The Duty of Christian Women:
Women's Practice of Protestant Nationhood, 1765-1865

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Introduction

Women from all walks of life have always had strong opinions about what they thought the United States should be. This is especially true in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the country was young. Women rhetorically constructed the nation in the way they thought was best. They wrote and argued about what the nation's purpose should be. As they thought about the nation, its meaning, and its potential, they were often guided by their own views of morality and destiny—their religious beliefs.

This dissertation will explore how women created Protestant nationhood in early America. However, this is a fraught term with a fraught history and historiography. I will come to my own definition of this term later in the introduction, but in order to fully understand the historiographical context of this dissertation we need to explore related concepts and scholarly interpretations. The terms that address this phenomenon, which are interrelated but distinct, include *civil religion*, *Christian nationalism*, and *religious nationalism*. It is a mark of this field that the terminology is notoriously hard to define. Or as Catharine Albanese wrote, "there is fuss and fury about the topic."[1] To fully understand how these terms developed I will give a brief history of these terms and their definitions, and ultimately explain why I decided to create my own term.

[1] Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), ix.

Status of the Question: Historiography

One of the earliest scholarly definitions of one of these concepts in an American context[2] was Robert Bellah's important 1967 article titled "Civil Religion in America."[3] In the 1960s there was a general decline in church-oriented religion in America, but Bellah believed that there was still a strong element of religious belief in American culture. He saw in American history a melding of religious and national language, a slowly-building tradition through which Americans found religious expression in "the American Way of Life." This was the case for most Americans, whether they practiced traditional religions or not. Bellah based his argument on the voices of people in power, like presidents, politicians, and prominent religious leaders, and on his own experiences as a white, Protestant, man.

There was significant backlash to Bellah's article on a number of fronts, which he addressed throughout his career but most prominently in his book *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*. In his Introduction to the Second Edition, he discussed the ways that readers tended to "identify what I[he] called civil religion with an idolatrous worship of the state."[4] But he went on to categorically denounce that interpretation. The term had become so contentious that in his 1985 work *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life,* Bellah and his co-authors never used the term civil religion, rather referring to the "biblical and republican traditions" and Martin Marty's "the public church." Bellah defines public church as "bringing the concerns of biblical religion into the

[2] Rousseau's discussion of civil religion in his work *The Social Contract* [Oxford World Classics (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 1994] is considered the first modern articulation of this concept, and Bellah was influenced by him.

[3] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967), http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm.

[4] Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, The Weil Lectures 1971 (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), ix.

common discussion about the nature and future of our society."[5] While exploring Bellah's long career and shifting definitions could be a dissertation in and of itself, suffice it say that by the end of his career Bellah himself ended up realizing how difficult his first articulation of this concept was. He recognized that his various definitions were not racially inclusive (though he doesn't appear to have tackled gender at any point) and that his original definition was too overarching and assumed homogeneity.[6] Though Bellah's various definitions of civil religion, and subsequent terms, don't stand the test of time, he is one of the first scholars to articulate the concept in an American context and therefore is important to this study.

The next prominent scholar to work with the concept of civil religion is Conrad Cherry, in his popular reader *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*. Cherry collected documents from the colonial period to the 20st century that dealt with concepts of civil religion and national destiny. Cherry largely supports Bellah's original iteration of civil religion, repeating much of the article in his introduction. Some key differences are that Cherry lists American civil religion alongside religions like Christianity and Buddhism, seeing it as a distinct religion rather than a "way of life" as Bellah put it, and he emphasizes destiny to a greater extent. Cherry also lays out three key features of his definition of American civil religion: "(1) the sources of its beliefs and symbols, (2) its institutions, (3) the relation between the civil religion and other religions in this country."[7] While the categories point to a greater degree of specificity, Cherry still articulates a civil religion that is a bit too broad, and the implication that it is just like any religion does not fully capture the nuances of this phenomenon in public life. However,

[5] Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1985), 246.
[6] Robert Bellah, "Reading and Misreading Habits of the Heart," *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2007): 189–93.
[7] Conrad Cherry, *God's New Israel Religious Interpretations of American Destiny / Edited by Conrad Cherry.*, Rev. and updated ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 10.

Cherry does recognize civil religion faces a dilemma of whether it can "truly encompass the African American, the poor, the American Indian, and those other citizens who have been excluded from the white, male-dominated, affluent mainstream."[8] He did not do much to address the dilemma, but at least he brought it up as a difficulty when studying civil religion. In addition to pointing out some issues with civil religion as a term, Cherry's emphasis on destiny provided an important analysis on how the mythology of American civil religion influenced many people's understandings of America's destiny and future.

Catharine Albanese contributed to the scholarly discussion with her 1976 work *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution*. She was one of the first scholars to take this somewhat nebulous phenomenon and apply it to a distinct moment in time. This would seem to allow her to avoid some of the pitfalls of previous scholarship because she could focus on a specific moment and specific people, rather than making sweeping judgements about the whole of American society or history. However, she too falls victim to the problem of definition. Albanese does not provide a succinct definition of American civil religion but rather focuses on the popular consciousness through which we search for civil religion. She states "popular consciousness means here a dominate mainstream which controls the public language, becomes internalized in structures of consciousness, and celebrates its awareness in collective rituals. Its myth is anonymous and largely unconscious-invented by no one in particular and speaking with the voice of its own intrinsic authority."[9] This somewhat convoluted definition reflects one of the main issues with this work. Albanese makes too many assumptions, using somewhat dubious psychohistorical methods, about what the true intentions were behind the actions of the founding fathers and other leaders. The "popular consciousness" almost seems to have more agency than

[8] Ibid, 18.
[9] Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers*, 15.

the actual historical actors. Some chapters are more successful than others. For example the chapter on the glorification of Washington is much more effective than her discussion in chapter two of the Liberty Tree. While Albanese's methodology is not one to emulate, her drive to apply civil religion to a specific time and people is a step in the right direction.

While civil religion never disappears entirely, there is a largely a break in the historiography around this term in the 1990s and early 2000s. The term was too complicated and despite several attempts, there hadn't been an example of how to discuss the phenomenon in an effective way. Instead there was a turn towards how the American political system and culture affected religions. One of the most prominent was Nathan Hatch's *Democratization of American Christianity*, which discussed how the new ideas of American democracy changed the organization and values of Christianity in the United States. But in more recent scholarship there has been a push to revisit this important phenomenon of civil religion/religious nationalism/Christian nationalism, especially as we contend with the consequences of the rise of the religious right and the recent tenure of the 45th president.

Though his work is not exclusively about civil religion, George Rable gives a useful and succinct definition of civil religion in his work *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*. He states that "civil religion in America, developed as a set of beliefs about the relationship between God and the nation that emphasized national virtue, national purpose, and national destiny. A general faith in the work of divine providence in human history grew into a more specific conviction that Americans were chosen by God to carry out his mission in the world."[10] This is a helpful definition in its level of specificity. There are specific categories of virtue, purpose, and destiny but it remains open enough to account for

[10] George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 1st ed., The Littlefield History of the Civil War Era (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 3.

multiplicity within civil religion, specifically in the words "set of beliefs." It is not one structured belief system, but rather a set of beliefs that can vary, but have a common purpose. Not only does Rable capture the important connection between God and the nation, but virtue, purpose, and destiny serve as organizing categories for different manifestations of religious nation building. Virtue captures the sacred-ness of morality and right-living. Purpose relates to the divine sanction, and drive, to accomplish certain goals. Destiny looks towards the future and the legacy of the nation, often dictated by or at least inspired by God. Both ordinary citizens and religious and political leaders make the connection between God and America in order to further specific goals. Although these goals vary by person and by time period, they are backed with a spiritual authority. This definition gives useful signposts to look for, and it works towards more specificity, but Rable didn't explore all the complexities that come with civil religion as a term.

In 2014, Peter Gardella took the term civil religion and reformulated it in a much more nuanced and specific way in his work *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred.* His format of microchapters on a variety of specific instances of civil religion, which range from The Declaration of Independence to Disneyland, allows him to discuss the multiplicity of the phenomenon. Though there are some notable omissions, such as Harriet Tubman and the Declaration of Sentiments, Gardella's work is much more understanding of the diversity within civil religion than those that came before it. His definition of civil religion remains a bit vague and focuses on the values that are derived from these various monuments, texts, people, and objects. Gardella argues that those values are "personal freedom (often called liberty), political democracy, world peace, and cultural (including religious, racial, ethic, and gender) tolerance."[11] Interestingly Gardella specifically states that he doesn't believe that violence is a part of

[11] Peter Gardella, American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

American civil religion, which makes him a bit more optimistic than other scholars. Due to this optimism, I don't believe he fully contends with the violence and power structures at play within civil religion. But those topics notwithstanding, Gardella presents a strong reformulation of civil religion that works to include a greater swath of the American population while still finding historically believable common ground in the four values he laid out. Gardella is also the first scholar in this historiography to discuss women and gender. It is not a central theme by any means, but it is not entirely absent from his analysis.

Then in 2019, Philip Gorski gave us one of the first in-depth discussions of different terminologies, including civil religion, religious nationalism, and radical secularism. In *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* Gorski certainly has a favorite term (civil religion) but he discusses how the three terms interact. He states that "American religious nationalism [is] a toxic blend of apocalyptic religion and imperial zeal that envisions the United States as a righteous nation charged with divine commission to rid the world of evil and usher in the Second Coming," and it is "not worthy of our allegiance."[12] Despite the emotionally charged language, Gorski does provide an interesting addition to these definitions, that of the duty of the nation. This idea is that the nation is, or should be, governed by the rules of Christianity and should act accordingly. Whereas definitions of civil religion have focused on a religious element to American life, one that is nebulous and often unintentional, Gorski recognizes that there is something different in the assumption that America should be Christian. He also recognizes the power that is at play in this, and that is what he finds so distasteful about nationalism.

[12] Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton,: Princeton University Press, 2017), pg 3.

Therefore Gorski decides to stick with the term civil religion, but that seems largely due to his value judgements about what is wrong with religious nationalism and radical secularism. He articulates civil religion as a middle ground between these two problematic ideas. Gorski states "religious nationalists advocate total fusion; radical secularists advocate total separation; civil religionists accept partial overlap."[13] It is a useful distinction, and even though he doesn't like the effects of religious nationalism he still explores it in history and never discounts the reality of it as a phenomenon. In his discussion of terminology however, he does seem to suffer from the same devotion to optimism that Gardella exhibited. This leads to the tendency to sort history into the categories of "good" and "bad." But despite his moral judgements, Gorksi helps to further hone the understanding of religious nationalism and civil religion within this scholarship.

Though he doesn't discussion religious nationalism or civil religion per say, Eddie Glaude's *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in Earth Nineteenth Century Black America* is an important addition to this historiography. Just as this dissertation is an attempt to center gender in the conversation of religion and nation, Glaude's work places race at the center of the conversation. He discusses the ways that the narrative of the Exodus, and the subsequent theology of being God's chosen people, has been at the center of Black nationalism. Glaude also explored the development of nation to mean simply a defining of boundaries for territory or language to "a set of common interest over and against a set of opposing interests."[14] Thus the idea of chosenness developed as a way to distinguish a nation against another. In the case of America, it was defining themselves against Britain. It also became a way to define white

[13] Ibid, 19.
[14] Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 71.

Americans against Black Americans. That is why the idea of chosenness is central to the concept of nationalism; chosenness is how you distinguish yourself as a nation. When that chosenness is derived from God, it then becomes religious nationalism. Glaude is important to the historiography because he points out the ways that nation must be included in any discussion of this kind of phenomenon.

Finally, a term that has not yet been explored is that of Christian nationalism. Especially after the 45th president and the attack on the U.S. Capitol, this term has come to have a very specific connotation. Andrew Whitehead, Samuel Perry, and Joseph Baker analyzed why people voted for Trump and came to the conclusion that it was largely a form of Christian nationalism. They argued that it most often involves "the exclusion of other religious faiths or cultures…and is often linked with racialist sentiments, equating cultural purity with racial or ethnic exclusion."[15] Additionally, Daniel Miller in his article "American Christian Nationalism and the Meaning of 'Religion'" argues that "Christian nationalism takes shape around a very narrow, idealized prototype of the 'real' or 'authentic' American as someone who is White, cisgender, heterosexual, Protestant, English-speaking…" and the list goes on and on.[16] In essence, in the current political climate, Christian nationalism has become the term which defines the nativist, racist, vaguely-Christian, political philosophy which seeks to keep a certain type of American in power.

Based on the multiplicity, difficulties, and pitfalls, of the definitions of civil religion, religious nationalism, and Christian nationalism, this dissertation will use the term Protestant

[15] Andrew L. Whitehead, Samuel L. Perry, and Joseph O. Baker, "Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 147–71.
[16] Daniel D. Miller, "American Christian Nationalism and the Meaning of 'Religion,'" *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 34, no. 1–2 (November 18, 2021): 64–85.

nationhood. There are several reasons for this. The first is that civil religion as a term has a history of being too vague and making too many assumptions, and there are simply too many different definitions and conceptions of the term to try to find common ground. Additionally, in recently historiography civil religion has also gained a reputation of being more palatable, or a middle ground between extremisms. I wish to avoid moralistic judgements of the women in this dissertation and using the term civil religion might seem to make to their actions more acceptable to modern readers.. However it is important to note that Protestant nationhood and civil religion share an overlapping historiography, and thus they do share some common elements, such the emphasis on the American Revolution, the chosen people narrative, and the concern with national destiny.

I also eschew Christian nationalism and religious nationalism because they come with their own assumptions, especially after the 2016 election and the events of January 6. Religious scholars have come to use these terms to imply the distinctly modern racist nationalism that supports white, Christian (even if in name only), heteropatriarchy which has come to national attention recently. So not only is the term nationalism inaccurate given its current usage, but it involves another moralistic judgement and a layer of assumptions. Additionally, nationalism refers more to the study of the relationship between nation and God, whereas I am studying the relationship between women and nation, which is influenced by their own relationship to God. These women were simply people trying their best to live out their principles. They were not saints looking for a palatable middle path, nor were they violent, hate-filled insurrectionists that would storm the capitol building. They believed that Christianity was the best way to create the nation that they wanted, but the specific means and outcome varied among all of them. They all

used language and principles derived from their religious traditions Protestant Christianity to express beliefs about the purpose of the nation and their places in it.

What is Protestant Nationhood?

Overall Protestant nationhood is a term which captures my overall goal because it speaks to the way these women wanted to create a Protestant nation. They believed that Protestant Christianity pointed the way to an ideal future for the nation. In other words, they believed that the state should be governed by the dictates of Protestant Christianity (as interpreted by the author). In combining religious and political language, these women worked to create their own version of a Protestant nation, hence Protestant nationhood. But it was more complicated than that. Since this rhetoric involved both religion and nation, it involved a sphere in which women were excluded and sphere in which they were included. These women did not have political rights within the United States, and so they had no political justification to enter this conversation of nation building. However, all of the women in this dissertation argued that their Christian duty compelled them to discuss the nation and participate in creating a Protestant nation. Overall, I ague that these women believed that they needed to play a role in American politics not based on their citizenship (or lack thereof) but based on their Protestant identity.

It is also important to define the term nation. While each individual woman has their own definition of nation, what I mean by nation is the United States as a political and symbolic entity. This includes the leaders and states which carry out the laws and vision of the country. Women dealt with the realities of laws which affected them, but they also dealt with the symbolic, and often prophetic, meaning of the United States. While the societal political reality will play a part in my dissertation, it is the symbolic aspect of the United States which will be the prime focus.

Women who were citizens pondered what it meant to be a citizen and how best contribute to the nation. They tackled questions of duty and legacy. They also glorified the nation in ways similar to the way they glorified their religion. But, there are many women in my dissertation who are not included in the political definition of nation; enslaved women were not citizens and native women belonged to sovereign nations. These women still dealt with and were impacted by the United States, and that is what I am writing about. Even for the women who referred to different, or multiple, nations (such as the Cherokee Nation, the Confederacy, or Black Nationalism) the relationship to America was paramount to their understanding of Nation. Both groups of women, both inside and outside the political category of citizen, had beliefs about how the nation should be and what it should become.

My understanding of Protestant nationhood is heavily influenced by Marcela Cristi's work *From Civil to Political Religion*.[17] Though she discusses civil religion rather than Protestant nationhood her categories are useful in understanding how women's participation in the growth of the nation was different from men's, in a broad sense, and helps us understand the power structures at play. Cristi's categories are ideological and cultural civil religion. She parses out the difference between an inward conviction by members of a group (cultural) and political leaders' intentional use of religious symbols to control a population (ideological).

Cristi's label of ideological civil religion, influenced by Rousseau, is the language, actions, and narratives constructed by people in power to control a population. Now to say "control a population" sounds inherently negative, but I do not mean it as such. Governments exist to provide rules and order for populations of people. The positive or negative impact of varying governments or powerful individuals can vary wildly, but they use religion and religious

[17] Marcela Cristi, *From Civil to Political Religion: The Intersection of Culture, Religion, and Politics* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001).

symbolism to compel submission to the order they provide. This is much more obvious in authoritarian states which use direct propaganda to explicitly control citizens' opinions. But I argue that it happens in the U.S. as well, albeit in less direct ways. This is where I differ from Cristi slightly; she heavily emphasizes the authoritarian and overt nature of ideological civil religion. Whereas I believe that this phenomenon is not evident only in authoritarian regimes. In other words, ideological civil religion is not always intentionally constructed to manipulate the populace. This is largely where we can see religious nationalism and civil religion employed by men. People in power have used specific symbols and narratives to control a population; often hinging on the providential destiny or Godly chosenness of the United States.

However, this says nothing about the adverse effects of ideological civil religion on affected populations. For example, in the U.S. one of the most obvious forms of this was Western expansion. The concept of Manifest Destiny was used by many presidents, most notably Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, to justify the stealing of Native lands. In these cases, the leadership of the country used religious language to justify their actions, and that language shaped the citizen's beliefs and actions.[18] Following the narrative created by men in power, white citizens espoused the belief of divine right to land ownership. Thus the nation continued to build into the west by destroying or severely harming Native communities because they believed they had a religious right to do so. In this instance ideological civil religion was not constructed by people in power in an authoritarian way, to intentionally control the populace, but it had

[18] For more information see: Robert Walter Johannsen, Sam W. Haynes, and Christopher Morris, *Manifest Destiny and Empire: American Antebellum Expansionism*, The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures 31 (College Station, Tex: Texas A&M University Press, 1997); Robert J. Miller, Native America, Discovered and Conquered: Thomas Jefferson, Lewis & Clark, and Manifest Destiny, Native America (Westport, Conn: Praeger Publishers, 2006); and William R. Nester, The Age of Jackson and the Art of American Power, 1815-1848 / William Nester., First edition. (Washington, District of Columbia: Potomac Books, 2013).

devastating effects regardless. To engage in this type of ideological civil religion requires a high degree of social and political power, which not many women had.

Whereas Protestant nationhood is influenced by Cristi's category of cultural civil religion. This is the consensus of a group of people in digesting and interpreting the messages given to them by the government. This is often labeled patriotism; but patriotism is a broad term, carrying multiple messages and meanings. But what distinguishes patriotism from Protestant nationhood? It is the connection to some sort of higher power. This can take many forms, some of which have been examined by others, including the portrayal of Washington as a god, the Chosen People narrative, and the focus on a collective national future.[19] In whatever form it takes, the important part is that my definition of Protestant nationhood comes from the people, not the leadership. So by merely being women all of the figures in this dissertation fall under this category. But some women had a greater degree of social power than others when it came to their social status, location, or their race. I will explore how these women interpreted common themes and even talked back to people in power, trying to communicate their vision for the ideal future of America. It is also important to keep in mind that these manifestations of Protestant nationhood are certainly not all praise, oftentimes it comes in the form of the jeremiad or even a rejection of America. That is the beauty of this kind of bottom-up approach, it can take a dizzying number of styles of structures because it comes from so many people.

