditional community, church affiliations strengthened the community’s ties to tradition by enforcing traditional ways of thinking and acting. Especially in the frontier areas, people were free to try on several different versions of Christianity and choose the one that suited them best. As missionaries and revivalists swept through the West, literally thousands of settlers attended Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist services that lasted hours or even days, sometimes requiring several different pulpits in a kind of fairgrounds setting. In the West, a person could choose, which meant a greater stake in maintaining and promoting the denomination’s ideas because they were more in line with the individual’s views as well. By extension, denominational affiliations offered individuals a way to lobby for action on matters of common interest. Overall, it may be that Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches gave as good as they got to American “Western” culture. Just as these denominations benefitted from the frontier setting that offered a seemingly endless source of potential converts, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist churches may have been responsible for establishing, if not creating, some of the

¹⁰Walter Brownlow Posey, *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), xiii.

characteristics commonly associated with the American frontier: volunteerism, praise for “the common man,” egalitarian organizations, and “common sense” solutions to ideological dilemmas.¹¹

In contrast with the late-twentieth century trends in church attendance, early nineteenth-century churches could boast more in their audiences than they could in their record books. Because full church membership, even in the loosely structured denominations, required evidence of a conversion experience and possibly a probationary period of trial membership, and conformity with other types of church discipline, church “populations” often exceeded “memberships” many times over. For example, a Baptist historian estimated that denomination’s 1840 figures to be about six hundred thousand “members” and three million in “population.” Another report indicated that in 1835 in Lexington, Kentucky, the two Presbyterian churches had only three hundred members between them but more than twelve hundred who attended services, the Baptists some one thousand in attendance but only two hundred on the rolls, and the two Methodist churches about eleven hundred who regularly appeared for services but only about four hundred members.

The Presbyterians at Nashville experienced the same kind of situation, reporting just twenty-one “members received during the pastorate of Reverend Gideon Blackburn 1814-1818,” but very large crowds attending the weekly outdoor preaching services and services held at the courthouse.¹² Just as the Waxhaw meeting house had served an early and significant role in the

¹¹T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers: Individualism and Conformity on the American Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 3-5.

¹²Session records of First Presbyterian Church of Nashville, in Demaris Witherspoon-Steele, *First Church: a History of Nashville Presbyterian Church* (2 vols. to date; Nashville: First Presbyterian Church, 2004–), I, 15; 23, 26-27.

life of the surrounding community, frontier churches in Tennessee and Kentucky did the same. Often the first public building constructed, the church offered a place for schooling and shelter (in case of attack or disaster), but also for gathering to hold “bees” or meetings of many different kinds. Frontier social life often revolved around and did not differentiate between church gatherings and social gatherings, no matter the denomination.¹³

Presbyterians may have had the greatest influence of the three most energetic Western denominations (Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians), in spite of having the slowest growth and smallest congregations, at least in terms of official memberships.¹⁴ Presbyterians had been the most committed of all denominations to the cause of the Revolution, boasting the only minister to have signed the Declaration of Independence, the popular John Witherspoon. Witherspoon had been hard pressed by colonial leaders such as Benjamin Rush to come to America to serve as the first president of the College of New Jersey, later Princeton University, which became a doughty stronghold for both Presbyterianism and education in the new United States. On the other hand, the people most interested in moving west and best positioned to do so were the Scots-Irish Presbyterians of Virginia and the Carolinas, many of whom lacked all but the most basic of educations but were the first to arrive in frontier areas such as Middle Tennessee. As a result, the North Carolina legislature lost no time in authorizing the construction of a school, which they asked the Princeton Theological Seminary graduate and Presbyterian minister, Thomas B. Craighead, to administer.¹⁵ It was no accident, then, that the legislature looked to Princeton for well-prepared educators to follow the Scots-Irish to

¹³Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 18; Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, 3.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁵Witherspoon-Steele, *First Church*, I, 2.

Tennessee. As the first settlers acquired land and prospered, they formed a class of “first families” who became very influential in local, state, and national politics, education, and banking. First Presbyterian Church of Nashville, for example, counted Tennessee Governor William Carroll and U.S. Presidents Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk as individuals who regularly attended or participated in church events. Other Jackson associates, including Senator and long-time Jackson friend Felix Grundy, controversial Jackson cabinet member John H. Eaton, None of them but Grundy was listed officially as a communicant at the church, but, significantly, many of their wives were, and were also regulars at a variety of church functions.¹⁶

Of all the denominations active on the frontier, the Presbyterians had the most viable means of discipline and most closely imitated republican forms of government. Locally, Presbyterian ministers could enforce church doctrine by denying baptism or communion to those who failed to act in accordance with church doctrine. For example, the Reverend William Hume, Rachel Jackson’s personal minister at The Hermitage church and pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Nashville, refused to baptize Jackson’s associate, Governor Sam Houston, in spite of what must have been a dangerous and confusing political whirlwind. Having abandoned his wife and abdicated his governorship, Houston wanted to be baptized before he went to “spend the remainder of his days among the Indians. He said that while he was an agent among the Cherokees he was adopted by the chief of that tribe as a son and that he now would become a member of his family. Sic transit gloria mundi.” Hume and another minister took Houston’s “application” for baptism under advisement and ruled on it in accordance with church

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 32-34.

doctrine.¹⁷

Significantly, the Presbyterian system of church governance took as its precedent Scottish law, which was based in turn on Roman law, not English Common Law. Individual congregations had a great deal of autonomy, but the system worked because the laity and the clergy were educated, sometimes nearly equally. Elected “ruling elders” could serve for life, which isolated them to some extent from changing currents of church and community politics, and they in turn each had a vote equal to that of the minister. The minister and ruling elders could and did hold “sessions” to decide church business but also make judgements on whether an individual was properly prepared for communion or ought to be admitted to church membership. Assemblies called “presbyteries” oversaw the congregations within their jurisdiction. The presbyteries were made of delegates chosen by the local congregations’ ministers and elders and were the arena for doctrinal debate and, at times, division as the delegates discussed the sermon preached at the meeting or queried candidates for licensure. A “synod” oversaw a number of presbyteries, and there was also a national “General Assembly” that met to make doctrinal statements and to set the broad agenda for the denomination as a whole.¹⁸

As historian Anne C. Loveland has observed, however, evangelical Protestants in the South “were more complicated than has generally been recognized.” Frontier Presbyterians and Methodists instigated the Great Revival of the 1790s by holding camp meetings attended by thousands of people at a time for several days. As Loveland has argued, evangelicals of all

¹⁷Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 21-23; Hume letter quoted in Witherspoon-Steele, *First Church*, I, 32.

¹⁸Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, 24-30.

denominations generally agreed that for a meeting to turn into a revival the ministers would have to preach so well as to create the possibility for the Spirit of God to move the hearers to conviction. This concept they labeled “human instrumentality,” and it led to a perilously divisive doctrinal dispute, particularly for the Presbyterians, since it contradicted the Calvinist idea that the individual could do nothing to save himself. Revivalists looked for immediate results to their preaching, but Calvinist thought dictated that no matter how much conviction of sin the preacher might wring out of his audience, the sinner could not on his own respond to the grace God would extend. In addition to instant results, revivals led to the idea that any number of hearers, perhaps large numbers over many days, would be saved, which contradicted the foundational Calvinist notion of predestination.¹⁹

For their part, revivalists, even Presbyterian revivalists, recognized that the best way to exercise their “instrumentality” and move an audience to conversion was to avoid the theological apparatus of predestination and reprobation altogether, as these tended to get lost in the translation. Listeners who wanted to respond could not understand why they might not be able to be saved nor why they could not be saved right then. The difference in opinion over whether to adhere to the traditional Calvinism of the Westminster Confession split the Presbyterians of Kentucky into corresponding upper and lower, “NewLight” and “Cumberland” factions. The influential preacher, Richard McNemar, argued that all “systems” of belief were detrimental to the effort to effectively preach salvation, and began referring to himself as a “Christian” instead of a Presbyterian, rejected the Westminster Confession, and espoused the free will tenets of Arminianism. Expelled by the Synod of Kentucky, he continued to preach and eventually

¹⁹Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), x, 69-70.

became a Shaker, but not before the bitter doctrinal dispute had given Calvinism a bad name throughout the revival-prone region.²⁰

In the battle of traditional versus modern, nearly every Calvinist tenet of the Westminster Confession came under fire, though not usually all at once from any given sect. “Old School,” conservative ministers preached that humanity had inherited Adam’s disobedient nature and therefore could not choose to do right. Although individuals had free will in their everyday courses of action, they were not free to override the power of Adam’s seed and would always end in doing wrong. Humanity’s great problem, a completely innate inability to obey God and His commands, could only be rectified by the understanding that it was, in fact, humanity’s great problem. That is, merely recognizing that he had “done wrong” would never be enough to cure the individual of his disobedience. He would always be as Adam had been, unable to obey, unless he acknowledged his total and complete dependence on God both to convince him of his unfettered wickedness and of his ingrained inability to conform to God’s nature as expressed through His commands.

God had allowed Adam to fall into sin but had not made him do so and had the right to judge humanity for sins because people who had not recognized their helpless, sinful state failed to recognize their dependence upon God and the mercy God had extended to them through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. God, not preachers nor regretful sinners, had to initiate the change in nature by first initiating the awareness of the condition. Individuals found reconciliation to God by responding to what God had initiated in their hearts by way of an understanding in their minds as to the spiritual reality of their condition and the reasons for it. Once reconciled, the individual should not assume he or she had become perfect nor that he or

²⁰Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 155-65.

she ever would in the earthly form of their existence. Instead, out of humility at having been spared eternal judgement and in recognition of his or her thorough-going inability to find and do what God would ask, the individual would actively seek to live a holy life out of gratitude and respect for God's saving work.²¹

On the other hand, revivalists who followed the line of Eastern evangelist Charles Grandison Finney contradicted the Westminster Confession at nearly every point. Finney, though widely known and very successful, more represented the extreme than the norm of what most members of an audience could expect to hear at a Presbyterian revival. The Finneyite revivalists represented an "American" position in regard to the scriptures, and their views differed little from that other uniquely American and rather extreme group of pietists, the Unitarians. At a Finneyite revival, listeners would be told that they did *not* carry within a "sinful nature" inherited from Adam, but rather that they turned out to be sinners because all the rest of humanity were sinners and had influenced them accordingly. That is, sinful thinking and acting were a matter of habit and viewpoint, of environment, instead of inborn, indelible nature. People were free and could make their own choices, even in regard to morality and spiritual matters. No matter how powerful the force of habit, the individual could always find and do what was right. Under this system, humanity created its own problem by continually choosing to sin, as much from force of habit as anything else. God had certainly not caused anyone to sin, since people chose of their own free will to disobey Him. God therefore had the right to judge and condemn people for their willful habits of disobedience to His commands. As the Holy Spirit moved upon a person, that person could of his own free will respond, demonstrating his faith by trusting God

²¹For this and subsequent paragraphs I am indebted to Mark A. Noll, *America's God: from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 266-268.

to change him and to cancel out the penalty for his past disobedience. As a result of the sinner's response to the Holy Spirit's actions, the person, once redeemed, could then perceive the Christian perfection held out to them as a promise from the scriptures and should actively seek to become perfect.

Most critically, the differences came down to the workings of Christ's atonement. Understanding of the atonement primarily assumed four forms, which historian of religion Mark A. Noll has labeled the "Christus victor," "penal substitution," "governmental," and "moral influence" views that were not seen as compatible.²² At least for the doctrinaire, a Christian had to belong to one of the four camps and would likely see the adherents to the remaining three ideas as doctrinally unsound or apostate and condemnable.

"Moral influence" adherents saw Christ's sacrifice as the supreme example of selfless service, a model to emulate in civic and familial duty. Unitarians and many Whig intellectuals like Ralph Waldo Emerson thought of Christ as the ultimate example of what it meant to be a moral person. Reformers and certainly abolitionists thought along the lines of the "Christus victor" version, seeing Christ as having become human in order to win a victory of death, hell, and the grave on human terms. Having fought for and won a way from earth back to God, Christ had also won a victory over temporal social ills, such as slavery, and it was the responsibility of true Christians to make His spiritual victory an earthly reality.

In the governmental model, Christ had set aright the moral order of the universe by making it possible for God to pardon sinners from the punishment for sin without compromising the eternal truths that brought judgement upon humans in the first place. Through His lovingkindness, God wanted to reconcile humanity to Himself but could not do so without

²²*Ibid.*, 268.

breaking his own commandments. Christ's sacrifice saves God's law-bound universe while also making it possible for God to bring His creatures back into right relationship with Himself. The penal substitution version differed from the governmental conceptualization in that the former supposed God's anger with humanity, making Christ's substitution necessary to avert God's poured-out and justifiable wrath. In the governmental conception, Christ performs a heroic act, making up the difference between human foible and Godly integrity.

When Colonel James Robertson asked Craighead to serve as the Cumberland's first school master, he was inviting the son of a well-known firebrand New Side revivalist who had also agitated for independence before the Revolution. Craighead carried with him the ideas put forward by a long line of Scottish Presbyterian ministers who saw in Calvinism the foundation for civil government. His father, the Reverend Alexander Craighead, had been a revivalist preacher based at Middle Octorora Church, Chester County, Pennsylvania, and had, together with John Whitefield, "made the woods ring, as they rode, with songs of praise."²³ Benjamin Franklin, also an acquaintance of Whitefield's, published Alexander Craighead's *Renewal of the covenants*, an energetic restatement of the theological reasons for the "Solemn League and Covenant" of one hundred years before. Under that agreement, the Scottish "Covenanters" agreed to support Charles I in the English Civil War in return for the imposition of Presbyterian church and governmental forms on the Irish and English after the war. When Charles II came to power in 1660, the Covenanters had some expectation he would uphold his father's agreement with them, but he did not, instead imposing on Scotland rule by appointed bishops ("Episcopal

²³Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church*, I, 62-63.

authority”).²⁴ In the argument, Craighead clearly identified himself with the Scottish Presbyterian “Covenanters,” angrily claiming that “if no Person have Access to the Throne but Episcopal, which is undeniable, then no Person can be a Magistrate without either being of the episcopal Persuasion, or that complies therewith by their Subjection to prelatical Laws.” “Prelacy,” a system of governance put in place by men who desired to rule one another, abrogated the equality afforded to each member of Christ’s church and threatened Presbyterian freedoms. Neither church nor civil governments made of hierarchical officials could express God’s desire for a righteous government on earth. Inherited monarchies depended upon “Prelacy, the known Inventions of Men,” and therefore had no God-given right to exist. In words that may have been common pulpit language for the time, Craighead said, “If ever it was the Duty of a christianized People to excite one another to enter into Covenant with the Lord, it certainly is now in this perjured, blood-guilty, apostate and backslidden Age, in which our *Zion* is laid deso’ate, like the Church of old”²⁵

In his own correspondence, Jackson often echoed that pulpit language: “another apostate priest should be found—These perjured immoral Monsters in Society I always did abhor, they never have or will be my associates—”²⁶ On another occasion, for example, Jackson wrote,

²⁴Peter Brooke, *Ulster Presbyterianism, the Historical Perspective, 1610-1970* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987) offers a useful introduction to the thorny controversies binding Presbyterianism to British politics.

²⁵Alexander Creaghead, *Renewal of the covenants, national and solemn league; a confession of sins; an engagement to duties; and a testimony; as they were carried on at Middle Octorara in Pennsylvania, November 11, 1743* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1743), xxxiv-xxxv and *passim*, xxvi. Early American Imprints no. 40475. “Creaghead” is the alternate spelling of Craighead’s name.

²⁶Andrew Jackson to Richard Keith Call, 15 Nov. 1821, in Sam B. Smith, *et al*, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, (6 vols. to date; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975–), V, 116. Hereafter, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* will be abbreviated *PAJ*.

“You say that *you are a stranger in Israel*. It was once prophesied that Zion would be built up with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity; but then the judges thereof were to judge for reward, and the priests to take money for teaching. This prophesy we are told has been fulfilled: and God forbid that the history of our Government shall ever realise the same awful words.”²⁷ The similar terms “apostacy,” “prophecy,” “blood,” and “Zion,” applied to similar subject matter, the unbroken line between individual fidelity and the fate of the nation, testify to the convictions Jackson and his preachers held in common.

Craighead also became a New Side Presbyterian, which brought him to what is present-day Bath County, Virginia, under the leadership of the Reverend Samuel Davies, a prominent New Sider and long-time, influential pastor to the revolutionary, Patrick Henry. When the French and Indian War broke out, Craighead and his congregants fled to North Carolina, where the Hanover Presbytery eventually appointed him as pastor to the settlers of Mecklenburg County. As more Scots-Irish moved into the area near Charlotte, North Carolina, Craighead became their pastor as well.²⁸ Although he died in 1766, ministers and elders of his two churches and of other churches in the “Mecklenburg district” “might be said to have given the impulse to the popular mind around them, which resulted in the Declaration of the celebrated Mecklenburg Convention,” at which the committee-men declared Mecklenburg County independent of Great Britain and proposed a government based on Calvinist principles drawn from the Presbyterian Westminster Confession, principles outlined thirty years before by Alexander Craighead in *Renewal of the covenant*. Eventually, Craighead’s sons became ministers as well, and Thomas B.

²⁷ AJ to Jesse Bledsoe, 18 Jan. 1826, in *PAJ*, VI, 133.

²⁸Howard McKnight Wilson, *The Tinkling Spring: Headwater of Freedom. A Story of the Church and Her People, 1732-1952*, (Fishersville, VA: The Tinkling Spring and Hermitage Presbyterian Churches, 1954), 151, 152.

Craighead supplied the pulpit of this same Sugar Creek church for a couple of years early in the 1780s, prior to his appointment to the Cumberlands.²⁹

True to his father's example, Thomas B. Craighead enthusiastically promoted both education and revivalist camp meetings as the great western revival movement swept through Middle Tennessee. After the revival spirit began to wane among Presbyterians, he ironically found himself at odds with many other Presbyterians in the area. Many, perhaps a majority, of local Presbyterians had joined the "Cumberland revolt" and formed an independent organization known as the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in 1810. Parishioners argued over the "New" and "Old" Schools of thought on what qualifications for the ministry the church ought to uphold and what kind of preaching ought to be promoted as well as over the degree to which the church ought to hold strictly to Calvin's doctrine of eternal election. Craighead remained committed the Scottish Seceders' doctrines that his radical father had preached, even as elements of those doctrines were becoming "traditional" in the minds of his parishioners.³⁰ Both Thomas B. and Alexander Craighead tried to straddle two worlds as they stubbornly adhered to the forms of church government laid out in the 1643 covenant while also preaching revivals in a way that could put them in conflict with the Westminster Confession.

Mrs. John Donelson and family attended Craighead's church, and her daughter, Rachel, married Andrew Jackson.³¹ Although Craighead had been in the area longer than any other minister and strongly supported traditional forms of church government, his New Side heritage

²⁹Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church*, I, 235.

³⁰Witherspoon-Steele, *First Church*, 4-5; Jerald C. Brauer, *Protestantism in America* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 120.

³¹Emily Donelson Walton, *Autobiography* (Nashville: Ladies Hermitage Association, 1932), 43 in Witherspoon-Steele, *First Church*, 6.

made him seem suspiciously non-Calvinist in the context of the local revival controversy. When William Hodge's church split over Hodge's revivalist tendencies, Craighead took the church. Soon after, the congregation accused him of "Pelagianism." In a sermon entitled, "Regeneration," which he also preached to the synod and published, Craighead appeared to reject the basic tenets of Calvinism "at every point," but differently from the way the Finneyites would have done. Pelagius, a fifth-century Irish monk, argued that the individual sinner could begin the process of salvation himself, which is to say he had free will or was otherwise not bound by the sinful nature of Adam. Whereas the Arminian Finneyites at least acknowledged both human initiative and the action of God's Spirit as necessary for salvation, Craighead seemed to be denying the action of the Spirit altogether, as well as predestination and election. For his part, he argued that "Christ's manner of preaching is out of fashion at the present day. You hear nothing from him of the current cant—Pray to God to give you faith to believe—pray, pray, strive, agonize, wait until Christ comes and delivers you."³² Craighead preached a "governmental" atonement, contending that

[God] never willed the destruction of any man, only on account of sin. He never rejects the sinner, who does not reject the counsel of God, against his own soul. And, to that rejection, we are neither compelled by any necessity of nature, by any dispensation of Divine Providence, nor secret purpose of his heart . . . In the licentiousness of your freedom, you may refuse to hear or obey God, and destroy your own soul; but if you admit his word to enter into the view of your understanding, as his word, it is the highest, most coercive and irresistible cause in the universe.³³

Congregations in the Cumberlands in 1805 knew what to watch for in a sermon, knew

³²Charles Crossfield Ware, *Barton Warren Stone* (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1932), 83 in Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 356.

³³Samuel J. Baird, *A History of the New School* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen, and Haffelfinger, 1868), 134-35 in Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 356.

what “Pelagianism” meant and how it differed from “Arminianism,” and were intensely interested in the trial for heresy of Thomas B. Craighead. In a well-publicized and widely read exchange of letters between Craighead and the Reverend John P. Campbell in the spring of 1810, Campbell proved Craighead’s failure to conform to the Westminster Confession. Worse, he claimed that Craighead’s heresy had spread to the revivalists Richard McNemar and Matthew Houston, who had left the Presbyterian Church to avoid the kind of disciplinary action Craighead himself would soon receive. The split brought on by their departure had crippled the Presbyterian efforts in Middle Tennessee, and Campbell blamed Craighead, calling him “the grand heresiarch of the West the prime mover of schisms in this section of our church.”³⁴ Craighead was tried and defrocked by April 2, 1811, and only reinstated in 1824, the year he died. Among the friends who supported Craighead throughout the ordeal of his difficulties, Andrew and Rachel Jackson stayed through the night at the trial.³⁵

The Jacksons had known Craighead since 1785 when he served congregations near Spring Hill, Tennessee, (Rachel’s mother’s home) and near the Jacksons’s first home at Hunter’s Hill, for Rachel’s parents had settled in the area in the same year as Craighead and his wife, Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Rachel were friends who “never lived more than five miles from each other” their whole lives “with the exception of about two years.” Late in her life, Elizabeth remembered that the young Andrew Jackson had a “gay, sprightly disposition and courtly

³⁴John P. Campbell, *The Pelagian Detected, or a Review of Mr. Craighead’s Letters Addressed to the Public and the Author* (Lexington, 1811), 21 in Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 357.

³⁵Hugh Walker, “The Apostasy of Craighead,” *Nashville Tennessean*, February 27, 1977; A. Waldo Putnam, “1850 Address to Historical Society of Tennessee,” quoted in Robert F. Bunting, *Manual of the First Presbyterian Church Nashville Tennessee* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1868), 648, in Witherspoon-Steele, *First Church*, 8; Noll, *America’s God*, 567.

manners.”³⁶ When the Reverend Craighead formed Cumberland College, Andrew Jackson signed on as one of the original trustees.³⁷ Craighead never left the Presbyterian Church, which suggests that he thought he would be vindicated, and perhaps because of his family ties to it that he loved the traditional version of his church. At any rate, he continued to press to be reinstated as a Presbyterian minister and to have his name cleared. The event seems to have wounded him deeply. Untroubled by the swirl of doctrinal controversy and investing heavily in friendships, Jackson maintained his relationship with the minister during the years after the trial.