If done correctly, Protestant nationhood can show the diversity of populations in America and the plethora of different interpretations. However Cristi, rightly so, cautions against an

[19] Most of these topics have been explored by all of the authors mentioned in the historiography. But for more specificity, the glorification of Washington is one of the stronger parts of Albanese's analysis in chapter 5 of *Sons of the Fathers* and Gardella discusses it in his chapter on Washington, D.C. Rable, Glaude, Bellah, and Stewart all discuss the narrative of a chosen people at length. Cherry and Gorski both focus on a national future and destiny, as well as the progression of this idea through history.

approach that is “too” cultural, as in an approach that assumes an expansive homogeneity. Both Cristi and Charles Reagan Wilson, in his book *Baptized in Blood*, critique Bellah for engaging with civil religion in this manner. Though these critiques are of Bellah and civil religion, they still inform this dissertation. Both authors speak to the correct ways to explore the relationship between nation and people, and thus are important to this work.

Firstly, Cristi’s critique of Bellah was that he assumed a homogeneous society. This study will take Cristi’s critique to heart and never assume homogeneity within the group of women, or within different subgroups of women. For example, I intentionally include many women of color, because I believe engaging with multiple perspectives is important to see a fuller picture. But, I do not assume that the women included in this project speak for all women of color. This is especially true when we take into consideration the importance of literacy to this project. This dissertation is based on language and the meaning behind specific words or phrases. Accordingly, I am focused on women who were able to read and write. As most women of color, especially women who were enslaved, could not read or write, the sample size I have used is skewed towards elite white women. This means that the Black and Brown women I discuss in this dissertation come from a specific subgroup of women of color and thus can only speak to a certain perspective. This had led me to focus only on six individual women, rather than trying to make claims about large groups. Therefore, I argue only for what these specific women are saying about their own conceptions of religious nationalism and avoid the pitfalls of assumption and generalization.

Where Cristi’s critique of Bellah guides my selection of sources, Wilson’s critique guides the time periods that I study. Wilson stated that “recent historical studies have cast doubt on Bellah's assumption of the continuing existence of the American public faith in permanent

organizations. Scholars increasingly believe the term 'civil religion' should be used to denote episodes of religious nationalism."[20] Wilson argued that civil religion is not a continual and steady through-line in the historical narrative of this country, but rather that it shows up in specific episodes of American history.

Taking this critique to account, I chose three moments in history which other scholars have studied as periods of religious nationalism. While religious nationalism is not the term I am using to denote what these women were creating, it does refer to moments in American history when the entire nation was discussing the relationship between religion and nation. Though what these women were doing was unique, it was still influenced by the time period they lived in and the rhetoric around them. A moment can be defined as particular, sustained ways of thinking and speaking about the nation with a religious frame, binding God to the way things are/or should be in a time and place. The moments are as follows: the Revolutionary War, the Early National and Antebellum Period, and the Civil War. Wars, including both the Revolution and Civil War, are hotbeds for religious nationalism for a variety of reasons: people coming together to fight a common enemy, the government inspiring and encouraging men to fight in combat, demoralization among the people because of death and the need to bring them back up again, the list goes on and on. The Early National and Antebellum periods were times of regrowth after the Revolutionary War in which citizens tried to find where they fit within the new American identity, which involved conversations about the true purpose and future of the country. From the Northern side, the Civil War involved a refashioning, and glorification, of Revolutionary language around national purpose and unity. The Civil War, from the Confederate side, saw many iterations of racially based religious language from slaveholders, in which they tried to use

[20] Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 14.

religion to keep hold of planter power. So, these moments all constitute significant moments of religious nationalism on their own and this project will probe and explore how women participate in constructing, speaking to, and challenging these moments in history by creating Protestant nationhood.

Overall, this project is about expanding the scholarly conversation around religion and nation by uncovering a multiplicity of female narratives. I hope to show that through their construction of Protestant nationhood, these women contributed to many of the aspects of religious nationalism or civil religion that scholars talk about today. Women helped to shape the relationship between nation and God in the United States. Women used Protestant nationhood to show when they thought the country was going the right direction and they used it to challenge the country on things they believed were wrong. This might not always diverge completely from the way that men participated in these conversations; my goal is not to articulate a completely separate male and female iteration of this topic, but to show how women's voices have been ignored in the historiography of this important concept.

This is a project of uncovering. While electoral politics was closed off to women, religion was seen as their domain in many respects. The nature of Protestant nationhood allowed women the use the religious authority they wielded in their households or families to comment on the political sphere that was outside of their grasp. Religion was a tool that women wielded with talent and dexterity to accomplish their various aims. Women's creation of Protestant nationhood practically begs to be studied and I am eager to embark on this work.

The Central Question of Gender

This work will delve into a previously unexplored facet of the history of Protestant nationhood: its gendered nature. As it has been discussed in the historiography, the connection between religion and nation is largely a male-centered concept. To an extent that is understandable, Robert Bellah's original definition of American civil religion is based on presidential speeches and words of the founding fathers. Such an approach looks at the way the government, and powerful men, influenced the country's beliefs. But using such an approach doesn't properly capture all the voices that contributed to the formation of civil religion. The nation was constructed by more than the voices from the top of our society. It is just as important to analyze the voices that echoed, elaborated on, or challenged those in power.

More specifically, I focus on the intersections of Protestant nationhood and women's societal roles. How did women's various roles, both those forced upon them and those joyfully adopted, intersect with their conceptions of the nation? Often, men's societal roles were affirmed by the systems of power which men glorified. When white men glorified the founding documents, they glorified documents which reified their own power. Women's construction of nationhood is often different because the government, documents, and men of power did not support women's right to power and often, especially with women of color, those systems actively took away women's power. So, an exploration of women's use of nation building must account for how women reconciled their own womanhood and raced identity with their rhetoric.

Additionally, by studying women as both gendered minorities and as racialized minorities I will probe how Protestant nationhood operates on an axis of power. By that I mean that someone's social location, and thus the power they wield societally, can impact the way their rhetoric is received. This does not mean that only those in power construct the nation, just the

opposite in fact. What this means is that the historiography has mostly focused on the construction by those with a high degree of power in society, such as presidents.

But throughout American history women have contributed to the national rhetoric of religiosity. Harkening back to Rable's definition, we can find examples of virtue, purpose, and destiny in women's practice of Protestant nationhood. In terms of virtue, Protestants often considered women to be more inherently virtuous than men. These women took that mantle and used it to claim a place in creating Protestant nationhood. Clarissa, the anonymous author of "Vision of the Paradise of Female Patriotism," published in 1779, spoke about how women's place in a heaven was based both on patriotism and virtue.[21] Rable's second point, purpose, is clearly evident though Phillis Wheatley. In her poem "To His Excellency General Washington," she reminded Washington that if they were to be a Christian nation, that necessitated the freedom and inclusion of Black people. An enslaved woman used Protestant nationhood to speak to one of the most powerful men in the budding nation and remind him of what his purpose should be. The concept of republican motherhood aligns strongly with virtue, but it also relates well to Rable's third point, destiny. Republican motherhood is concerned with women's place in the future of the nation and is most clearly seen in the antebellum period. For some white women, republican motherhood was the responsibility to raise good American men to create a better nation and a more virtuous citizenry. However, Black women in this time, many who were outside of the category of citizen largely due to their enslavement, took this concept and used it for racial uplift. They saw themselves as mothers to their whole race, thus heightening their

[21] Clarissa, "Vision of the Paradise of Female Patriotism," *The United States Magazine* (Philadelphia; 1779) 122.

importance and using nationalistic religious language to create about a brighter future for Black Americans.[22]

There are many other examples that will be explored in this dissertation. Many women glorified the nation. These women contributed to the creation of Protestant nationhood, and some intentionally created a place for women's voices in this rhetoric. The flip side of this is that many women, especially those outside the category of citizen, pushed the nation to develop in a different direction, or pushed for a different nation altogether. For these women, their religious beliefs did not connect with the laws, morals or overall path of the United States. They still contributed to Protestant nationhood, but it was from a critical perspective rather than supportive one. The ways that women interact with and create a religiously right nation are vast; these are just a few of the expressions of this important and fascinating subject. This work will expand the idea of civil religion by exploring the ways that women participated in Protestant nationhood from American Revolution through the Civil War. The main question I want to explore in my dissertation is as follows: in what ways did women contribute to the creation of Protestant nationhood?

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Phillis Wheatley[23]

[22] Wilma King, *Essence of Liberty: Free Black Women During the Slave Era* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006). For more information see chapter 2, which relates to gender conventions and Black motherhood.

[23] I intentionally use these women's first names rather than last names when referring to them. For almost all of these women, their last name is in reference to either their enslaver or their husband. At the first AAR I attended, in 2016, I attended a session which a scholar whose name I have sadly forgotten discussed how women's last names in early America were most often a symbol of patriarchal control and coverture, even in loving marriages. Therefore, by using their first names I attempt to give some agency to these brilliant women.

The first chapter focuses on Phillis Wheatley, the first African American and second woman to publish poetry in the British colonies. She was born in West Africa in 1753 and brought to America as an enslaved woman and purchased by the Wheatley family, hence her last name. Despite enslaving her, the Wheatleys did furnish her with an education, and she took to it with vigor. Using her education, her newfound Christianity, and her gift of words, Phillis wrote numerous poems and was eventually discovered by the Countess of Huntington, who ensured that her poems were published for all to read.[24] Though Phillis did not live a long life, her words had a pronounced effect on the formation of America and Protestant nationhood.

In terms of time period, Phillis falls squarely into the Revolutionary period. She lived before and during the Revolutionary War, dying only one year after the war was over. Thus her writing captures the rhetoric and sentiment that was in the air at that time. Freedom and equality were prominent themes of the time period and Phillis believed in them wholeheartedly. As a devout Christian, Phillis believed that Christianity mandated the inclusion of African and Black people into the American community. This dissertation will focus on two of her many poems: "On Being Brought from Africa to America" and "To His Excellency General Washington."[25] Published in 1773 and 1775 respectively, these poems capture her views on Protestant nationhood and show the Revolutionary context in which they were written. Overall, Phillis was hopeful about the budding nation and believed that, with Christianity at its center, the country would grow in the right direction and have freedom for all.

[24] For biographical information about Wheatley I use Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); G. J. Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); and Darlene Clark Hine, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 1998).

[25] These poems can be found in Phillis Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, ed. Julian D. Mason (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

Chapter 2: Mercy Otis Warren

Mercy Otis Warren is the second figure who represents the Revolutionary Era in this dissertation. She was born in Massachusetts in 1728 to a wealthy family. She received an education fitting a man at the time because her father had liberal ideas regarding who had the right to be educated. Largely due to her upbringing and her family's close ties with the Boston political community, Mercy grew to love and deeply understand politics from an early age. She started publishing plays and poetry about politics, oftentimes thinly veiled interpretations of real people and events. With the war came a halt to her publishing, as, like most women, she had to survive and take care of her household. But after the war, she started again and became the first woman to write a history of the Revolutionary War in 1805.[26]

That history, called *History of the Rise Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, along with a short 1776 poem called "Simplicity," is the focus of this chapter.[27] As her history was published several years after the war, we get to see how people were starting to interpret the war and its various meanings, with the benefit of hindsight. For Mercy, she idealized the Revolutionary War and participated in sacralizing it. She also saw a decline in public virtue from the time of the Revolution to when she wrote her history. She wanted to remind people of their responsibilities as citizens. And in her mind, one of the best ways to ensure public virtue and continued attention to the common good, was by following the tenets of Protestant Christianity.

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[26] For biographical information I consulted Nancy Rubin Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008) and Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2015);

[27] Mercy Otis Warren, "Simplicity," in Specimens of American Poetry, with Criticial and Biographical Notices: In Three Volumes, ed. Samuel Kettell, vol. 2 (Boston: SGGoodrich and co, 1829). Pgs 31-35; Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution In Two Volumes*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988).

Chapter 3: Catharine Brown

The third chapter marks a change in time period from the Revolutionary to the Early National/Antebellum period. The first woman we will discuss in this period is Catharine Brown. She was a Cherokee woman from the town of Creek Path, which is in present day South Carolina. Born around the turn of the century—the exact date of her birth is unknown—she was raised in a thoroughly Cherokee home, but also spent a considerable amount of time with some family friends whose homes were biracial. Through these friends Catharine eventually attended Brainard Missionary School. She was not forced to go; in fact it was considered by many Cherokee to be beneficial to attend a white school. It would allow young Cherokees to understand white people and eventually become cultural brokers, which is exactly what Catharine became. While attending the school, Catharine converted to Christianity and became quite devout.[28] Through her deep understanding of Christianity and white culture, Catharine became a leader who desperately wanted to help her people avoid physical and spiritual destruction. So she began her quest to convert her tribe to Christianity, for the sake of their own survival.

Unlike the other chapters in this dissertation, this chapter does not focus on one or two specific pieces of writing. Rather it looks at the collection of her letters and her diary to form a full picture of her beliefs.[29] It is reflective of the Early National period and the American drive to

[28] Biographical information found in Theresa Strouth Gaul, ed., "Editor's Introduction," in *Cherokee Sister: The Collected Writings of Catharine Brown, 1818-1823, Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Joel W. Martin, "Visions of Revitalization in the Eastern Woodlands," in *Reassessing Revitalization Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific Islands*, ed. Michael E Harkin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); and Theda Perdue, "Catharine Brown, Cherokee Convert to Christianity," in *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives, Viewpoints on American Culture* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001),

[29] Catharine Brown, *Cherokee Sister: The Collected Writings of Catharine Brown, 1818-1823*, ed. Theresa Strouth Gaul (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

expand, but Catharine offers the perspective of someone who is a victim of that expansion rather than the instigator of it. We see someone from a different nation looking in and trying to find a place for her people in. Catharine predicted catastrophe if her people couldn't find a way to fit. So her attempt to create Protestant nationhood is for the sake of survival; without Christianity she didn't think her people would make it.

Chapter 4: Maria Stewart

Maria Stewart was a free Black woman who was born in Connecticut in 1803. Heavily influenced by her mentor David Walker, Maria was a staunch abolitionist and proponent of Black nationalism. Sadly when both Walker and her own husband died in quick succession, she found solace in the African Baptist Church. She had always been a religious person, but her grief gave religion a deeper meaning for her and it became the backbone of her fight for freedom.[30] As she grappled with both her religion and her hopes for her people, she concluded that America could not offer Black people the future they deserved. Thus Maria critiqued America outright and she used Protestant nationhood to do so. Through covenantal theology, she believed that by enslaving people white Americans had broken their covenant with God and were damned. But Black people still had hope and by behaving in a good Christian way, they could hope for a Black future apart from America.

[30] Biographical information: Marilyn Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches,* Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Valerie C. Cooper, *Word, Like Fire: Maria Stewart, the Bible, and the Rights of African Americans,* Carter G. Woodson Institute Series (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

Most of this theology is documented in the primary text for this chapter, *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality*, which was first published in 1831.[31] This launched a career as a pamphleteer and lecturer, leading her to become the first woman to preach/lecture to a mixed-gender audience. As this piece straddles both the Early National and Antebellum periods, it is a perfect reflection of how, with a little time, people could determine whether or not ideals the Revolution were being carried out. Maria's answer was a definitive no. But she still participated in a kind of religious nation building, just for a different nation. With America lost, it was up to Black people to carry the mantle of God's chosen people, and with a strict adherence to Christianity they could achieve racial uplift and maybe even their own nation.

Chapter 5: Angelina Grimke

Angelina Grimke is another figure who straddles different time periods. She was born in 1805 in South Carolina to a wealthy, slave-owning family, but her own beliefs quickly separated from those her of family. After a childhood of feeling like the odd ones out, Angelina and her sister Sarah left the South for Philadelphia and found community with the Quakers. Through their religious and physical journeys, they both became abolitionists and women's rights activists.[32] After being deeply affected by a piece in Garrison's *The Liberator*, Angelina wrote back commenting on the piece and it was published.[33] This letter launched Angelina into a speaking and writing career centered on abolitionism and women's rights.

[31] Maria Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality: The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build (1831)," Oxford African American Studies Center. 30 Sept. 2009 [originally published 1831].
[32] Biographical information: Carol Berkin, *Civil War Wives: The Lives and Times of Angelina Grimké Weld, Varina Howell Davis, and Julia Dent Grant*, Kindle Edition (New York: Alfred AKnopf, 2009); Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Stephen H. Browne, *Angelina Grimké: Rhetoric, Identity, and the Radical Imagination* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999).
[33] Angelina Emily Grimké, "Slavery and the Boston Riot," The Liberator, 1835, Library of Congress.

The piece that really placed Angelina into the forefront of the movement was *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South,* a deeply biblical work was published in 1836.[34] Angelina felt it was her duty as a Christian and as an American to help Southern women see the evils of slavery. Although the pamphlet didn't reach its intended audience, primarily because it was banned in the South, the piece was immensely popular in the North. *Appeal* is rife with Protestant nationhood, as Angelina used Christianity to guide Southern women into making political change. She predicted the loss of God's favor, and whatever horrors that entailed, if Southern Christian women didn't do their duty and work towards emancipation. Though the piece is written in the Antebellum period, it also serves as a foray into the Civil War period. Angelina spoke to the issues that prompted the Civil War and showed the stark North/South divide. True Christianity, one that embraced freedom and love, was the only way to prevent calamity. But, sadly no one listened to her and she was proven right.

Chapter 6: Lucy Virginia French

The final chapter marks a full turn towards the Civil War with Lucy Virginia French. Born in 1825 in Virginia, Lucy was a poet, novelist, and staunch supporter of the Confederate cause. After moving to Memphis with her sister to become a teacher, she started publishing some of her poetry. It was because of her poetry that she met her husband and moved to McMinnville Tennessee, where she spent the rest of her adult life. Though it was uncommon for Southern women, Lucy continued her literary career even after starting a family. In her work she shows her support of the Confederate cause and her belief that God favored the South.[35] Though she

[34] Angelina Emily Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South, [3rd ed.].* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836).

[35] Biographical Information: Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Tamara Horn, "French, Lucy Virginia Smith (1825-1881), Writer and

would see how wrong that was during her lifetime, her hopes were not dashed. Lucy, in her last published novel, was one of the first voices to start the Lost Cause mythology. Though her cause were horrific, and some of her writings are chilling, she showed the power of religious nationalism. Even after being beaten, Lucy didn't question that God had a glorious plan for the South.

This dissertation will focus mostly on her private diary, which she wrote during the years of the Civil War. But it will also discuss her novel, *Kernwood; or After Many Days*, published in 1867 and the poem *Sullied Name*, published in 1856.[36] Spanning many years, these sources show how Lucy's thoughts changed and developed over time. But there is always the through line of support for the Confederacy. Her diary showed her initial optimism and steadfast hope in God; there was no doubt in her mind that they would win. She does not show the deep theological mind that some of the other authors do. Her faith was simple but deep; God would prevail for the South. When that didn't happen, she did show a brief time of questioning, but with her novel she came out strong with Lost Cause theology, showing the ways that women played a part in this particular strain of Protestant nationhood.