When the General Assembly agreed to retry the case, Craighead wrote to Jackson to let him know and to ask a favor. The letter does not read as though the two men had not spoken about the issue in twelve years: “I am persuaded from the long neglect of me and the evident leaning of that assembly to the Synod that the members of that Synod have represented me to the assembly as a semi-savage or one of the lowest and most contemptible orders of society.” In spite of the bad omens, Craighead had enlisted a “Mr. Campbell of Nashville” to carry his appeal to “a Doctor Eli of Philadelphia [Ezra Stiles Ely]” and “mentioned you [Jackson] as a gentleman from whom he had heard a good character of me and in the overflowing of his friendship has added a supplication and entreaties.” Campbell wanted to help the minister, but wouldn’t Jackson help as well? He had heard that the Doctor Ely knew Jackson and “highly respected [Jackson’s] opinion.” Craighead’s entreaty ended with the expectation that the Jacksons would soon “perform” their “promised visit” to the Craigheads’ home, since the latter had closed their school and no longer had boarders. Craighead, nearly blind from cataracts and still stung after

³⁶Elizabeth Craighead, “Statement of Elizabeth Craighead,” 2 Dec. 1826, *Jackson Papers*, Supplement.

³⁷Witherspoon-Steele, *First Church*, 8.

twelve years by the “fanaticism and superstition” that had removed him from the pulpit, turned to Jackson because he sought the comfort of a life-long friend upon whom he could depend.³⁸

Craighead, the previously mentioned William Hume, and a missionary named Gideon Blackburn, carried out three different varieties of Presbyterian ministry in the Nashville area between 1785 and the time Jackson left for the White House in 1829. Although all three had some experience and enthusiasm for revivals, Blackburn had the most aptitude and made part of his living as an itinerant revivalist. Andrew and Rachel Jackson, the Grundys, and the Carrolls, as well as many other prominent citizens around Nashville, heard Blackburn preach sermons that could last three hours. The wives of many of these citizens convinced Blackburn to help them charter a church in Nashville, which opened in 1814.³⁹ Nashville did not differ from other communities where Protestant women in general and Presbyterian women in particular were finding church life to be a meaningful outlet for their talents and interests. Sewing, quilting, collecting goods for the needy, and teaching Sunday Schools, as well as holding prayer groups and campaigns to support missionaries, usually to the Indians, offered a way for women to extend the sphere of their womanly, supportive influence outside the home.⁴⁰

The Secession Church of the Church of Scotland, Kirkaldy Presbytery, had sent William Hume as a missionary to the Cumberlandlands not long after 1800. As the nearby revivals gathered big crowds, Hume’s congregation shrank to the point it could not pay his salary. To support his

³⁸Thomas B. Craighead to AJ, 25 Apr. 1823, *AJP*, roll 32.

³⁹W. E. Beard, “History of First Church,” in *First Presbyterian Church Nashville: 100 Years of Service* (Nashville: Foster & Parker, 1915), 49.

⁴⁰Lois A. Boyd and R. Douglas Brackenridge, “Pious Females: *Ornamental and Useful in the House of God, 1789-1870*,” in *Presbyterian Women in America: Two Centuries of a Quest for Status* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 3-14.

large family, Hume became the first president of the women's college, taught at the other schools, and preached regularly at Hermitage Presbyterian Church, which the Jacksons constructed near their home: "I have recd from my friend Parson Hume, a kind letter; in my answer, I have requested him to visit you, in your next advise me how the church progresses" wrote Jackson to Rachel, late in 1823.⁴¹ Hume preached Rachel's funeral sermon after her sudden death in 1828, and continued to be an important support for Jackson, who may have won the presidency but whose heart remained at the Hermitage: "What satisfaction to me to be informed that you [Captain John Donelson] and Mr Hume had visited the Hermitage and Tomb of my dear departed wife. How distressing it has been to me to have been drawn by public duty from that interesting spot, where my thoughts delight to dwell, so soon after this heavy bereavement to my enfeebled health and constitution forwarned me, that my time cannot be long here upon earth, and admonished me that it was time I should place my earthly house in order and prepare for another, and I hope a better world."⁴²

Jackson included Hume and his family within the same family circle for whom he was willing to pay debts and extend credit. Along with a number of other business matters, Jackson's friend, Josiah Nichols, reported: "agreeable to instructions I have delivered the Revr. Mr Hume, his Sons note, With a Credit placed on it, of One hundred dollars."⁴³ As life-long friends often do, Hume thought he should inform Jackson upon the death or illness of common acquaintances, as in this example: ". . . I had been advised by letters from Mr. Lacy, Mr. Barry

⁴¹AJ to Rachel Jackson, 21 Dec. 1823, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (6 vols.; Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926-33) III, 219. Hereafter abbreviated as *Bassett*.

⁴²AJ to John Donelson, 7 June 1829, in *PAJ*, IV, 41.

⁴³Josiah Nichols to AJ, 12 Mar. 1832, in *Bassett*, IV, 417.

and the Revd. Mr. Hume of the death of my old and valued friend Judge Overton.”⁴⁴

Shared frontier experiences created a common bond between Jackson and the Nashville-area ministers he knew. At least one of them, Gideon Blackburn, was so well known as to earn recognition in William B. Sprague’s monumental, nine-volume *Annals of the American Pulpit* published in 1859.⁴⁵ Blackburn (1772-1838), one of the more colorful ministers in Middle Tennessee, became well-known to the Jacksons and to many others throughout Eastern and Middle Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois. Known for his powerful oratory and strenuous circuit ministry, Blackburn and Jackson were roughly the same age and shared similar frontier experiences. Like Jackson, Blackburn was orphaned suddenly at an early age, had settled in Tennessee when it was still part of the North Carolina frontier, had fought Indians, and had struggled early on to acquire an education.⁴⁶

⁴⁴AJ to Major William B. Lewis, 29 Apr. 1833, in *PAJ*, V, 66.

⁴⁵For an useful and entertaining look at the importance of Sprague’s work, see John M. Mulder and Isabelle Stouffer, “William Buell Sprague: Patriarch of American Collectors,” *American Presbyterians, Journal of Presbyterian History* 64 (1986): 1-17. Sprague’s encyclopedic *Annals of the American Pulpit* took fifteen years to complete and represents an attempt to provide a biographical sketch of “every prominent minister from every church.” Mulder and Stouffer consider Sprague’s work a kind of “written oral history of the nineteenth century.”

⁴⁶William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-five, with Historical Introductions*, vol. 4, New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859, 43-58. Pages 47-58 present a remarkably thorough letter from Reverend J. W. Hall, a long-time acquaintance of Blackburn’s. Sprague’s is the earliest biography of Blackburn, but see also Alfred Nevin, *Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: Including the Northern and Southern Assemblies*, ed., (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Encyclopedia Publishing Co., 1884), in Aprille Cooke McKay, *History of the Early American Presbyterian Church* [Internet] <http://sdss4.physics.lsa.umich.edu:8080/~mckay/amckay/presbiob.htm>; V. M. Queener, “Gideon Blackburn” *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* (1934): 12-28; Thomas Rinaker, “Gideon Blackburn, the Founder of Blackburn University,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* October (1924): 398-410. These and other sources on Blackburn rely primarily on Sprague, Hall’s letter, and a few scattered writings of Blackburn’s to the *Panoplist*

Blackburn was born in Augusta County, Virginia, 1772, to devoutly Presbyterian, Scots-Irish parents who moved the family to Tennessee in the 1780s, died not long after, and left Blackburn to be raised by his grandfather and uncles. One of those uncles, General Samuel Blackburn, had fought under George Washington in the Revolution and had amassed a significant estate. Gideon “received the Renewing Grace” to become a Christian at about fifteen years of age and soon felt “the call” to preach. He made his way to Samuel Doak’s Martin’s Academy, and then continued his training under Dr. Robert Henderson at Dandridge, Tennessee. Well known for his speaking powers and frontier humor, Henderson may have helped Blackburn to develop his skills as an orator. In 1792 Blackburn received his license from the Presbytery of Abingdon, Virginia. Presbyterians of Abingdon had encouraged the Virginia delegates of 1775 by declaring that “We are deliberately and resolutely determined never to surrender any of our inestimable privileges to any power upon earth but at the expense of our lives.”⁴⁷

Further, the story arose that Blackburn had led in prayer about a “thousand mounted riflemen” from East Tennessee as they prepared for the Battle of King’s Mountain in 1780. As Blackburn ended with the Biblical quote, “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon,” the men supposedly shouted, “The sword of the Lord and of our Gideons!” Unfortunately for this story, which originally appeared in the Lyman C. Draper’s laudatory *King’s Mountain and Its Heroes* of 1881, Blackburn would have been eight years old at the time and therefore unlikely to have attended or led the prayer. On the other hand, the story says a great deal about the enthusiastic relationship between the Revolutionary generation of Presbyterian Scots-Irish and the early Tennessee frontier. So important were they to the Revolutionary war effort that General George

and the *Evangelical Intelligencer*.

⁴⁷Posey, *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest*, 13-14;

Washington, replying to a message from the Presbyterian General Assembly, claimed that the “patriots of the Valley” around the Blue Ridge were such deeply convicted patriots that they alone would be sufficient for the “foundations of a new republic,” should all other plans have failed.⁴⁸

Blackburn and Jackson had some other things in common besides their Presbyterian, Revolutionary, and frontier heritage. His fellow minister, J. W. Hall painted him as “much above the ordinary stature, being about six feet one or two inches high,” and argued that “although he was lame . . . it was often remarked that his gait, as well as his whole bearing, was military.” Both Blackburn and Jackson regularly had to travel or carry out their duties in spite of painful infirmities, diseases, or past injuries. Because Blackburn came across as “always dignified,” Hall called him “old school” in his manners, which he defined as distant and reserved: “There was even something of a reserve, if not distance, in his manners, and that too in his own family, and among his most intimate friends. No one could treat him with familiarity.” In Hall’s mind, a notable Christian man ought not to be “dignified” to the point of being unfriendly or uncaring, “especially to the sick, the unfortunate, the aged, or infirm.”⁴⁹

In an effort to satisfy the reader that Blackburn was privately as he professed publicly, Hall relied on Blackburn’s way of speaking to “one of his old and infirm domestics, –a colored woman, –‘Aunt Judy’, (as we all called her),” which he described as “condescending and touching.” More remarkable is the similarity between Blackburn’s and Jackson’s jealous defense of their respective reputations: “when he [Blackburn] met with those who had assailed

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 14; Lyman C. Draper, *King’s Mountain and Its Heroes* (Cincinnati, 1881) 176. Posey cites the story and the letter from Washington on the pages indicated.

⁴⁹Hall to Sprague, December 20, 1848, in Sprague, “Gideon Blackburn, 1792-1838,” *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 48-49.

his character, or impugned his motives, or attempted an overbearing manner with him . . . his friends could have wished that there had been more meekness, more gentleness, more humility.” Perhaps their similarities explain why Jackson and Blackburn nearly came to blows in the presence of “the General’s staff and the Army.” Blackburn arrived at Jackson’s camp with badly needed reinforcements. The young men’s parents had placed certain stipulations on which officer would be allowed to command them, and Jackson bristled at the imposition. Both men felt their honor and authority were being questioned, but perhaps the two men’s similarities also led them to become long-term friends thereafter. At least, Hall seemed to think that Blackburn’s bearing and experiences made a difference to his frontier audiences. Although he wanted to make sure his readers would not consider him a “eulogist of heroes” “while under the cassock” or an “advocate of war,” Hall also wanted his readers to know that Blackburn had earned his military demeanor by fighting Indians in his earlier days and had even led expeditions against the Indians after he became a minister.⁵⁰

Blackburn’s reputation and demeanor might have helped, but his preaching made all the difference. His everyday language convinced his hearers that he was one of them, even as it offended those more polished who went to hear him. One of the Tennessee state legislators learned first hand the power of those spellbinding sermons that could hold audiences for hours at a time. Blackburn was preaching to the legislature, and the legislator (a “Mr. B.”) had heard the reports that the preacher “pronounced many words contrary to all analogy, polite usage, or authority,” and determined to have his fun at the preacher’s expense. Intending to make a list of all the times Blackburn’s gaffs, such as saying “decreptitude” for “decrepitude” and “he done” instead of “he did,” Mr. B. was going to prove that audiences loved Blackburn’s preaching

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 48-49.

because they were just as “ignorant and uncultivated” as he was. The minister’s warm-up discourse (which included “a fine allusion to Xenophon”) disarmed the critic, though, and he soon forgot himself, swept away by the “whole paragraphs at a time” that Blackburn could weave together in spell-binding fashion. “I could not criticise him: not that he was not vulnerable enough, but a man must be a cold-hearted, mean, contemptible creature, even in his own eyes, to criticise such a man and such preaching.” For Mr. B., Blackburn and his preaching could not be criticized because of their natural beauty: “He that would or could do it, would criticise any thing—the Falls of Niagra—the bend of the rainbow” Painting vivid images of the crucifixion and other biblical events, Blackburn told stories and gave his audiences the chance to enter emotionally into his message. His colorful preaching might have failed to carry the day, though, had he come across as artificial. “Ignorant and uncultivated” as his hearers might have seemed, they knew the difference between one who spoke at them and one who spoke as one of them.⁵¹

An enthusiastic member of the “New School” Presbyterian preachers, Blackburn nevertheless dedicated himself to founding and administering schools in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Illinois, and his missionary plans for the Cherokee depended on successful schools for the Indians. In spite of or perhaps because of his activities with the militia, Blackburn wanted to establish a mission among the Cherokee. Although the Moravians had already established a model farm in the Cherokee Nation, the Indians wanted less farming and more schooling, especially for their mixed-blood children. Blackburn perceived this need and proposed that several schools be constructed and clothing be provided to the students.⁵² The Presbyterian

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 54-56.

⁵²Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 194.

General Assembly saw the venture as an experiment and only voted Blackburn money sufficient for two months' work, hardly enough to begin a long-term mission and school. Undaunted, Blackburn pressed the issue by getting Federal Indian agents to assemble a council of 2000 Cherokee, who perhaps reluctantly agreed to Blackburn's plans. After the mission proved to be a success, Blackburn raised nearly six thousand dollars over the next couple of years.

Apparently, he and his associated workers' preaching did lead a number of Cherokees "to become hopeful and exemplary Christians," though the English-language literacy school drew much more interest. Blackburn saw the English language and school as the best way to lead Cherokee children to conversion, which he believed would then spread throughout the Nation.⁵³

Although the missionary's idealistic views also owed something to the common interest in empire building and land speculation, the two languages and the two ways of looking at the world were so radically divergent that the Cherokee themselves observed that their language did not have the words to express the Christian and English concepts related to salvation. Further, Blackburn wrote to the federal Indian agent, Captain Return J. Meigs, in 1807 that the two problems were the older generation's stubborn desire to cling to their traditions and the "unprincipled and scape gallows white-men" who brought trouble and corruption. Although Blackburn thought white, Protestant, Presbyterian culture superior to that of the Cherokee, he did not think the Cherokee racially inferior to whites. He did, however, recognize the extreme difficulty that both sides had in hearing and applying the others' language when difficult, precise concepts needed to be employed. Trading was one thing, Calvinism another.⁵⁴ Although most

⁵³Gillett, *History of the Presbyterian Church*, II, 203-04; Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 194-95.

⁵⁴William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 54-81, 65-69.

church histories explain Blackburn's departure from the Cherokee mission as a health-related issue due to his fund-raising exertions, historian William G. McLoughlin has argued that Blackburn disgraced himself with the Cherokee and Creek and had to leave because he could no longer attract students to his schools. The two issues in question had to do with what appeared to be a speculative land deal related to a federally sought Cherokee cession and a suspicious (and sizeable) shipment of whiskey down the Little Tennessee and Tombigbee Rivers, illegally, through Cherokee and Creek territories.⁵⁵

As part of his mission activities among the Cherokee, Blackburn also acted as the eyes and ears of the federal Indian agent, Return J. Meigs, and also became a supporter of the controversial Lower Town chief, Doublehead. Among other things, the three had in common their interest in President Thomas Jefferson's proposal to swap land west of the Mississippi for Cherokee land east of the river. Jefferson's policies had not been directed at bringing the move into effect, but Meigs, reintroduced the idea. He was responding both to the rapid expansion of white settlement and the slow pace of Cherokee response to missionary efforts. Indians who had learned to farm as whites did would be allowed to own their land and stay, while those who had not yet learned white ways would have more time out West to do so.⁵⁶

Meigs's plans obviously represent the same kind of thinking about Indians and removal as Jackson carried with him to the White House, a view not at all uncommon among the settlers, Indian agents, missionaries and even Indians of the Cherokee border areas. More to the point, Blackburn's involvement with Meigs and Doublehead, the principal Cherokee leader in support

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 78-81.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 44-45; William G. McLoughlin, "Thomas Jefferson and the Beginning of Cherokee Nationalism," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 32 (October 1975): 547-80.

of the land swap idea, puts him actively on the scene as Meigs tried to convince the Cherokee to settle down or move west. The controversy over the issue made for deep divisions among the Cherokee. As a result, in 1807 three leaders of the Upper Town sent assassins to kill Doublehead for his part in a treaty that would have given millions of acres to the United States (and also secretly provided Doublehead with a reward for his support). The assassins did not succeed on their first attempt, so Doublehead went to hide at one of Blackburn's missionary schools at Hiwassee. The killers found the wounded man there and murdered him the next day.⁵⁷

After Blackburn removed to Middle Tennessee, he helped establish First Presbyterian Church of Nashville by preaching regular revival-style services to large crowds numbering perhaps in the thousands, meetings which the Jacksons and their associates, Felix Grundy and William Carroll, also attended.⁵⁸ Although there is some disagreement over whether Blackburn served as Jackson's chaplain or not, Jackson warmly offered him the position in December, 1811, just before departing for New Orleans: "I do myself the pleasure to offer the appointment to you, and I assure you your acceptance will give me a very real satisfaction. The pay and emoluments will be those of a major of infantry, nearly \$120 per month, and in the event of your acceptance I will be happy to offer you a place in my boat and in my family."⁵⁹

When Jackson's army was hemorrhaging enlistees whose terms were up, Blackburn sent a letter offering to recruit some more. He did so and he and his recruits joined William Carroll's force as it went to assist Jackson at his camp in northern Alabama. Blackburn also offered some

⁵⁷McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) 72-74.

⁵⁸V. M. Queener, "Gideon Blackburn," *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* 6 (1934): 23.

⁵⁹AJ to Gideon Blackburn, 11 Dec. 1812, *Jackson Papers*, Supplement.

intelligence, encouragement, and advice: “I am inclined to think that you will find my estimate of the state and force of that nation fully correct. I am doubtless you will yet have considerable fighting but I hope as victory has perched on your banner she will never forsake your standard.” Along with suggestions on how to meet Jackson with troops and supplies, the missionary assured the general that “our hearts are well awake to your situation” and offered the opinion of a practiced Indian fighter: “Should the Indians be determined to give you battle it will . . . be near the Hickory ground—they are no doubt influenced by the Spaniards and British and if so will defend to the last extremity.”⁶⁰ Grateful and encouraged, Jackson lamented, “Gladly would I have saved these men from themselves, and ensured them the harvest which they themselves had sown, but if they will abandon it to others, it must be so.” The Biblically poetic references to reaping, sowing, and uncomplaining resignation to fate in Jackson’s response offer and example of the ways Jackson could practically apply his Presbyterian world view.

Liquor and slaves also made Blackburn a part of the same frontier life as Jackson, but they also show the ways similar people with similar backgrounds could choose different paths. Blackburn had a large-scale whiskey enterprise, including a distillery on his farm. Both John Sevier and the Creek Indians knew of it, apparently, since Sevier commented in his diary that the Creek had “seized upon and took away Parson Blackburn’s whisky.” Despite his profitable distillery, he eventually became an agent of the Kentucky State Temperance Society in the 1830s.⁶¹

After Blackburn removed with his family to Franklin, Tennessee, in 1811, he began

⁶⁰Blackburn to AJ, 20 Nov. 1813, in *PAJ*, II, 7 and 61. Two copies of this letter exist, and one of them bears Jackson’s lengthy response on the reverse.

⁶¹John H. Dewitt, ed., “Journal of John Sevier,” *Tennessee Historical Magazine*, VI (1920-21): 59; Posey, *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest*, 99.

traveling a circuit some fifty miles in radius. He also founded several churches and academies, including First Presbyterian Church of Nashville, Harpeth Academy, Tennessee, Centre College, Kentucky, and Blackburn College, Illinois.⁶²

Blackburn also exhibited some antislavery tendencies. He freed his slave, John Gloucester, who became the pastor of the First African Church in Philadelphia (founded in 1807). Apparently, Gloucester responded to Blackburn's evangelical efforts, making a profession of faith and continuing to show such dedication that he was able to win his release and eventually earn enough money to buy his family's freedom. Well known for his powerful speaking and singing voice, Gloucester pastored the church until he died in 1822.⁶³ Blackburn also "helped" a Kentucky parishioner complete a deathbed will and testament that freed the man's slaves, drawing the anger of the would-be heirs. Eventually, in Illinois, he freed all his other seven or eight slaves, except for "two exceptions. These were very wicked, and were judged by him unfit or unworthy to enjoy their freedom, and being an annoyance in his family he sold them. The sale of these slaves, it is believed, he ever regretted"⁶⁴ Both Maryville College in Eastern Tennessee, to which he sent his son to train for the ministry, and Blackburn College, which he founded in Illinois, became centers of abolitionist sentiment. Maryville's student body may have been "fifty percent abolitionist" by 1839.⁶⁵

In spite of differences of opinion over the significant issues of slavery and temperance,

⁶²Nevin, *Encyclopedia of the Presbyterian Church*.

⁶³Posey, *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest, 1778-1838*, 87; Gillet, *Presbyterian Church I*, 486-878.

⁶⁴Hall in Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 50-51;

⁶⁵Harold M. Parker, Jr., "A School of the Prophets at Maryville," *Studies in Southern Presbyterian History* (Gunnison, Colo.: B & B Printers, 1979), 120.

Jackson and Blackburn remained friendly. Hall told the story that years later he visited Jackson at the White House, having come from the neighborhood near the Hermitage. “The first person after whom he inquired was ‘my much respected friend, Dr. Blackburn.’ It so happened that I had a letter from the Doctor, and I immediately handed it to him. He apologized to me, saying—‘Excuse me a moment while I run over this letter.’ He broke the seal eagerly, and as he read, his countenance betrayed deep and serious emotion.” In the letter, Blackburn urged Jackson to make good on his “promise to confess Christ before the world. After the letter was read, the conversation turned upon the Doctor, and the President spoke of him with the greatest respect, and paid an eloquent tribute to his piety, usefulness, and eloquence.”⁶⁶

Other clergy, such as the renowned revivalist, Peter Cartwright, and the Nashville minister, John Todd Edgar, also told stories of Jackson’s attendance at revivals, conversion, and baptism, which gave a happy ending to the life-long Presbyterian experience for Andrew Jackson. The story in Washington, D. C., however, had no happy ending. Ominously incorrect, the Reverend Doctor Ezra Stiles Ely had congratulated Jackson on winning the presidency by predicting that “New England will yet be as well pleased with the Patriarch of the Hermitage, as with any former presidentOld Mrs. Calhoun . . . said that she would spend another winter there if you should become president, ‘that she might see a President who would go to church.’”⁶⁷ Embittered by the Maragaret Eaton controversy and finding only cold comfort in the First Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C., Jackson fought withdrew from public church life and only gave in to publicly professed faith and public baptism after he had retired and returned to the Hermitage. Whatever Presbyterianism meant to Jackson, it meant more to him in

⁶⁶Hall quoted in Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 50.