Editor," *American National Biography Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Thelma Shinn J, "French, Lucy (Virginia) Smith," in *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Taryn Benbow-Pfalzgraf, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Detroit, MI: St. James Press, 2000).

[36] L. Virginia French, *Kernwood, or, After Many Days: A Historical Romance Founded on the Events of the Late War, from the Manuscript of a Confederate Spy* / by l'inconnue. (Louisville: The Author, 1867); Lucy Virginia French, "Lucy Virginia French Diary" (Tennessee Virtual Archive, 1881 1825), https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll15/search/searchterm/Diaries/field/media/mode/exact/conn/and.

Chapter 1: Phillis Wheatley

Born in 1753 in West Africa, Phillis Wheatley's birth name has been lost to time. Known by the name given by those who enslaved her, she was forcibly brought to the U.S. when she was kidnapped into slavery at the age of seven or eight. The ship upon which she survived the Middle Passage was called *The Phillis*. So John Wheatley, the man who purchased her, named her after that vessel. As was the custom for enslaved people, Phillis was also given the last name of the family who enslaved her. Forced away from a homeland she had just started to know and stripped of the name which connected her to her family, Phillis was all too familiar with the cultural trauma of slavery from an early age.

When she arrived in Boston in July of 1761, Phillis was put on the auction block and suffered the further indignity of being labelled a "refuse slave," or a slave with very little monetary value due to her frailty and young age.[37] But John Wheatley wanted a servant for his wife Susanna, and Phillis was most likely a bargain. The Wheatleys are often presented as kind or progressive enslavers. While it does not appear that they treated Phillis with the unspeakable brutality of other slave masters, they still purchased and owned another human being. What the Wheatleys did do was furnish Phillis with an education. Susanna ensured that Mary Wheatley, John and Susanna's daughter, tutored Phillis, who was about ten years her junior, in Christianity, language, history, and geography.[38] The level of education that Phillis received would have been

[37] Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 11.
[38] Phillis Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, ed. Julian D. Mason (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 25.

somewhat rare even for an upper-class white woman, but for an enslaved woman it was nigh unheard of.

Susanna's goal behind Phillis's robust education was surely based on her desire to convert the young girl to Christianity. The Wheatleys were all members of the Congregationalist New South Church of Boston. John and Susanna were married there, and all their children baptized there. Whether through education, the religious household, or the preponderance of Christianity in Boston, Susanna Wheatley was successful in her proselytizing mission. Phillis was baptized when was 18, the typical age of baptism for Congregationalists. However, she chose to be baptized at Old South church, not her family's congregation at New South. Biographer Vincent Carretta argues that "being baptized at Old South, rather than at New South, the Wheatley family church, may have been one of Phillis Wheatley's earliest acts of independence, though she was still a slave."[39] Perhaps one of the most prominent reasons for Phillis's choice was the fact that Old South was a place known for attracting budding patriots. Even in bondage Phillis showed, through her poetry, an affinity with the plight of her adoptive country, and the values espoused by the patriots. New South, on the other hand, was known for its loyalist congregation, of which the Wheatley's certainly were.[40] This early connection between her church selection and her passion for freedom shows that the two were always intertwined for Phillis, as would later be reflected in her poetry. In addition to her choice of baptismal church, Phillis understood the colonialist implications of her conversion to Christianity, as will be seen later in the discussion of her poem "On Being Brought from African to America." This is not to say her Christianity was false or a simply front maintained for her

[39] Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 35.
[40] Darlene Clark Hine, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*, 1st ed. (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), 25.

survival; her belief is clearly genuine. But she was not blind to the societal workings of Christianity on a global scale, and specifically what it meant for enslaved people.

While her education most likely started as a proselytizing effort, she showed an aptitude for learning which reached genius levels. She was able to read and write in English, and was beginning to learn Latin, within sixteen short months.[41] The Wheatleys recognized Phillis's intelligence and made efforts to support her education, and her budding efforts at writing. Susanna especially recognized the caliber of Phillis's writings, not only in their pure beauty, but in Phillis's clever use of the themes and forms of great poets from her education, most notably Alexander Pope.[42] In 1772 the Wheatleys made an effort to publish her poems in Boston, but they were unsuccessful.[43] So, they moved the publication effort to England. Susanna sent Phillis and her son Nathaniel to London with the intention of securing her a patron. The effort succeeded when Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon agreed to become her patroness. One of the primary reasons behind Huntingdon's patronage again comes back to religion. She was a devout Methodist and quickly became an influential religious leader, developing connections with John and Charles Wesley, as well as another one of her patronees George Whitefield. Similar to other Methodists at this time, Huntingdon became almost obsessed with missionary work. It is due to this missionary zeal that G. J. Barker-Benfield argues that Huntingdon used Phillis to demonstrate Africans' capacity for conversion. However, he also argues that Phillis was aware of this intention and either ignored it or was content with it.[44]

[41] Ibid, 25.
[42] Ibid, 25.
[43] Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 27.
[44] G. J. Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom* (New York: New York University Press, 2018). Barker-Benfield makes this argument throughout chapter 3.

Regardless of the intentions of her patroness, with Huntingdon's help Phillis Wheatley published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* in 1773 in London.

After her work was published, she returned to America armed with many influential admirers. It was largely due to pressure from those English fans that the Wheatleys emancipated Phillis upon her return.[45] After her emancipation she chose to stay with the Wheatleys and they provided her with financial support for the years that John was living, something not unheard of but rare for the time. But that time was short lived as Susanna died in 1776 and John in 1778. When Susanna died, Phillis married grocer John Peters. But with the termination of the Wheatley's financial support upon John's death, the couple struggled throughout their marriage with maintaining their basic needs. In addition to their financial burdens, John and Phillis struggled emotionally with the death of their first two children in infancy. While Phillis continued to write some, "her spirit and her health were affected," and her writings waned in number and quality.[46] Then in 1784, at the young age of 31, Phillis died due to complications from her third pregnancy.

Though Phillis's life was cut short, the impact of her poetry lasted far beyond her death and beyond the Revolutionary period of American history. Two poems in particular, "On Being Brought From Africa to America," and "His Excellency General Washington" showcase her unique point of view regarding how America's political and religious realities should be combined. This chapter argues that Phillis's style of Protestant nationhood was one that whole-heartedly affirmed the sacred mission of America, which was a combination of Christian salvation and God-guaranteed freedom. But it was also a Protestant nationhood that probed the contradictions between that mission and the lived reality of enslaved people. Her Protestant

[45] Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 141.
[46] Hine, *A Shining Thread of Hope*, 26.

nationhood was multifaceted and spoke to both Black and white audiences in different ways, but her ultimate goal was always freedom, a freedom that was holy and innate to all human beings.

"On Being Brought from Africa to America"

"On Being Brought from Africa to America" is one of Phillis's shortest poems, but the length does not preclude a multiplicity of meanings and deep social commentary, largely relating to America's place in Christian colonialism. As with many of Phillis's writings, her sarcasm and wit are clear to those who understand her perspective. But her poems can also be read at face value. Thus her Protestant nationhood here can be interpreted in several ways, depending on which layer the reader is capable of interpreting. The surface level of this poem is one which celebrates Christianity and portrays America as a holy land, whereas the sarcastic elements of the poem cast doubt on the civilizing mission of Christianity. In both readings however Christianity is used to push back against racism. The result is a Protestant nationhood that is still founded upon Christianity, but one that also includes a capacity for critique. As this poem is so short, I will reproduce it in its entirety because each line and word bears scrutiny:

> 'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,
> Taught my benighted soul to understand
> That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
> Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
> "Their colour is a diabolic die."
> Remember, *Christians*, *Negros*, black as Cain,
> May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.
> (emphases in original)[47]

The surface reading of the first few lines is relatively clear; Phillis celebrated the Christianity which brought her to America. In the first line of her poem she made that journey

[47] Phillis Wheatley, "On Being Brought from Africa to America," in Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral. Eighteenth Century Collections Online (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1789), 13–14.

palatable for her white readers. Overall she seemed to celebrate the fact that the forces of Christianity brought her to America and taught her the truth about God and Jesus. However, she wrote that it was "mercy" which brought her, rather than brutish and terrorizing slaveholders. By using a personification of a religious concept, rather than the system of slavery as the medium by which she arrived, Phillis placed the focus on God's overall plan for her. The details of her traumatic middle passage would not endear herself to her white readers, and thus she did not focus on them. In the same vein, Phillis cast Africa as a "Pagan land." Through this rhetorical move, and the italics which highlight it, the reader is forced to think about the unsaid opposite, to think about the land to which Phillis was brought: America. If Africa is pagan, that must make America holy. Using both of these rhetorical moves, Phillis cast herself as a grateful convert who was glad that God's plan brought her to the United States. In this, Barker-Benfield argues that "Wheatley told the countess [of Huntingdon]—and many subsequent evangelical, antislavery writers—what they wanted to hear."[48] That is to say, even antislavery writers did not want to hear about the horrors of the middle passage. They instead wanted to focus on Christianity's salvific message. Most scholars of Phillis Wheatley[49] argue that she was very intentional about presenting this image for her readers. She knew what was palatable and what wasn't. So, in order to keep her readers engaged, Phillis chose to ignore the middle passage altogether.

However, another enslaved person would have read that opening line very differently. Anyone who had experienced the middle passage first-hand would understand that it was no mercy. So how would they have understood this line? Barker-Benfield argues that one of the primary themes in all of Phillis's works, but especially this line, is "giving sense and

[48] Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom*, 57.
[49] Most notably in Sondra O'Neale, "A Slave's Subtle War: Phyllis Wheatly's Use of Biblical Myth and Symbol," *Early American Literature* 21, no. 2 (September 1986): 144–65.

transcendent value to horror."[50] While she left the description of the horror to her Black reader's memories, the poem does help her readers place that experience in a grand whole. Though she did critique Christianity at points, Phillis was still very much a Christian herself. Her faith helped her understand and interpret many of her life experiences. Christianity helped the horrors of slavery have meaning for her. Though this may leave a sour taste in the mouths of modern readers, Barker-Benfield argues that this is a common theme of Phillis's poems and was often helpful to her readers, as evidenced by her numerous commissions for poems on the death of children.[51] Phillis had a talent for taking trauma or loss and finding her way out the other side, often using Christianity to guide her. By including the middle passage, albeit vaguely, in this poem, she encouraged other enslaved people to use Christianity to make sense of that trauma.

Never one to shy away from a little contradiction, Phillis also used this poem to speak to her African readers and remind them of the value of African religions. Her use of the word pagan can be viewed as deeply sarcastic. Many of Phillis's African and enslaved readers daily worked to preserve that the faith traditions of their homeland, as Raboteau explores in his important work *Slave Religion*.[52] Those readers (or listeners in the case of the many illiterate people who still consumed her poetry) who practiced those traditions would understand that Africa was not devoid of religion and spirituality, but simply was not a Christian continent. Additionally the third line of the poem might look like a simple story of protestant conversion, it also has a deeper meaning when viewed with sarcasm. Tom McCulley states that "Shields, O'Neale, and others have pointed out that Wheatley's separation of God and Saviour, given her other subversive uses of language, can only be deliberate…it is hard to overlook the idea that Wheatley is pointing out

[50] Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom*, 57.
[51] Ibid, 58.
[52] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Though the whole book deals with the theme of preserving African traditions, it can mostly notably be seen in the first three chapters.

that she was aware of a god before having one explained to her by white Christians."[53] Phillis acknowledged here that God can exist in many forms, including those forms which are outside of the structures of Christianity. Almost all scholars of Phillis agree that this particular line is an instance of sarcasm, however McCulley stands against Shields and O'Neale in that he argues that this is a rare instance of sarcasm. O'Neale specifically argues that most of Phillis's poems can be read from a sarcastic point of view, especially as it relates to the layered nature of her writing. But regarding this specific instance of sarcasm, and the explicit separation of God and Saviour, Phillis complicated Christian supremacist ideas of superiority and ownership of spirituality. She showed that her Christianity was one that acknowledged other faiths, though it did not celebrate them outright.

Ultimately, the main point of "On Being Brought from Africa to America" was combat anti-Black Christianity with a Christian theology that necessitates the inclusion of Black people. One of the main ways that she did this is through the juxtaposition of light and dark, and a play on prevalent conceptions of the term. In the eighteenth century, the connection between light and goodness and dark and sin was common, especially in evangelical Christianity. In almost every conversation narrative from this time, including Phillis's, the author described their pre-conversion state as one of absolute darkness and their post-converted stated as one of glorious light.[54] The color black became synonymous with ignorance, sin, and even the devil himself. But that trope did not exist in a theological vacuum; slaveholders soon started to use the light/good dark/sin connection to justify slavery. They used the story of Cain in Genesis 4 (in addition to the curse of Ham, but that is not relevant to Phillis's poem) and the "mark of Cain" to justify their

[53] Tom O. McCulley, "Queering Phillis Wheatley," in *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, ed. John C. Shields and Eric D. Lamore (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 191–208.
[54] Douglas L. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2017). This theme is explored in the introduction.

enslavement of human beings. The story goes that after murdering his brother Abel, God cursed Cain with a mark so that no one would kill him, and he would suffer forever. While the story makes no mention of race nor even gives a basic description of the mark, slaveholders used hundreds of years of biblical interpretation to argue that Cain was Black.[55] So, if Cain was Black, and Black was synonymous with evil, then it was morally acceptable, or even imperative, to enslave dark-skinned Africans. Given these intersecting interpretations of Blackness, it might seem as if Phillis engaged in self-hating rhetoric by repeating such ideas. However, in typical Phillis fashion, she cleverly used language to argue for something the exact opposite.

In actuality, Wheatley combined these two ideas to call upon all Christians to enact a truer Christianity, which is one that necessitates the inclusion of Black people. Firstly, she did this by equating the dark to light in conversion narratives to Black people converting to Christianity. That is to say, if anyone can come into the light of God from the darkness of ignorance, then so too can Black people be included in the fold of Christianity. "She moves her images of the darkness and the 'diabolic die' from dark skin (or a literary expression of psychological depression) to a heightened and totally spiritual and evangelical world view whereby anyone who has not heard and received the gospel is in darkness."[56] By placing the ultimate focus on spirituality rather than race, Phillis joined the chorus of 18th century evangelicals who spoke about spiritual equality before God. Her theology was one that simultaneously reified the association between Blackness and sin and one that also asked Christians to transcend such earthy concerns in the face of God's goodness.

[55] David M. Goldenberg and David M. M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 180.
[56] O'Neale, "A Slave's Subtle War," 148

That reification of Blackness as sin has troubled many modern scholars of Phillis; but employing the double lens helps provide an alternative explanation. Carretta makes this argument using the subtleties of emphasis in the last two lines of the poem:

> Wheatley may be subverting conventional equations of blackness with evil and whiteness with good. The imperative "Remember" may not be addressed solely to Christians. Perhaps we should not read the final couplet as "Remember, Christians , [that] Negros , black as Cain , / May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train." It may also be read very differently as "Remember, [that] Christians , Negros , black as Cain , / May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train." In the second reading blackness would still be associated with sin, but it would more clearly be used metaphorically rather than physically.[57]

Carretta's argument hinges on the words "Christians" and "Negros." When it is read as speaking to Christians about Black people, it separates the two categories, which assumes Christians are white and makes Black people the other. But the second reading speaks about Black Christians, using the words "negro" and "black as Cain" as descriptors for the word Christian. Technically both readings still fit with Phillis's argument, in that she calls for Black people's inclusion in the Christian faith. But each reading speaks to her different audiences. The first reading speaks to her white audience, playing on their assumptions of a white Christianity. She, in a polite and poetic way, called them hypocrites for that assumption. But the second reading, which Carretta argues is how we should read the poem, more clearly emphasizes the spiritual darkness of pre-conversion, rather than the darkness of skin tone. As he states, it does still uphold the Black/sin connection to an extent, but it also works to leverage that connection for the sake of a more inclusive Christianity.

After scrutinizing the words of this poem, the question remains of what "On Being Brought from Africa to America" communicates about Phillis's approach to building a Protestant nation. The core message of her poem is about Christianity. In fact, the text of the poem does not

[57] Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley*, 83.

mention America at all. But the title alongside the text of the poem is very telling. For with the title Phillis set up her transition from Africa to America. It is a movement of place, nothing else. And then the poem itself is about Christianity. This necessarily equates America with Christianity. The poem implies that a displacement to America must include a conversion to Christianity. In so doing, Phillis did not challenge Christian supremacy in America, in fact she accepted it. This is especially true given her own conversion to the religion. It is partially due to her strong faith that she saw America as ultimately redemptive. Christianity in America is flawed and hypocritical, according to Wheatley, but it can and should be made better. This poem is a plea from one Christian to another (or many others) to help Christian America live up to its true mission. She wanted to help build up America to be the Protestant nation that she believed it should be and fulfill its purpose. For Phillis the purpose of America is a Christianity that embraces every soul which comes from the darkness to the light, regardless of skin color.

But Phillis's conception of American Christianity was more complicated than that. The poem admits that Christianity is almost a necessary evil, specifically the line that reads, "once I redemption neither sought nor knew." This is Phillis's thinly veiled attempt to discuss the missionary efforts of slaveholders. She admitted that this religion was thrust upon her. For her that didn't minimize Christianity's meaning, but it was honest about how most Black-skinned people were introduced to the religion: without their consent or desire. But this also goes towards Phillis's message, specifically to white Christians. She told her audience that if they persisted in converting Africans to Christianity, and forcing them to come to this country, they also needed to do the work to provide an accepting environment for Black people. Her conflation of Christianity and America also means that this work needs to be done both in the religion and in American society on the whole.

This is one of Phillis's most unique poems in its directness. Certainly, her sarcasm in the early part of the poem offers a different reading to different readers, but the last few lines are relatively direct in terms of how America can fulfill its redemptive purpose by improving the religious landscape for Black people. Phillis's concern with freedom and creating a place for Black Americans runs through all of her poetry, but in some poems that message is obscured by forthright praise of the nation she grew to love. The next poem which I will discuss, "To His Excellency General Washington," is often lifted up as one of the most patriotic poems in early American literature. But the poem does not just communicate that singular message. Phillis Wheatley was able to praise Washington and place herself squarely in the patriot camp, while also using the divine sanction of America's mission of freedom to work to change the mind of a slaveholder.

"To His Excellency General Washington"

Unlike the previous poem, which was one poem of many in her first published volume, Phillis sent "To His Excellency General Washington" directly to the subject of the poem. It was then later published by Washington's secretary, Colonel Joseph Reed, apparently without Phillis's nor Washington's permission.[58] Notwithstanding its eventual publication, the direct communication between Phillis and Washington allows us to interpret her poem with a specific audience in mind, rather than the general audience of "On Being Brought from Africa to America." This poem, perhaps more than any other work in this dissertation is a clear and obvious example of Cristi's category of cultural civil religion. A person who is at the bottom of the power structure, a Black, enslaved (formerly, at the point of publication), woman

[58] Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom*, 158.

communicated directly to one of the most powerful figures in the colonies about her views for the future of the entire American community. She showed Washington just how she interpreted the messages, specifically regarding freedom, which powerful people instilled in the populace at the time.

One of those messages which Wheatley interpreted revolved around the personification of the nation itself in the form of Columbia. There is some disagreement in the scholarship as to whether Phillis was the first to use the name Columbia to describe the nation. But even if another lesser-known poet used the name first, Phillis was certainly the first to create, as Barker-Benfield notes, "a fully developed personification of America as Columbia."[59] This personification has two important ramifications; not only did Columbia serve as a unifying rallying cry for all Americans, but Columbia's gender also communicated the American ideals of femininity. At the beginning of the poem Columbia seems to embody the ideals of beauty and conservative femininity of early America:

> The Goddess comes, she moves divinely fair,
> Olive and laurel binds Her golden hair:
> Wherever shines this native of the skies,
> Unnumber'd charms and recent graces rise.[60]

Columbia, in this stanza, is one who conforms to all the standards of femininity in early America. Kimberly Brown Pellum argues that these standards were pervasive and well known by Americans at this time. "This cultural message emphasizing the importance of femininity, as defined by piety, virginity, submissiveness, domesticity, and whiteness, was transmitted through a number of mediums, including churches, popular magazines, and dolls."[61] Wheatley's portrayal

[59] Barker-Benfield, 154.
[60] Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 164.
[61] Kimberly Brown Pellum, "Beauty Standards," in *The World of Jim Crow America: A Daily Life Encyclopedia*, ed. Steven A. Reich (Denver: Greenwood Press, 2019), 232.

of Columbia fits these standards almost perfectly. Columbia is both fair and has golden hair, thus adhering to standards of beauty which required whiteness.[62] Columbia also brings charms and grace wherever she goes. Charm would not have had the same implications as it does today, when it can often mean flirtatiousness. For the majority of American history charm was connected with wholesomeness, virginity, and the ability to please others.[63] This portrayal of femininity comes back to Biblical standards, and as Pellum noted, was put forth by churches to ensure that women stayed chaste. The culmination of this description is one that highlights a femininity typical of upper-class, conservative, Protestant, white communities.

However, Phillis was not one to stick the surface level of any topic. Later in the poem she ascribed attributes to Columbia which would not be considered feminine. She mentions the French and Indian war in the line: "One century scarce perform'd its destined round,
When Gallic powers Columbia's fury found."[64] But she described the war in such a way that makes Columbia the primary actor, and a primary actor with strong emotions. France provoked Columbia's fury. Fury is at odds with the submissiveness and domesticity of early American femininity. Moreover, in a subsequent line Phillis referenced how freedom itself depends upon if "Columbia's arm prevails." Not only is Columbia again a central actor, but the reference to arm is interpreted by many to mean armies.[65] Certainly no one would deny that America had armies, but to explicitly connect those armies to Columbia makes the armies controlled by a female

[62] Columbia's whiteness is also solidified by her evolution as a figure in national consciousness. Colonial America had been represented as an Indian princess. This racist depiction represented an America that was still being "discovered" by Europeans. It conflated the land with the Indigenous inhabitants and in doing so represented the Western hemisphere as a whole. When the new republic was being formed, Columbia was the refashioned America and clearly represented the whiteness, and even purity, of the new nation. See Thomas J. Schlereth's *Columbia, Columbus, and Columbianism* in the *Journal of American History* Vol. 79, No. 3 for more.
[63] See Pellum and Molly M. Wood, "'Commanding Beauty' and 'Gentle Charm': American Women and Gender in the Early Twentieth-Century Foreign Service," *Diplomatic History* 31, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 505–30.
[64] Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 164.
[65] Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom*, 156.

figure. A war leader would most certainly be outside of the purview of a proper American woman. So Columbia was coded in this poem as a perfect picture of white femininity, but she also engaged in warlike and angry actions.

The effect of Phillis's contradictory Columbia is to show white women that they can, and should, move outside of the sphere of white femininity for the cause of freedom. She created a connection with Columbia, and thus America, and her white women readers. Columbia looks and acts like them. She is "fair" and graceful and charming. This makes her readers feel like a quintessential American. They are Columbia. So first Phillis created this connection, and then she writes about Columbia showing outward fury for the cause of freedom. This legitimates white women moving outside of the sphere of acceptable femininity. Since she recognized the sphere in the first place, Wheatley shows that she understands it and it makes moving outside of it an acceptable act, under the right circumstances. In this case the circumstances are that of essential freedom. Wheatley argues that when the fate of America is at stake, women must act like Columbia and show righteous fury. I also posit that it is due to Phillis's status as a Black woman that she is able to make this argument. Mary Beth Norton in *Liberty's Daughters* argues that most upper-class white women were stuck in domestic thinking. "Eighteenth-century American white women found the fact of their sexual identity inescapable."[66] They were not able to think outside of their prescribed norms. But Phillis's social position as an outsider meant that she was able to see where white women could, and needed, to change in order to guarantee freedom for all. Ultimately, the national cause of freedom transgressed any religious restrictions on gender.

[66] Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800: With a New Preface* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1996), 112.

Not only did Phillis push white women to show fury, but she also made the cause behind that fury a religio-nationalist imperative that all people, including Washington, need to work towards. Freedom can be interpreted many ways. It can mean religious freedom, it can mean basic human rights, it can mean specific political rights. But in the case of this poem, it is a sacred, distinctly American right. When speaking about the cause of Columbia's fury she wrote: "And so may you [face the fury of Columbia], whoever dares disgrace; The land of freedom's heaven-defended race!"[67] Barker-Benfield interprets this line to say: "race is made up of all those identifying themselves with freedom; the word did not yet have the narrow denotation it would, although pseudo-scientific racism was crystallizing in this era."[68] Phillis not only made freedom an aspect of America the country, but of Americans themselves. In doing so, the concept becomes something that is beyond the control of the government but is integral to human beings. She regarded Americans as a race, intentionally using a social term rather than the more political term of citizen. She took this a step further and said than this race of people, and the freedom which unites them, is defended by heaven. This idea is echoed in her letter to Samson Occum where she used a very similar argument: "for in every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom."[69] While her letter to Occum addressed racial inequality more directly than this poem, this idea is the same. Freedom is a God-given principle that is intrinsic to every human. This further crystallizes the argument that freedom is not guaranteed by earthly powers. Phillis used Protestant nationhood to argue that heaven, and by extension God, defends Americans as a people, not necessarily their government. This is how she was able to understand America as ultimately redemptive but still leave room for criticism of

[67] Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 164.
[68] Barker-Benfield, *Phillis Wheatley Chooses Freedom*, 156.
[69] Phillis Wheatley, "Letter to Reverend Samson Occum (1774)," Online Resource from *Learning for Justice* (January 2018).

the governing powers which denied her, and people like her, power and rights. God favors Americans, for their love of freedom, and sends Columbia down to defend them.

Finally, one of the most cited aspects of this poem is the glorification of Washington. While there are small verses of praise peppered throughout the poem, the most potent part comes in the last stanza:

> Proceed, great chief, with virtue on thy side,
> Thy ev'ry action let the Goddess guide.
> A crown, a mansion, and a throne that shine,
> With gold unfading, WASHINGTON! Be thine.[70]

This is one area in which Phillis's exercise of Protestant nationhood overlaps with a very common practice. Catherine Albanese, in her book *Sons of the Fathers,* devotes an entire chapter to the ways in which Americans glorified Washington.[71] However, she uses male-authored sources almost exclusively. So one of the simplest things that this passage shows us is that a religious and political praise of George Washington was not an exclusively male enterprise. In fact, many of Albanese's sources wrote to glorify Washington after the war had been won. With Phillis writing this poem in 1775, she was one of the first to start such a practice, and before Washington had definitively proven his martial prowess. While female Protestant nationhood is unique in many respects, there are also several points of overlap and this one of them. We cannot then assume that modern constructions of civil religion only evolved from male historical figures. Women like Phillis Wheatley contributed to this important aspect of Protestant nationhood and the civil religion that evolved alongside it.

However, as this is Phillis, that praise not one dimensional. As mentioned earlier, she made a distinction between the freedom integral to American people and the American

[70] Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 164.
[71] Catherine L. Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers: The Civil Religion of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976). For more information see chapter 5.

government. The praise of Washington is structured in order to make him pay attention to this disconnect, and to push him towards the political freedom of all. Babacar M'Baye writes about the ways in which Phillis's Pan-African consciousness shows up in her praise of Washington: One of Wheatley's major goals in writing about General Washington may have been to help him see the contradiction of the American patriots' fight to defeat the British at a time when blacks and other groups in America were taken away from their homeland(s)…Wheatley was able to intersperse into her poetry a subtle denunciation of the political leadership that Washington represented without alienating the man behind the general, whom she continued to admire and support personally.[72] As M'Baye states, Phillis had to balance a criticism of the leadership which denied freedom to Black people with a true support for Washington as an individual. She does this expertly in the stanza quoted earlier. Firstly she asked that Washington let the goddess, meaning Columbia, guide his every action. That means, from the other implications of Columbia which came before, that Washington needs to be guided by the belief in an innate freedom. He needs to be guided by righteous anger towards those who take away the freedom of others, which in this case includes himself and the state governments which condone slavery, and theoretically the national government that was to come. Then the last two lines make the crown, mansion, and throne which will eventually belong to Washington, dependent on fighting for the freedom of all.

Conclusion: What is Phillis Wheatley's brand of Protestant nationhood?

Through an analysis of her poetry, we can see that Phillis Wheatley believed in the promises of America. She saw the possibility that this country could achieve. Freedom was more

[72] Babacar M'Baye, "The Pan-African and Puritan Dimensions of Phillis Wheatley's Poems and Letters," in *New Essays on Phillis Wheatley*, ed. John C. Shields and Eric D. Lamore (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2011), 290.

than just a rallying cry for Phillis. As someone who was enslaved, she understood freedom at a much deeper level than most patriots. Freedom was a sacred right that God had given to Americans. It was both Christian and American. But the problem was that the religious and political structure of America took that right away from Black people. Ultimately, it was Phillis's deep religious conviction that prompted and compelled to make these claims in order to create an America that lived up to its ideals of Protestant Christianity.

Phillis utilized the shared belief in American possibility to motivate people to change that structure. She encouraged white Christians to do better to live by the equality guaranteed in the Bible, saying that American Christianity is one that embraces all people. She was proof of that. Her own conversion led to a strong belief in Christianity, but she saw the ways that the power structure of the religion prevented true equality and freedom. Phillis also cleverly pushed George Washington to recognize the hypocrisy of holding his own slaves and fighting for freedom. She argued that the thing which unites all Americans is the holy notion of freedom, and it is upon the upholding of that freedom which his glorious future rests. Phillis also encouraged white women to be more like Columbia, the goddess of America. She recognized the gendered strictures that bound white women to behave in certain ways, but argued that their duty as Americans allowed them to push beyond those boundaries for the good of the country. In this case, the good of country meant the guarantee that freedom would apply to all people. Her religious beliefs were such that God dictated that everyone should be included in the human construct of the church. That religious belief affected her belief in how the new government should be run. Since Protestant Christianity demanded the inclusion of all people, so too should the budding government of the United States. Ergo, Christianity was the best way forward and the state should be governed by the primary principle of Christianity, as Phillis understood it: freedom.

But Phillis's poetry was not meant just for white audiences. Her poetry demonstrated what Du Bois would later call double consciousness.[73] One layer was obvious to white audiences, but a deeper layer spoke to the experiences of Black people. She used sarcasm and key words to signal to her Black readers that she saw them and shared in the pain they experienced as a result of slavery and marginalization. In this way Phillis articulated a Protestant nationhood that served to unite both groups. She did this not by arguing that everyone was the same, but by sending different messages to each group which both ended up at the same place: American freedom. White people needed to work to guarantee it and Black people needed to hold on and believe in the promise of America that was to come.

[73] John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2016 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016).

Chapter 2: Mercy Otis Warren

Mercy Otis Warren was born into a privileged, politically connected Boston family in Barnstable, MA. Born September 14, 1728 to James Otis and Mary Allyne Otis, Mercy was the third of thirteen children, but tragically six died in infancy. James Otis was a local attorney, and despite his lack of formal education on the subject, was highly sought after by the citizens of Barnstable.[74] His affability and general charm stood in direct opposition to his stringent and meticulous wife. Mary Allyne Otis seems to have been a distant parent and was mostly concerned with running a strict, conservative religious household. Her Puritan heritage meant that sin and atonement held center stage in their religious experience. Both of her parents influenced Mercy in different ways. Though her belief in God remained strong, her mother's Calvinism made Mercy swing the other direction and focus more on tolerance and love.[75] Her father's political proclivities and connectedness fanned the flames of Mercy's passion for politics, especially in his liberal ideas about education.

Mercy received an education that was far beyond what most women at the time received, even for white upper-class women. After realizing from an early age how much she enjoyed learning, Mercy begged to join her brothers' education by private tutor, Reverend Jonathan Russell.[76] Remarkably, her father agreed. This decision was one that was counter to the standard beliefs of gender at the time. Women were not educated formally. Some scholars guess that his reason for doing so was his son Joseph's lack of interest in education. Mercy was allowed to fill

[74] Nancy Rubin Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 10.
[75] Ibid, 13.
[76] Rosemarie Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma: Mercy Otis Warren and the American Revolution* (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2015), 12.

the gap left by her brother.[77] While that is certainly possible, it is also possible that the family as a whole simply believed in a greater degree of gender equality than their neighbors. This belief is supported by the attitudes of her brothers and tutor, who never attempted to tell her that her gender precluded her from education. Her education was just a robust, challenging, and fulfilling as any well born white male would have received in Barnstable. Mercy learned from a young age that she was capable and smart, and those qualities were encouraged. Those qualities influenced many of her life choices and Mercy the determined, outspoken, confident woman that she became.

However, this education did not mean that she was excused from learning the proper duties of a woman in the house. Since she was the oldest daughter, and her mother was frequently pregnant, and subsequently depressed when so many of children died, Mercy was essentially her mother's "deputy."[78] She was in charge of many of the household duties of cooking, cleaning, and raising the children. Her mother also taught Mercy some of the typical feminine pastimes, of which she particularly excelled at embroidery. Though the Calvinistic and patriarchal structure of the house did give women a dignified and important role, Mercy still learned early on how a man rules the household and gender roles must be strictly adhere to. The interesting combination of her somewhat liberal education and conservative household made for some inconsistencies in Mercy's later writings, which will be explored in more detail.

When her beloved brother Jemmy went off to Harvard, Mercy kept abreast of all his learning and activities through frequent letters. Her closeness with her brother also brought another opportunity her way. James Warren was a classmate of Jemmy's and the pair grew close after most likely meeting at Jemmy's Harvard graduation. They were married on November 14,

[77] Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 13.
[78] Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 10.

1754.[79] Though some scholars argue, based on both James and Mercy's rationalistic attitudes towards life, that their marriage was similarly based on convenience and shared goals. But their letters show that, even if the relationship did not form because of undying passion, it certainly grew to one of a deep and abiding love. Mercy also found an uncommon man in her husband. While the societal norms of the dictated that women should not engage in politics, or even show intelligence or wit, James supported his wife's writing career and showed adoration for the very thing which was supposed to make her an unsuitable wife: her intellect.

After her marriage, the 1750s and 60s were a family centered time for Mercy. She and James had five sons over the course of nine years. Surely it was an exhausting time for Mercy who was either pregnant or recovering from pregnancy and surrounded by infants, for almost a decade. Despite this, Mercy took her role as a mother very seriously and seemed to be a loving and kind mother, a direct opposite to her own strict Calvinist mother. She still took religion seriously, but the religion she instilled in her children was more of a rationalistic religion rather than the fire and brimstone religion of her own upbringing.[80] While motherhood would always remain an important part of her life, the situation in the world around her would propel Mercy's mind to the political world of men.

Mercy's brother Jemmy was caught up in the stirrings of, if not outright revolutionary sentiment, at least anti-tyrannical sentiment particularly directed at the lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson. During his tenure as lieutenant governor and then governor, Boston endured both the Stamp Act and the Boston Massacre. Jemmy was one of the strongest voices in opposition to British tyranny, of which Hutchinson was the embodiment. Some of Jemmy's writings, among other things, led to mob violence directed at Hutchinson and his

[79] Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 20.
[80] Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 27.

brother in law. In addition to the political upheaval, Jemmy suffered a blow to head which caused terrible mood swings and eventually a descent in insanity. Finally, Mercy had to admit that her brother could no longer be the political voice of the Otis family, a role that she was poised to fill.

The embers of her revolutionary fire stoked by Hutchinson's treachery, and the desire to carry on Jemmy's legacy, Mercy published her first piece of writing *The Adulateur,* in 1772. It was a thinly veiled political satire which cast Hutchinson firmly as the arch villain.[81] This launched Mercy's career as a well-known political writer and satirist. Though her characters and motivations changed along with her changing environment, Mercy always used the written word to express her opinions. During the Revolutionary War, that writing was relegated to private letters to her female friends, most especially Abigail Adams, who all weathered the storm of the war together. After the war, Mercy and her husband became some of the pivotal members of the antifederalist movement, and she used her writings to bemoan the decline in virtue and true republicanism which the federalists brought upon her country. Up till this point Mercy used the mediums of plays and poetry to communicate her ideas to the public. While impactful and well-read, these were softer, more feminine forms of writing. It wasn't until Mercy started working on the more masculine study of history that her masterpiece would come forth.

Mercy Otis Warren became the first woman to publish a history of the American Revolution, which was also one of the first histories of the revolution generally. The three volume, 1200 page work was published in 1805. Though "history [was] not the province of ladies,"[82] as John Adams famously wrote, Mercy wrote a detailed and honest portrayal of her experiences and opinions of the Revolutionary War. Her gender made it unique in that it was

[81] Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 49.
[82] John Adams, "From John Adams to Elbridge Gerry," (Letter, April 17, 1813) *Founders Online*, National Archives.

more of a social history rather than the military history written by most men at the time. This also meant that her honest opinions of certain figures, John Adams most notably, made her book divisive and not very successful. However it remains as not only an important source for women's history, but of American history as whole.

Overall, Mercy Otis Warrens' brand of Protestant nationhood was one which embraced classical republicanism and relied on religion to engender virtue in all people, which was required to maintain a just society and government. Additionally, Mercy's understanding of gender provided several ways for women to participate in the new nation, ways which both conformed to and transgressed prescribed gender roles. Rather than discuss individual works, as I did with Phillis, I have organized this section topically, as Mercy's rhetoric of Protestant nationhood was not as concentrated as Phillis's in her poetry. I will be using various letters, the introduction to her history, and a poem entitled "Simplicity."

Mercy, Classical Republicanism, and Virtue

Before we delve into Mercy's dependence on classical republicanism, we must first understand the concept in relation to American Revolutionary politics. Gordon Wood, in his important work *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776– 1787*, clearly laid out republicanism as a political philosophy: "The sacrifice of individual interests to the greater good of the whole formed the essence of republicanism and comprehended for Americans the idealistic goal of their Revolution."[83] Put another way, the common good was most important goal for both government and citizens. However the only way that common good can work as a

[83] Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 53.

concept is if there is a unified and homogenous citizenry. Wood explains that "since everyone in the community was linked organically to everyone else, what was good for the whole community was ultimately good for all the parts."[84] The individual was important insomuch as they supported the good of their neighbor, and thus their whole society. The only way that this system could function if the people were inherently good and self-sacrificing. So at the heart of classical republicanism lies a virtuous populace.