⁶⁷Ezra Stiles Ely to AJ, 28 Jan. 1829, in *PAJ*, IV, 3-4.

Tennessee than it did in Washington. The reasons for that difference form the subjects of succeeding chapters.

Chapter Four A Father's Invocation

The war against the Redstick bands of the Creek Indians had begun, and Andrew Jackson was right in the middle of it. He had succeeded in his campaign to become the major general of the Tennessee militia. Ambitious for the chance to defend his country and the white settlers of the frontier, Jackson also believed the British were the real instigators behind the Indian unrest, so going to war against England's Creek surrogates would be setting out on the most direct avenue for settling his old score with the English Crown. Yet the soon-to-be hero had gotten no farther than Nashville, some twenty miles from his home, when he wrote to his wife, Rachel: "I thank you for your prayers—I thank you for your determined resolution, to bear our separation with fortitude, we part but for a few days, for a few fleeting weeks, when the protecting hand of Providence if it is his will, will restore us to each others arms." Waxing poetic or perhaps paraphrasing a church hymn, Jackson tried to find words to comfort Rachel: "In storms, in battles, amidst the ragin billows recollect, his protecting hand can save, in the peaceful shade, in cabins, in pallaces, his avenging hand can destroy—Then let us not repine, his will be done."¹

Jackson's words of comfort also contained a simple but fundamental theological premise that would guide Jackson's thinking and his relations with family, friends, and enemies, both real and perceived. So great was the power of God and so complete was his right to exercise his mastery over human events, that his "protecting hand" could save in the most violent and life-threatening of circumstances, while no safe place existed that might spare an individual from

¹Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson, 8 Jan. 1813, in Sam B. Smith, *et al*, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, (6 vols. to date; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975–), II, 354. Hereafter, *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* will be abbreviated *PAJ*, and the name "Andrew Jackson" will be abbreviated to "AJ." When other members of the Jackson family appear together in the text, I refer to Andrew Jackson as "Jackson" to maintain consistency, and refer to the others by their first names, such as "Rachel" and "Andrew, Jr."

God's justified vengeance. For example, during the Creek War, Jackson responded to the freezing temperatures, lack of food and supply, and (what he regarded as) "desertions" of the bulk of his volunteer army by saying, "I shall certainly . . . move down upon them and Teach my enemies to know . . . that I will fight and with the smiles of heaven beat down my enemies."² So long as the cause was just, Jackson would be on the right side of Providence and had nothing to fear. His enemies, on the other hand, would by definition be on that wrong side, and nothing, nothing could save them from meeting their appointed end. He went on to remind Rachel of the justness and necessity for the war, at least in the eyes of frontier settlers, asserting that "our country calls, its rights are invaded, the innocent babe, and helpless mother, massacred by the ruthless savages, excited to these horrid Deeds, we trust in the righteousness of our cause, and the god of Battle and of Justice will protect us."

The formula would serve Jackson well for the length of his military and political career, but those well-traveled aspects of Jackson's life merit discussion as a separate topic from the relationship between religious thinking and Jackson's personal life. On the other hand, the difficulty of keeping Jackson's public and private life separated for purposes of discussion helps to demonstrate the continuity between Jackson's deeply held convictions, his personal relationships, and his public life. Jackson did not believe he was invoking Providence to bless his actions, making the "god of Battle and of Justice" into a servant for human action. Rather, he thought that once the cause of "Justice" had properly been identified, Providence judged individuals by the choices they made as a response. In other words, in spite of what might seem to be Jackson's overconfidence, he believed that life brought too many hardships and events beyond one's control or understanding to be navigated safely using only one's own reckoning as

²Andrew Jackson to Robert Hays, 4 Jan. 1814, in *PAJ*, III, 8.

a guide. The best course of action for self preservation meant accepting the same long view of things as Providence seemed to take: namely that there was more to lose in life than life itself, that honor and virtue had eternal value greater than the value of any individual's life, that aligning himself with the Providential plan offered precious security from life's many trials, and that only a fool would "tempt fate" by failing to be grateful for what blessings he had received or by failing to submit meekly to both the "protecting" and the "avenging" hand of the Almighty.

In practical application, trusting Providence meant following the dictates of conscience and common sense and leaving the rest up to God. Even later in life when he was president of the United States, Jackson was advising his adopted son that "Whilst I regret the Frost and the bad prospect of our cotton, still as it originates from the act of god, we ought not to murmur or complain. You have only to see that what cotton is left, if worth cultivating, is well attended to, kept clean, and fostered by good culture. this is all humanity can do, for apolla may plant etc. but it is god who giveth the increase."³ Even the President had to submit himself to the likelihood of calamity and tragedy, so when Jackson's beloved Hermitage burned, he applied the Providence principle to himself. Because no one could be blamed for the fire, "we ought, and I do meet it, as an act of Providence, and always reconciled to his will, and prepared to say at all

³AJ to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 5 June 1834, Andrew Jackson to Robert Hays, 4 Jan. 1814, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (6 vols.; Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926-33), V, 268; The phrase "apolla may plant, etc." is a reference to The Bible, I Corinthians 3:4-8, which have to do with competition among ministers and the role of the Christian worker in the ministry: " For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building." The Bible, King James Version, Electronic Text Center (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Library, 2005) <http://etext.virginia.edu/kjv.browse.html>.

times and under all circumstances, "the Lords will be done," it was he that gave me the means to build it, and he has the right to destroy it, and blessed be his name."⁴

Lastly, Jackson stubbornly held to the belief that, no matter how painful some of life's trials could be, all manner of disappointment and injustice could be reconciled with hope for the future by remembering that Providence governed the world for its own good. To question the goodness of Providence and the right of Providence to govern as He saw fit meant removing the reason for hope in the future, since in the end God understood the way it would all balance out in favor of the good. Therefore, it made perfect sense in Jackson's mind that Rachel should be comforted to think that the cause was just. Since it was just, Jackson had a duty to go deliver that justice. Everything else would work out for the good, even if Jackson were to lose his life, so long as he and Rachel obeyed the seemingly obvious dictates of Providence and did not remove themselves from his protection by complaining about their situation. Jackson continued trying to argue Rachel into more peace of mind by reminding her of Providential expectations: "hence then dispel any gloomy ideas that our seperation may occasion, bear it with Christian cheerfulness—and resignation, I shall write you often, and shall be always happy to hear from you May the angelic hosts that rewards & protects virtue and innocence, and preserves the good, be with you untill I return—is the sincere supplication of your affectionate Husband."⁵

More than a year and a half later, after his defeat of the Redstick Creeks and just a few days before the signing of the Treaty of Fort Jackson to end that war, Jackson wrote from Fort Jackson to explain to an anxious Rachel that he would not be coming home soon. He had just received orders to go to Mobile, and perhaps anticipating Rachel's dismay, said with less poetry

⁴AJ to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 23 October, 1834, *Bassett*, V, 302.

⁵AJ to Rachel Jackson, 8 Jan. 1813, in *PAJ*, II, 354.

and more steel, " . . . had I thought it was to separate us again for a length of time I certainly would have been at the Hermitage—But I have *accepted*, my honor never shall be stained—when danger rears its head, I can never shrink from it—I trust in a kind Providence, for protection and success—I owe to Britain a debt of retaliatory, Vengeance—" Charging that Britain and Spain were arming the Indians and thereby threatening "our women and children," Jackson again drew the line connecting his unforgiving determination to bring the war to the British to his conviction that the God who governed the world and meted out justice in deciding the fate of nations also determined the fate of individuals, as he prayed, "may that superintending being, who governs, worlds—and destinies of nations protect & bless you & my little Andrew, with health untill I meet you, is the sincere prayer of your affectionate Husband."⁶

Although she certainly supported her husband in his endeavors and agreed that the individual ought never to complain in the face of disappointing turns of events, Rachel may have been less sanguine about the movements of Providence than Jackson, honor and destiny notwithstanding. A decade later, when Jackson was making his first run for the presidency, he confided to a friend that "Mrs. J. Is more disconsolate than I ever knew her before, & I do assure you I leave home with more reluctance than I ever did in my life—it was so unlooked for, unwished for, & so inconsistant with my feelings—But I have no doubt but Providence will protect her & myself as well absent as present . . . we ought allways to be ready to say the lords will be done."⁷

Still, the Jacksons' mutual, deeply felt sense that trusting in a "kind" Providence who had the world's best interests firmly in hand contributed significantly to the strength of their

⁶AJ to RJ, 5 Aug. 1814, in *PAJ*, III, 70-71.

⁷AJ to John Overton, 8 Nov. 1823, in *PAJ*, V, 320.

marriage. The daily business of managing the Hermitage, concerns over various matters with extended family, and, of course, political developments offered plenty of reasons for both Andrew and Rachel to look for meaning by trying to discern the subtle movements of God's workings. Worries over health, however, preoccupied the couple in nearly all their correspondence for the rest of their lives.

Both had seen numerous friends and family fall ill and die, which they attributed to inclement weather or, in regard to each other, to too much worrying. The worry over health cast a fatalistic cloud over their correspondence, reminding each of the fleeting, tenuous nature of life. Humanity was on a "journey" through life that would continue at God's pleasure and until His purposes had been fulfilled, at which time the humble pilgrim could "rest."⁸ Future plans should be made in light of being "permitted to remain Tennants here below."⁹ Jackson wrote that he was "blessed with fine weather" on his long journey to Washington, but even that and the happiness of the crowds that turned out to celebrate him as he passed through were not enough without his beloved Rachel. With home on his mind and feeling lonely, Jackson hoped for "the permission of heaven, never to separate, or be separated from you in this world" and urged Rachel to "bless [our family] for me, and accept of my prayers for your health and happiness untill I return."¹⁰

A week or so later, he wrote that "I have to thank my god that my health has improved and I trust that with care I may continue to enjoy health," which inspired him to this small

⁸*Ibid.*: "We are travelling our Journey through life, when our time is fulfilled here below we will *rest*, Providence will continue us here untill we fulfill those purposes that his goodness has designed."

⁹AJ to RJ, 7 Dec. 1823, *Ibid.*, 323.

¹⁰AJ to RJ, 28 Nov. 1823, *Ibid.*, 320.

sermon:

when we Trust in Providence it is well placed and under every circumstance in life as you will observe, in him alone we ought to trust, his is the fountain of all good, he giveth life and health, and at pleasure taketh it away, and we ought so to conduct in all things, that we ought allways to be prepared to say his will be done Therefore I am sure that in the Variable climate if it is his will I shall enjoy as much health here as at home—provided I can bring my mind to be calm under our separation—This, being informed of your health, I shall endeavour to do.¹¹

In another letter only a few days later, he reasserted the same principle by telling Rachel, "I trust that the god of Isaac and of Jacob will protect you, and give you health in my absence . . .we are told that the prayers of the righteous prevaieth much—and I add mine for your health and preservation untill we again meet."¹² Even so, or perhaps because even heartfelt sermons can only do so much, Jackson finally felt compelled to remind Rachel of the damage her worrying was doing to her health: "My love, remember you have promised me that you would bear up under my absence—recollect that your health much depend upon your keeping your mind calm and at ease, and I pray you to do so."¹³ Rachel did share the sentiment, for in 1828, when Jackson had succeeded in being elected to the presidency, she confided to a friend who was going to have dresses made for her that she did not want to leave her home, "but since it has pleased a grateful people once more to call him to their service and since by the permission of Providence he will obey that call I have resolved indeed it is a duty." The couple believed that the opposition to Jackson's presidential campaigns had been so intense that he could never have been elected without God's approval. For Rachel's part, she believed she owed "it to myself and

¹¹AJ to RJ, 11 Dec. 1823, *Ibid.*, 324-25.

¹²AJ to RJ, 21 Dec. 1823, *Ibid.*, 330-31.

¹³AJ to RJ, 2 Jan. 1824, *Ibid.*, 345.

my husband to try to forget, at least for a time all the endearments of home and prepare to live where it has pleased heaven to fix our destiny."¹⁴ As destiny would have it, Rachel did not need the dresses because she died suddenly just a few days later.

Ironically, Jackson's condolences to friends and family who had lost loved ones would soon have to help him deal with Rachel's death. The statements also reveal much of his thinking about life. Jackson was only thirty-seven years old when he "comforted" his friend John Coffee by saying, "it was your duty you owed her you have, and was right to perform it—She is gone to happier climes than these, you have performed your duty by her—She is happy—you cannot help it—human nature is such—but you ought not to mourn."¹⁵ Disease threatened to overtake even the healthiest individuals at any time, including Jackson's first biographer, John Reid, who fell ill and died in a matter of hours while on a visit home. Rachel's response to the epidemic and to Reid's death in a letter to Reid's widow indicates that she shared Jackson's sentiments: "how sincerely I have sympathised in your sorrows, it has not been in the power of an absent Friend To soothe or alleviate one sorrowful hour or rest assured it would have been done—there is none exempt from trouble And the great Disposer of all who holds the Destiny of nations in his hands sees and knows what is best for us Let us my Friend resign to His will."¹⁶

Jackson offered one of his fullest descriptions of his understanding of death, heaven, Providence and God when he wrote to comfort one of the many young men whom he informally adopted, Edward George Washington Butler, following the sudden death of Butler's beloved younger brother. For Jackson, death was the great equalizer, respecting "no age nor merit; he

¹⁴RJ to Louise Moreau Davezac de Lassy Livingston, 1 Dec. 1828, *Ibid.*, 537.

¹⁵AJ to John Coffee, 28 Feb. 1804, in *PAJ*, II, 6-7.

¹⁶RJ to Sophia Thorpe Reid, 27 April 1816, in *PAJ*, IV, 27.

sweeps from this earthly existence the High and the Low, the rich, and the poor." Taking the opportunity to deliver a layperson's sermon to his ward, Jackson reminded him that ultimately all people were helpless to control the events that mattered most to them, which "should teach us to liv, to be prepared for death." Even such a "promising" young man as Butler's brother could be snatched away in an instant, "but we have a hope that he is removed from the troubles of this, to a blissful state of immortality, in the next world; and we are taught by the Scriptures 'to mourn not for the dead, but for the living . . . let us be consoled in the hope that he is at rest and happy in the arms of our crucified Saviour." Butler, who had already lost his own parents and now lost his brother, needed to "remember too, that to be reconciled with our Lot is a duty we owe not less to ourselves than to that God, to whose Providence we are all committed. Against his will, it is vain to repine." On the other hand, "a calm submission to that will," no matter what the degree of disappointment or pain, "makes human fortitude triumph over the grave, and conducts us to thos happier regions, in which we love to believe our young friend immortal . . .in preparation to overtake him there."¹⁷

Although the letter to Butler may have seemed like cold comfort, Jackson had already experienced losses very similar to Butler's, having lost his own mother and brothers during the Revolutionary War. In response to that loss, he found comfort in the grim Scottish

¹⁷AJ to Edward George Washington Butler, 12 Dec. 1824, in *PAJ*, V 454-55; the scripture reference is used in similar form by Jackson repeatedly in nearly all his condolence correspondence, but the exact passage does not appear in the Bible. Possibly Jackson was piecing together the parts of sermons or eulogies that had the most meaning for him. See, for example, *The Bible*, II Samuel 12: 18-24. The illegitimately conceived child of the Jewish King David and his wife, Bath-sheba, had died, "And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"; see also Luke 20:38, where Jesus says "For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him."

Presbyterianism that taught parishioners not to question the sovereignty of God. God watched over the world and the affairs of men, and God was good. His goodness ought never to be questioned, certainly not by mortals whose life and life's achievements could be erased in the blink of an eye. Time and again Jackson reminded his family and friends not to question God's governance, to do their duty to their remaining loved ones by accepting their loss with humility, and to think about earthly events from a heavenly perspective. "I have sensibly felt for your family affliction and offer you my heartfelt condolence on the mournful occasion," he wrote to one friend, but "we must bend to circumstances and be reconciled to the will of Providence, and with cheerfull heart be ready to say 'the lord's will be done.'"

Although Jackson certainly had his own hopes and ambitions and did what he could to maneuver events to accomplish those interests, he steadfastly believed that his actions could only succeed if blessed by Providence, and to Providence he owed a debt of thankful obedience. When his close friend Richard Keith Call lost three of his children to disease and death in childbirth, among them one named after Jackson, Jackson looked for the what hope he could find in the situation: "we rejoice at the happy prospect of Marys speedy restoration to health . . . but instead of repining at the loss, we ought to rejoice at their change from this world of evil and of wo, to those heavenly climes," and in spite of the tragedy to remember "that god *doeth all things well*."¹⁸ Life was so uncertain that people should always remember they owed all things to God. "It is he that giveth, and he has a right to take away," but since God was good and just, all things, even the death of young children and beloved spouses, ought to be born with humility and submission.¹⁹

¹⁸AJ to Richard Keith Call, 21 Nov. 1826, in *PAJ*, VI, 233.

¹⁹AJ to Andrew J. Hutchings, 25 Jan. 1835, in *Bassett*, V, 322.

Only a couple of years later, Jackson had occasion to remember all his words of consolation and apply them to himself. When Rachel suffered the seizure and heart attack that soon killed her, he wrote to tell Call what had happened. "I trust in a kind Providence, that he will restore her to her usual health."²⁰ His hopes were in vain, for Rachel died soon after, and in subsequent correspondence, Jackson's trust in a "kind Providence" gave way to a rueful acceptance of the "afflicting dispensation of Providence which has deprived me of the partner of my life. A loss so great, so sudden and unexpected, I need not say to you, can be compensated by no earthly gift." Shaken by the devastating loss, Jackson still maintained his doctrine of accepting fate and looking for signs of hope, finding consolation in "the reflection that she lived long enough to see the countless assaults of our enemies disarmed by the voice of our beloved country."²¹

For the entire time he was in office as president of the United States, Jackson's views bore the burden of his crushing loss. No matter how actively he pursued his agenda, he always felt that he had been given the office by God's design and against his own wishes, then required to rise to the challenge of fulfilling his official duties without the comfort and support Rachel would have provided. Jackson confided to his friend, vice-president Martin van Buren, "my heart is in the grave of my dear departed wife, from which sacred spot no living being can recall it."²² The bustle of the presidency may have taken his mind off of his sadness and loneliness, but Jackson wrote to his Tennessee neighbor and friend, the Reverend Hardy M. Cryer, that in the evenings he felt "the great weight of the late affliction of Providence in the bereavement I have

²⁰AJ to R. K. Call, 22 Dec. 1828, in *PAJ*, VI, 546.

²¹AJ to Jean Baptiste Plauché, 27 Dec. 1828, in *PAJ*, VI, 547.

²²AJ to Martin Van Buren, 25 July 1833, in *Bassett*, V, 144.

been visited with in the loss of my dear wife; I find myself a solitary man, deprived of all hope of happiness this side of the grave." Writing to friends in Tennessee seemed to help, for Jackson daydreamed of returning to the Hermitage, "there to spend the remnant of my days, and daily drop a tear on the tomb of my beloved wife, and be prepared, when Providence wills it, to unite with her in the realms above."²³ The presidency became another test in a long series of challenges whereby Jackson had to prove his unwillingness to complain and his faithfulness to accept the will of Providence.

Jackson so longed for Rachel and for the comforts of home that his friends made a practice of visiting the Hermitage and the place there where Rachel had been buried, then writing letters describing how things were. He felt he had a duty to visit Rachel's grave, and the letters helped him fulfill that duty vicariously, even as he attended to the all-consuming affairs of state. He called the place "that interesting spot, where my thoughts delight to dwell," and his memories of Rachel anchored him to the Hermitage and to Tennessee more than anything else. God had given Jackson "this heavy bereavement" so he would be "admonished that it was time I should place my earthly house in order and prepare for another, and I hope a better world." Consequently, thoughts of Rachel led him to become more sympathetic with her evangelical outlook, and he began increasingly to write more openly, as she had done, with reference to the Bible and to Christ. After obtaining the office for which he had fought so strenuously for years, Jackson wished he had listened to Rachel's advice to retire from public life and enjoy the comforts of home. He even urged his brother-in-law, Captain John Donelson, Jr., to learn the lesson God had delivered with Rachel's passing, and "withdraw from the busy cares of this world, and put your house in order for the next, by laying hold 'of the one thing needful.' go read

²³AJ to Rev. Hardy M. Cryer, 16 May 1829, *Ibid.*, IV, 33.

the Scriptures, the joyful promises it contains, will be a balsome to all your troubles, and create for you a kind of heaven here on earth, a consolation to your troubled mind that is not to be found in the hurry and bustle of this world." Rachel had worried about her brother's salvation and happiness "in the dead of the night," and, as it sometimes happens with older, widowed men, he began to cherish and even act on his dead wife's evangelical religious sentiments.²⁴

The Reverend Dr. Ely noticed the change as well. The Ely family's visit at the Hermitage had led to correspondence between Rachel and Ely regarding the condition of Jackson's soul, and Ely eagerly pressed the departed Rachel's case for her: "I flatter myself, therefore, that one celestial being [clo]ser to you than any other, except her Saviour, knows, with gratitude to the God of all grace, that you are a different being in relation to spiritual and eternal matters, from what you was in 1819; and that you have since that time begun to be one of the humble followers of Christ."²⁵ Further evidence of Jackson's increasing sympathy to evangelical expression is scant but persistent. At some point in 1833, Jackson scribbled an indorsement on the back of a letter whose contents did not survive: "but I hope god will relieve all those who trust in him in true faith and is worthy of his favours through the atonement of our Lord Jesus christ our savior and redemer. A.J."²⁶ Also during 1833, Jackson's close friend, John Coffee, knew that he was dying and from his death bed, asked his family to join a church and entrusted Jackson with the responsibility of praying for the widow and children that he would leave behind. Jackson comforted his friend's daughter by telling her "his request for my prayers . . . will be bestowed with pleasure. they will be constantly offered up at the throne of grace for you

²⁴AJ to John Donelson, 7 June 1829, *Ibid.*, 41-42.

²⁵Ezra Styles Ely to AJ, 3 July 1829, *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁶AJ indorsement, [1833], *Ibid.*, V, 1.

all, and our dear Savior, has spoken it—‘that he will be a father to the fatherless and a husband to the widow’ True religion, is calculated to make us not only happy in this, but in the next and a better world."²⁷ Jackson could not have remained such a close friend for so long had he not admired Coffee’s morals and identified them with his own. When he proposed the epitaph for Coffee’s tombstone, Jackson penned words he thought applied to himself as well. "Death could do no more than remove so excellent a being from the theatre he so much adorned in this world," wrote Jackson, "to the bosom of the God who created him and alone has the power to reward the immortal spirit with exhaustless bliss."²⁸ Apparently Coffee believed that the survival and prosperity of his family depended on a man of true religion as a patriarch to offer sincere prayers for them, and he believed that Jackson’s prayers would work. For his part, Jackson thought of Coffee as a man of "true religion" and, taken together with Rachel’s death, Coffee’s may have reminded Jackson of Rachel’s desire that he should join a church.

In Jackson’s mind, God governed the world according to the ultimate good attainable by divine Providence. "Providence" meant the way God guided events, often subtly and surprisingly, in order to bring about an overarching good that mortals could not expect fully to understand, nor even enjoy the process of its creation. God’s great design might require one to sacrifice an ambition, another to submit to bereavement through the death of a loved one. From his earliest correspondence to his last words, Jackson believed he had never failed to accept God’s providential dealings nor to do his duty by his family. He saw himself as providing for his family what God had provided for him, namely an unshakeable, unquestionable, and obvious commitment to their welfare. Even as a young man, Jackson had become concerned that he

²⁷AJ to Mary Coffee, 15 Aug. 1833, *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁸AJ to John D. Coffee, 24 Dec. 1834, *Ibid.*, 315, footnote.

could only do his best and try to be on the side of the right, and that the results depended on heavenly prerogatives. In turn, Jackson conducted his relations with his family, his slaves, the Indians, his political proteges, and the nation at large in just the same way. All who depended on Jackson ought to understand that he had their best interests at heart and would do his duty by them, but that duty required some sacrifices, and no one ought to complain. "I trust in Providence that this fine weather may continue; and that health may be maintained evry where;" he wrote, "but This cannot be expected," capturing in one sentence the outlook he held on the matter for his entire life.²⁹

Jackson did not rule his home as an iron-jawed patriarch, however, and he did think of himself as a father and offer advice, monetary support, and especially funds for education for many children of family and friends. Although the Jacksons did not have children of their own, they formally adopted two and served as the legal guardians for eight others. One of the two adopted boys was Andrew Jackson, Jr., the son of Rachel's brother, Severn Donelson, and his wife. The couple adopted the boy in 1808 and named him Andrew, Jr.. Jackson always referred to him as "my son," as if to strengthen their bond as father and son, overcoming the biological fact that he and Rachel had not been able to have children. Moreover, he devoted himself to the boy. The other son was Lyncoya, a ten-month-old Creek Indian that Jackson's interpreter found on the battlefield after the wholesale and gruesome slaughter at the battle of Tohopeka.³⁰

Jackson told Rachel, "Quals my interpreter took him up carried him on his back and brought him to me—charity and Christianity says he ought to be taken care of and I send to my little Andrew,

²⁹AJ to Rachel Jackson, 29 Jan. 1824, in *PAJ*, V, 348.

³⁰John Reid and John Henry Eaton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, ed. Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr. (1817; University: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 395.

and I hope will adopt him as one of our family. Kiss my little son and receive my blessing."³¹ Although Jackson said he sent Lyncoya "to" Andrew, which has led to the charge that he thought of Lyncoya as a "pet" for his son, Jackson clearly indicated he wanted Rachel to "treat him like an orphan."³² For his part, Andrew, Jr., did seem to think that Lyncoya would be his servant and companion, perhaps replacing a slave boy named Charlie. Andrew, Jr., may have been a little jealous of the attention Charlie received from Rachel because, as he put it, "I like Charly but he will not mind me my mother thinks highly of his understanding she treats him as well as any purson on Earth Could."³³ Instead, Jackson considered Lyncoya to be a full member of his intimate family, and ordered that the boy be kept in the house, saying, "he is a Savage [but one] that fortune has thrown in my h[ands when] his own female matrons wanted to k[ill him] . . . I therefore want him well taken care of, he may have been given to me for some Valuable purpose—in fact when I reflect that he as to his relations is so much like myself I feel an unusual sympathy for him."³⁴ Lyncoya died of tuberculosis in 1828, the same year in which Rachel died, but not before Jackson had provided him the same education and opportunities as for his Andrew, Jr., his namesake. He even went so far as to try to get Lyncoya admitted to West Point.³⁵

The other children over whom Jackson assumed guardianship included Caroline, Eliza, Edward, and Anthony Butler, all children of the deceased Revolutionary War General Edward

³¹AJ to RJ, 19 Dec. 1813, in *PAJ*, II, 494.

³²AJ to RJ, 1 Feb. 1814, *Ibid.*, III, 23.

³³Andrew Jackson, Jr. to AJ, 8 Apr. 1814, *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁴AJ to RJ, 29 Dec. 1813, *Ibid.*, II, 516.

³⁵Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (3 vols.; New York: Harper & Row, 1977-84), I, 193-94.

Butler. Butler had asked Jackson to watch over his children. When Rachel's brother, Samuel Donelson, died in 1804, his three boys, John Samuel, Andrew Jackson, and Daniel Donelson all went to live at the Hermitage. Andrew Jackson Donelson became a trusted aide and secretary when Jackson became president; he had sent the young man to West Point. Finally, the Jacksons welcomed into their home their great-nephew, Andrew Jackson Hutchings. In addition, as their son and wards married and had children of their own, those children frequently visited or even lived at the Hermitage with Jackson during his retirement.³⁶

One of Jackson's moral duties toward his family included offering his blessings and prayers. In one poignant instance, he wrote to a family friend in order to make certain that his Rachel and their son were on their way to meet him as he traveled toward New Orleans in 1814. Having had no letters or newspapers from Tennessee for nearly three months, Jackson was anxious to make sure the pair had begun their trip, but he also insisted they hear that he wished them a blessing. "If she is still at home," he urged his friend, "say to her . . . and my little son god bless them."³⁷ When a few days later no word had yet arrived, and while in the field four miles below New Orleans waiting for the British advance, Jackson asked, "Where is Mrs. Jackson—is she on her way—pray advise me—if at home tell her and my little son, may god bless them and your family—."³⁸ Almost every letter to his family ends with Jackson's request to extend his blessing. Their letters in return to him do not. Although they mention best wishes for his health and perhaps that he was being remembered in their prayers, the responsibility and authority to bless fell to Jackson alone.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 160-62.

³⁷AJ to Robert Hays, 23 Dec. 1814, in *PAJ*, III, 217.

³⁸AJ to Robert Hays, 26 Dec. 1814, in *Ibid.*, 222.

Jackson believed that his authority derived from his own submission to divine authority, and that he had been entrusted with the responsibility to provide for those given into his care, and he included the slaves at the Hermitage in his definition of family. Upon returning to Washington from a visit home, he wrote, "I found all my family well, a few of my negroes excepted, little Rachel as sprightly as a little fairy and as wild as a little partridge."³⁹

Significantly, Jackson's thoughts of his granddaughter, who bore his beloved wife's name, occur in the same sentence, as though in the same thought, with what he had to say about "all my family," which included his enslaved family as well. By the time of his death in 1845, Jackson may have owned around two hundred different slaves, with the most at any one time being the 150 or so who were living and laboring at the Hermitage when he died. He bought his first slave, Aaron, at twenty-four, so he bought and sold slaves for more than fifty years.

Slaves at the Hermitage lived in family units and were even allowed firearms for hunting their own game. Aaron, George, Ben, Alfred, Squire, Betty, Hannah, and Old Hannah all are mentioned in Jackson's letters, if only briefly, but they were people on whom he depended and whom he entrusted with important responsibilities, such as blacksmithing, cotton ginning, tending his prize-winning stock of horses and cattle, and management of the Hermitage home. Most of the ones mentioned had been born at the Hermitage and had lived there all their lives. Both Alfred and Hannah took "Jackson" as their last names after emancipation, and both remained at the Hermitage until their deaths, Alfred's funeral was held in the Hermitage mansion itself. Hannah Jackson's husband, Aaron, may have preached occasionally.⁴⁰ Jackson may have

³⁹ AJ to Francis P. Blair, 7 Aug. 1834, in *Bassett*, V, 280.

⁴⁰Marsha A. Mullin, curator, *Stories from the Hermitage Slave Community* (Nashville: The Hermitage Museum, 2004-06), exhibit.

been known as a moderate master, for while he was president, a free woman of color asked him to buy her mother, Nancy, and Nancy's family and move them from Washington to the Hermitage. On the other hand, Jackson slaves also ran away, and he at least once offered a reward for both the return and the beating of an escaped slave. On another occasion, he attributed a poor corn crop at his property in Alabama to "the absence of my negroes, four having ran away . . . I was fortunate in regaining my negroes, and although I hate chains, was compelled to place two of them in irons, for safe-keeping untill an opportunity offers to sell or exchange."⁴¹ Also, Jackson had at least once brought slaves on the long trip overland up from Natchez, Mississippi, to his home in Tennessee, which led his political enemies later to accuse him of participating in the long-distance domestic slave trade. For his part, Jackson looked down on the domestic slave trade when it became the primary source of income. He criticized one of his early opponents with the sarcastic observation that the man was "engaged in the humane pursuit of purchasing Negroes in Maryland and carrying them to Natchez and Louisa and thus making a fortune of speculating on human flesh."⁴²

Ensuring that the Hermitage slaves were cared for and never abused also greatly concerned Jackson. "I have only time to add that I do not wish you to permit [John] Fields [the overseer] to abuse Clum," he wrote to Rachel in 1814, and decided to keep Clum rather than sell him, in spite of whatever trouble had occurred.⁴³ To allow injury to his black family would endanger Jackson's place on the right side of Providence, for few abrogations of duty were worse than failing to care for one's dependants. Slaves, like other family members, children,

⁴¹AJ to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 28 June 1822, in *PAJ*, V, 195.

⁴²AJ to Thomas Eastin, c. June 1806, in *PAJ*, II, 106.

⁴³AJ to RJ, 28 Jan. 1814, *Ibid.*, III, 20.

orphans, widows, and eventually, even the Indians demanded the care and concern of someone greater than they who could protect them. While he served as president, Jackson continued to worry about the success of the Hermitage and the well-being of his slave family. His concern about the treatment of the Hermitage slaves did, of course, derive in part from his understanding that the success of the farm depended on the cooperation of his labor force. Early in his first term, Jackson received the alarming news that several of the Hermitage slaves had died. Apparently, the deaths did not impact Andrew, Jr., the way they did his father, who hurriedly responded with a letter that shows Jackson's real concern for the well-being of the Hermitage slaves, but also reveals how Jackson tried to balance and sort his obligations:

[In reply to the letter] advising me of the death of my negroman Jim, and the manner of it. I pray you my son to examine minutely into this matter, and if the death was produced by the cruelty of Mr Steel, have him forthwith discharged. But as you are young, advise with Col Love upon this matter. My negroes shall be treated humanely. When I employed Mr Steel, I charged him upon this subject, and had expressed in our agreement that he was to treat them with great humanity, feed and cloath them well, and work them in moderation. If he has deviated from this rule, he must be discharged.

Since I left home I have lost three of my family. Old Ned, I expected to die, but I am fearful the death of Jack, and Jim, has been produced by exposure and bad treatment. Your Uncle John Donelson writes, that *Steel has ruled with a rod of iron*. This is so inconsistant to what I expected, that I cannot bear the inhumanity that he has exercised towards my poor negroes, contrary to his promise and has impaired my confidence in him. Unless he changes his conduct, dismiss him, and employ another.

I write this in haste that it may go by to nights mail and meet you at Nashville. Consult with Colo. Love and doctor Hogg about Mr Steel and whether he ought to be discharged. I am your affectionate father.⁴⁴

Judging from other correspondence, Jackson worried that Andrew, Jr., would think his father

⁴⁴AJ to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 4 July 4 1829, in *Bassett*, IV, 50.

lacked confidence in his judgement, and he also felt that he needed further proof before he dissolved the contract with the overseer, Graves W. Steele. Preserving good faith with Andrew, Jr., and honoring the contract with the white overseer were important obligations that had to honor. On the other hand, Jackson's own moral standing, not to mention the lives of the slaves, hung in the balance. Finally, Jackson wrote to Steele directly, which indicates that even months later neither Andrew, Jr., nor Jackson's friends had resolved the matter to the president's satisfaction.

When the Hermitage bacon supply ran low and some of the livestock developed infirmities, the president intervened, but only by writing letters. Jackson had himself ensured a large supply of bacon "for my White and Black family salted in my smoke house" before he left for Washington, and was "truly astonished to hear my beacon was nearly gone, this to me was unaccountable." Even so and against the advice of his Tennessee friends, Jackson retained the man with the admonishment that "I have been advised by some not to continue you But when I say I have concluded to retain you another year, it is on the express conditions that you treat my negroes with humanity, and attention when sick; and not work them too hard, when well—that you feed and cloath them *well*, and that you *carefully attend to my stock* of all kinds."⁴⁵ News from the Hermitage continued to worry Jackson, however, even in his second term in the White House and with a new overseer. He wrote to his friend, Major William B. Lewis, who was helping him watch over his home and its management by the rather spendthrift Andrew Jackson, Jr., saying

I had been kept under great anxiety and pain from various rumors, and letters containing intimations of Mr. Holtzclaws [the new overseer's] severity to my negroes, still, he has promised me to treat them with

⁴⁵AJ to Graves W. Steele, 7 Nov. 1829, *Ibid.*, 85.

kindness and humanity so far as their conduct would permit, holding them to strict subordination. Your letter with one just recd. from Doctor McCorkle, has relieved me from those apprehensions of cruelty to the negroes, and as to his capacity and industry I had no apprehensions about.

Jackson also went so far as to call for a doctor to provide care for Hannah, who had fallen ill, and to keep Betty from abusing the “little negroes” in the kitchen.”⁴⁶ From the far-off capital of the United States of America, the father of all at the Hermitage tried to protect the children of his black family. The problems continued, though. A later visit to the Hermitage left Jackson frustrated but still blaming the overseers. He complained to his son that “the worthlessness of our overseers for the last three years has been strongly evinced in the total want of vegetables of the above description, and inattention to the garden.”⁴⁷

Jackson, as patriarch, had to protect his family, indelibly divided by the color line into white and black, with one of the main differences being that the black side had to learn physical “subordination” before they could fit into the Providential scheme of things. Jackson could not provide for their well being without their acceptance of his benign but formidable authority. Yet another overseer had failed, this time because he was too lenient. Jackson believed “he was only a screen to the negroes, knew nothing about cultivation, and was beholden to the negroes for instruction what to do,” which did prove to be cause for dismissal.⁴⁸ Jackson could thank “that all wise and over-ruling Providence” that the Hermitage was finally put back into proper order by the next overseer, who succeeded because he has reduced the hands to good subordination, and in doing this he has obtained their confidence and attachment—he now has a set of willing

⁴⁶AJ to William B. Lewis, 4 May 1833, *Ibid.*, V, 74-75.

⁴⁷AJ to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 15 Nov. 1834, *Ibid.*, 308.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

hands, who do their duty cheerfully, and one willing hand is really worth two who only does what labour he is forcibly compelled to perform." The balance lay between establishing mastery and treating "our poor servants" with "humanity," and Jackson was "delighted."⁴⁹

In Jackson's view, slaves must not be abused, but neither could he truly care for them if they did not have cause to respect the knowledge and disciplinary authority of their master. A decade earlier, Jackson had advised a neighbor on the subject of teaching slaves "subordination," by saying "this he must be taught to, or he is worth nothing to you, & still less to me, & it is such an example as cannot be tolerated by me, it would ruin all my negroes." A slave, Cyrus, had "run away without cause," and would have to be broken of that habit by a man specially employed for the purpose. A grim process, to be sure, but one Jackson fully believed would make life better for all concerned, including Cyrus, who would not be "abused, but he must be taught subordination . . . I have but little doubt but Mr Parsons [the slave breaker] will entirely cure him without injury."⁵⁰ Cyrus would be "cured" and the local farms spared the bad example that threatened to undermine their tranquility.

Jackson wanted to have peaceable relations with his slaves, whom he generally referred to as "Negroes," "hands," "servants" or "the family," and he seems to have enjoyed knowing that in Squire, Alfred, George, Hannah, and Betty, for example, he had trusted experts who could manage their critical operations themselves and were loyal to him. Perhaps Jackson maintained the habit of buying and selling relatively few slaves and instead relying on the natural increase of the Hermitage slave families because it promoted harmony and a pastoral, family feeling. As white and black residents of the Hermitage worked together and raised families there, they might

⁴⁹AJ to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 1 May 1835, *Ibid.*, 342.

⁵⁰AJ to Hardy Murfree Cryer, 12 July 1823, in *PAJ*, V, 285.

all have felt they had a stake in the success of its operations and even shared pride in their accomplishments. Troublemakers and runaways could and would be sold or traded to preserve order and happiness.

Whatever the case, when Jackson died, his family, white and black, were there with him. Two very different people, one the white male family physician and the other a female member of the Jackson slave family since the 1790s, agreed on some key points of Jackson's religious world view at the end of his life. For the sake of accuracy and comparison both accounts are presented here at length, though not in their entirety. Jackson's physician, Dr. John N. Esselman, remembered the scene this way:

His family and servants, believing him to be dead, were very much alarmed, and manifested the most intense grief; however, in a few seconds . . . he became conscious, and raised his eyes, and said: 'My dear children, do not grieve for me; it is true I am going to leave you; I am well aware of my situation; I have suffered much bodily pain, but my sufferings are but as nothing compared with that which our blessed Saviour endured upon that accursed cross, that we might all be saved who put their trust in Him' . . . most of the servants had collected in his room or at the windows. When he had taken leave of them all, he delivered one of the most impressive lectures on the subject of religion that I have ever heard. He spoke for nearly half an hour, and apparently with the power of inspiration; for he spoke with calmness, with strength, and, indeed, with animation. I regret exceedingly that there was no one present who could have noted down his precise words. In conclusion, he said: 'My dear children, and friends, and servants, I hope and trust to meet you all in heaven, both white and black.' The last sentence he repeated—'both white and black,' looking at them with the tenderest solicitude. With these words he ceased to speak, but fixed his eyes on his granddaughter, Rachel Jackson, . . . it did appear to me that he was invoking the blessings of Heaven to rest upon her.⁵¹

With his last moments, Jackson refused to depart the earth without doing his duty by his family,

⁵¹James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols; 1859; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1888), III, 677-78.

whether free or enslaved. He needed to impart blessing, to press them to think of their lives from the perspective of eternity, to provide for various individuals their inheritance, and to honor Rachel's memory. Jackson's insistence that Heaven was open to both races gathered around his death bed made quite an impression on the doctor.

The slave, Hannah, had been with Jackson since she was eight years old, which made her about fifty-four at the time of his death. She was eighty-nine when, in 1880, she told her story to a journalist visiting the Hermitage, where she still lived:

The Doctor ordered Massa Andrew to order the servants out, but we wouldn't go out. Old Hannah his first Cook went on so she had to be carried out. She was nearly 80. About an hour before he died he come to—we had all thought he was dead before that 'Richard hand me my specs' He wet them with his tongue and wiped them on the sheet, looked around and said here's poor George and Hannah, I have [arranged] it that you shall be well taken care of' He then turned to us all and said 'I want all to prepare to meet me in Heaven; I have a right to the Tree of Life. My conversation is for you all. Christ has no respect to color. I am in God and Gods in me. He dwelleth in me and I dwell in him.' He was propped up with three pillows. He asked to have them drawn out. George took two out. Missus cried don't George don't. Just then Master gave one breath hunched up his shoulders and all was over. There was no struggle. Missus fainted and we had to carry her to her room, strip her and bathe her in camphor before she come too. 'Our master, or father is gone.' The darkees would not be driven out. They looked on him as if they had as much right to him as Massa Andrew.⁵²

Jackson the "father," Jackson preaching, and Jackson recognizing both white and black as his family, equal under God are all sides of Jackson that Hannah wanted others to see. She also wanted her audience to know that the Hermitage slaves felt they had as much right to be present as any member of the family and that Jackson also wanted them there and that they had paid proper respect to Jackson. The doctor wanted his audience to know that Jackson had been

⁵²"Old Hannah's' Narrative of Jackson's Last Days," in *Bassett*, VI, 415.

religious, at least at the end of his life, even to such a degree of sincerity that he could be "inspired" by God to preach from his death bed. Hannah wanted people to know that Jackson had named her as one to be provided for, that Jackson had acknowledged his salvation, and that his Christ had no regard for a person's color. To his last breath, Jackson campaigned for faith, Providence, family, and duty,

Chapter Five

The Nation's Father and Evangelical Providence

“General Jackson was certainly a very extraordinary man,” wrote Peter Cartwright, the itinerant frontier Methodist evangelist, in his autobiography. “He was, no doubt, in his prime of life, a very wicked man, but he always showed a great respect for the Christian religion, and the feelings of religious people, especially ministers of the Gospel.”¹ Cartwright had the opportunity to deliver sermons for which Jackson was in attendance on at least two occasions in 1818, and wanted to tell the story of his encounters with the Hero of New Orleans. When the Methodists held their Tennessee Conference at Nashville in the fall of 1818, Cartwright and other young ministers had the opportunity to preach in local churches and outdoor revivals. So great was the interest in ecumenical doctrinal debate that ministers who were not Methodist scrambled to invite the visiting Methodist ministers to speak to their Nashville congregations. Gideon Blackburn invited Cartwright to speak at the Presbyterian church, but the Methodist Conference officials knew they could not trust the outspoken Cartwright to moderate his views on “slavery, dress, or dram-drinking,” which would surely have gotten him in trouble in other denominations’ pulpits. When Cartwright bragged that when he went to speak to the Presbyterians, he would “give Calvinism one riddling,” the Methodist officials pulled his assignment and consigned him to preach at times that were so late or so early they hoped fewer people would attend. Undeterred, Cartwright ministered at the odd times they gave him, and even more people came to hear him because of the controversy. Jackson was one of those people.²

The local minister responsible for the tent meeting had taken his turn to preach, and then

¹Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography* (1856; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 134.

²*Ibid.*, 133

he introduced Cartwright: "I then read my text: 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'" Cartwright paused and looked up in time to see Jackson walking up the middle aisle under the crowded tent. "He came to the middle post, and very gracefully leaned against it, and stood, as there were no vacant seats. Just then I felt some one pull my coat in the stand, and turning my head, my fastidious preacher, whispering a little loud, said: 'General Jackson has come in; General Jackson has come in.'" Cartwright jumped at the chance to let the general have the gospel: "I felt a flash of indignation run all over me like an electric shock, and facing about to my congregation, and purposely speaking out audibly, I said, 'Who is General Jackson? If he don't get his soul converted, God will damn him as quick as he would a Guinea negro!'"³ The confrontation made for an awkward moment that also suggests that people who had dealings with Jackson knew better, but Jackson's reputation for violent confrontation frightened the minister in charge, who "tucked his head down, and squatted low, and would, no doubt, have been thankful for a leave of absence. The congregation, General Jackson and all, smiled, or laughed right out, all at the preacher's expense." The minister later told Cartwright, "'General Jackson will chastise you for your insolence before you leave the city,'" but Cartwright had a different sense of Jackson's personality, replying that "'General Jackson, I have no doubt, will applaud my course; and if he should undertake to chastise me, as Paddy said, 'There is two as can play at that game.'"⁴

Coincidentally, Cartwright encountered Jackson the next day on a Nashville street. Jackson "smiled, and reached out his hand and said: 'Mr. Cartwright, you are a man after my own heart. I am very much surprised at Mr. Mac [the minister in charge of the tent revival

³*Ibid.*

⁴*Ibid.*

service] to think he would suppose that I would be offended at you. No sir; I told him that I highly approved of your independence; that a minister of Jesus Christ ought to love everybody and fear no mortal man. I told Mr. Mac that if I had a few thousand such independent, fearless officers as you were, and a well-drilled army, I could take old England."⁵

One Sunday, Cartwright spoke at a church near the Hermitage and Jackson thought well enough of the revivalist to invite him and "several gentlemen and ladies" to a meal at the Hermitage, Cartwright being the only clergyman: "Among this company there was a young sprig of a lawyer from Nashville, of very ordinary intellect, and he was trying hard to make an infidel of himself." The ill-mannered young attorney hoped to get the better of the minister by provoking him into an argument about the existence of hell, but Cartwright kept sidestepping the conversational snares. The normally fiery, outspoken preacher did not want to upset the polite conversation of a dinner party, but he also "saw that his [the lawyer's] head was much softer than his heart, and that there were no laurels to be won by vanquishing or demolishing such a combatant." The lawyer took the churchman to be a conversational coward and continued to press his attacks with renewed energy. So intent was he on embarrassing the minister that he did not perceive the danger of his situation. Cartwright "saw General Jackson's eye strike fire, as he sat by and heard the thrusts he made at the Christian religion. At length the young lawyer asked me this question:

‘Mr. Cartwright, do you really believe there is any such place as hell, as a place of torment?’
I answered promptly, ‘Yes, I do.’
To which he responded, ‘Well, I thank God I have too much good sense to believe any such thing.’
I was pondering in my own mind whether I would answer him or not, when General Jackson for the first time broke into the

⁵*Ibid.*, 134.

conversation, and directing his words to the young man, said with great earnestness:

‘Well, sir, I thank God that there is such a place of torment as hell.’