This virtuosity was Mercy's primary concern in her writings. For without virtue the nation could fall into utter darkness and depravity. She most clearly communicates these ideas in her 1779 poem "Simplicity." Mercy's definition of virtue is not an overly complicated one. Virtue embraces love, peace, piety, and simplicity. It is the absence of luxury, wealth, and pride. For with luxury comes greed and with greed comes such dissatisfaction that one is completely controlled by their passions. She used Rome as the example in this jeremiad, for Rome developed "all the ills that sink a virtuous state." When Rome became corrupt with "silken commerce," "simple manners lost" and even "paint and sculpture, elegance and song," that was when "her virtue sicken'd, and her glory di'd."[85] What this ultimate lack of virtue came down to was selfishness. Silken commerce occurred when men tried to make more money for themselves rather than providing goods for the community. Grandiosity of manners indicated that one thought too highly of themselves. Mercy's threshold for virtuosity was so high that even the arts teetered on the side of too luxurious, and therefore not necessary for the common good. This comes down to the core of virtue in classical republicanism; it is public virtue. As Gordon Wood states public virtue was "the willingness of the individual to sacrifice his private interests for the

[84] Ibid, 58.
[85] Mercy Otis Warren, "Simplicity," in *Specimens of American Poetry, with Critical and Biographical Notices: In Three Volumes*, ed. Samuel Kettell, vol. 2 (Boston: SGGoodrich and co, 1829), 31-35. However it was originally written in Oct 1776 according to Zagarri's biography.

good of the community."[86] Mercy squarely fit herself within the party line, both in this poem and in her entire life. Anything that could be seen as highlighting one's personal desires and not properly working towards the good of the people and the state was the opposite of virtue and should be exorcised. This connection to Rome not only gives a clear example of what Mercy meant by virtuous, but also what she believed would happen should virtuosity no longer be the order of the day. Rome fell, and so would America if people did not heed Mercy's warning. America's future was at stake in the way the citizens lived out their duty as virtuous people, and in general Mercy's prognostication was not positive. As she wrote in a letter for her husband, if she could "see a little more virtue and religion among individuals, I should have more hopes of the state."[87]

However Mercy's concern was so great that she used not one but two examples of fall to make her point. Rome was the first example that Mercy used in her jeremiad, but she also used the example of humankind's fall from Eden. Just as the fall of Rome was due to a lack of virtue, so too was the fall from paradise. Mercy wrote:

> Since God forbad the mother of mankind
> To taste the fruit to which she most inclin'd;
> Her taste so delicate, refin'd and nice,
> That the exuberance ev'n of Paradie,
> The grassy banks beside the blue cascade,
> The winding stream to blue cascade
> ….
> The shady dome, the rosy vaulted bower,
> And nature deck'd with ever fruit and flower,
> Were insufficient, rude, and incomplete,
> For taste ran wanton, and the fair must eat.[88]

[86] Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic,* 68.
[87] Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 99.
[88] Warren, "Simplicity."

With characteristic flair Mercy wrote that Eve so lacked the simplicity and austerity of true virtue that her taste for excess was insatiable. Even with the infinite beauties of Eden around her, Eve still longed for more. And with that desire her beautiful surroundings became "insufficient, wanton, and incomplete." It is for this reason that mankind fell, because one woman lacked virtue. These stanzas have multiple meanings, about America as a chosen nation and about the nature of the fall of America. First, we will address what these stanzas say about America as a chosen nation.

The comparison to Eden is a commentary on both America's past and its future. Mercy placed herself within a long history of comparing this nation to Eden. For some of the first British explorers to Powhatan territory continually described is as an Edenic land of plenty, even creating illustrations such as "Adam and Eve in America," which imagine the creation of humankind happening in the New World.[89] The message was clear: this land had everything one could ever want and British/white people could thrive here, despite the Native Peoples who already resided there. America was essentially empty and ripe for the picking. Mercy's message scarcely strayed from that of her forebears. Her lavish descriptions (which carry on for even longer than quoted here) presented Eden, and therefore America, as absolutely perfect and untarnished in its natural beauty and abundance and had everything that Adam and Eve/Americans needed to survive. The other message that is similar to her forebears is the lack of concern for Native Peoples. In comparing America to Eden, Mercy intentionally called upon a narrative that was created by and for white people. Native Peoples were inconsequential and very clearly not inheritors of paradise.

[89] Theodor de Bry, *Adam and Eve in America*, 1590, Illustration, 1590, https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3g05347/.

This narrative was only exacerbated when Americans went against Britain and started to form their own identity. As Eddie Glaude explains in *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in the Early Nineteenth Century*, American shared a racial and cultural identity with Britain, so they needed something to set them apart as a nation. They took the idea of American chosenness that had been brewing since the first colonists compared America to Eden and used that to set themselves apart.[90] It was that chosenness which laid the foundations for America's racial identity, for, as it was since the first colonists, only white people were chosen. Though Mercy's poem was ostensibly about virtue and a declining state, her comparison to Eden harkened to a deep racism within the concept of America as a chosen nation.

The second aspect of this comparison relates to the inevitable future of any Eden, and that is to fall. The core message of the poem was the Eve was greedy. She was surrounded by incomparable beauties of nature and she was still not satisfied. She had everything she needed and yet she longed for excess. Her greed for more caused humankind's fall from grace. The message here is that Mercy believed America had everything that we could ever need. It is American's greed that would cause the fall, and she saw the seeds of it around her.

However, her cry of decline must be placed in the context of her political environment. As Zagarri comments, "like the jeremiads [of her Puritan forebears], Mercy's declamations about the decline in public virtue cannot be taken at face value. As genuine as her concern was, she was steeped in an intellectual tradition derived from classical republicanism that stressed the inevitability of corruption, decay, and decline. Before the war, she had regarded Britain as the source of that corruption; now it seemed to emanate from within."[91] In many ways, Mercy could

[90] Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus: Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 74.
[91] Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 103.

not help but see decline; it is part of the very fabric of classical republicanism. At its core classical republicanism is an ideal. It is an ideal of disinterested and selfless aristocrats who make decisions which are always for the good of all people. It could never work in reality because it is an ideal that doesn't take into account the motivations and actions of real people, which are often selfish and rarely for the good of all people. Since classical republicanism is such a lofty, unrealistic ideal, is it no wonder that Mercy and her fellows saw decline everywhere. As Gordon Wood put it, "the rapid emergence of democracy virtually destroyed the classical republican dream."[92] However, there is one key difference between Mercy and her like-minded colleagues: she was a woman. Where her male counterparts worked out their beliefs in the nitty-gritty, give-and-take world of politics, Mercy never had to translate her values into reality. She could afford to keep her lofty ideals and therefore her perception of a decline was much sharper than those men who negotiated their ideals in the public sphere of politics that was denied to Mercy. It is a great irony that her exclusion from that world is precisely what allowed to be one of the purest proponents of classical republicanism of her time.

Another consequence of Mercy's strict adherence to classical republicanism was that she gave women the subordinate role when it came to positionality in American society. This was not out of negative feelings she harbored towards her own sex, but rather her understanding of the best ways to guarantee America's survival. As Zagarri notes, "because she conceived of politics in the narrow, classical republican sense which required a resort to arms or direct political participation, she relegated women to a subordinate role."[93] For Mercy, and for many others who lived through the Revolution, the future of America was not assured. Constant

[92] Gordon S Wood, "Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 66, no. 1 (April 1990), 36.
[93] Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma,* 76.

vigilance was necessary in order to keep the new government in place. The ways, under classical republicanism, to ensure America's future were voting, to ensure the nation's future from within, and taking up arms, to defend the nation from those outside. These were the very definition of male public virtue. As women could not participate in either, in Mercy's opinion, women naturally had the lower role. She was not interested in challenging the status quo. It simply was as it was.

But the incredible irony is that when we examine the growth and change of the concept of virtue over the course of the Revolution and early republic, it actually grew to be much more of an all-encompassing term than Mercy will admit. Ruth Bloch, in her essay "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America" points out the various ways that virtue was much messier than Mercy's largely black and white understanding.[94] Bloch outlines three distinct understandings of virtue that came emerged in America during the 18th century. The first comes from the Puritans of New England as a result of the relationship between grace and works. This is where we see, from the mind of Jonathan Edwards, the idea of disinterested, selflessness come into the concept of virtue. Along with this came a celebration of female piety and virtue as they were considered especially receptive to grace. It is only with love for God, rather than self, could one have true virtue. The second idea of virtue came from Scottish philosophers who debated whether reason or emotion was the truest source of virtue. The gender binary was in full effect for these thinkers as men were considered the arbiters of reason and emotion was the sphere of women. The fact that the question was never fully answered shows that virtue was a not universally understood in any way, and that many considered women, and their emotionality, to play a strong role. The third hat in the ring was literary sentimentalism. In these works of

[94] Ruth Heidi Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America (First Published 1987)," in *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture, 1650–1800* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 136–53.

fiction "virtue was above all a feminine quality" and women were often responsible for keeping men on a moral path. Due to these three factors, the notion of virtue began to change. It was no longer only the classical republican idea of a man who voted or fought. The public and private, masculine and feminine boundaries were beginning to fade at the edges.

While this blurring most certainly did not appear in Mercy's strongly classical republican writings, it is evidenced by the very fact of her writing about virtue in 1779. As Bloch notes, "Americans never altogether abandoned the idea that the populace of the republic should be virtuous."[95] Instead, they relegated the production and maintenance of public virtue to a new realm, one presided over largely by women. Women, as Lester Cohen and Linda Kerber have observed about the Revolutionary writer Mercy Otis Warren, continued to embody the collectivist values of classical republicanism after they had ceased to resonate in national politics.

Strangely, it was the blurring of gender boundaries around the topic of virtue which allowed, or perhaps even forced, Mercy to be so strict in her approach. As virtue became less and less an exclusively masculine quality, women were more involved in the negotiation and definition of the term. But for someone like Mercy who was raised on such a strong classical republican outlook, the inclusion of women into the category of virtue was grossly inappropriate. So that blurring is part of why Mercy saw a decline in overall virtue of the public. Virtue was no longer something that Mercy recognized anymore, as it had become more nebulous than just men protecting their liberty. For that reason, Mercy clung ever more tightly to defined gender roles and the virtue they represented.

[95] Ibid, 151.

However, not all hope was lost for Mercy; there was a way that society could regain its virtue and keep it. In her *History* she wrote: "Few will deny that religion, viewed merely in a political light, is after all the best cement of society, the great barrier of just government, and the only certain restraint of the passions, those dangerous inlets to licentiousness and anarchy."[96] In other words, religion is one of the best ways to ensure that government is just. (I read "barrier" here as a barrier to protect government, not a stumbling block which prevents it, anything else does not make sense with Mercy's philosophy.) The way that religion does this is, essentially, by promoting virtue. Religion prevents licentiousness, or decadence and indulgence, which are the very attributes which threaten virtue. So for Mercy, religion is necessary in a good society because it is one of the ways which virtue can be maintained. If citizens have religion, and therefore virtue, then the whole populace is not given to excess, and therefore the government can work as it should: for the good of the people.

However, it is important to discuss what kind of religion Mercy was referring to. She differed from Phillis, and from many of the women in this dissertation, in that she did not rely on Evangelical Christianity to make her case. In this way Mercy is a bit of an outlier. Her Puritan background differed strongly from the more emotional religious experience of the rest of the women in this dissertation. But that does not mean it was absent. Her approach to religion reflects some of the rationality and practicality that was common in Calvinist theology.[97] Mercy also relied heavily on Calvinist principles of Providence. "The New England Calvinists taught that God normally governed the world through ordinary ways and means."[98] They distinguished

[96] Mercy Otis Warren, History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution In Two Volumes, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988), 12.
[97] E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War.* (New Haven, Connecticut; Yale University Press, 2005), 31.
[98] Ibid, 37.

between this type of ordinary providence, and an extraordinary providence, or the miraculous ways that God could intervene directly. Mercy referred to the ordinary providence, or the way that God ruled the world in the day to day. What this means is that God did work in the day to day, but he didn't usually intervene directly. But, as Mercy did not follow her mother's religion quite so staunchly and find some aspects of it stifling, her understanding of providence is slightly different. The way that God ruled the world, for Mercy, was to create opportunities for humans to follow the right path. In this case that mean to live virtuously. Religion was still necessary and provided a rational way to keep society together, and God's providence was involved. But ultimately it was still up to humans to fulfill their end of the bargain.

Mercy and the Role of Women

For Mercy, motherhood was the most important role a woman could have. She exhibited perfected what Linda Kerber famously described as "republican motherhood." Kerber explains that:

> In the early Republic a consensus developed around the idea that a mother, committed to the service of her family and to the state, might serve a political purpose…The Republican Mother was to encourage in her sons civic interest and political participation. She was to educate her children and guide them in the paths of morality and virtue.[99]

Republican motherhood was a push to sacralize the role of mother, to make it intrinsically important to the survival of the new nation, and Mercy believed in it whole-heartedly. She wrote a letter to Abigail Adams in which she asked for "advice in the mighty task of cultivating the minds and planting the seeds of Virtue in the infant Bosom, from one who is yet looking abroad

[99] Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2000), 283.

for Every foreign aid to Enable her to the discharge of a duty that is of the utmost importance to society."[100] This shows just how much motherhood meant to Mercy; it was one of the most important duties she could do for society. One on hand, and the hand Kerber favors, republican motherhood is a radical concept. It gave women's private sphere a place to intersect with the public. It allowed women a limited role as political actors. But on the other hand, this role kept women firmly in their prescribed gender roles. This concept which Mercy so embodied made women important only in relation to their male children. Women still did not have a voice of their own but spoke through their male children. If anything, republican motherhood reaffirmed that gender precluded one from fully participating in the political realm. The fact that Mercy, in Zagarri's words, "arrived at the notion [of republican motherhood] before the first shot of the war was fired,"[101] shows a great deal about Mercy's opinions regarding gender and nationalism. She wanted women to have some kind of relationship with the public sphere of politics, but she did not want to push the envelope of gender roles. Rather, she engaged in an attempt to refashion already existing gender roles to have greater import.

This is echoed in Zagarri's analysis of Warren. "Neither in her private correspondence nor her published writings did Mercy ever call for the expansion of women's political or legal rights."[102] Many women around her in similar positions of privilege, white and upper class, called for the expansion of women's roles but Mercy never did. For example, Mercy probably would have considered Abigail Adams's famous "Remember the Ladies" letter to be scandalous. Adams's letter explored in no uncertain terms her views on gender roles. She told her husband that "all men would be tyrants if they could" and threatened a rebellion if women did not have a

[100] Mercy Otis Warren, "Mercy Otis Warren to Abigail Adams" (Letter, July 25, 1773), *Founders Online,* National Archives.
[101] Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 29.
[102] Ibid, 94-95.

voice in their government.[103] While she stops short of outright arguing for women in government, that is the tenor of her letter. So where Abigail argues for rebellion against male tyrants, Mercy hangs her hat on the safe and relatively conservative ideals of republican motherhood.

However, the confusing part of Mercy's approach to gender roles comes when she has to apply them to herself. Mercy's writing career, most especially the way it grew over time and culminated in her history, was not considered a legitimate profession for women, insofar as white upper-class women even had professions. As John Adams not-so-kindly put it, "history is not the province of the ladies." Now John was partially just angry at Mercy's portrayal of him in her book, but he also captured a common view of the time. Writing was only considered in the realm of women if it dealt with womanly themes, in which politics and history certainly did not belong. So, Mercy wanted women to stay in their lane and stick to motherhood, but she allowed herself to move outside of prescribed womanly domesticity with her writing.

Mercy tackled this issue head on with the introduction to her *History*, and to an extent made more sense of her views. She admitted that she saw history as more the province of men, or rather "masculine strength." She wrote:

> It is true there are certain appropriate duties assigned to each sex; and doubtless it is the more peculiar province of masculine strength, not only to repel the bold invader of the rights of his country and of mankind, but in the nervous style of manly eloquence, to describe the blood-stained field, and relate the story of slaughtered armies. Sensible of this, the trembling heart has recoiled at the magnitude of the undertaking, and the hand often shrunk back from the task.[104]

What is interesting here is that Mercy did not outright declare that men are the only ones who can participate in either soldiering or writing of history. Rather, the person who does such tasks

[103] Abigail Adams, "Letter from Abigail Adams to John Adams, 31 March - 5 April 1776," 1776, Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.
[104] Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution,* xlii.

has a masculine or manly element to their character. In this period, this would most often be men. But as Mercy demonstrated in her other plays, it is not only men. In arguably one of her most feminist plays, the main character Donna Maria, is characterized as having a "manly force of mind."[105] What this means is that women must sacrifice some of their femininity when they enter into male activities, such as politics or history. But it also means that what is masculine need not be exclusively male. So the issue is not that women are incapable or should never engage in the writing of history, but rather that their gender morphs slightly as a result and they take on elements of masculinity. This move might have given her more access, in that she was able to justify a woman writing history. But losing even a part of her femininity was largely a burden and a sadness which almost entirely prevented her from starting. It is clear from Mercy's hesitation and her "trembling heart," that this sacrifice is not something she took lightly. But there was a more important issue at stake which allowed her to overcome this sacrifice.

Mercy's introduction continues with her reasons why she ultimately did decide to write her history of the American Revolution.

> Yet, recollecting that every domestic enjoyment depends on the unimpaired possession of civil and religious liberty, that a concern for the welfare of society ought equally to glow in every human breast, the work was not relinquished.[106]

Where certain activities were unequal by nature, and required a sacrifice of femininity, certain feelings were completely and totally equal among all human beings. The most important of these for Mercy were civil and religious liberty and a concern for society as a whole. This relates back to her strong belief in classical republicanism. Her concern for society was paramount, and for her, the act of writing this history was a way of contributing to the good of all citizens. It was a

[105] Mercy Otis Warren, *The Ladies of Castille: A Tragedy in Five Acts* (Boston: I. Thomas and E.T Andrews, 1790). Act III, Scene V.
[106] Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*, xlii.

way of reminding her readers about the values of the Revolution so that they could live up to their ideals. That concern for the welfare of society was not gendered, indeed everyone needed to find a way to contribute to it. If writing the history required a sacrifice of femininity, it was worth it for the cause of classical republicanism, which after all, required individual sacrifice for the good of the many.

Additionally, for Mercy the rights of civil and religious liberty are required for anyone to have true happiness. Those liberties were not dependent on one's gender but were enjoyed by all Americans, or should be. These freedoms, of course, were not the reality for many people living in the United States at the time of her writing this history and this statement a clear indication of her privilege and ignorance. She did not problematize the state of liberty to include enslaved people specifically, but rather refers to "every human." So she did believe that liberty ought to be enjoyed by all. Even though she did not specify who was included in that, but as this belongs to a section on gender, we can assume she is referring to gender equality rather than racial equality. It does however show a thinking which posits equality of spirit. It is that belief in a natural equality which propelled her forward in writing her history. This equality of spirit is similar to Phillis using spiritual equality before God to argue for increased rights for Black Americans

Early in her History, Mercy waxed poetic about the causes and purposes of the Revolutionary War, and how it fit within the larger scene of human history. While most of her stated causes for the war related to class struggles and a somewhat condescending description of the efforts of the "common people," she does credit a higher power as a driving force behind the war. She said: "the sudden rotations in human affairs are wisely permitted by Providence, to remind mankind of their natural equality."[107] The concept of Providence was a common, almost

[107] Warren. *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution,* 216.

universal belief in eighteenth century America.[108] It comes from Calvinist principles of predestination and belief in God's plan. Though the strictness of the doctrine waned over time it still bore the same general idea: God had a plan and one must have faith in that plan. Put another way, calling up Providence was way of signaling that something had a divine purpose. The way that Mercy used Providence is somewhat unique in that Providence is not credited for creating or prompting the "sudden rotations in human affairs" but rather allowing them to occur. It is perhaps a reflection of her attempt to move away from the strict Calvinist beliefs of her mother. Mercy recognized that God had a hand in human affairs but would not credit him with pre-ordaining everything. In that way the term providence became a way for Mercy to signal a religious purpose for the Revolution, but still allowed for human autonomy and free-will. However the second clause "to remind mankind of their natural equality" is where things get a little tricky. So humans are the ones who ultimately created the "sudden rotation" which was the Revolution, and Providence simply allowed it to occur. But there was a reason that Providence allowed it: "to remind mankind of their natural equality." This indicates that equality has a divine origin. It is so important the God will sanction human activities like war in order to bring about a greater degree of equality, which is innate to all people.