This sudden answer, made with great earnestness, seemed to astonish the youngster, and he exclaimed:

‘Why, General Jackson, what do you want with such a place of torment as hell?’

To which the general replied, as quick as lightning, ‘To put such d–d rascals as you are in, that oppose and vilify the Christian religion.’⁶

Mortified, the young lawyer had no answer and presently made himself scarce.

When Jackson ran for the presidency several years later, his refusal to join a church became evidence his opponents used against him in their allegations that he was an irreligious, violent, and irresponsible man who should not be entrusted with the nation’s highest elected office. Although historians have not found Jackson’s faith or lack thereof to be of much interest in their assessments of him and his military and political career, Jackson’s spiritual condition came under intense scrutiny from the time of the 1824 campaign until his death in 1845, both by his friends and by his enemies. Rachel was very concerned about the condition of her husband’s soul, and her minister friend, the Reverend Doctor Ely, shared her concern. Ely also came to believe that a man like Jackson, who cut such a heroic figure, could boost interest in evangelical concerns across several fronts if he were elected to the presidency. If a man’s man like Jackson could "get religion," he reasoned, then his example might bring thousands more of the men who idolized Jackson into the church along with him. For his part, Jackson welcomed the support, and Ely released some of Jackson’s earlier letters for use in newspapers as campaign literature: “Having been educated & brought up under the discipline of the Presbyterian rule (my mother being a member of that Church) I have always had a preference for it. Amongst the greatest

⁶*Ibid.*

blessing secured to us under our Constitution, is the liberty of worshipping God as our conscience dictates. All true Christians love each other, and while here below ought to harmonize; for all must unite in the realms above." In the letter, Jackson had gone on to define "true religion" as a matter of conscience rather than church membership, saying "I have thought one evidence of true religion is, when all those who believe in the atonement of our crucified Saviour are found in harmony and friendship together." Jackson's enemies, therefore, might not be true Christians, even though they had made public professions of faith and joined churches: "My enemies have charged me with every crime but hypocrisy: I believe they have never alleged this against me: and I can assure you no change of circumstances, no exalted office can work a change upon me. I will remain uniformly the same, whether in the chair of state, or at the Hermitage. My habits are too well fixed now to be altered."⁷

Around the same time as the general heard Cartwright's preaching, the Ely family visited the Hermitage. Although Jackson was not there, Rachel discussed the state of his spiritual condition with Ely, who was also hoping for Jackson to make a public profession of faith and join a church. As early as 1819, then, Jackson's Christianity became a political issue that would play an important part in his presidential campaigns. Although historians have usually been more interested in other issues from those campaigns, such as the Bank of the United States, Jackson's Christianity came to be of great importance to the factions fighting both for and against his election. At least as early as 1819, then, Ely and other evangelical leaders were hoping to recruit Jackson as a public convert who would lend his prestige to their causes.

⁷Andrew Jackson to Ezra Stiles Ely, 12 July 1827, in Sam B. Smith, *et al*, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, (6 vols. to date; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975–), VI, 358-59; hereafter abbreviated as *PAJ*; Ely had the letter printed in the *Nashville Republican*, 1 April 1828.

Despite their friendship, however, Jackson remained aloof from the Ely family, limiting his correspondence to a more formal, respectful tone. Rachel's regard for Ely as a national leader of the Presbyterian Church may have led her to accept his suggestion that Jackson make a public profession of faith. Her concern with Jackson's soul, therefore, derived more from her association with Ely and with evangelicals who urged Christians to make their faith public than with a real fear that Jackson was not a "Christian" in his words or behavior.

In contrast to Rachel's more evangelical, outspoken mode of Christian expression, Jackson limited most of his Christian expression to his inner circle of family and friends. For those who looked for outward evidence to confirm the truth of an inward conversion, Jackson seemed "unregenerate." He went about his business without making overt reference to religious sentiment and with an almost superstitious avoidance of any prediction as to the will of God. The Providential will could be entreated, hoped for, and even made sense of after the fact, but only a fool would pretend to have special knowledge into the plans of the Almighty. To the ever-pragmatic Jackson, it made perfect sense to expect that there was a God and that He was active in the world, but also not to pretend to know too much. Yet his conception of God's existence and involvement remained present in his mind as he went about his affairs. Jackson had only recently left office as Tennessee's first senator and entered into a business venture as a dry goods merchant just after the turn of the nineteenth century when another dealing swept him into the intrigue surrounding former vice president of the United States, Aaron Burr. Allegations were emerging that Burr intended to raise a private army and use it to carve his own country out of the Louisiana Territory. Jackson had entertained Burr at his home and honored him as a patriot. Now, unbelievably, Burr might be turning out to be a traitor. Jackson responded to the overturning of his confidences and the threat to his own reputation by refusing to condemn Burr

until conclusive evidence could be presented, but he also wrote to his successor in the Senate, Daniel Smith, to warn him of the potential for a conspiracy: "I hope I may be mistaken—but I as much belie[ve] that such a plan is in operation as I believe there is a god—and if I am not mistaken, there are in the plan many high charectors from New York to Neworleans." Jackson believed, but could not prove, conspiracy, and the conspiracy might undermine the nation's good faith in its leadership, whether at the commercial center of New York or the capital of the nearly foreign territory, Louisiana. He did not want to believe what the evidence indicated, but he could not ignore the ominous cloud of facts that indicated a conspiracy, and he likened the difficulty of discerning the truth to the matter of proving the existence of God. A few days later, he wrote again to Smith that "My mind is still as firmly fixed in the belief as it possibly can be in a thing of which it has not positive proof; however circumstances may arise that may bury the project in oblivion." God had not spoken to Andrew Jackson nor given him an unmistakable sign, but sufficient evidence existed to indicate His existence that one would be prudent to act as though He did.⁸

Within about ten years, Jackson's religious understanding had progressed from skeptical acceptance of the existence of God to the more emotional acknowledgments of the doings of Providence in the Creek War and the Battle of New Orleans. Within the next five years, Jackson often attended church with Rachel and met Cartwright at the tent meeting, and Ely visited the Hermitage. It was also in 1818 that Jackson organized support for the construction of a community church, meetinghouse, and school at the Hermitage. Shortly thereafter, the nation suffered a terrible economic contraction known as the Panic of 1819. Jackson made his first run for the presidency five years later in 1824 with Ely and other divines supporting him in the

⁸AJ to Daniel Smith, 12 Nov. 1806, in *PAJ*, II, 118; AJ to Smith, 17 Nov. 1806, *Ibid.*, 120.

campaign. While the Jacksons were in Washington awaiting the results of the election of 1824, they regularly attended church. Church services and prayer meetings made up a significant portion of Rachel's social activity while in Washington, which she referred to as a "Babylon." Jackson also sought companionship and guidance at church, which he attended in Washington, even though Rachel was not there to accompany him: "Today being Sunday I have spent at Church where I was edified with a very sensible discourse from a young presbyterian preacher," Jackson wrote Rachel in December of 1823. Instead of joyful optimism and predictions for the future, the opportunity to run for the nation's highest elected office moved Jackson to reflect on the solemn duty first to submit to Providence, then to the needs of the nation, and then to look for companionship with his family. Even the president of the United States was a "Tennant" who should remember the insecure hold he had on life's happenings: "This seperation has been more severe to me than any other, it being one that my mind was not prepared for, nor can I see any necessity for—still my country [did]; & no alternative was left for me but to obey—If providence permits us <to> again to unite, we must travel together, & live together whilst permitted to remain Tennants here below—."⁹

The "young presbyterian preacher" was Daniel Baker of 2nd Presbyterian Church in Washington. Baker was on his way to becoming one of the most successful Presbyterian evangelists of the time. By the time Jackson became president at the end of the decade, Baker had resigned his well-respected and well-paid pastorate to become a missionary to Texas and the Old Southwest, winning more converts than any other southern preacher. The "sensible discourse" may have reminded Jackson of Cartwright and other preachers of Tennessee and Kentucky, and consequently moved away from formal presentations of doctrine toward energetic

⁹AJ to Rachel Jackson, 7 Dec. 1823, *Ibid.*, V, 323.

persuasion and sincere, if humorous, storytelling. By his own account, Baker preached an evangelical message not much decorated with complex theological discussion, focusing instead on "Jesus Christ and him crucified." Yet his contemporaries at the *Presbyterian Review* characterized his sermons as bringing "afresh before us the impassioned preacher and the thronged assemblies whose hearts were then moved as the trees of the forest are moved before the wind. Still our ideas of what belongs to good taste are not met by these discourses. They abound more in anecdote, in exclamations, and free colloquialisms, than suit our views."¹⁰ The family with whom Jackson was staying while in Washington were church-goers who entertained "every Sunday evening . . . with sacred music—to which we are invited I am thus particular in giving you a narrative of our situation with which I know you will be pleased—every Sunday we spend at church—" Jackson reported to Rachel. Jackson's ecumenical tour of Washington did not stop there, for, as he went on to tell Rachel, "This family belong to the Methodist society—on last Sunday as I named to you I went with Mrs Watson to her church. She belongs to the Presbetarians, to day I went to hear a Baptist whose church is near us, & was edified by a good concise discourse, so my dear you see, that notwithstanding I am in the midst of intrigue, gaity & bustle, I spend my Sundays & leisure hours agreably, & I hope profitably—."¹¹

Jackson felt compelled to accept invitations to parties and dinners in order to do his part for the campaign, yet he steadfastly believed he had to remain above the dirty process of presidential politicking, with a powerful Old Testament metaphor to remind him of the

¹⁰Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South* (3 vols.; Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1963), I, 428-29; Baker qtd. in *Ibid.*, 429; "A Series of Revival Sermons, by the Rev. Daniel Baker," *Southern Presbyterian Review* 1 (1847): 165-66, qtd. in *Ibid.*, 429.

¹¹AJ to Rachel Jackson, 21 Dec. 1823, in *PAJ*, V, 330-32. Beyond Jackson's mention of "this family" and of "Mrs Watson," information regarding the exact identities of these families and their connections to Jackson has proven to be elusive.

importance of staying pure: "I get on pretty well, as I touch not, handle not of that unclean procedure; I keep myself entirely aloof from the intriguers, and caucus mongers—with a determination that if I am brought into that office it shall be by the free unsolicited Voice of the people." Just as Jehovah ordered the Jews to remain ceremonially clean by refusing to imitate the ways of people around them, Jackson would have to pass a test should he wish to be president. Such a high office should only be awarded by God to a man whose purity of conscience remained unquestionable, and any man who wished to govern well would need the confidence inspired by knowing Providence had specifically approved him for the job. Consequently, when after the election it appeared that John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay had made a "corrupt bargain" that awarded Adams the presidency at the expense of Providential plans and the chosen, "free and unsolicited Voice of the people," Andrew Jackson, Jackson's drive to oust Adams in 1828 took on a significance of Biblical proportions.

To round out the epic, Old Testament theme, Jackson concluded by encouraging Rachel that "I trust that the god of Isaac & of Jacob will protect you, & give you health in my absence, in him alone we ought to trust, he alone can preserve, & guide us through this troublesome world—and I am sure he will hear your prayers—we are told that the prayers of the righteous prevail much—and I add mine for your health & preservation until we again meet—."¹²

Jackson may have carefully refrained from getting out of line with Providence by making pronouncements about the divine will, and he may have kept his private religious life out of the

¹²*Ibid.*; For applicable Old Testament references, see Exodus 11:7-8, "And the swine, though he divide the hoof, and be clovenfooted, yet he cheweth not the cud; he is unclean to you. Of their flesh shall ye not eat, and their carcass shall ye not touch; they are unclean to you" and Genesis 50:24, "Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

public presses, but he did not separate church and state in his understanding of his own life and place in history. He may not have officially joined the church until after he left the White House, but since well before the Battle of New Orleans, Jackson had put his life's political events up against the expectations of Providence as he understood them and used that measurement for instruction and inspiration.

After another four years of fighting and bitter accusations, Jackson attained the presidency in 1828, only to watch Rachel die suddenly just weeks before they moved to the White House. Rachel's death, old age, illness, and the stress of being president softened Jackson to Rachel's more evangelical type of Christianity, and he began to urge faith and devotion on his friends and family more and more frequently in his letters to them. Finally, when he believed he had retired from political life, Jackson publicly joined the First Presbyterian church in Nashville. He had regularly supported the Presbyterian denomination and its concerns while he was president by paying his pew rents in Washington, even though he did not attend services, and of course by establishing and funding the church at the Hermitage, but he believed that making public statements about his faith would only offer ammunition to his critics: "I would long since have made this solemn *public* dedication to almighty God," wrote Jackson in August of 1838, "but knowing the wickedness of this world and how prone many are to evil, that the scoffer of religion would have cried out hypocrisy—*he has joined the church for political effect*, I thought it best to postpone this public act, until my retirement to the shade of private life, when no false imputations could be made that might be injurious to religion."¹³

Even so, Jackson had asked the Reverend Doctor John Todd Edgar, of First Presbyterian

¹³AJ to William P. Lawrence, 24 Aug. 1838, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (6 vols.; Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926-33), V 565; hereafter abbreviated as *Bassett*. The emphases are Jackson's.

Church in nearby Nashville to come to the Hermitage to see about his beloved daughter-in-law, Sarah Yorke Jackson, whose life seemed threatened by an illness. Sarah told the minister that she was "a great sinner." Jackson overheard her confession, and rushed to defend Sarah from her own conscience: "You a sinner? Why you are all purity and goodness! Join Dr. Edgar's church, by all means." From that point onward, Edgar believed Jackson had confused membership in the church with the "regeneration" that accompanied an acknowledgment of the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ as God's way of pardoning humans' disobedience, or "sin." Sarah "converted," or committed to a belief that only trust in Christ's sacrifice and resurrection could save her from judgement, forgoing any pride in her accomplishments or the strength of her moral character or even membership in the church.

Ironically, forgoing such things were the prerequisite for church membership, and when Edgar returned to preach at the Hermitage church in honor of Sarah's conversion, he aimed his message for Jackson's now-tender heart with "unusual animation and impressiveness": "The preacher spoke in detail of the perils which beset the life of a man, and how often he is preserved from sickness and sudden death. Seeing General Jackson listening with rapt attention to his discourse, the eloquent preacher sketched the career of a man who, in addition to the ordinary dangers of human life, had encountered those of the wilderness, of war, and of keen political conflict;" Men like Jackson, "who had escaped the tomahawk of the savage, the attack of his country's enemies, the privations and fatigues of border warfare, and the aim of the assassin. How is it, exclaimed the preacher, that a man endowed with reason and gifted with intelligence can pass through such scenes as these unharmed, and not see the hand of God in his deliverance?" On the way home from the service, Jackson encountered Edgar on the road and insisted that the minister come to the Hermitage that night to speak with him about joining the

church, but Edgar had to visit a sick parishioner and promised to return in the morning.¹⁴

Jackson and Sarah spent much of the evening in conversation and prayer, and after Sarah retired, he paced, read, and meditated with some distress for the duration of the night. The minister arrived after daybreak to find the general in a state of peace and asking to join the church. After satisfying Edgar with his answers to the usual doctrinal questions, Jackson had still one more obstacle to overcome before he would be allowed to take communion. He had to forgive his enemies. After being silent for a while, Jackson replied, "My political enemies, I can freely forgive; but as for those who abused me when I was serving my country in the field, and those who attacked me *for* serving my country—Doctor, that is a different case." Unmoved, Edgar insisted that those and all other enemies must be forgiven if Jackson wished to seal his conversion with the approval of church membership.

The decision, or at least being certain of his sincerity, must have been difficult for Jackson, for "after a considerable pause," he "said that he thought he could forgive all who had injured him, even those who had assailed him for what he done for his country in the field." With that, Jackson secured his formal admission into the church, which took place at an emotional ceremony in which both Jackson and Sarah took communion, witnessed by a crowd that included the Hermitage slaves peering in through the church windows.¹⁵ He may have done so before, but afterward, Jackson held nightly worship gatherings where he read the Bible and prayers written beforehand to his household, which included the slaves. He read the Bible from beginning to end twice in his remaining years, but not just any copy. Jackson loved the very

¹⁴James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols; 1859; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1888), III, 644-45.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 646-48.

popular edition of the Bible known as "Scott's Bible," prepared with commentary and in six volumes by Thomas Scott, an English clergyman who had participated in the evangelical movement by becoming a "regenerate" Christian. Scott had begun as an Anglican priest, became Unitarian, and then under the influence of John Newton, the author of the popular hymn, "Amazing Grace," Scott underwent a conversion experience and became a Calvinist minister and instructor of missionaries. Over a period of twenty years, Scott published weekly commentaries on the Bible and Biblical prophecies, which eventually he published as his multi-volume Bible with commentary. Jackson was in good company, as the 20,000 copies of the second edition of Scott's Bible had sold out very quickly and was reprinted ten more times by 1865.¹⁶

If 1819 marked a beginning point for Jackson's move toward evangelicalism, it also marked the beginning of one of Jackson's most controversial political views, his animosity toward the Second Bank of the United States. Admittedly, Jackson's personal religious experiences and the nation's economic woes do not seem at first glance to have much in common. Still, the financial crisis that came to be known as the Panic of 1819 was shaping Jackson's political views at the same time as his encounters with Cartwright, Ely, and others were contributing to his religious views. Juxtaposing Jackson's religion with Jackson's bank policy offers an explanation for why Jackson assaulted the bank in such a determined manner. Historians have credited the panic as one of the greatest influences on Jackson's deep, abiding resentment for the Second Bank of the United States, which many Americans blamed for the widespread economic disaster they experienced between 1819 and 1821. The Panic of 1819

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 648; for Scott's views and conversion, see Thomas Scott, *The Force of Truth: an Authentic Narrative*, third ed., (Philadelphia: William Young, 1793), <http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libezp.lib.lsu.edu>; on Scott's Bible and trends in Bible publishing and reading, see Mark A. Noll, *America's God from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 371-72

ushered Americans into their first experience with a massive economic depression, and it also marked the beginnings of a heated national economic debate. Other economic crises had occurred recently, especially during the War of 1812 and the years leading up to it, but none had affected the entire nation so broadly and so deeply as that of 1819. Also, the panic could not at first be blamed easily on any one person or cause. Whereas other crises could be pinned to President Thomas Jefferson's Embargo or events related to the War of 1812, the economic distress of 1819 seemed sudden and unattributable to any one cause, at least at first. Newspaper editors across the country led a vigorous debate over what had caused the depression and how best to treat it, and eventually fingers began to point at the Second Bank of the United States.¹⁷

The Second Bank of the United States had come into being as a solution to the chaotic banking situation that existed after the War of 1812. The number of banks had expanded rapidly after the war ended in 1815. Banks printed their own notes and were in a headlong rush to sell loans to the thousands of settlers moving west. Both bankers and settlers hoped to make money by speculating in land values, buying large tracts of cheap land and then selling later at a premium. The value of the nation's currency therefore fluctuated from place to place and bank to bank, even as it fluctuated normally over time, and the speculation in land encouraged an inflationary currency that badly needed stabilization. As a remedy, Congress chartered the Second Bank of the United States, a public-private institution that would provide a more uniform value for the notes in circulation. Still, the BUS operated as a profit-making corporation. The BUS engaged in its own land speculations, and it also acted as the sole repository for federal deposits, which included monies from land sales, customs duties, and even the postal service.

¹⁷Murray N. Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), ii.

The BUS soon became a clearinghouse for a rapidly expanding currency energized by rampant speculation. To meet its own financial obligations coming due in 1819, the bank, under the direction of its new president, Langdon Cheves, began calling in its loans and redeeming the notes it was holding from the state-chartered banks. The sudden, drastic contraction threw the state banks into insolvency and panic. In turn, the state banks had to call in their loans and notes, leading to sudden bankruptcies, significant unemployment, and startling depreciation of currency throughout most of the United States, with the frontier areas being hit the hardest and New England generally suffering less than the other sections.¹⁸

Ten years later, when Jackson became president of the United States, he made the bank a central issue of his first administration, and his determined struggle to destroy it came to be known as "the Bank War." Jackson's attitude toward the Bank has provided both his critics and his supporters, past as well as present, with a tidy, symbolic representation of the most essential elements of Jackson's character and political thought. Under the direction of Cheves and his successor, Nicholas Biddle, the BUS had become solvent, respected, and then increasingly even more powerful. It had millions of dollars in capital to dispense through its branch banks, and it also served as the chief financial institution for the United States government. The BUS had gained overwhelming influence on the nation's finances. Jackson attacked the Bank's right to exist under the Constitution when he first addressed Congress in 1829 and remained dedicated to its dissolution thereafter. The Bank was due for recharter in 1836, but Jackson's opponents thought it would make an excellent campaign tool, useful for demonstrating Jackson's poorly controlled temper and the threat he posed to the financial security of the country. Led by Henry Clay, friends of the Bank pushed an early recharter bill through Congress in time for the 1832

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 1-24; Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 38-40.

election, goading Jackson into a veto. Jackson sought to destroy the Bank on the grounds that it was a private institution that made profits by managing public funds, that even when the Bank's operators performed their duties with integrity and impartiality they directly benefitted from their connections to governmental power, and that the whole relationship was inherently corrupt. If government were to serve the interests of all equally, government could not favor a few with inside information, special connections, and ready access to public wealth. "The rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes," wrote Jackson, and in his mind the Bank represented an irresistible lure to the most corrupt of society's "best" citizens.¹⁹

From Jackson's point of view, a republic could not survive if its people did not respect the laws and feel that all citizens would receive equal treatment under them. If citizens believed that playing by the rules would be rewarded with injustice and loss, then their virtuous adherence to law and their sacrifices for the good of the country were made a mockery, and eventually, he believed, the republic would collapse under the burden of bearing up a government dependent on the goodness of a people who no longer behaved honorably toward each other. Inequality was a fact of life for Jackson. As he saw it, Individuals could not choose the talents with which they were born any more than they could chose any other aspect of their lot in life. In Jackson's world, the certainty of injustice and the fundamental inequalities of life proved that no human government could ever smooth out all of life's injustices and unequal distributions of wealth and ability.

¹⁹AJ, "Veto Message," 10 July 1832, in *The Avalon Project at Yale Law School* (New Haven, Conn.: Lillian Goldman Law Library, 2005), <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/president/veto/ajveto01.htm>; For my account of the Bank War I am indebted to Daniel Feller's overview of the same in *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 169-172.

Instead, Jackson reasoned, God governed over that distribution, and He had decided that not all should receive the same: "Distinction in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions." Jacksonian government existed to make and enforce laws that would preserve as much equanimity as possible in the exercise of talents in the pursuit of happiness, or, put another way, just governments made laws that did not interfere with God's distribution of wealth and talent. For Jackson, God gave, people made do, and those who had the ability to do well should not be interfered with, and neither should they be able to use their advantages to the worsen the plight of those less fortunate than they. Those who had done well with what was given them owed a debt of virtuous behavior to the society that had made it possible for them to pursue their ambitions, Jackson believed, and those who did not do so were violating a fundamental principle of the relationship between man and Providence: "In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society – the farmers, mechanics, and laborers – who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government."²⁰

The public sympathized with Jackson's position and reelected him in a landslide victory over Clay, his chief opponent in 1832. The victory gave Jackson his great redoubt against his critics' offensive, for he had appealed to the virtue of the American people. They had not failed the test, and now he had an obligation before them and under Heaven to proceed against the

²⁰*Ibid.*

incipient threat to that virtue, the bank.