It is important to investigate what kind of equality Mercy espoused here. Frequently in her history Mercy used the phrase "equality of condition," and once she specified that to mean "equality of rank, fortune, and education."[109] As stated previously, Mercy never outright called for the expansion of women's rights, but this veiled attempt was as close as she got. Mercy had always believed in the intellectual equality of men and women, that was instilled in her from

[108] Rod Gragg, *By the Hand of Providence: How Faith Shaped the American Revolution* (Simon and Schuster, 2011), 8. and Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[109] Warren, *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution,* 331.

when she was young. Especially in her later years she began to believe that all women (though she did not specify, we can assume that she meant all white women) deserved to have the education that she did.[110] So here when she calls upon equality of rank, fortune, and education it is not only a call for equality between classes it is also a veiled called for the education of women. So, to connect these ideas, Providence sanctioned the Revolution because it reminded mankind of their natural equality and included in that equality is the right of white women to an education.

So, Mercy glorified women's role as mothers, thereby keeping them squarely with appropriate gender roles. But she also wrote an entire History of the American Revolution, a task that even she herself considered manly. She was willing to engage in the writing of that history, sacrificing some of her femininity in the process, for the sake of liberty and a concern for the welfare of all people. Finally, she believed that Providence allowed for the Revolutionary War to occur to remind mankind of their natural equality, an equality that might even extend to women's education. She was a complicated woman. Kate Davies provides a possible explanation by examining Mercy's literary forays in the private and public spheres. In her work on Catherine Macaulay and Mercy Otis Warren, Kate Davies argues against Zagarri in terms of Warren's approach to gender. While Zagarri argues that Mercy's focus on political equality left no room for a consideration of gender, Davies argues that gender permeated every part of Mercy's life and she had no choice but to consider gender inequality an important issue. She highlights a letter that Mercy sent to her brother in which contained both a discussion of her niece's birth and future marriage and her political commentary on the rise of Federalism. Davies argues that "there is an outward movement of association between the subjugation of her niece as a dependent

[110] Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 229.

without marriage to the disenfranchisement of her future husband within a political system which Warren perceived as pseudo-aristocratic and inimical to the republican ideal of independence." For Davies, this shows how Mercy echoed the private-sphere concerns about marriage with similar public-sphere concerns about a domineering government. So Mercy's concern with gender was not as explicit as someone like Abigail Adams, but according to Davies, Mercy's political self-understanding largely came out of her experiences as a woman in the private sphere. This helps explain her complex views because her private sphere was itself complex. As stated previously, she had unique access to education and supportive brothers and father, but she was also still born into an eighteenth century upper-class white family. She had to navigate a private sphere which simultaneously supported her intelligence and insisted on women's roles within the home. So, those sometimes-conflicting experiences within her private sphere, influenced her political opinions (including those opinions on gender) so that they too were complex.

However, there is another important reason which explains Mercy's theory of gender: her privilege. Mercy was raised in a home which required relatively little from its women. She had some duties typical to her station and motherhood did consume her life for many years, but Mercy was an upper-class woman who had servants to do many of the required tasks around the house. Little is known about them, other than she cared about them and mourned the passing of a servant in a letter to her friend Hanna Winthrop.[111] But merely having servants allowed Mercy the time to engage in non-essential tasks, like writing. Most of the duties of a woman were seen to in her home by another woman. Therefore, she understood the importance of those tasks and the place a woman occupied in the home, but she did not have to fill the entirety of that role

[111] Mercy Otis Warren, *Mercy Otis Warren: Selected Letters* (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 23.

herself. And as race was one of the most important indicators of class in this period, it is also her whiteness which allows her this position of privilege. Just as Deborah White argues that "slaves…were denied the privilege, enjoyed by white feminists, of theorizing about bondage,"[112] Mercy, as a white upper-class woman, enjoyed that theorizing privilege in spades. Since she did not experience the realities of heavily policed womanhood, Mercy could believe that those gendered distinctions should be reinforced. But, more importantly, she was not beholden to them and therefore could legitimate her forays into the world of masculinity.

Conclusion: What is Mercy Otis Warren's brand of religious Protestant nationhood?

For Mercy Otis Warren, there is one clarion call which resounds through her writings and speaks most directly to her concept of Protestant nationhood: classical republicanism. She is so obsessed with it that it becomes her religion of sorts, it is the best and only way she can see the nation progressing. But if it were just a political idea then it would not be Protestant nationhood. It is how she constructs this idea, and how it connects to religion, that mean that Mercy was constructing a kind of Protestant nationhood. As classical republicanism is based on the virtue of the public, it requires all people to behave a certain way. It requires collective goodness. Without that goodness, excess, greed, and avarice would bring about society's downfall. The way that downfall could be prevented was through religion. She still wanted religious freedom, as she frequently called upon the religious freedom espoused by the revolution. But some form of religion (some form of Protestantism that is; it would have been difficult for her to imagine any religion other than Christianity and she was anti-Catholic) was required in order to keep the

[112] Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Rev. ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 15.

people fundamentally good and virtuous. That means that her form of religion nationalism was a politically motivated one, not one based in personal devotion, as with Phillis Wheatley. Religion was a necessary tool that helped the nation progress in a virtuous manner. It upheld a just government by relegating the passions of the people, without it the nation would descend to chaos and anarchy. Mercy believed that the collective work ethic and communal responsibility of Protestant Christianity was the best way forward for the country, and in fact was the only way the United States could function.

Additionally, Mercy's beliefs on gender also speak to her Protestant nationhood, albeit in a less direct way. Firstly she believed that Providence, another way of saying God, called for human equality. For Mercy this did not mean racial or even full gender equality. It was a very specific type of equality that once again came back to classical republicanism. It was an equality of class, but it was also equality of education. Women needed to be educated, both for themselves to be better citizens but also to educate their children. This leads back to her belief in republican motherhood, one of the best ways for women to contribute to the new nation, and thus work towards the good of society was to be good mothers for their male children. The reasoning is that to have a just society, mothers need to raise virtuous children. This both sacralized the role of women in the new nation but also didn't allow them to stray from the private sphere.

However, Mercy's Protestant nationhood did allow women to have some slight transgressions from gender roles: when it is for the good of all people. Her history of the Revolutionary War was criticized by many because the writing of history was a masculine effort, not suitable for women. However when Mercy addressed that head-on, she recognized that her book was a masculine effort, and she even sacrificed some of her femininity in order to write it. But it was important because it reminded her readers of the values of the Revolution, especially

as she believed that America was slowly sliding into moral decay. So, she allowed herself to leave prescribed gender roles in order to accomplish something that would help society as a whole, something that would promote virtue.

Chapter 3: Catharine Brown

Kā tý was born in the Cherokee town of Creek Path to Yaenugvyaski (John Brown) and Tsa luh (Sarah Brown) at the turn of the nineteenth century; her exact birthdate is unknown. She had two brothers, John and David, and a number of half-siblings from the previous marriages of both her parents. In the typical way of Cherokee families, she was close to not only (what we would call) her nuclear family but her extended family as well. This is important in that we have almost no information about the first 16 years of Kā tý's life from her own voice or pen. But what we do know, we know through her siblings and half-siblings. From her brother David we learned that they were raised in staunchly Cherokee home. They only spoke Cherokee at home, they learned Cherokee history, including the harms done to them by white people, and were taught Cherokee spiritual beliefs and practices, among many other things.[113] Though this type of childhood was certainly not rare for Cherokee families at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was not the only type of upbringing that was possible for Cherokee children at this time. Due to the intermarrying of white men and Cherokee women, there were a growing number of biracial homes in the Cherokee nation. It was in these homes that Kā tý, who had not yet received her new name from Christian missionaries, started down a journey of education that would change her life.

In biracial homes, not only the English language but American culture and customs merged with Cherokee society. Specifically, Kā tý spent time with Mrs. Jane Coody and Mrs.

[113] Theresa Strouth Gaul, ed., "Editor's Introduction," in *Cherokee Sister: The Collected Writings of Catharine Brown, 1818-1823*, Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 8.

Anna McDonald, two Cherokee women who married Euro-American men. They were also the sister and grandmother, respectively of the future chief John Ross.[114] We know from Kā tý's half-sister Polly that they lived with Mrs. Coody for a time,[115] and there they were taught English along with a basic American education. Her time with the two women mostly likely led her towards her eventual attendance at Brainerd Missionary School, as Mrs. McDonald's husband sold his property to be used as the site for the school.[116] However before she attended, a troubling incident occurred in her life which likely informed many of her life decisions.

When an intratribal conflict within the Creek Nation grew beyond the confines of the tribe, the Cherokee people sided with the U.S. to help quell the so-called rebellion of their long-time enemies. In what came to be called the Red Stick War, or the Creek War of 1813, Kā tý's father and half-brother joined up, fighting under the leadership of Andrew Jackson.[117] Though she did not fight, the war affected her in unimaginable ways. While U.S. soldiers were camped near the Brown's family home, her family suffered theft of livestock, crops, and whiskey, among other smaller items. More impactful however was the terrifying story, fully uncovered by Theresa Strouth Gaul, of an officer's attempted rape of Kā tý. This white officer used increasingly threatening methods to attempt to get Kā tý to sleep with him until she felt so frightened that she ran into the forest anytime that he was remotely near.[118] Finally unable to stand his predations, she moved north to be with Mrs. Coody and Mrs. McDonald to escape the trauma of the Creek War.[119] Unfortunately Kā tý's experience was all too common, and shows

[114] Gaul, 9.
[115] It is unclear if it was both Polly and Catharine or just Catharine.
[116] Gaul, "Introduction," 10.
[117] Joel W. Martin, "Visions of Revitalization in the Eastern Woodlands," in *Reassessing Revitalization Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific Islands*, ed. Michael E Harkin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 70.
[118] Gaul, "Introduction," 10.
[119] Martin, "Visions of Revitalization," 73.

the ways that Native women's sexual and bodily autonomy was threatened by colonization, even when they were "on the same side" as the colonizers.

Due to her traumatizing experience, Kā tý found herself not only growing familiar with white ways of living in the homes of Mrs. Coody and McDonald, but also grew increasingly familiar with the land upon which Brainerd would sit. Before delving into Kā tý's life and conversion at Brainerd it is important to understand how and why the school was founded, and how the Cherokee leadership understood it. The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, (hereafter "The American Board") founded in Boston in 1810, had the goal of converting as many people as possible to Protestant Christianity. Though many of their efforts were dedicated to overseas conversions, the Native nations of North America were just as foreign to Congregationalists as any other non-white country they hoped to blanket with Christians. Their goal with Indian mission schools was to fully "civilize" Native peoples, and that meant converting them to Protestant Christianity but it also meant anglicizing every aspect of their lives, from their clothing to their hunting, farming, language, and so much more. The missionaries believed that to become a true Christian required one to be white in look, language, and culture, even to the point of outright rejection of Cherokee lifeways.[120] However, the Cherokee leadership had a different understanding of the mission schools.

First, The American Board did not force Brainerd onto the Cherokee people, rather Cherokee leaders chose to invite the board to build a school in their nation and chose to enroll their children and this act shaped the relationship between the two entities, placing the Cherokees in the position of power rather than the American Board. As Gaul notes, "the fact that the

[120] Theda Perdue, "Catharine Brown, Cherokee Convert to Christianity," in *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives*, Viewpoints on American Culture (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 78.

Cherokees had not been conquered shaped their response to Christianity."[121] In fact many Cherokee people believed that with a white education they could benefit their own community as cultural brokers, which is eventually what Kā tý, soon to be renamed Catharine, would become.[122]

When she entered Brainerd school Kā tý was almost instantly successful in her studies, showing a zest for learning. Initially though she was skeptical about the religious side of things, as she saw Christianity as the white man's religion, not something that she was interested in. However, three months into her studies she experienced a powerful dream which changed her mind. The dream itself will be explored in more detail later, but for the moment it is enough to know that it combined both Cherokee and Christian symbolism and afterwards Kā tý confessed her sins and was baptized as Catharine Brown, the first Cherokee convert to Christianity.[123]

After her conversion Catharine continue to excel, and she grew to have a high degree of cultural power both within the American Board and among her own people. Catharine wrote that her goal throughout school was to be "useful to her people."[124] With that goal in mind, Catharine became a teacher herself at the newly formed girl's school in Creek Path, even earning a missionary's salary from the American Board.[125] She also engaged in many individual religious exchanges, translating Bible verses and sermons, facilitating a female prayer society, and even sometimes leaning into what could be called preaching. Both her own people and the missionaries relied on Catharine not only as an interpreter but as a "cultural broker," to use the

[121] Gaul, "Introduction," 14.
[122] Martin, "Visions of Revitalization," 64.
[123] Ibid, 80.
[124] Catharine Brown, *Cherokee Sister: The Collected Writings of Catharine Brown, 1818-1823*, ed. Theresa Strouth Gaul (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 73.
[125] Gaul, "Introduction," 22.

term explored by Margaret Szasz.[126] She defines cultural brokers as those who live in the middle ground, or liminal space, between two cultures. They are cultural intermediaries, interpreters, goods traders, teachers, religious intermediaries and a whole a host of other identities. But their core purpose is connection between two disparate cultures.[127] Catharine Brown connected the two worlds of Americans and Cherokees, two groups who only barely understood each other, and in doing so became a highly influential person.

Sadly, Catharine had to take a break from her work as a teacher when her brother became ill with tuberculosis. He died in February of 1823. Only a few months later Catharine herself started to develop symptoms of the disease. The Brown family was then rocked by two deaths in the same year when Catharine's life was cut short on July 18, 1823. However before her death, in a highly symbolic act, she sought two different doctors. One was a Native practitioner, selected by her parents, as the other was a white doctor from Alabama, selected by the missionaries. As Martin argues, this moment in the final days of her life shows "her simultaneous commitment to at least two communities and two changing, complex traditions and the ways they claimed her and contested for her loyalty."[128]

Like Phillis Wheatley, Catharine's life was tragically short, but she had an impact far beyond those years. Also like Phillis, her life and writings have often been twisted to suit the needs of the historian and the time period. Shortly after her death (and even some while she was alive) the American Board held up Catharine as the epitome of the converted Indian. For them she was proof that "savage" people could truly change. In that effort they published many of her letters without her permission and even commissioned a book about her life, written by Rufus

[126] Margaret Szasz, *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).
[127] Ibid, 19.
[128] Martin, "Visions of Revitalization," 83.

Anderson. However this book, entitled *Memoir of Catharine Brown, A Christian Indian of the Cherokee Nation,* showed more about the author and the commissioner than it did about Catharine. Anderson makes sweeping unfounded claims about her religious experiences and overall life experiences and motivations. This problematic text became the basis for early scholarship around Catharine. Arnold Krupat in 1994 argued that she was fully "civilized" and had lost her Cherokee heritage completely, making her an isolated aberration rather than a figure who expertly navigated two rapidly changing worlds.[129] However, this zero-sum thinking about converted Indians is highly problematic and obscures the lived reality of cultural brokers like Catharine. As is true when studying almost any woman or minoritized figure, we must look outside of the submissive-resistant binary, or perhaps more accurate in Catharine's case, the conquered-agential binary. Thankfully, more recent scholarship around Catharine, done primarily by Theresa Gaul and Joel Martin, works to place her in her true multiplicity of contexts and explore the way she served her community by living out both of her identities as a Cherokee and a Christian.

I argue that Catharine Brown participated in the creation of Protestant nationhood because she believed Christianity was the way to ensure a future for her people; she was trying to change her nation to allow it to survive. Harkening back to my definition of Protestant nationhood, which is the belief that Christianity is the best way to create the ideal future for a nation, it is clear that Catharine wanted to use Christianity to create her ideal future, which was survival. But she also continually was guided by the ideals instilled in her by Cherokee society. Both a devout Christian, and a Cherokee woman, Catharine Brown wanted to use Christianity to save the "precious and immortal" souls of her people. But what makes this specifically Protestant

[129] Arnold Krupat, *Native American Autobiography: An Anthology*, Wisconsin Studies in American Autobiography (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 115.

nationhood is the fact that Catharine understood the political power of Christianity to make Cherokees seem more American, or at least less other. In that way, Catharine's plan to convert all Cherokees to Christianity not only ensured the spiritual survival of her people, but also their literal survival in the face of encroaching American expansion.

Catharine's "Christian Indian" Identity

As Gaul notes in her introduction, Catharine, along with many Native people who converted to Christianity, were viewed by their contemporaries and later historians as "Christian Indians." This term has a very specific meaning, more than just an Indian who practices Christianity. Dating back to the 1600s, the idea of the "Christian Indian" or the "Praying Indian" was steeped in colonialism and imperialism. As Kristina Bross explains in *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons,* missionaries to Native peoples expected that with a conversion to Christianity came an adoption of all English (later white American) customs and practices. Even the physical appearance of the seventeenth century "Praying Indian" became so anglicized that it was easy to distinguish visually between a converted and unconverted Native person.[130] These Christian Indians were seen as a middle ground between "savage" Indians and the colonists. This position was not without its dangers. Jill Lepore, in *The Name of War*, discussed John Sassamon, a Christian Indian, translator, and cultural mediator who was murdered, most likely by Metacom (King Philip). While an obvious cause behind his murder was his betrayal of Metacom, Lepore also argues that straddling two worlds became untenable. Metacom believed that John had

[130] Kristina Bross, *Dry Bones and Indian Sermons: Praying Indians in Colonial America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

become too English, too literate, and too Christian.[131] Though this moment came more than 100 years before Catharine was born, it shows the fraught history of cultural mediators. There was the risk of becoming too Christian, and therefore too white, and thus becoming a threat to your people. That risk also cut both ways; if a mediator didn't adopt enough European/American customs they were not seen as trustworthy by white populations.

This idea that with Christianity comes Anglo-European customs continued throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and beyond. After Washington's 1791 Inaugural Address in which he called for Native people to be "civilized," it was mostly missionaries who took up the call.[132] It was believed that a Christian education was the best way to accomplish this mission.[133] Though the primary missionary goal was to convert more souls to Christ, and to, in many of their minds, help Native people live better lives, the civilizing mission as a whole could only lead to destruction. As Maureen Konkle states in *Writing Indian Nations* "both the hypothetical civilization of Indians and the hypothetical extinction of Indians are part of the same discursive field. They both ultimately lead to the same thing: the denial of Native political autonomy, the naturalizing of the incorporation of Native land under U.S. jurisdiction, and the reinforcement of white superiority and Native subordination."[134] While individual missionaries may have had different goals and ambitions, a core component of the civilizing mission was a destruction of

[131] Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1998), 43.
[132] Colin G. Calloway, *The Indian World of George Washington: The First President, the First Americans, and the Birth of the Nation* (Oxford: University Press, Incorporated, 2018). For more information see Chapter 14.
[133] Washington's goal however was not religious, but political. He wanted to find ways to steal Native land in a semi-subtle way. He believed that with "civilizing" would come an altered understanding of hunting and farming practices and ultimately a different relationship to the land. The idea was that once Native people were convinced that neat little, individually owned plots of land were the best practice, they would need less land and then settlers could swoop and steal the extra without too much trouble. For more information see Colin Calloway's *The Indian World of George Washington* (Oxford Press, 2018), specifically the introduction.
[134] Maureen Konkle, *Writing Indian Nations Native Intellectuals and the Politics of Historiography, 1827-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 34

Native people. Thus in working to fulfill Washington's mandate, many Protestant missionaries across the country made it their goal to not only convert souls, but to make Native people into white Americans, thus erasing them.[135]

However, the goals of the civilizing project and the reality of its reception are two very different stories. It is important for historians, especially non-Native historians, to separate the racist and destructive intentions behind Indian policy throughout history from the ways that Native people have negotiated, changed, and survived despite those policies. Looking at Catharine, the famous "Christian Indian," one might think she was more white than Cherokee by the end of her short life. And even reading her letters without any context, one might think they were written by a white woman. However I, along with Gaul and Martin, argue that Catharine walked a fine line in order to maintain both of her identities. She converted to Christianity but that does not mean that she was so devoid of identity and that she wholesale accepted everything else the missionaries attempt to force upon her. Catharine expertly negotiated between her two identities to accomplish her own goals. I add that it is through the interplay of her Christian and Cherokee identities that we can see a unique form of Protestant nationhood, one that fits with Native notions of change and survivance. But first, I must prove that Catharine did maintain her core Cherokee identity, or in other words the civilizing mission was not successful. I argue this based on two main themes: the dream which prompted Catharine's conversion, and the tenor of her language regarding unconverted Cherokees. While scholars like Gaul and Martin have

[135] In general, early missionary efforts by Catholic priests did not involve cultural or lifestyle changes. The emphasis was on converting souls, not changing Native people to become more white. But as Protestant missionaries came onto the scene, many believed that it was only by converting to an entirely Christian lifestyle (meaning a white European lifestyle) that people could truly convert to Christianity. Being Indian became "othered" and was seen as somewhat incompatible with Protestant Christianity. This is one way that missionaries contributed to the construction of race in early America. For more information see Sarah Ruble's chapter "American Missionaries and Race" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Race in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

explored this question, it is important to do so in more detail because the way that Catharine combined her Cherokee and Christian identities has bearing on her Protestant nationhood.

When Catharine arrived at Brainard she was a successful student, but she was not convinced about the religious aspect of her training. In a letter to Mrs. A. H. in 1821, she recalls when she first arrived, saying "when I first entered the school at Brainard, and saw Christians, I was not pleased with them: I thought they were entirely deprived of pleasure, and did not like to hear their converse on religious subjects."[136] Given her palpable dislike of the Christians, even in a letter written after her conversion and with that hindsight, it is hard to imagine how she could have been converted. Perhaps not surprisingly, it was not through the efforts of the missionaries that Catharine eventually converted, but rather a portentous dream.

Before I get into the details of Catharine's dream, it is important to discuss the meanings of dreams within Cherokee worldviews. In Native tribes across Turtle Island, dreams serve as important forms of knowledge production and communication with the divine. For Cherokee it is not different. Lee Irwin intricately dissects the way that dreams function within the context of Cherokee spirituality, saying "the spiritual dimensions of Cherokee religious identity were constantly informed by personal experience through dreams, visions, and healing rites that worked in conjunction with the sacred word and the sacred world."[137] In order words, dreams were an important way that Cherokee people learned to understand their own spirituality. This means that the fact that Catharine took religious guidance from a dream is an intensely Cherokee act. She used Cherokee ways of knowing to guide her towards Christianity. In fact without her Cherokee attitude towards dreams, it is possible she would not have seen such a dream as

[136] Brown, *Cherokee Sister*, 89.
[137] Lee Irwin, "Cherokee Healing: Myth, Dreams, and Medicine," *American Indian Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (1992): 237–57, 241.

significant, and ironically, not have converted. It is important to note that Evangelical Christians also put great stock in dreams, which is why the dream made sense to the missionaries at Brainard as a way to explain her conversation. However I argue that the dream shows more of Catharine's Cherokee spirituality than her Christian one because she had not yet converted when she had her dream. Up till that time she had put little stock in Christian beliefs, so without her Cherokee upbringing that taught her to take dreams seriously as signs of portent, she might not have understood this dream as significant.

Even more than underscoring the significance of dreams, Irwin explores the specific way that dreams function as fully real and metonymic. By metonymic Irwin means that "they were sign-based and indexical of the entire schema of Cherokee religion and mythology."[138] So almost everything within a dream can be interpreted and by connecting the dream sign to its real cause (real in this instance meaning sacred powers or beings), knowledge would then be obtained. Using this logic, we can then interpret the specific aspects of Catharine's dream.

Regrettably, we do not have the text of the dream from Catharine herself, but rather from a missionary who recorded it for her. This does mean we need to maintain something of a hermeneutic of suspicion when approaching this text. But I follow in the footsteps of Gaul and Martin, who both ascribe Catharine as the ultimate author of the text.[139] I am further convinced of her authorship because the Cherokee aspects of the dream have not been erased. The goal of the missionaries of the American Board was to show that Catharine was fully Christianized and white-ified. Describing (and later publishing) a dream that includes heavy Cherokee symbolism, despite the ultimate conversion, would not have served that purpose. Thus, with the reasonable

[138] Irwin, 247.
[139] Gaul, "Editor's Introduction," pg 17; Martin "Visions of Revitalization," pg 76.

assumption that Catharine is the author, we can examine the dream with an eye for Cherokee symbolism and meaning. Here is the dream in full:

> In my sleep I tho't I was traveling and came to a hill that was almost perpendicular. I was much troubled about it, for I had to go to its top. I knew not how to get up. She said [she] saw the steps which others had gone and tried to put her feet in their steps, but found she could not ascend in this way, because her feet slipped. Having made several unsuccessful attempts to ascend, she became very weary, but although she succeeded in getting near the top, [she] felt in great danger of falling. While in this distress in doubt whether to try to go forward or return, she saw a bush just above her of which she tho't, if she could get hold it she could get up, and as she reached out her hand to the bush, she saw a little boy standing at the top, who reached out his hand; She grasped his thumb, and at this moment she was on top and someone told her it was the Saviour.[140]

Firstly, mountains and hills serve as sacred sites across Native country, from the Navajo mountain chants,[141] to the Pueblo creation story,[142] to the Blackfeet's reverence for the Sweet Grass Hills,[143] these geological formations are so much more than simply geology. Though the exact symbolism varies across nations, a general similarity is that mountains are places for spiritual quests or transformations because there is a great deal of sacred power held in these sites. Christian Snyder explored in her article *The Once and Future Moundbuilders, how* specifically in the Southeast, mounds served a similar sacred purpose to mountains across Turtle Island.[144] These small hills served as burial mounds, sites of council meetings, and places to hold religious ceremonies. So, it is certainly no accident that Catharine's dream takes place on a hill, and a rather treacherous one at that. The setting alone signals that a specifically Native kind of spiritual transformation is about to take place.

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[140] Originally in a letter written by Moody Hall, reproduced by Gaul, pg 17.
[141] Washington Matthews, *The Mountain Chant: A Navajo Ceremony*, ed. Paul Zolbrod (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1997).
[142] Judith Hendry, "Mining the Sacred Mountain: The Clash Between the Western Dualistic Framework and Native American Religions," *Multicultural Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 2003): 3–10.
[143] Emily Cousins, "Mountains Made Alive: Native American Relationships with Sacred Land," *Cross Currents (New Rochelle, N.Y.)* 46, no. 4 (1996): 497–509.
[144] Christina Snyder, "The Once and Future Moundbuilders.," *Southern Cultures* 26, no. 2 (June 22, 2020): 96–117.

Secondly, the holy figure may ultimately be labelled as Christ, but the figure also bears a similarity to the Cherokee Yunwi Tsunsdi' (Little People). Little People are as their name describes, small people who are a kind of minor deity within the Cherokee religious framework. They are mischievous yet compassionate and are known for helping people in times of need, especially children.[145] Moreover they are known for living in mountains and for facilitating spiritual passages.[146] The figure in Catharine's dream is described as a little boy, which is a very uncommon way for the divine to appear in conversation narratives, that is if a divine figure appears at all. In fact having a figure facilitate a conversion was more common among Catholic narratives, whereas in Protestant narratives it was more often an overwhelming feeling that occurred in the narrator.[147] So having a small boy be a primary actor in a conversion narrative was not likely an idea Catharine received from the missionaries at Brainard. Though we cannot know for certain that the figure in Catharine's dream is one of the Yunwi Tsunsdi', the number of similarities, and the lack of correlation with anything similar in Protestant narratives, make it a very likely possibility.

Combining the setting, characters, and the nature of Cherokee dreams as fully real, Catharine's dream reads as someone who is undertaking a spiritual journey in a sacred natural site and is helped on that journey by a Cherokee deity, who only at the very end reveals (or perhaps even changes) his identity to be that of Jesus Christ. It is only through a distinctly Cherokee form of knowledge production that Catharine comes to know Jesus. As Martin argues, "a traditional Cherokee spirit protector had convinced a young Cherokee woman that she could

[145] MariJo Moore, "Cherokee Little People," *News from Indian Country*, February 28, 1999.
[146] Gaul, "Introduction," 17.
[147] Lisa M. Gordis, "The Conversion Narrative in Early America," in *A Companion to the Literatures of Colonial America* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2005), 369–86.

make a safe approach to Christ."[148] This makes it clear that from the start of her journey as a Christian, her Cherokee identity was equally important within her. Overall, the dream shows the hybridity through which Catharine understood the world. She did not see a stark, unimpeachable wall between Cherokee and Christian, rather she used one to understand the other.

Another important way that we can see Catharine's attitudes to "civilization" is actually in what she doesn't say. The writing of white missionaries often leans heavily into discussions of culture, and how Native culture has changed for the better (i.e. to be more white). Here is an example from the pen of Laura Potter, one of Catharine's close friends at the Creek Path mission:

> Two years since Creek Path was a place of the grossest ignorance. The Saviour's name had scarcely been heard among the people. They passed their time in idleness and dissipation; and most of those who were clad at all, were covered in rags. The Sabbath was known but by few, and these had been taught by the whites to consider it a holly [sic] day. But now, how changed the scene! Many of them have become sober and industrious. They assemble regularly on the Sabbath for the worship of God, and manifest a tender solicitude for the welfare of their immortal souls. Their dress though course, is neat and becoming. Seldom is a dirty garb seen in our little sanctuary. They frequently speak of their former ways of living, and express much gratitude that missionaries have been sent to teach them better things.[149]

While Laura's description does have some religious elements, it is also heavily centered on how the Cherokee people of Creek Path changed their dress and overall attitude. Laura clearly casts pre-converted Native people as lazy, practically naked, dirty, and perhaps even drunk. Whereas after the conversion, they kept the Sabbath but they also dressed in a way that was more "neat and becoming" and became "sober and industrious." Laura described a wholesale culture and attitude change, not just a change in religion. Her description is rife with condescension, even describing Native people as naïve, almost simple people who graciously accepted the correction

[148] Martin, "Visions of Revitalization," 80.
[149] Gaul, "Introduction," 39.

to their lifeways. Firstly, we know that this description is simply incorrect, as most Native people who converted did so in a syncretistic way. Even Catharine's own Christian brother delivered a sermon that chastised Europeans for the horror they wrought upon Native peoples.[150] But the piece that is more important than the historical inaccuracy, for the sake of this argument, is that Laura shows what her ideal is with this passage. She shows that she wants the wholesale cultural conversion, a "civilization," of the Cherokee people at Creek Path.

Catharine's writings on the other hand are very different from those of her friend and mentor. Her language focused solely on religion when describing both converted and unconverted Cherokees. As Gaul states, "Brown did not praise the missionaries for bringing civilization to the Cherokees, with its valuing of order, temperance, industriousness, or particular style of dress. She locates her discussion of the changes occurring among the Cherokees entirely on a spiritual plane."[151] When speaking of converted Cherokees she references opening the eyes of sinners, praising the Redeemer, and living in light. Catharine even at one point in a letter to a Mrs. A. H. in Philadelphia, seems to make an argument that unconverted Cherokees are no different than any other unconverted person. Of her people she said "they have precious and immortal souls to be lost or saved."[152] In writing this Catharine shows that she sees her people, no matter their spiritual state, to have souls that are ultimately worthy. She redirects the missionary conversation inward. Catharine seems to be reminding missionaries that the ultimate goal is to save souls, not to change a culture, and that Cherokee are just another iteration of the souls which need saving.

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[150] Joel W. Martin and Mark A. Nicholas, *Native Americans, Christianity, and the Reshaping of the American Religious Landscape* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). This information is location primarily in the introduction.
[151] Gaul, "Introduction," 39.
[152] Brown, *Cherokee Sister*, 77.

Finally, in proving that Catharine retained her Cherokee identity after conversion, there is one letter which Catharine wrote to her brother that is especially important. Her brother David was also a missionary and travelled delivering sermons. He also is the only family member to which Catharine ever wrote (that we have a record of) and they often discussed religion and how to be of greater service to their people. In one such letter Catharine writes:

> I am glad to learn that you have meetings on Sabbath evenings, and especially that you pray and converse in your own language. Our Father's family have, for some time past, held prayer meetings, on the same evening. Thus you see (though we know it not) our prayers have ascended, at the same time, and in the same language.[153]

It was clearly important to Catharine that both her brother and her father spoke their own language while praying. It is a simple and obvious form of syncretism: Christian prayers said in the Cherokee language. In many cultures using a traditional language is a sign of connection with one's culture, but that is especially true for Native American tribes. For most Native people "the traditional language is a sacred gift, the symbol of one's identity, the embodiment of one's culture and traditions, a means for expressing inner thoughts and feelings, and the source of ancestral wisdom."[154] In this way, Catharine and her family's use of the Cherokee language to voice Christian prayers is not just a symbolic connection to their culture, but an actual combining of two different forms of sacred-ness.

The drive that past scholars have shown to understand Catharine as only Christian, or "whitified," comes down to a misunderstanding, or ignorance of Native ways of knowing and being in the world and a reliance on a binary, colonial framework. David Moore, in *The Dream Shall Have A Name,* summarizes his own past work on this subject:

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[153] Ibid, 96.

[154] Phyllis Ngai, *Crossing Mountains: Native American Language Education in Public Schools* (California: AltaMira Press, 2012), 15.

> When one's way of knowing is structured by the reciprocal economy of the world as natural, spiritual, and social, by the comic complexity of Indigenous reality, then one's political choices and judgments expand into those interconnected relations toward a more democratic pluralism. Alternatively, when one's way of knowing is structured by the extractive economy of the industrial, financial, colonial world, by the perceived simplicity of imperial fantasy, then one's political choices and judgments follow those relations of dominance towards a more hierarchical politics. The former, a dialogical model, conceives a culture of mutuality and integration of difference. The latter…exploits pluralities to maintain its hierarchal nightmares.[155]

What Moore is saying is that it is easy for people who come from a hierarchal, imperial, colonial world to see things in absolutes. If Catharine converted to Christianity then she must no longer be Cherokee. However we must understand Catharine from an Indigenous reality, where one's choices and actions exist in a pluralistic and interconnected environment. With this understanding, the question is not "Is Catharine still Cherokee" but rather "How are her Cherokee-ness and her Christian-ness interacting?" It is not a hierarchal positioning of identities but a pluralism of identities that work together. This pluralism helps us understand more deeply how her Protestant nationhood functioned as a way to help Cherokees survive both spiritually and literally, but also as a way to keep some of their Cherokee lifeways.

Catharine's Use of Christianity to Avoid Destruction

If we come back to my simple definition of Protestant nationhood as the assumption that Christianity was the best way forward to create an ideal future for the nation, Catharine fits that perfectly. She wrote over and over again about her desire for all of her people to convert to Christianity; Christianity was the only future for the Cherokee people. However, as with all the women discussed in this dissertation, her motivations and beliefs behind that desire make it a

[155] David L Moore, *That Dream Shall Have a Name: Native Americans Rewriting America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 28.

multifaceted and unique kind of Protestant nationhood. Catharine wanted her people to be Christian because she thought it was the best way forward, the best way for her people to survive. Protestant Christianity was the tool which could solidify a good future for her people. Now this doesn't mean that Catharine was simply using Christianity; she believed in it whole-heartedly. But she also hints at an understanding of its political power in addition to her overt reference to its salvific power.

After reading through all of Catharine's letters I have noticed two different ways that she writes about missionaries. One is directly related to how missionaries, herself included, bring about conversion. In this category falls references to bringing souls to God, bringing people to read the gospel, or opening the eyes of sinners. These references are overflowing with religious language, as shown here:

> A short time since, when my nation was in darkness, and all was blind. I hope God has opened the eyes of many sinners like me. He has not begun his glorious mission in our land and I hope He will prosper his missionaries and carry on his work until all the nation shall become acquainted with our blessed redeemer.[156]

This is Protestant nationhood insofar as she believed that all her people should be Christian. It is relatively simple. She believed it was the correct religion and she wanted all her people to be saved. But it is possible to hope for a conversion of an entire group of people without participating in Protestant nationhood. There needs to be a political component. Thus, it is the second way that Catharine spoke about missionaries that truly shows how this is Protestant nationhood.

The second category references missionaries contributing to the welfare of the Cherokee nation and is almost entirely bereft of religious language. I separate Catharine's words into these two categories because it is clear that she sees two different uses for Christian missionaries. They

[156] Brown, *Cherokee Sister*, 71.

bring religion, but they also bring "welfare." Though the exact meaning behind that is unclear, it is clear that it is separate from spiritual welfare. One of the most poignant references is in a letter to Flora Gold, a donor of the American Board in Connecticut:

> Should you ever be directed by the Providence of God to this western wilderness, you should be truly welcome to your red brethren and sisters. You can hardly imagine how ignorant we are, and how much we need more good missionaries to instruct us. I can not express how much I love and thank those who have come from a far distant land to labour for the welfare of my people, who have long been neglected. May they be made instruments of doing much good.[157]

Though Catharine admits that her reader would be directed by Providence, the rest of the text does not mention religion at all. This passage is about missionaries instructing Cherokee who are ignorant and laboring for the welfare of her people. Of course ignorance can be in reference to religion and we can never know for sure what Catharine intended. But juxtaposing this passage to Catharine's references to religious conversion, we can assume by the lack of religious language that Catharine means something else in this passage. Presumably in this passage she is referencing education in a broad sense. As mentioned above, one of the goals of the missionaries of the American Board was to provide Native people with an American education. Catharine believed that Christianity was the best way forward for her people because, in addition to providing salvation, it provided an education that she believed her people needed. And in her writing that Providence guided the actions of the missionaries, we can even say that Catharine might have believed the education of Cherokees was part of God's divine plan for her people.

Catharine would not have been the only Native person, or even the only Cherokee, to see a "formal" education as an important way forward for Native peoples in a post-contact world. Plenty Coups, the famous Crow chief, is quoted as saying "Education is your most powerful

[157] Ibid, 87.

weapon. With education you are the white man's equal; without education you are his victim."[158] Plenty Coups meant that a white education was a tool by which to understand how white men operated and acted, so that you could play the game as well as they did, rather than being a victim due to a lack of understanding. While Catharine's writings don't reveal this level of thought on the subject, she did seem to at least be on this track of thinking. She stated that she wanted to use her education at Brainard to be "useful to my people."[159] This does indicate that Catharine saw the education provided by the missionaries as some kind of tool, maybe not the weapon that Plenty Coups said it was, but still a tool of some sort. As Martin said, "Catharine Brown and other elite Cherokees thought that formal education of male and female Cherokees would benefit their communities and people."[160] More than converting souls that faced damnation, Christianity provided education, which was a tool that could also avoid a different kind of destruction.