Jackson often referred to the bank as a "monster," a monster fed by the massive amounts of money deposited with it by the federal government. To starve the bank, Jackson ordered federal deposits relocated to state-chartered banks, usually to banks somehow favorable to the administration. Because Jackson played favorites with the federal deposits, the state banks who received them came to be known as "pet banks." In what might be considered a case of destroying the village in order to save it, Jackson had dislocated the entire American system of finance and banking and grafted it back to its original root stock, effectively returning it to the chaotic conditions that prevailed between 1815 and 1819. The move revealed some perplexing contradictions in Jackson's ideology. He had argued that all private and public monies ought to be kept separate in order to avoid corruption, yet he gave millions of federal dollars to unregulated, privately owned state banks friendly to his administration.

He attacked the proliferation of paper money, saying that its unreliability and fluctuations in value swindled the common man out of the value of his own wages or property and could lead him to ruin with his creditors, yet moving the deposits only encouraged the kind of speculation in paper notes that had led to the Panic of 1819. The monster was not yet dead, however, and Biddle struck back by restricting the bank's loans. So powerful was the bank that its reduction in credit threw the national economy into a contraction in 1833, which Biddle hoped would force a reconsideration of the bill for the bank's recharter. He reasoned that once people saw how much of their prosperity depended on having a strong bank of the United States, they would clamor for its recharter. Instead, his gamble only convinced Jackson and Jackson's many constituents that they had been right all along in associating the bank with unwarranted privilege, aristocracy, corruption, and arrogance. By 1836 the bank had reverted to its original status as

just another state-chartered bank, distinguished only by its massive, imposing porticoes overshadowing the colonial-era neighborhood surrounding Liberty Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The enormity of the struggle against the bank staggered the imagination of both friends and enemies of the bank. As though he were assaulting a fortified enemy position, Jackson had dug beneath what he saw as a fortress built of unearned wealth and unwarranted privilege, eliminating its source of strength, the federal deposits. Jackson had shown this kind of determination before, but his sense of himself as responsible to God to carry out a mission energized and sustained him during the protracted fight against the Bank and its supporters. Neither Jackson himself nor his cherished friends nor family were more important than his duty to win the war against the Bank.

When discussing the possibility that Congressional support for the Bank might be so strong as to sustain an impeachment proceeding against him, Jackson declared, "Under such circumstances . . . I would resign the presidency and return to the Hermitage!"²¹ As two of his cabinet officers offered their resignations and his party's support in Congress threatened to disintegrate, Jackson explained to Vice-President Martin Van Buren that "It will be unpleasant for me to differ with these two gentlemen for whom I have such high regard, but when duty points the way, my private friendships must yield to public good." Jackson believed he was being consistent with his earlier veto of the BUS recharter, which he also considered consistent with his stand against using federal money to build a road near Maysville, Kentucky, in 1830. The Maysville Road bill proposed using federal money to purchase stock in a company that would extend a road between Maysville and Lexington, Kentucky. Jackson vetoed the bill

²¹AJ in conversation with William B. Lewis, qtd. in Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 506.

because he believed it unconstitutional and morally wrong for federal support to favor one state over another: "and if I should loose twenty more friends as highly prized as they, my feelings being now as it was on the Maysville Road bill, and the Bank veto; 'that it is a duty I owe to my country, my conscience and my god' to put down this mammoth of corruption and to separate it from being the agent of the Government as early as possible for the safety of its fiscal concerns."²²

Savvy Jackson advisors, such as old friend William B. Lewis, argued at the beginning of his second administration that Jackson could easily let the Bank's charter expire on schedule before he left office, that if Congress determined to recharter the bank, he could veto the measure again, and that there were a host of more politically expedient measures Jackson could take other than using executive fiat to stop federal deposits. They worried he was making an unnecessarily exposed target of himself and adding needlessly to the intensity of the conflict.²³ Jackson, though, believed the Bank would use the deposits to purchase still more influence in Congress, and he feared he might fail in his obligation. Privately, he confided to Van Buren that "I mean to adopt a course worthy of myself—of the purity of the morale of our happy country, regardless of all consequences. you see the Bank has bought up the Editor of the Pennsylvanian, and our friend Noah is set up by the Bank, or I mistake the signs of the times. is it possible that your friends hesitate, and are overawed by the power of the Bank. it cannot overaw me. I trust in my God and the virtue of the people."²⁴ Providence had given Jackson the presidency twice because Jackson had properly understood the order of things. First, he had an obligation to God,

²²AJ to Martin Van Buren, 16 Aug. 1833, in *Bassett*, V, 159.

²³"Narrative by Major William B. Lewis," in Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 501-08.

²⁴AJ to Van Buren, 8 Sept. 1833, *Basset*, V, 183.

then to country, and finally to family and friends. So long as he kept himself separate from corrupting influences and true to the commission given him by Providence, he could not fail, for he did not serve his own ends but those of an all-ruling Providence. On the other hand, he might have gotten it wrong. He could maintain his confidence against a great deal of evidence and the advice of some of his closest advisors because he believed that purity of motive made it possible for God to extend favor. Even if, strictly speaking, he had not divined the precise will of Providence, he had correctly understood his obligation and performed his duty, which returned the obligation back to God, who would "smile" on the effort, regardless. He drew the lesson carefully for Andrew Jackson, Jr.: "My conscience told me it was right to stop the career of this corrupting monster. I took the step fearlessly believing it a duty I owed to my god and my country. providence smiles upon the act and all the virtuous of the land sustains it The history of my administration will be read with interest years after I am dead, and I trust will be the means of perpetuation our happy Union and our liberties with it."²⁵

As a measure of his devotion to the cause, he felt he could not leave Washington to visit the family of his life-long friend, John Coffee. The loss pained Jackson and he felt he made a sacrifice by not returning home to care for his friend's family. In the middle of the deposits controversy, he wrote to Coffee's daughter, Mary, saying "Would to God I could return from here to private life. it would be a pleasure to me to act in his stead as father to you all and in every act of friendship I could bestow alleviate your sorrows. this at present I cannot do, but receive the assurance that my constant prayers will be offered up at the throne of grace for his blessing to you all. in him put your trust and he has promised, those who trust in him, he will

²⁵AJ to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 11 Oct. 1833, in *Bassett*, V, 217.

never forsake."²⁶

Another issue that defined Jackson's presidencies developed from the inherent tension between Jackson's belief in "the right to self-preservation" and his understanding of the sovereign rule of Providence. The problem was what to do about the Indian populations east of the Mississippi River and their proximity to expanding areas of white settlement. Even in the 1820s, many Americans understood the relationship between the United States and the American Indian as one of the greatest, most enduring moral dilemmas in the history of the country. The nation had never settled on one course of action in regard to the Indians, but had instead wavered between treating Indian tribes as either sovereign nations or as dependents of the government. Numerous Indian governments and groups existed east of the Mississippi River by the time of Jackson's election in 1828, with the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole being the most numerous and powerful and possessing the most land.

The five tribes had accepted aspects of their neighboring white societies, such as plow farming, livestock raising, European-style houses and clothing, ownership of black slaves, and, in the case of the Cherokee, a written language and laws. Nevertheless, and over the strenuous objections of Christian missionary organizations, Jackson sponsored and then enforced the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which relocated all even the largest, peace-loving, and "civilized" tribes to land west of the Mississippi River. By 1859, these five Indian tribes who had at times in the past been at war with one another were sharing a much smaller tract of land in present-day Oklahoma, where they formed an association and began calling themselves "The Five Civilized Tribes."²⁷

²⁶AJ to Mary Coffee, 15 Sep. 1833, in *Ibid.*, 188.

²⁷Feller, *Jacksonian Promise*, 179.

Jackson inherited the problem from president John Quincy Adams's administration. Under Adams, the states with Indian populations had prepared to appropriate the lands from the Indians and open them for white settlement, but Adams took the Indians' side and interposed federal authority to thwart the actions of the states. When Jackson assumed office, the Indian problem had become defined as a states' rights versus federal powers conflict. Presidents as early as Thomas Jefferson had acknowledged the desirability and even inevitability of moving Indians to land west of the Mississippi, but they had been unwilling to settle the matter, leaving it to future administrations. Jackson insisted on resolving the problem, and he had no moral qualms about demanding that Indians either adopt white ways and assimilate or accept an exchange of land to the west. He confronted the problem in his first inaugural address, and he asked Congress to designate land west of the Mississippi that could be offered as an exchange for Indian lands in the east. The bill became law in 1830, and it was the only major legislation Jackson actively sponsored himself during his two terms. He conducted the negotiations in person, and, not surprisingly, presented himself to the Indians as a father figure who had their best interest at heart. The Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek all eventually agreed to the treaties, but the Cherokee refused. The state of Georgia responded by seizing Cherokee lands and abolishing Cherokee sovereignty, actions that the Cherokee challenged in court.

In cases that appeared before the United States Supreme Court, Chief Justice John Marshall wrote opinions that spelled out the contradictory status of the Indians under U. S. law. They were "a distinct community" where "the laws of Georgia can have no force," but also a "dependant domestic nation," not foreign, and therefore under the protection of the federal government. Marshall put the national government on the Indians' side, which also put it in opposition to the actions of the states. Jackson rejected chief justice's line of thinking, and aided

Georgia instead. By negotiating with some of the smaller Cherokee factions, Jackson was able to erode Cherokee solidarity and force the tribe's factions either to sign land-swapping agreements or be forced west.

For his part, Jackson saw the Indian issue in moral terms that embraced both the reality of white settlement on the frontier and the danger posed to the "moral character" of the United States. To him, the Indians were wards of the United States, and Providence would not smile on a nation that failed to fulfill its obligations to its wards. In tension with the responsibility of the government to the Indians was Jackson's understanding of himself as the advocate of the white common man. Providence had also placed the white settler into Jackson's care, he believed, and his responsibility to them included securing land for peaceful settlement without threat of Indian or foreign attack. In Jackson's mind, the Indians did not threaten the frontier nearly so badly as the foreign imperial powers that despised American liberties and had used the Indians as pawns against the expansion of the American republic. Missionaries had worked among the eastern tribes for decades, but Jackson perceived that still the majority of the Indians clung to their traditional ways. Like children, he thought, they needed patience but also firmness from the national government, which had the responsibility to move the Indians to a safer place wherein they might have more time to shed their savage past and learn civilization. The general-turned-president believed that if his government did not make the Indians move to a place that seemed at least temporarily out of the reach of white settlement, even the five large tribes would face certain destruction at the hands of white settlers and their state governments. To Jackson's way of thinking, Providence, that just dispensation of the mercies of God in concert with His great purposes, demanded that His ward, the United States, extend to its wards the same discipline and mercies it had received from the Almighty. In other words, Jackson reasoned that just as

Providence occasionally dealt a bitter disappointment to those whose best interest could not be served by their deepest wants, the United States would have to care enough about the well being of the Indians to confront their situation and take on the onerous duty of forcing them westward. In the end, Jackson feared that his nation's special status as a ward kept safely on the right side of Providence was at stake. He therefore also believed he, as its president, was directly responsible for ensuring that the United States remained on Providence's good side by properly dispensing of its duties to its hapless wards, the Indians.²⁸

Ironically, the greatest opposition to Indian removal came from Christian reformers and missionaries. The Supreme Court case, *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), for example, had to do with the state of Georgia's jailing of missionaries protesting the state's treatment of the Cherokee. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, abolitionist newspaper editor William Lloyd Garrison, and Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, who was very active on behalf of Christian reforms such as temperance and Sunday School, began organizing against the removal bill of 1830, as did many other Christian activists and missionaries to the Indians. Opponents of the removal bill argued against the bill for the same reason Jackson had determined to promote it: American survival depended on the favor of Providence, that favor derived from America's virtuous behavior, and mistreating the Indian jeopardized that good credit with the Ruler of All Destinies.²⁹

The fate of American settlers and Indians were tied together when the first Europeans arrived at Virginia. Like an Indian wrestling match, one group would have to win by pulling or pushing the other one past a boundary or off balance, and the drama had played out through

²⁸Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise*, 179-183.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 182.

violent conflict, massacre, treaty, trade, alliance, and intermarriage. The divine significance of the struggle to survive on the American frontier was not a new concept, but the fight over Indian removal imbued "survival" with a much more metaphysical, long-term condition. For Jackson and his opponents, American "survival" no longer depended on mere physical survival. Winning a war against the Indians or their imperial provocateurs could not ensure the survival of the United States because the world was such a hard, unforgiving and unpredictable place that the fate of individuals and of nations belonged to God. So difficult had it been to bring the United States into being and make civilization out of the wilderness that Providence had to have willed it, had to have smiled upon the endeavor, many Americans reasoned, or it never could have succeeded. National moral issues, such as Indian removal, slavery, temperance, and upholding the Sabbath, all became indicators of the nation's moral condition and therefore of its likelihood of staying in God's good graces. Both Jackson and those opposed to the bill thought of themselves as advocates for the Indians' best interest and protectors of public morality therefore American destiny.

Jackson's "negotiations" gave the Indians so little room for bargaining as to be little more than a pretense at fair treatment, and the corruption, abuse, pain, and suffering caused by removal only proved to his opponents that they had been right all along. The Cherokee had developed a written language and adopted many of the elements of white society that Jackson himself had called for the Indians to adopt, for instance, yet he arrayed the force of the United States government most heavy-handedly against the Cherokee.³⁰ Also ever on the lookout for duplicity and hypocrisy, Jackson saw the enemies of removal as enemies of the American people and of the Indians, for they were willing to sacrifice the long-term survival of the Indians in

³⁰*Ibid.*

exchange for self-righteous pronouncements. As Jackson had said after the Battle of New Orleans fifteen years before, one might give up all rights but "the right to self preservation." In his mind, opponents of removal not only threatened to impede progress but thought nothing of surrendering other people's rights to self preservation. The New England states, where most of the resistance to removal had its roots, had long ago killed, absorbed, or expelled their Indian populations, but now they accused the southwestern states of immorality. New England never could have prospered had it tolerated large, unassimilated Indian nations within state borders, so their arguments only revealed their self-righteous hypocrisy.

In Jackson's mind, Christian "benevolence" toward the Indians had accomplished little with the one or two generations that had had the opportunity to hear the missionaries, thus moving the Indians to a less traveled section of the country would allow them more time to accept Christianity, to him the precursor to becoming civilized. Any "Christian" policy toward the Indians had to take into account the policy makers' first responsibility, their own countrymen's right to self preservation. Allowing the Indians to remain on their own lands would not solve the issue of white encroachment onto those lands, and, worse still, it would put the federal government at odds with its own populace, fighting a losing battle to "save" the Indians at the expense of its own citizenry's right to pursue the happiness afforded by new lands. Saving the Indians was a laudable goal, but Jackson thought the government should not be in the business of offering up its own citizens as Christian sacrifice. Years before, he had castigated the Spanish governor of Florida, Mateo González Manrique, for espousing the kind of Christianity that favored the Indians over white settlers. The Spanish offered shelter to "Indian Banditti," who refused to abide by the laws of the United States and threatened frontier white and Indian settlements alike. He also believed Spain was harboring British agents who

manipulated the otherwise peaceable Indians into making attacks. "In possession of all these facts," Jackson shouted through his letter to Manrique, "*Our* Christianity would blush at taking shelter under the benign influence of humanity and hospitality for Justification. Yet we may not possess that refined meek christian forgiveness which has operated on your Excellency in washing from your recollection the Savage brutal and indiscriminate massacre of our helpless women and children at Fort Mimmes Duck River and elsewhere," Jackson raged.³¹

Providence favored the virtuous, Jackson believed, and virtue had to be rooted in justice. Crimes had been committed, and both "repentance" and "retribution" were at hand in the person of Jackson's army: "and we could not take them to our paternal bosoms without any evidence of their repentance, and put into their hands the means for a repetition of such acts in open violation of solemn Treaties without anticipating a day of retribution." The truly responsible parties were the white agents and governments who encouraged the same Indians who had "raised the exterminating Hatchet against their own nation." Governments who failed to put the interests of their own citizens first had not a proper foundation in the virtue borne of paternal care for its dependants and therefore deserved whatever chastisement Providence might mete out: "But it is not on defenceless women and children that retaliation will be made but on the head which countenanced and excited the barbarity. He is the responsible person and more barberous than the savage whom he makes his instrument of execution. An Eye for an Eye, Toothe for Toothe, and Scalp for Scalp—" The governor ought to arrest individual Indian leaders of "that Matricidal band for whom your christian bowels seem to sympathise and bleed so freely."³²

³¹AJ to Mateo González Manrique, 24 Aug. 1814, in *PAJ*, III, 119-121.

³²*Ibid.* Jackson's phrase "an Eye for an Eye" refers to Old Testament Jewish law: cf. Deuteronomy 19:21, "Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." Jackson added the bit about "Scalp for Scalp," obviously, to show that the idea transferred easily to his situation.

Jackson's Indian policy reflected his life-long experience with native peoples on the frontier. We have already seen that his friends who were preachers had also pursued the dual calling of being both missionaries to the Indians and Indian fighters, and Jackson had felt compassion for the Creek boy, Lyncoya, whom he had helped to orphan then adopted. A young, glory-seeking Jackson had used strong language in encouraging Tennesseans to go to war with the Creek: "The wretch who can view the massacre at the mouth of Duck river, and feel not his spirit kindle within him and burn for revenge, deserves not the name of a *man*; and the mother who bore him should point with the finger of scorn, and say "He is not my son."³³ The 1812 Duck River incident ignited several other events that led to the Creek War of 1813, and marked the beginning of Jackson's official career as an Indian fighter. Resentful of federal road building and white encroachment into Creek lands, a party of hostile Creeks were on their way back from a war council with the great Shawnee Indian prophet and war leader, Tecumseh. Just south of Nashville, they killed seven white families living in a remote settlement near the mouth of the Duck River and carried off one white woman, Martha Crawley, as a captive.³⁴ The event shocked settlements all around Nashville, where even established communities now seemed vulnerable to surprise attack, and where Martha Crawley symbolized every man's wife, hence Jackson's declaration that mothers should disown a son who was not man enough to defend her.

The Creek War also depended on preachers on both sides to encourage volunteers. White preachers we have already discussed, but the Red Sticks used preaching, magic, and prophecy to recruit young warriors to their cause as well. When in the difficult winter of 1813 Jackson knew he was close to winning the war, but his men suddenly began protesting that their

³³AJ to the 2nd Division, 9 July 1812, in *PAJ*, II, 314.

³⁴Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and His Indian Wars* (New York: Penguin, 2001), 5.

enlistments were up, he believed the Red Stick prophets had worked some powerful magic. In the same letter where he informed Rachel about Lyncoya, Jackson began, "The Phisic of the indians prophets must have curiously worked upon them to occasion those men, once so brave, once so patriotic to conduct so strangely and so disgracefully to themselves and country."³⁵ That was not all, either. He surmised to his fellow general, John Cocke: "It appears that there is some enchantment, wrought, by the Indian prophets on our contractors, that will lead to our Starvation but to counteract this *phisic*—" Jackson had appointed a new quartermaster to get the desperately needed supplies.³⁶

For Jackson, the war with the Indians meant combat with them on a spiritual and magical front as well, which made the preservation of the favor of Providence all that much more crucial to success. He might be left with little more than his brave artillery company and the spies to defend the posts and prosecute the war—But fear not my better self—" he had said to Rachel, "The guardian angles will protect us, and support us, under every trial danger and difficulty, so long as we are engaged in so riteous a cause—."³⁷ By April of 1814 the situation had greatly improved, but Jackson told his troops that one of the goals of the war meant the Red Sticks "must be made to know that their prophets are impostors, & that our strength is mighty & will prevail. Then & not till then may we hope for a lasting & beneficial peace."³⁸ Rachel, too, thought of the war as an epic spiritual fight, and she encouraged herself by remembering that "in aney Ease at preaset I know you are Daily Exposed to Daingers hardships & of Every disscription but I trust that the

³⁵AJ to Rachel Jackson, 19 Dec. 1813, in *PAJ*, II, 494.

³⁶AJ to John Cocke, 28 Dec. 1813, *Ibid.*, 512.

³⁷AJ to Rachel Jackson, 19 Dec. 1813, *Ibid.*, 494.

³⁸AJ to Tennessee Troops in the Mississippi Territory, 2 Apr. 1814, in *PAJ*, III, 58.

same God that Led Moses through the wilderness has been and now is Conducting you giving you his aide his protection on that my hopes are founded—."³⁹

Jackson clearly did not think of all Indians as savages incapable of "civilized" life. To the contrary, he believed they were capable but had been misled by the "false prophets," and by the older generations that refused to adopt white ways and give up their traditions for Christianity,⁴⁰ Blaming stubborn elders and wolves in sheep's clothing cast Jackson in his familiar role as protector of the innocents, a mind set he carried with him to the presidency and from which he pursued the policy of removal. The goal of wars against the Indians was indeed to open lands for white settlement and secure the borders of the United States, yet it also meant delivering holy retribution to the "barbarians" who were "ignorant of the influence of civilization & of government over the human powers Stupid mortals! Their yells only designate their numbers and their situation with the more certainty," Jackson told his troops. The "barbarian" element had been defeated, and Jackson laid out his vision for the survivors: "They have disappeared from the face of the Earth. In their places, a new generation will arise who will know their duties better. The weapons of warfare will be exchanged for the utensils of husbandry; & the wilderness which now withers in sterility & seems to mourn the desolation which overspreads it, will blossom as the rose, & become the nursery of the arts." In his dealings with the Indians during the Creek War, Jackson had discovered nothing to shake his

³⁹Rachel Jackson to AJ, 7 Apr. 1814, *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁰The phrase, "false prophet," appears several times in both the Old and New Testaments. For example, see Jeremiah 5:31, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?"; Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves."; and II Peter 2:1, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

understanding of the role of Providence and its interplay with the right to self preservation:

"How lamentable it is that the path to peace should lead through blood & over the carcasses of the slain!! But it is in the dispensations of that providence which inflicts partial evil, to produce general good," and that "dispensation" rained down on both white and Indian alike.⁴¹

The problem of reconciling Jackson, the West, Providence, and the Indians has attracted the attention of numerous American intellectuals and writers, many of whom have explored the issues and criticized the "manipulators . . . of [American] destiny."⁴²

Yet, Americans of Jackson's generation believed Providence had favored them, in part because of all the land acquired by moving the Indians west of the Mississippi River, one of the very reasons that Americans of the twentieth century might be skeptical of such a claim. Mindful of the young nation's moral heritage, Jackson believed its promise could only be fulfilled if its leaders and its citizens held fast to virtue. Staying on the right side of Providence meant

⁴¹AJ to Tennessee Troops in the Mississippi Territory, 2 Apr. 1814, in *PAJ*, III, 58.

⁴²William Faulkner, "Lo!", *Selected Short Stories of William Faulkner* (New York: Modern Library, 1970), 132-56. In his humorous story entitled "Lo!", William Faulkner imagined the entire nation of the Chickasaw Indians had descended on Washington, D.C., to contend with Jackson and the U.S. government in a war of wits. In the story, the Chickasaw chief and the American president, who could be none other than Jackson, understand each other on an intuitive level not matched by their associates and aides. Jackson draws a boundary line at the Mississippi River, which is not all that different from what he imagined he was doing by removing Indians to Oklahoma. The story illustrates the humor and complexity of Indian-white relations, yet even a writer with Faulkner's creative powers could not propose a solution much better than Jackson's without resorting to pure fantasy.

As a matter of related interest, Faulkner captured Jackson's personality by including him as an entry in the fanciful "Appendix" to his novel, *The Sound and the Fury* (1929; New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 204: "JACKSON. A Great White Father with a sword. (An old duelist, a brawling lean fierce mangy durable imperishable old lion who set the wellbeing of the nation above the White House and the health of his new political party above either and above them all set not his wife's honor but the principle that honor must be defended whether it was or not because defended it was whether or not.)" Faulkner used the rest of the entry to excoriate Jackson for turning the Indians into drunken, "homeless descendants of the dispossessed."

preserving the integrity of thought and action from private to public life. Just as Jackson had responsibility for his family, so did he have that responsibility at a national level as president for his constituents and the Indians.

Chapter Six Two Roads Diverge - Jacksonian versus Emersonian Providence

Andrew Jackson towered over the political and social life of early nineteenth-century America. So thoroughly did his characteristics and successes represent the ideals and aspirations of his constituents that historians have often referred to the time from the 1820s to the 1840s as the "Age of Jackson" or the "Jacksonian Era." Few people live so closely in tune with their times as to have their lives become an emblem of their era, but Jackson did. Yet for all the symbolic power of Jackson's life to help historians describe the "Era of the Common Man," the role of religion in Jackson's life has largely been overlooked.¹ In the process of presenting Jackson's views on democracy, republicanism, banking, Indians, expansion, domesticity, reform, slavery, and other topics that generated so much of Jacksonian-era public discourse, commentators have not seen Jackson's religious principles as contributing significantly to his other ideas. In contrast, Jackson saw himself as beholden to an almighty Providence who decided the fate of individuals and of nations, and to whom individuals owed the utmost respect and allegiance, even at the expense of their own lives and happiness.

For example, while separated from his wife, Rachel, during the Creek War, Jackson drew strength from his belief that "when the protecting hand of providence if it is his will, will restore us to each others arms, In storms, in battles, amidst the ragin billows recollect, his protecting hand can save, in the peaceful shade, in cabins, in pallaces, his avenging hand can destroy—Then let us not repine, his will be done, our country calls." He wanted to encourage Rachel, too, because he worried also about her loneliness: "I thank you for your prayers—I thank

¹Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1945); Robert V. Remini, ed., *The Age of Jackson* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972); and John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953) are a few examples of books that have seen Jackson as the preeminent symbol for his times.

you for your determined resolution, to bear our separation with fortitude we trust in the righteousness of our cause, and the god of Battle and of Justice will protect us, hence then dispel any gloomy ideas that our separation may occasion, bear it with Christian cheerfulness—and resignation."²

In spite of the prevailing notion that Jackson's God seems to have held little sway over Jackson's attitudes, the general lived his entire life under the shadow of an "all-Ruling Power" that he believed infallibly just and intimately concerned with the future of the United States, as well as the individual lives of the nation's inhabitants. Jackson appears never to have doubted that there was a divine plan for the world, that the United States in general and American republicanism in particular could be included in that plan, and that he and his family and associates could also be favored by Providence to play their part in the unfolding divine story, so long as they stayed on the right side of God's expectations. In Jackson's view, staying within God's favor meant adhering to several basic principles. He believed he should never, ever complain at the lot Providence had meted out to him. He could mourn the death of a loved one, chafe at the absence of needed supplies for his troops, and even bemoan his poor health, but Jackson's "God of Battles and of justice" ought never be questioned as to the rightness of His dispensations. Even for Jackson, who led a full, prosperous life, surviving in early nineteenth-century America meant reckoning daily with the threat of death, disease, and unpredictable calamity. No matter how deeply disappointing any turn of events might be, however, the first duty of the Christian was, in Jackson's mind, to hold fast to the claim that God was just, even as He chastised individuals with trials. To Jackson, the commandment to "fear the Lord thy God"

²Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson, 8 Jan. 1813, in Sam B. Smith, *et al*, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, (6 vols. to date; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975–), II, 354; hereafter abbreviated as *PAJ*

meant remembering that God was so good and so infallible that He could even hand out suffering in such a way as to work for the long-term good of the individual and the nation. Challenging God's prerogatives took the individual out of God's favor and protecting hand. Should he, Jackson, or the American people ever fail to fear God, they would forfeit their special place in the destiny He was busy working out through the world's history. For Jackson, American destiny depended on Providence, which had manifestly blessed the young nation with its miraculous independence, natural resources, virtuous people, and signature victory over the superior British force at New Orleans. In Jackson's view, however, the blessings were conditional upon Americans' acceptance of God's sovereignty.

Although he became increasingly evangelical after Rachel's death in 1828, Jackson never gave up his earliest notions about the workings of Providence in the daily affairs of humanity. The many events of Jackson's life did not shake his confidence that he correctly understood what Providence expected of him. Besides fearing God, Jackson had the obligation to thank God for His blessings, even when they seemed meager in the face of difficulties. He needed to remain optimistic, also even when situations seemed most grim, which followed the logic that ultimately, the outcome of all events depended on the dispensation of Providence. No matter how hopeless, painful, or difficult something might seem, it was not for mortal beings to know what would finally be the result. Individuals like Jackson, then, were not at liberty to turn from a course of action they believed just nor fail to attempt a virtuous cause, no matter how impossible the odds of success might seem. Jackson's belief that he did not have the power to determine the outcome of events led him, paradoxically, to a deep-seated optimism and determination to act on behalf of necessary and honorable causes. Precisely because he could not guarantee the results, he was more willing to expend all manner of effort to ensure he had

exhausted all possibilities. Leaving nothing undone gave Jackson greater confidence that the All-Ruling power might honor Jackson's limited, human actions. For Jackson, a just God governed the world and honored the actions of honorable men, and that belief governed his assessment of most any situation. As he wrote to his friend, John Coffee, about a local disagreement, "rest assured that ample punishment will await him for the corrupt Deed—Heaven must have some choice curse in store for such Rascals."³ What might be impossible for Jackson to accomplish could easily be settled by the intervention of Providence. Jackson therefore felt the aegis to act on behalf of what he believed was right while cautiously hoping that a correct choice would put him in line with the Providential plan, ensuring success.

Jackson's Providence, then, did not serve as a kind of cosmic footman bound to the successful future of the United States. Jacksonian-era newspaper editors and politicians may well have proclaimed Providence's favor on their policies of expansion: "Who can reject such evidence . . . such illustrious testimony of divine interposition. And if Providence is for us, who can be against us."⁴ The influential historian John William Ward did not approve of the Jacksonian opinion-makers' use of Providence, for they stretched the idea until it so well suited their ambitions that they could feel confident in pressing ahead with their violent expansion into Texas and the West. "The nation, expanding violently, needed confidence to carry on its gigantic task," he observed. "In its optimism it firmly believed that God had foreordained its success and it therefore saw God's hand in the most unlikely places. There is no sense in protesting the logic of the confident creed of expansion since, in the human process of self-

³AJ to John Coffee, 9 Apr. 1804, *Ibid.*, I, 14.

⁴Quoted in Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*, 110.

justification, logic has little place."⁵

Yet Jackson's Providence differed in critical ways from the kind put forward by other would-be spokesmen for the deity. For one thing, Jackson would have considered it the ultimate hubris to claim Providential favor in advance of an event. In Jackson's mind, doing so would have been to invite disaster. Human beings could not expect to succeed because they declared that the Almighty had taken up their cause. Instead, humanity could only expect to succeed when human endeavor most closely matched divine intentions. For Jackson, it would have been the height of presumption to make statements about the divine will, which remained inscrutable to limited human minds. Ever mindful of his inability to control his own destiny, the general hesitated to make pronouncements about his own plans, telling Rachel, for example, that "I have a pleasing hope we will with the protection and permission of him who governs all, meet shortly."⁶

Jackson's solution was to find what he believed was right, or at least compose what he thought was a fair explanation for what was right, and then stick to that course no matter what. Disappointment in earthly life Jackson fully expected, even as he prospered and succeeded. Expecting the worst while finding what seemed right and doing it produced optimism, but of a more metaphysical variety than Ward described. Jackson hoped that by doing the right thing he would succeed because God was succeeding, and even if he failed he would be preparing himself for a heavenly life that would make up the difference for earthly disappointments. That is, the calculus of Jackson's decision-making habits included Providence, which was an infinite variable, not a number known for certain. In the end, even a negative result could become

⁵*Ibid.*, 110-11.

⁶AJ to Rachel Jackson, 21 Feb. 1814, *PAJ*, III, 35.

positive because earthly trouble translated into the kind of chastisement designed to make the individual or those they left behind ready for eternity: "The brave must die, in a state of war the brave must face the enemy, or the rights of our country, could never be maintained—it was the fate of our brave Nephew Alexander Donelson to *fall* . . . but still we know we have to die, still the pleasing heavenly thought that we are to meet on high never to part again where we will enjoy happiness unmingled, by the interruption of human depravity & corruption—."⁷

Jackson saw his life guided and goaded by Providence, but so did a great many Americans of his and the succeeding generation. The majority of his countrymen also held a Jackson-like view of Providence and apparently did so at least until the outbreak of the Civil War. For them, it would have been wrong, even a foolish temptation of fate, not to give grateful credit to God as the provider of favorable circumstances. They too acknowledged God as "good," while not expecting the dispensations of Providence always to go their way, for God's faithfulness to His own design might well mean the disappointment of individuals. For ordinary Americans who lived during the decades prior to the Civil War, their hopes and ambitions were not lashed to a Providence which they dragged around behind them and forced to fulfill their goals but were instead buoyed by a "severely qualified form of optimism" based on the belief that even failure could indicate God's favor.⁸

From the time of his first attempt at the presidency in 1824 until after his death in 1845, Jackson became a powerful symbol of how ordinary Americans could make use of the West to achieve their ambitions. In the American political landscape, no one stood taller nor or loomed

⁷*Ibid.*, 34-35.

⁸Lewis O. Saum, *The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 23.

more threateningly, depending on one's perspective, than Jackson, "The Hero of New Orleans." From the point of view of his opponents, Jackson seemed profane, violent, and hardened to the suffering he could inflict on others, but to the public at large Jackson also represented republican patriotism and the way a white man could make himself into a success in the West. He had, seemingly by dint of implacable desire and a close acquaintance with the ways of Providence, bought Americans security and prosperity by winning most of "the West," New Orleans, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida, from Spain, Britain, and the Indians. As one contemporary eulogized, "The Spirit of God descended upon the Savior of the world in the form of a dove Because his countrymen saw their image and spirit in Andrew Jackson, they bestowed their honor and admiration upon him." Yet, precisely because of Jackson's iconic powers, the American Second Party System emerged as Jackson's opponents sought to derail his political progress by proposing their own set of political symbols, which led to the formation of the Whig party.⁹

To defeat Jackson, the Whigs would need powerful symbols of their own. Unfortunately for the Whigs, many of the most talented American writers and artists had already found inspiration in the symbolism employed by the Jacksonian Democrats: Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Cullen Bryant, Walt Whitman, James Fenimore Cooper, George Bancroft, Washington Irving, Orestes A. Brownson, and John L. O'Sullivan, were among the most famous, but there were still others.¹⁰ As for those opposed to Jackson, Ralph Waldo Emerson became one of the most significant voices raised against Jacksonian symbolism. Although he remained aloof from direct political action, Emerson traveled, spoke, and wrote extensively, becoming an enormously

⁹Quoted in John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age*, frontmatter.

¹⁰Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, 369-70.

popular American icon in his own right during Jackson's second term as president. Perhaps because of his reluctance to join the antislavery cause or perhaps because of his persistence in remaining above and beyond the ordinary forms of political language and action, Emerson successfully campaigned for his political ideals without appearing to be so partisan as to reduce the attendance at his lectures. On the other hand, most commentaries on Jacksonian America include some reference to Emerson because he represented the great, early achievement of independence in American letters. His effort to fashion a uniquely American rhetoric, which he called a "poetics," influenced the language of American poetry, politics, and pulpits for generations to come, helping to shape a uniquely American public discourse. Emerson had helped to found the American Transcendentalist movement, which was a loose organization of intellectuals, mostly in New England, who were dissatisfied with the state of American, especially formerly Puritan, Christianity and culture.

Transcendentalists differed in their ideas, but in general they believed in a spiritual state of being that "transcended" the measurable, physical world. For a Transcendentalist like Emerson, intuition, not deductive reasoning, would lead an individual to truth, and personal, revealed, truth, as understood and acted on by an individual, mattered far more than the traditionally accepted ideas held by society in general: "The riddle of the age has for each a private solution."¹¹ In Emerson's view, constant spiritual "unsettling" kept people from allowing basic virtues to grow stale. For him, a virtuous republic would only survive if its citizens constantly moved from inspiration to inspiration, frequently refreshing what virtue meant to them as individuals. Emerson and other Transcendentalists had even found fault with the

¹¹Emerson, "Fate," *The Conduct of Life* (1860, rev. 1876; Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute, Apr. 2006) <http://www.rwe.org/works/Conduct_1_Fate.htm> (27 Apr. 2006).

Unitarians, a Christian denomination that espoused Jesus as a moral example rather than as the son of God. Emerson saw the West as the place where American virtue would be tested and American destiny defined, and a sampling of Emerson's way of weaving the West into his discourse illustrates that he held a goal not significantly different from the Jacksonians: American expansion and prosperity via the West. Emerson's line of rhetorical symbols would offer an alternative route to the same goal, as he tried to lead Americans toward an intuitive grasp of Transcendental principles that he thought would preserve national virtue.

Just as Jackson had dedicated his life to shaping American destiny, so did Emerson intend to guide his country to a better future. Instead of committing himself to politics or warfare, however, Emerson chose to exercise his imagination for the shaping of American destiny, as might be clearly be seen in one of Emerson's most representative but lesser-known essays. A lecture entitled "The Young American" clearly demonstrated his intentions. The essay offers a window into the ways that Emerson's early thinking helped to define American identity by articulating a patriotic, forward-looking, optimistic vision heavily dependant on the cultural opportunities afforded by the availability of new lands. Emerson replaced Jackson's Providence with an impersonal but powerful Nature. As Americans expanded, they would have to make important choices as to how they would deal with their new environment, and the result of those choices would be judgements or blessings on future generations. Like Jackson, Emerson believed that the future of the republic depended on the virtue of its citizens, and he believed that a failure of virtue could bring judgement. In Emerson's scheme of things, though, the judgement had little to do with heaven or hell. Instead of divine destinations, the nation would reach earthly states of being, such as having the appearance of prosperity, but would not have attained any spiritual satisfaction. For Emerson, expansion at the expense of the Indians

and expansion for the sole purpose of commerce would be selling the nation's soul.

As a popular speaker and writer, Emerson left a long-lasting imprint on the way Americans would begin talking about their nation's meaning and purpose. Although Emerson critics such as historian Perry Miller have questioned whether Emerson's small group of New England Transcendentalists could rightly be said to be speaking for an America larger than, say, Boston, the charge should not apply to Emerson.¹² Emerson traveled extensively as a lecturer and became so well known in America and Europe that he usually arrived in cities to cheering crowds of admirers. They cheered him because he had something to say that an audience not limited to the confines of Boston wanted to hear. Emerson's congregation of listeners, spread from London to California, received instruction from Emerson's numerous lectures and essays, including his most critically acclaimed works, "Nature" (1836), "The American Scholar" (1837), and "Self-Reliance" (1841), to name a few of the most familiar ones. "Nature," "Self-Reliance," and "The Young American" explore extensively the spiritual relationship between the individual, society, and the natural world. Emerson's exploration of the relationship between Transcendentalism and nature led him to imagine in "The Young American" that through westward movement and by conspiring with the designs of the Spirit who led us hither . . . we shall quickly enough advance . . . into a new and more excellent social state than history has recorded.¹³

¹²Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1967).

¹³Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Young American," *Nature: Addresses and Lectures* (1849; Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute, 2005)

<http://www.rwe.org/works/Nature_addresses_5_The_Young_American.htm> (accessed 20 Apr. 2006); All of Emerson's lectures and essays are available over the Internet courtesy of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute: <<http://www.rwe.org>>. Unless otherwise noted, Emerson references are from the RWE.org searchable collection. Pagination is not available; interested parties may easily search for any word or phrase of interest, locating it almost instantly.

Although Emerson made two trips to Europe before he made his first trip to the giant sequoias of Yosemite Valley, California, a careful reading of his works and journals reveals the centrality of the West to Emerson's imagination. The metaphorical power of the West, of the opportunities America represented, had captured his imagination while he was still a student at Harvard. He wrote in one of his earliest journals that "Europe would lack the regenerating impulse, and America lie waste, had it not been for El Dorado."¹⁴ El Dorado, the legendary City of Gold hidden in the West, suggested to Emerson Europeans and Americans owed their prosperity to the dream of finding or building legendary cities of gold in a West that was imagined before it was experienced. Emerson avidly read the published journals of those who had explored the Louisiana Purchase and the rest of the West. The writings by explorers Meriwether Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, Zebulun Pike, and Stephen Long inspired Emerson. In turn, Emerson sought to offer Americans a way of talking about Nature and the West that would lead them to a uniquely American, spiritualized sense of their destiny. Put another way, Emerson's "Nature" and the *Journals* of Lewis and Clark all "write the same plot" because they are all about "exploration and conquest driven by destiny."¹⁵

The political problem was that many New Englanders, especially well-educated Bostonians like Emerson, despised Andrew Jackson's Democrats, who were considered to be the "party of the West," yet they too believed that America had a destiny to fulfill and the West held the key to unlock it. One way to read Emerson, then, is to see him straddling the problem of how a patriotic American could support the conquest of the Louisiana Purchase while at the

¹⁴Emerson, *Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes, eds. (10 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909-1914), II, 194.

¹⁵Kris Fresonke, *West of Emerson: the Design of Manifest Destiny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 12.

same time preserving New England's cherished position as the authority for the American conscience. As Emerson constructed a complex metaphor that presented nature and his "American landscape" as the agent of what others might have construed to be the Godhead, he imagined a plan that began with Christopher Columbus and should end in a society that had expanded both its physical and its spiritual territory in such a way as to benefit the whole world.

In other words, Emerson's efforts to get Americans to imagine the West in conjunction with their national and personal destinies gave his national congregation a quasi-Christian way of describing their ambitions. For Emerson, successfully bringing civilization to the West depended on recognizing the grand design, the obviously well-laid plan, for the country to span the continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific coasts. Thus did Emerson contribute in his own way to the American national discourse about the West, and his words were not so different from those of the ardent expansionist and Jacksonian, O'Sullivan, who also argued that Americans needed a literary language to help them fulfill their divine mission: "And our literature!—Oh, when will it breathe the spirit of our republican institutions? When will it be imbued with the God-like aspiration of intellectual freedom—the elevating principle of equality? When will it assert *its* national independence, and speak the soul—the heart of the American people?" For O'Sullivan, the "American literati" only needed to "be inspired by the magnificent scenery of our own world, imbibe the fresh enthusiasm of a new heaven and a new earth Is not nature as original . . . in this, our Western hemisphere, as in that of the East?"¹⁶ O'Sullivan wrote that article in 1839, but not until 1845 was he credited with coining the phrase, "Manifest Destiny." The phrase caught on as a convenient way for both advocates and opponents of expansion to

¹⁶John L. O'Sullivan, "The Great Nation of Futurity," *The United States Democratic Review* 6 (1839): 428-29.

discuss whether the United States had a great national mission to spread republicanism by expanding territorially in the western hemisphere, yet as early as 1839 O'Sullivan was proclaiming that "The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? Providence is with us, and no earthly power can."¹⁷

For his part, Emerson sought to nudge that expansion down spiritual paths that led to a more spiritual society composed of more self-reflective individuals. Emerson thought it his calling and his patriotic duty to do so. In Emerson we also have one of the most enduring expressions of American optimism, whereby Americans exhibit the dual tendency to believe that America, no matter how they may imagine it, is always in danger of being lost or of failing at some great purpose, while at the same time acting as though no bad times could last forever because somehow, America, favored by some divine Power, must be an exception to the rule. Optimism, exceptionalism, and Manifest Destiny all resided in Emerson's prose.

A brief summary of Emerson's century-spanning career suggests the kind of influence he had over Americans' self-conception. By the time of his death in 1882, Emerson had written nearly 8000 pages of journal entries, enough letters to fill more than 4000 pages of the volumes in which they are collected, and this output does not include his notebooks (which he indexed himself), his poetry, and his published lectures and essays. Collecting all the public and private writings of Emerson requires more than fifty volumes, in which one can find some comment from Emerson on seemingly every conceivable issue of religion, science, politics, or society in America and abroad during the bulk of the nineteenth century. During his travels he met and

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 427.

corresponded with such luminaries as the hero of the American Revolution, the Marquis de Lafayette, British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Scottish writer and historian Thomas Carlyle, English philosopher John Stuart Mill, English poet William Wordsworth, German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, American poets and writers Emily Dickinson, Margaret Fuller, Louisa May Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman, and American naturalist John Muir. One of the chronologies of Emerson's life requires five hundred pages to list its "most significant" events, many of which were social engagements with intellectuals of the day. He was also avidly read by thinkers as dissimilar as Karl Marx and William James. For his part, the influential German philosopher and philologist Friedrich Nietzsche claimed to have slept with a copy of Emerson under his pillow.¹⁸

Not only intellectuals, but also ordinary Americans paid attention to what Emerson, a self-styled American prophet, had to say. Emerson's young American, like the young nation itself, would find that "the land is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture . . . The land, with its tranquilizing, sanative influences, is to repair the errors of a scholastic and traditional education, and bring us into just relations with men and things."¹⁹

Most of Emerson's published essays were originally delivered as lectures. Born as the son of a soon-to-become-Unitarian minister, himself the son of a long line of ministers stretching back to

¹⁸Some helpful introductions to Emerson's life and work include Ronald A. Bosco and Joel Myerson, eds., *Emerson in His Own Time: a Biographical Chronicle of His Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003); Lawrence Buell, *Emerson: a National Icon for a Post National Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2003); Perry Miller, ed., *The American Transcendentalists: Their Prose and Poetry* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1957); Joel Myerson, ed., *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Joel Porte, ed., *Emerson in His Journals* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1982); Albert J. von Frank, *An Emerson Chronology* (New York: G.K. Hall, 1994).

¹⁹Emerson, "The Young American," <<http://www.rwe.org>>.

early colonial days, Emerson left his respectable, Unitarian pulpit at Boston's Second Church and by 1833 had begun supporting himself by specializing in public lecture performances at the popular middle-class phenomenon, the lyceum.

The lyceum had begun in the 1820s in New England as a venture to extend the blessings of higher education to the public, and by the 1830s they had spread even to the new western states, where they remained a popular form of civic recreation, particularly in Ohio, even after the Civil War. Delivering lectures added to Emerson's reputation, and he thrived on it, having spoken more than 1,500 times by the 1870s, or roughly thirty to forty times per year. He prepared lectures by borrowing from his own copious notebooks and his other orations, so that any one address that he delivered might well contain elements from several of his other writings. Because an Emerson lecture often combined ideas he had presented elsewhere in other engagements, hearing Emerson once meant getting a sampling of many of his writings at the same time. "The Young American" essay, for example, contained stock ideas that Emerson could copy into his other addresses with ease, so numerous audiences may have heard parts of it, even though the talk they attended had a different title.²⁰

Although one of the lyceum's attractions might have been the chance to hear impassioned speeches on the issues of the day, the real attraction lay in the lyceum associations' assiduous avoidance of controversial topics. For example, one historian found that when the Young Men's Mercantile Library Association of Cincinnati invited the activist and writer Orestes Brownson to speak, they were horrified at the verbal thrashing he delivered on the subject of an international controversy, the Hungarian independence movement, and apologized publicly to the attendees. A list of 137 lyceum lectures delivered at Chicago in selected years of

²⁰Myerson, *A Historical Guide to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 57.

the 1850s, 60s and 70s shows that none dealt with slavery, none dealt with temperance, and exactly five, only in 1870, dealt with women's rights. Yet slavery, temperance and women's rights were probably the three most incendiary issues of the day. The vast majority of lectures presented light entertainment or self-help information, or they treated audiences to history, literature, inspiration, or travel.²¹ It was before just such an association, Boston's Mercantile Library Association, that Emerson delivered his lecture, "The Young American" early in 1844. He cleverly worked around the proprieties of the lyceum venue with poetic language that could impart a politically charged message without appearing to be controversial. "The Young American" lecture presented Emerson's most determined effort to describe the America he saw while at the same time showing how his nation could be transformed into the achievement of the vision he had for it. The lecture had all the hallmarks of the Emersonian project—to call his audience into connection with some of their most deeply held aspirations and then use poetic language to forge an emotional link between their aspirations and his American ideal. As such, the poetics of "The Young American" gave the appearance of conforming to the expectations of the lyceum audience but were in fact deeply political. Literary historian Michael Cowan puts forth another consideration—Emerson knew he was speaking to an audience of Bostonians who would likely have the opportunity to use or abuse the power they gained from the West.²²

So what was it that Emerson had to say to his middle-class, New England audience that chilly day in February, 1844? It was an election year, and it looked as though the Whigs would nominate Henry Clay to run for the presidency against the Democrats' Martin Van Buren. The

²¹Vern Wagner, "The Lecture Lyceum and the Problem of Controversy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 15 (1954):119 - 135.

²²Cowan, *City of the West*, 26.

controversy over American territorial expansion fired political debate and political grandstanding across the nation, and, as it turned out, Clay would run against America's first dark horse candidate, James K. Polk, who won by advocating expansion into Texas and Oregon. Another campaign issue had been the old Jacksonian controversy over whether the federal government ought to fund the construction of public works (known as "internal improvements") that would only benefit one state, such as the road Clay had wanted for his district near Maysville, Kentucky. In addition to the political issues of expansion and internal improvements, the outcry against slavery continued to increase. In just six months Emerson would deliver his historic abolitionist speech, "Emancipation in the British West Indies."²³ When seen in the light of the campaign the expansion of commerce, the debate over the use of federal power and money for projects in the states, and the intensifying abolitionist movement, the political content of "The Young American" lecture becomes more significant. Emerson used the essay to make a series of political points, while at the same time appearing not to violate the unspoken prohibition against being too controversial or political at a lyceum lecture..

When he published the lecture as an essay, Emerson spoke to a segment of the contemporary political debate: what to do with Western lands, what to do about the increasing pace of commerce, and what role moral concerns should play in the exercise of state power. In addition, the underlying structure of the essay is one common to Emerson, that of the "ascending spiral" whereby the writing "circles on itself," adding meaning to the whole from within each of

²³Emerson, "Emancipation in the British West Indies," *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Miscellanies* (12 vols.; 1884; Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute, Apr. 2006), XI, <http://www.rwe.org/comm/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=73&Itemid=251> (20 Apr. 2006).

the several sections, moving the discussion from external matters to internal ones.²⁴ Thus, Emerson introduces his three themes as constituent parts to his overall concern, the creation of an American national feeling, and he concludes with a prophecy: “the development of our American internal resources, the extension to the utmost of the commercial system, and the appearance of new moral causes which are to modify the state, are giving an aspect of greatness to the Future, which the imagination fears to open.”²⁵

Emerson famously said of himself, “Do not set the least value on what I do, or the least discredit on what I do not, as if I pretended to settle any thing as true or false. I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane; I simply experiment, an endless seeker, with no Past at my back.”²⁶ In “The Young American,” however, he is speaking directly into the center of nascent American nationalism, striking chords that must have resonated well with what his audience already believed. Right away he posed the American problem, saying “Gentlemen, it is remarkable that our people have their intellectual culture from one country and their duties from another,” which in the original version was followed by this critique of the books being read in schools: “Our books are European . . . We are sent to a feudal school to learn democracy.” But just as immediately, Emerson proposes the solution: “America is beginning to assert herself to the senses and to the imagination of her children, and Europe is receding in the same degree.”²⁷ The rest of the argument was about the ways the newly acquired lands would

²⁴Cowan, *City of the West*, 30.

²⁵Emerson, “The Young American,”
<http://www.rwe.org/works/Nature_addresses_5_The_Young_American.htm>.

²⁶Emerson, “Circles,” *Essays: First Series* (1841; Ralph Waldo Emerson Institute, Apr. 2006)
:<http://www.rwe.org/works/Essays-1st_Series_10_Circles.htm> (25 Apr. 2006).

²⁷*Ibid.*

themselves demand something of young men that would make them into Americans. The land was already imposing itself on that most vital of Emersonian characteristics, the imagination. Emerson hoped that through poetic language he could inspire a generation of Americans to become a self-sufficient, moral, but spiritually independent people who would not surrender civic virtue in order to attain earthly prosperity. True prosperity depended on a successful inner life, he argued.

Along with the political darts he aimed at those who opposed “internal improvements,” Emerson described the ways the railroad had unexpectedly introduced Americans “to the boundless resources of their own soil,” a claim which he immediately restated poetically: “railroad iron is a magician’s rod, in its power to evoke the sleeping energies of land and water.” Emerson saw clearly the colonizing potential of technology like the railroad, calling it “a sort of yard-stick, and surveyor’s line. The bountiful continent is ours, state on state, and territory on territory, to the waves of the Pacific sea.” Emerson’s case, creating a national identity by imposing order on what would otherwise “lie waste” was in his mind a good thing. Here, Emerson thought that the Greek poet, Euripedes, would also have approved, and quoted a couple of lines: “Our garden is the immeasurable earth; The heaven’s blue pillars are Medea’s house.” He quickly followed with the notion that developing and building in the “immeasurable earth” would require a “sentiment” worthy of the land and superior to the “purely trading spirit” that “sprang up” during the early colonial period “whilst all the population lived on the fringe of the sea-coast.”²⁸

Emerson moved next to Christopher Columbus, who sought a “continent in the West, that the harmony of nature required a great tract of land in the western hemisphere, to balance the

²⁸*Ibid.*

known extent of land in the eastern.” Americans would have to “estimate the native values of this broad region to redress the balance of our own judgements, and appreciate the advantages opened to the human race in this country, which is our fortunate home. The land is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture.” Columbus, who often appeared in Emerson’s thinking, showed up as a metaphor to make the point that by design, there was a balance to the world and that those who trusted in the design could have revelation. The metaphor continued its spiral upward, too, to apply to the issues of the day. Whatever had been set in the wrong direction in the early years could be made right by remembering with gratitude the opportunities Columbus’s find would make available for “the human race.” Americans had a calling from God in the form of the vastness of the lands made available and the scale of the enterprise necessary to settle and make them of value. The language had a double meaning as well, for although Emerson, like a good Transcendentalist should, deplored the “purely trading spirit,” he was not above making some money on his own and here he used wording such as “estimate the value,” “redress the balance” and “natural wealth.”²⁹

Better still, as he called upon the young men to leave the cities and go out to “conquer the soil,” he noted that even the gardens of the individual settlers would make up for nature’s deficiencies: “A garden has this advantage, that it makes it indifferent where you live. A well-laid garden makes the face of the country of no account; let that be low or high, grand or mean, you have made a beautiful abode worthy of man.” Emerson recognized that the materials people make and leave behind can be “read” or interpreted as expressions of unspoken or half-understood culturally grounded desires. People who plant gardens do not usually think of themselves as “making the face of the country of no account.” The difference is just that

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Emerson recognized how powerful his American shaping and measuring of the landscape would be as an agent of American, expansionist nationalism and, again, he saw it as a good thing.³⁰

Yet in that section on American resources and internal improvements, it was actually the land, not the people, who had the overarching power. Not a Romantic Nature personified, but what Emerson insisted on calling “the American landscape,” would exert the same kind of influence over the American destiny as God Himself had over Emerson’s Puritan forebears: “We must regard the land as a commanding and increasing power on the citizen, the sanative and Americanizing influence, which promises to disclose new virtues for ages to come.” The land, destiny, design, and the impersonal Godhead were all at work in the lands of the Louisiana Purchase, where Emerson saw “a sublime and friendly Destiny by which the human race is guided Men are narrow and selfish, but the Genius or Destiny is not narrow, but beneficent Only what is inevitable interests us, and it turns out that love and good are inevitable, and in the course of things. That Genius has infused itself into nature.”³¹

Finally, for Emerson, the idea of America had spread from the astute metaphysical observations of Christopher Columbus and had met in the scale of the landscape an invigorating and challenging endeavor that might call forth the best in the still undefined “American character.” Because “the people, and the world is now suffering from the want of religion and honor in its public mind,” Emerson called upon the “Young Americans” of New England to “obey your heart, and be the nobility of this land.” Because every age had had a “leading nation, one of a more generous sentiment,” Emerson argued that if Americans found the proper balance between using the land to extend commerce and developing their concerns for the betterment of

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*

humanity, they would surely become a great nation. Without the moral and spiritual dimension, however, they would merely divide up and settle the land, becoming a “public mind so preoccupied with the love of gain” that it had gone numb to the “natural force” of conscience.³² Or, as Perry Miller characterized the event, “The most utilitarian conquest known to history had somehow to be viewed not as inspired by a calculus of rising land values and investments but . . . as an immense exertion of the spirit.”³³ Although many would argue that Emerson’s poetics failed to produce a kinder, gentler America, it is harder to dispute the long-term effectiveness of his poetic vision in inspiring the American self-conception. Many Americans still want to be a nation that “advances out of all hearing of others’ censures, out of all regrets of our own, into a new and more excellent social state than history has recorded.”³⁴

If the natural world of the West held the power to transform the American soul, Emerson’s nature held other lessons, too, and not so gentle. “But let us honestly state the facts. Our America has a bad name for superficialness. Great men, great nations, have not been boasters and buffoons, but perceivers of the terror of life, and have manned themselves to face it,” he wrote in his essay, “Fate” (1860), an essay colored by the strife immediately preceding the Civil War. In the essay, Emerson described the harsh reality of a world governed only by the rules of nature, unguided by Jackson’s “all ruling power.” He likened the views of “our Calvinists, in the last generation,” to the “Hindoo, under the wheel [of endless reincarnation],” and “the Spartan, embodying his religion in his country, [who] dies before its majesty without a

³²*Ibid.*

³³Miller, Perry Miller, *Nature’s Nation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967), **

³⁴Emerson, "The Young American,"
<http://www.rwe.org/works/Nature_addresses_5_The_Young_American.htm>.

question. The Turk, who believes his doom is written on the iron leaf in the moment when he entered the world, rushes on the enemy's sabre with undivided will. The Turk, the Arab, the Persian, accepts the foreordained fate.” He also pointed to the ministers who preached “a pistareen-Providence, which, whenever the good man wants a dinner, makes that somebody shall knock at his door, and leave a half-dollar. But Nature is no sentimentalist, -- does not cosset or pamper us. We must see that the world is rough and surly, and will not mind drowning a man or a woman; but swallows your ship like a grain of dust.”³⁵

By comparing Jackson’s kind of Providence to foreign, un-enlightened practices, Emerson tried to bring all humanity down to a common level of experience. Since “the book of Nature is the book of Fate. She turns the gigantic pages, -- leaf after leaf, -- never returning one,” all people began with the same limitations, and none was called specially. “The races of men rise out of the ground preoccupied with a thought which rules them, and divided into parties ready armed and angry to fight for this metaphysical abstraction,” he continued. “The quality of the thought differences the Egyptian and the Roman, the Austrian and the American. The men who come on the stage at one period are all found to be related to each other.” By its design, nature proved that all people and nations were the same, that the illusion of difference, election, or calling developed only out of the temporary successes of one people over another, and that the primary aim of life was to reconcile oneself to the truth that no God existed who would offer a blessing, even if earned. “History is the action and reaction of these two, -- Nature and Thought; -- two boys pushing each other on the curb-stone of the pavement,” Emerson observed, yet his stoic, universalist view did not inspire him to very much action.³⁶

³⁵Emerson, “Fate,” <http://www.rwe.org/works/Conduct_1_Fate.htm>.

³⁶*Ibid.*

Comparing Jackson, the symbol of American success through action, with Emerson, the symbol of American success through intellect, shows the ways the old Calvinist understanding of Providence could forge parallel, never-intersecting ways of thinking. Both men were concerned with the meaning and purpose of life, both believed a person's way in the world was shaped by forces beyond his control, and both thought the pursuit of virtue to be the highest goal for any well-lived life. On the other hand, Jackson's fear of the Almighty and faith in a Providential plan encouraged him to act, even against seemingly impossible odds, precisely because he believed the end result depended on the Divine will and was out of his control. In contrast, Emerson accepted life and history as accidents of nature, removed from the possibility of intervention or judgement by a deity. Left to himself, literally, in the great wide world, he asked, "Why should we be afraid of Nature, which is no other than 'philosophy and theology embodied'? Why should we fear to be crushed by savage elements, we who are made up of the same elements?"³⁷ Unable to provide concrete, meaningful solutions to the problems of Jacksonian and antebellum America, Emerson retreated so far from reality that all the conflicts of the world resolved into one homogenous dot he found more easy to discuss. Harsh and unforgiving, all-powerful but unintelligent nature did not need to be feared, for all people, plants, and animals were the same, being made of the same substances, and therefore all "differences" were artificial distinctions drawn by unenlightened men. Over time, the views Emerson articulated would overtake Jackson's Calvinist views and have an equal or greater long-term impact on American politics and life.

³⁷*Ibid.*

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: “His Will Be Done” - Jackson’s Confidence in “the Fountain of All Good”

In his sermon entitled “The Sovereignty of God,” The Reverend Daniel Baker thundered, “I repeat it, I am a *Calvinist* but I am no *fatalist*!” In simple terms, Baker outlined the same set of beliefs on Providence that Andrew Jackson had held since childhood. In doing so, Baker only expressed what many Americans, including Jackson, already believed about the complex relationship between Providence and the free will of the individual, and his sermon offers a way to illustrate and summarize Jackson’s views. “I hold to the sovereignty of God, and also the free-agency of man, and whilst I believe that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,” Baker conceded, “it may not be possible for me to discriminate between the human and the divine agency.” For Baker and for Jackson, God’s actions in the world were many and varied, but they were also seamless, blending together into one expression of the Providential will. To illustrate, Baker pointed out that everyone could see a rainbow when it formed and that people could distinguish its different colors, but that they could not say where, precisely, one color ended and the next began. “What does the Bible teach?” he asked his audience. “That the government of God extends, not only to all things but to all events; not only to all creatures, but to all their actions.

In other words, that the providence of God is, in some way or another, concerned with all that is done or transpires on earth.”¹ Jackson had the opportunity to hear Baker’s sermons when the latter served as the minister of Second Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., during the 1820s. Baker’s brand of Calvinism made a favorable impression on the general, precisely

¹Daniel Baker, *Revival Sermons: Second Series*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1854), 313-16. The 1854 edition included sermons Baker had delivered in various forms for more than forty years, according to Baker’s own introduction to the volume. The emphases are Baker’s.

because it so closely agreed with his own: “Today being Sunday I have spent at church where I was edified with a very sensible discourse from a young presbyterian preacher,” he told his wife, Rachel, after attending one of Baker’s church services.² Only a few days later, another of Jackson’s letters to Rachel offered a concise statement of the his understanding of the relationship between people and Providence: “I have to thank my god my health has improved and I trust that with care I may continue to enjoy health.” The general could not expect to stay healthy if he did not take care of himself, but health was also a blessing from Providence. “When we Trust in providence,” he continued, “it is well placed and under every circumstance in life as you will observe, in him alone we ought to trust, he is the fountain of all good, he giveth life & health, and at pleasure taketh it away, and we ought so to conduct in all things, that we ought allways to be prepared to say his will be done Therefore I am sure that in this Variable climate if it is his will I shall enjoy as much health here as at home–.”³

Jackson’s understanding of Providence, or, more specifically, of the relationship between Providence and the individual, guided his thinking and his actions regarding his white and black family, his friends, the Indians, and the nation. He held together in seeming contradiction the belief that “history” represented the unfolding of a pre-ordained, divine plan, with the belief that individuals could and should be held accountable for their actions as well as prepare for a future over which they acknowledged they had no control. If God controlled all things, the individual might be tempted to inaction, resigning himself to fate. John Calvin’s theological argument that God was so great and powerful that he must, by virtue of being God, have pre-ordained the

²Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson, 7 Dec. 1823, Sam B. Smith, *et al*, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, (6 vols. to date; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975–), V, 322-23; hereafter abbreviated as *PAJ*

³AJ to Rachel Jackson, 11 Dec. 1823, *Ibid.*, 324-25.

entire history of the world did not drive American Presbyterians such as Jackson and Baker to a fatalistic outlook, however. Instead, they confronted the uncertainties of American life with a determined optimism rooted, ironically, in their conviction that God was so sovereign and just that even the worst of calamities would eventually lead to the greater good. Based on their belief that God held all things in his power and that He also could do no wrong, they reasoned that disappointment and disaster could descend on anyone at any time, and therefore only the hand of Providence could stave off such misfortune. In other words, by accepting the harsh realities of American life, especially American frontier life, Jackson could expect less from life but be grateful for more whenever he received it. Americans who knew the difficulty of their world faced the future with a cautious optimism born of the conviction that if they had not been on the right side of Providence, far worse would have befallen them already. Fearing God meant submitting to His will, no matter how dire the consequences might seem. In turn, submitting to the will of Providence offered the hope that on earth or in heaven God's government would establish justice.

Jackson found a durable and consistent source of strength in the Calvinist tradition. His Calvinist belief that earthly trials served a heavenly aim imparted an aura of sacred responsibility to the difficulties Jackson encountered in during his life, and certainly encouraged his sense that the many political fights of his public career were tests of his spiritual worthiness. For Jackson, the fear of losing loved ones, of being killed in a battle, or of failing to win a political fight paled in comparison to the fear of failing to submit properly to the sovereign will of God. Still, both sides of the Providential question mattered greatly to Jackson. From his earliest years in public life until his death, he held tightly to the two seemingly contradictory ideas that Providence ruled over all earthly events and also that individuals could and must be held accountable for their

actions. Jackson could say “I trust in a kind providence” at whose whim, presumably, he could lose life, family, friends, and possessions and by whose power even the daily events of Jackson’s life had been foreordained.⁴ On the other hand, Jackson could also say that people had the “right to self preservation,” even though Providence might have made other plans for them. He believed that the future of the nation depended on the favor of Providence at the same time as he imagined that that Providential favor depended on the virtuous behavior of the American citizenry and government. For Jackson, God could and did hold individuals and nations accountable for their actions, even as He planned in advance their fates. Instead of inspiring inaction and moral laxity, the Calvinist notion of predestination encouraged Jackson to search for and adhere to what he saw as right. Jackson’s innate stubbornness acquired a rigidity borne of the fear of displeasing the Almighty, and made him seem to be even more unreasonable to those who disagreed with him.

“Reasonable” Americans such as Ralph Waldo Emerson had little patience for the mysterious balancing act, the mental gymnastics that Jackson’s kind of Providence required. Emerson and his followers tended to see just one side of the Providential equation. Emerson emphasized the freedom and accountability of the individual, leaving the “pistareen-Providence” to the ministers and the “Calvinists, in the last generation,” who in Emerson’s mind differed little from the “Spartan,” “Hindoo,” and “Turk, who believes his doom is written on the iron leaf in the moment when he entered the world, rushes on the enemy's sabre with undivided will. The Turk, the Arab, the Persian, accepts the foreordained fate.”⁵ Emerson’s new generation would

⁴AJ to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 2 April 1833, in John Spencer Bassett, ed., *The Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (6 vols.; Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1926-33), V, 48-49; The phrase appears frequently in Jackson’s letters.

⁵Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Fate,” <http://www.rwe.org/works/Conduct_1_Fate.htm>.

replace Providential design with the unforgiving laws of nature and move all of the accountability to the individual “self.” Instead of God planning out a destiny, the vagaries of nature shaped human action. For Emerson, life had the meaning individuals created for themselves as they adapted and explored new, creative possibilities for their own personalities. In order to avoid limiting the imaginative development of the self, the individual should refuse to be defined by society. In practical terms, Emerson’s steadfast determination not to be captured or limited by a social label led him to refuse to serve communion regularly, arguing that repetition made the ceremony into an empty ritual, robbing parishioners of its meaning.⁶ Even God had been too carefully defined for Emerson’s taste. Jackson’s Calvinism, which belonged to “the last generation,” limited the individual’s free will and limited God as well, even as it claimed Him as the governor of the world: “And I thus say, my friends, that to the human race the discoveries of astronomy have added vast meaning to the name of God.

Once God was understood to be the governor of this world. Now they perceive him to be an Infinite Mind.”⁷ Emerson also concluded that Christianity would serve the world better as a less well-defined set of beliefs, so he argued that removing the divinity of Christ from the religion’s core doctrine would make Christ’s moral principles more accessible to the world: “The largest consideration the human mind can give to the subject . . . will not teach any expiation by Jesus; it will not teach any mysterious relations to him. It will teach great, plain, eternal truths. It will teach that he only is a mediator, as he brings us truth, and we accept it, and live by it; that he only saves us, but inducing us to save ourselves . . . and that such principles as Jesus Christ

⁶Emerson, “The Lord’s Supper,”
<http://www.rwe.org/works/Uncollected_Prose_1_Lords_Supper.htm>

⁷Emerson, “Sermon CLVII,” in *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Albert J. von Frank (4 vols; Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989-1992), IV,158.

inculcated must forevermore be the standard by which actions shall be judged."⁸ For Emerson, individual freedom began and ended with the self, who must eschew even the limitations imposed by the concept of a deity, and the government of the world thus depended solely on the actions of individuals, shaped to some extent by the limitations of nature, rather than society or Providence.

For Jackson, "a kind providence" afforded him the opportunity to hope for the well being of his family, a bright future, and the preservation of the republic. The dispensations of Providence explained why some were enslaved or poor and others were prosperous and successful, but under God's government, all would eventually work together for the good. Despite Emerson's criticism, Jackson's "pistareen-Providence" continued to offer a way to understand inequities, suffering, and uncertainty, even through the American Civil War. When President Abraham Lincoln sought during his second inaugural address to find meaning in the war's devastation, he turned to "the last generation's" Calvinism: "If . . . American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?"⁹ Andrew Jackson had used the same kind of language time and again to comfort loved ones, to comprehend the death of a slave, or to interpret his political battles. In doing so, Jackson expressed a view that guided many Americans of his day. Jacksonians could

⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹ Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/inaug/lincoln2.htm>.

have hope for a better tomorrow because the uncertainty of daily life left them little choice but to entrust their fate to “a kind providence.” If, after the Civil War, later generations of Americans seem to have found less comfort in the belief that the Almighty governed the world, they also found inspiration in the Emersonian theme of the expressive self, freed from the expectations, and therefore freed from the hand, of Jackson’s Providence.

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