Finally, Catharine's drive to bring Christianity, and the education that came with it, to her people came from a place of deep conviction. For Catharine, this was truly about the life or death of her tribe. Throughout her letters and diary she wrote that her people were "on the brink of destruction" and urged missionaries "to teach Christ to our perishing Countrymen," saying that her people were living "without any hope in the world." These references always came alongside a discussion of the work of missionaries, to either explain or motivate their actions. Catharine believed that her people were dying, and she saw Christianity as a way to avoid that calamitous future. Thus for Catharine Brown, her Protestant nationhood, at its core, was used for survival.

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[158] C. Adrian Heidenreich, "Plenty Coups (1848-1932)," in *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, ed. David J. Wishart (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).
[159] Brown, *Cherokee Sister*, 73.
[160] Martin, "Visions of Revitalization," 64.

In order to determine how Christianity and education could prevent that destruction, it is important to briefly examine the historical context surrounding Catharine's writings. That context shows that her concerns regarding survival were not unfounded. Going back to the American Revolution, Cherokees sided with the British, which caused destruction after the end of the war. Their official status as a conquered people meant that their land was sold off and stolen at a rapid rate and there was internal chaos about leadership and tribal organization.[161] So they needed a way to come back together and reorganize. Andrew Denson in *Demanding the Cherokee Nation* discusses the important ways that the Cherokee nation changed in the early nineteenth century after the chaos of the Revolutionary War. Between 1810 and 1830 the Cherokee people "remade themselves politically" by refashioning their government to become a constitutional republic, using the United States as an example. "They defended that status against consistent and intensifying attacks by American authorities and an expanding non-Indian population."[162] In one way the changing structure of Cherokee government shows that they wanted to become a modern nation. Denson argues that the Cherokee leadership tried to allow their people to negotiate with the Americans while also keeping important aspects of their culture; it was change on Native terms.

However as the mid-nineteenth century approached, the early policies of Washington started to fade as younger American policy makers didn't see the hoped-for outcomes in terms of civilization. As a whole, Cherokee people, as well as other Native people, stayed too "Native" in the eyes of the American government. "Although Indian civilization remained a stated goal of

[161] Colin G. Calloway, *The American Revolution in Indian Country: Crisis and Diversity in Native American Communities*, Cambridge Studies in North American Indian History (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 1995). For more information see Conclusion.
[162] Andrew Denson, *Demanding the Cherokee Nation: Indian Autonomy and American Culture, 1830-1900*, Indians of the Southeast (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 3.

American policy, some involved in Indian affairs responded to the perceived failure of the civilizing program by questioning whether Indians were capable of progress."[163] This mentality is what led to the ultimate forced removal, and subsequent massacre, of Southern tribes caused by the Indian Removal Act of 1830. While Catharine died almost a decade before the Indian Removal Act, Denson shows that the seeds of that level of destruction were planted and growing during her lifetime. As a leader in her community, the chances are high that she was aware of this growing tension, and of the dwindling American attitudes towards her people.

We can never know exactly how Catharine saw this playing out, or even if she had conceived of how it could work, but the truth is that it could. There were many possible reasons as to why Catharine saw Christianity as the way to prevent destruction. One such reason comes back around to America's historical connection to Protestant Christianity. Vine Deloria, in *For This Land*, explains the way that America's dependence on Protestant Christianity influenced Native policy, specifically as it related to the Osage in their attempt to get land back from the Railroad companies in the late nineteenth century. "The criterion for deciding the legal rights of the Osage was not the legal documents which detailed the rights of the responsibilities of the US and the Osage tribe, but a higher criterion which took precedent, 'such considerations of justice as will control a Christian people in their treatment of an ignorant and dependent race.'"[164] Deloria explores the way that civil religion was used to justify the subjugation of non-Christian peoples. In this case the Osage didn't have the same rights as the white men who ran the railroad companies because they were not Christian. There were different religious ethics behind negotiating with non-Christian people, which then led to different legal ethics.

[163] Ibid, 22.
[164] Vine Deloria, *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 172.

This is one way in which converting her tribe to Christianity could have helped prevent the destruction of Catharine's people. If they were a Christian people, it would mean that they merited, in the eyes of the State, a different, more equitable kind of treatment. While the Osage case occurred long after Catharine died, it is probable that she saw a similar attitude in her interactions with missionaries. Even looking at the earlier quote regarding Laura Potter's perceptions of non-Christian Cherokees indicates that Catharine would have seen the differential treatment. It is possible she wanted to prevent outsiders from seeing her people as so wholly other by making a connection between the Cherokee and the white people who had the power to destroy them. Catharine's motivation could come down to an adapt or perish kind of mentality.

This comes down to one of the most frustrating aspects of studying history: we do not know for sure why historical figures acted or spoke the way they did. We don't know for sure if Catharine meant a spiritual or literal destruction of her people. But we can guess based on the fact that we know she was a highly intelligent woman, and by looking at what was happening around her, that she could understand what the potential futures were for her people. Her world was rapidly changing, and in the words of Theda Perdue "Christianity offered certainty when little else seemed certain."[165]

Catharine Brown and Gender

One of the most common topics in the scholarship on Native women and gender revolves around contact and power. Many narratives on Native women from a variety of tribes start with the question "did women retain their power post-contact?" It is a question that Theda Perdue

[165] Theda Perdue, "Catharine Brown, Cherokee Convert to Christianity," in *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives, Viewpoints on American Culture* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 81.

famously answered for Cherokee women. When she published *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change* in 1998 she refuted many earlier scholars who held tight to the declension model, adding more nuance to the discussion. As she wrote, "too great an emphasis on change led us to the declension model, whereas obsession with cultural continuity obscures the dynamic nature of cultures."[166] In other words, when scholars focus too much on change, it can make it seem as though Native culture is declining because anything that is different is deemed as negative. It contributes to the myth of the historical Indian, which makes the only "authentic Indian" a figure who existed in the past and cannot exist in modernity. But Perdue also argues against scholars who only focus on continuity because that can also have a detrimental effect on the true understanding of how cultures change over time. The overall point to Perdue's argument is that scholars must be nuanced in the way they address gender and culture change by avoiding sweeping judgments and embracing ambiguity. So the question should never be "did contact with whites decrease Native women's power?" which implies a singular yes or no and takes away Native women's agency by placing all power for change in the hands of whites. Rather we should examine how and why things changed regarding gender, and look into what aspects of gender didn't change, or adjusted in minor ways. This methodology retains Native women's agency as we examine how the world around them changed, and asks what they did to change, or not, alongside it. Applying this to Catharine Brown, we can see how her relationship and negotiation of gender is fraught with ambiguities.

First an important part of the civilizing mission of the American Board revolved around re-ordering Cherokee ideals of gender. One prominent example of this is that in Cherokee society women farmed, while men hunted, but in white American society men farmed, which

[166] Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*, Indians of the Southeast (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 7.

allowed women to stay in the home. Missionaries made it their mission to teach boys to farm and to teach young girls to keep a clean house.[167] This is just one of the ways that Catharine's education taught her domesticity and prepared her to be at home with middle-class white women. We know from her letters that this was at least partially successful. She often mentions missing the women she became friends with at Brainard, even saying "I feel grieved when I think of leaving all my Christian friends, and of going far from all religious people, into a wild howling wilderness…"[168] While she does not explicitly mention domesticity or even gender, we know that the friends she is referring to are all women, and the reference to "howling wilderness" makes the world of Brainerd, by comparison, a place of civilization and domesticity. Mostly we see that Catharine found a home with women who "embodied the roles of middle-class white women on the Northeast."[169]

However there are many aspects to Catharine's life that show how her understanding of gender remained heavily influenced by Cherokee lifeways. First, even the tight-knit circle of women "replicated in some ways the world in which Catharine grew up."[170] Women in Cherokee society often lived very separate lives from men; gender roles were distinct and clear and did not offer many places to men and women to interact. The type of sisterhood inculcated in Cherokee society was strikingly similar to the sisterhood formed by Christian women at Brainard.

Additionally the way that women worked and fit within religious structures of power was similar between Cherokee and Christian spirituality. In Cherokee society, the Green Corn Ceremony was one of the most important religious rituals. It celebrated the corn upon which Cherokee people survived but it was also a time for forgiveness and a reestablishment of

[167] Perdue, "Catharine Brown, Cherokee Convert to Christianity," 80.
[168] Brown, *Cherokee Sister*, 62
[169] Perdue, "Catharine Brown, Cherokee Convert to Christianity," 82.
[170] Ibid, 82.

equilibrium. As women were the famers and tenders of corn, this ceremony "placed women squarely in the center of Cherokee religion."[171] This meant that both community harmony and the survival which corn provided were both religious matters that were primarily governed by women. This fits very well with Catharine's understanding of her place in the religious structures of her people. It was not out of the ordinary for a woman to concern herself with the religiously influenced survival of her people, in fact it was her duty to lead in such matters. While not to the same extent as Cherokee religion, Protestantism too gave spiritual authority to women. Janet Moore Lindman states that "for many white women in early America, religion not only meant an idea of spiritual equality but also access to power and activism within their godly communities."[172] Amanda Porterfield also argued that Puritanism, the foundation for American Protestantism, gave substantial power to women in its emphasis on the family. Women had power in their household and in the education of their children.[173] Theresa Gaul relates this specifically to Catharine when she writes that her religion allowed her to access power "through Euro-American gender roles, which accorded women spiritual influence."[174] This too fits with Catharine's ideas, except in her Cherokee worldview "children" would not have meant only biological children but rather the entire community. So the power and leadership that Catharine found in religion has roots in both the religious tradition she was raised in, and the one she eventually converted to.

[171] Perdue, *Cherokee Women Gender and Culture Change, 1700-1835*, 25.
[172] Janet Moore Lindman, "Beyond the Meetinghouse: Women and Protestant Spirituality in Early America," in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine A. Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 143.
[173] Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England*, Religion in America (Oxford University Press, 1992). Particularly chapters 3 and 4.
[174] Gaul, "Introduction," 20.

So what does this all mean? It means that Theda's Perdue's ideas regarding gender and Native women are certainly true: it is complicated. It is not possible to sort through all of Catharine's actions and say what aspects of her womanhood were influenced by Christianity and which ones by Cherokee religion. She personified the melding of two cultures, and so that meant her gender melded two cultures as well. One thing that Catharine does help prove more definitively is that the declension narrative regarding Native women is not accurate. Contact with whites, or the development of a more extensive relationship with them, does not immediately and definitely lower women's power and place in society. Catharine is an example of someone who was able to take the power offered to women by two different religions and use her leadership skills to bring the two peoples together. If anything her power in both societies increased due to her ability to blend and adapt.

Ultimately, Catharine used the melding of two ideas of gender to help further her mission of Protestant nationhood. She found the similarities in gender construction so that her words would be recognized by her people and also that she would have (albeit limited) power within Protestant circles. As Carolyn Johnston writes, "Cherokee women were central in asserting Cherokee nationalism and cultural autonomy. They creatively accepted those aspects of the civilization program that made their domestic tasks easier, such as using spinning wheels, but the majority rejected the injunctions to become subordinate to men and resisted attempts to diminish their power during the early nineteenth century."[175] Johnston doesn't deal with the term nationalism on the scale that I do in this dissertation, but she uses the term when talking about acculturation and the civilization program. So it seems that the second term she uses, "cultural autonomy" is an indication of what she means by nationalism. Catharine also creatively accepted

[175] Carolyn Ross Johnston, *Cherokee Women In Crisis Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907*, Contemporary American Indians (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 52.

certain aspects of gender in order to further her cause, such as sisterhood and domesticity, without giving up the community leadership afforded to her by Cherokee religion. Though Catharine's methods were different from other Cherokee women, many who resisted any form of acculturation, I argue that Catharine's mission was still one of Cherokee nationalism, both according to my own definition and Johnston's. Catharine wanted to use Christianity to ensure her people's political and spiritual survival, but she also wanted them to retain aspects of their Cherokee culture. Her primary concern was always the future and survival of her people, and in that way she fits with Johnston's claim that it was Cherokee women who were the primary forces in asserting Cherokee nationalism.

Conclusion: What is Catharine Brown's brand of Protestant nationhood?

One thing this chapter has proven is that Catharine Brown was a woman who blended two cultures. Her Cherokee ideals of community, sacredness, and gender stayed with her throughout her life. But also her Christian faith influenced the way she understood the future of her people. Her uses of Protestant nationhood come from both of those identities, but still ultimately comes down on the side of all of the women in this book: Christianity should be connected with the nation, except in Catharine's case it was the Cherokee Nation.

Catharine's concern for the fate of her people is palpable in her letters, even when she was trying to follow standard letter-writing conventions for the time you can still feel the concern in her words. She believed her people were on the brink of destruction. As a newly converted Christian, Catharine believed that Christianity was the way forward for her people. What makes Catharine's words are emblematic of Protestant nationhood because she wasn't just concerned about converting individuals, though she did do that. Her primary concern was for her

whole nation to convert. She frequently referred to the Cherokee nation as a place of darkness and blindness, a place in need of light. This shows that the need for Christianity was not individual but national. Additionally, her motivation was about more than simply a need to convert because of some belief that Christianity was the correct religion (in fact she never disparages Cherokee religious beliefs or makes a direct comparison between the two). Rather Catharine believed if her entire nation converted to Christianity, then they could avoid destruction and ensure their own survival.

Though Catharine herself never gave details as to why or how she saw that Christian-based survival occurring, we can look at Native scholarship and make some hypotheses. Vine Deloria catalogued how Indigenous Nations have been treated differently by the US government explicitly because they were a non-Christian people. Joel Martin and David Moore describe the ways that Native people are experts at negotiating and adapting in order to guarantee their own survival. Theda Perdue argued that key Cherokee ideals, specifically regarding gender, were able to survive amidst change and provide a sense of continuity for Cherokee people. Whether or not she knew it, Catharine was taking into account all of these ideas when she exercised her Protestant nationhood. A Christian Indian nation would likely be more successful at negotiating with a Christian nation like the US. But that change wouldn't mean a complete negation of Cherokee identity, as seen by Catharine herself who still lived by some Cherokee ways of knowing and community and gender norms. Ultimately, Catharine was a woman who wanted the best for her people, and for reasons we will never fully understand, she believed the best way forward was Christianity.

Chapter 4: Maria Stewart

Maria Stewart, nee Miller, was born in 1803 in Connecticut. Very little is known about her life, especially her early life. She was orphaned at the age of five and was bound out to a clergyman's family where she stayed until she turned fifteen. Then it seems as if she supported herself though work as a domestic servant. Marilyn Richardson, a biographer of Maria, posits that she gained as much informal education as she could, largely through Sunday school classes which offered limited literacy education in order to read the Bible.[176] That is all we know about her early life, until her marriage on August 10, 1826 to James Stewart. James was several years his wife's senior, having served in the war of 1812 and set up a successful business as a ship outfitter. Interestingly, Maria not only took James's last name but also his middle initial, "W." After only three years James came down with an illness which left him bedridden. He died on December 17, 1829.[177] Though James was a successful businessman and left her a substantial inheritance, she was cheated out of it by unethical white businessmen who used the American legal system against her. She faced another blow when her mentor David Walker mysteriously died in the summer of 1830.[178]

The two deaths threw Maria into a time of deep grief and mourning. In her own reflections Maria noted how in this period she "cried unto the Lord in [her] troubles."[179] In doing so she experienced a born-again moment. Whereas she had always been a religious person,

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[176] Marilyn Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 19.
[177] Ibid, 23.
[178] John C. Inscoe, "Walker, David," in *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography: Vol. 6: T-Z*, ed. William S. Powell (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 110–11.
[179] Maria W. Stewart, *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart, Presented in 1832 to the First African Baptist Church and Society of Boston, Mass*, (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 53.

having been a member of Boston's African Baptist Church, her grief led her to an even deeper understanding of religion's place in her daily life. This was the moment in Maria's spiritual life when she started to connect spiritual and religious directives with the plight of Black people, both slaves and free, in the United States. She started to understand herself as a spiritual warrior in the fight for equality.[180]

One year later, in 1831, Stewart was determined to find an outlet for her thoughts on abolition and religion. Following in Walker's footsteps, Maria affiliated herself with white activists, though they did not agree on everything (such as Maria's more overt militance). Given that, Maria found *The Liberator* to be the best way to bring her thoughts to the public. So she went to their offices and asked them to publish a manuscript which called for the Black community to "sue for their rights and privileges."[181] In this first meeting, Garrison recognized Maria's intelligence and writing prowess. Thus the document, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality: The Sure Foundation on Which we Must Build" was published in one of the first editions of *The Liberator.* The essay was relegated to the "ladies department" of the newspaper due to the conventions of the day.[182] Despite the gendered caveat, this essay launched a short but impactful career as a pamphleteer and lecturer, partially due to Garrison's support. Maria went on to deliver five speeches between 1831 and 1833, becoming the first woman to lecture publicly to a mixed-gender audience.[183] These speeches, along with some of her personal reflections, were collected and published as *Productions of Ms. Maria W. Stewart* in 1835 and again in 1879, as *Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart.* The central theme of all her speeches and

[180] Richardson, *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer*, 24.
[181] Ibid, 26.
[182] Ibid, 27.
[183] Maria Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality: The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build (1831)," *Oxford African American Studies Center*. 30 Sept. 2009.

publications was that of theodicy. She continually asked, and tried to answer, the question of why bad things happen to good people.[184] And this wasn't purely a theoretical question, Maria wanted to figure out how God could allow slavery to exist, and more importantly, what needed to be done for the system to be done away with. Her deeply prophetic understanding of the world culminated in God coming down to mete out justice and end the slaveocracy once and for all.

Little is known about Maria's life after she delivered those influential speeches. We know that she spent time teaching in New York and Baltimore before finally setting in Washington, DC.[185] She wrote a small autobiographical account called "Sufferings During the War," which starts in the late-1850s. The writing is a touch melodramatic, as Maria refers to herself as "the heroine" and tells her story like a novel rife with drama. First, she catalogued how she lost her job in Baltimore as a teacher when all of the denominations formed their own schools and staffed them with their own members. Her status as a Black episcopalian meant that she had no school in which to teach. Then she moved to Washington, DC in 1871 to find work, having been reduced to begging due to lack of income. Once in DC Maria started a small school which provided some basic income.[186]

As a good Christian woman, much of her short autobiography detailed her efforts to organize prayer meetings. She painstakingly accounted their meeting locations, the number of attendees, which leaders were involved and so on. Eventually some of the other women grew angry with Maria, the reason is unclear, and they complained to one of the prayer meeting leaders, Dr. Hall, that Maria was seeking praise and personal commendation for her efforts. Understanding pride as a sin, our heroine was shunned by the community she had helped to

[184] Valerie C. Cooper, *Word, Like Fire: Maria Stewart, the Bible, and the Rights of African Americans*, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 3.
[185] Ibid, 2.
[186] Stewart, "Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart," 14.

build. But ever faithful that God would help her, she continued on, once again reduced to a state of begging. Maria's story then takes a different turn when she describes the way in which the Episcopalian church sometimes "administered her communion to the blacks when they were at the table of the Lord, and sometimes she passed them by when they were at the table."[187] Maria was filled with "holy indignation" and complained. Eventually the problem was rectified and Maria, after having suffered "martyrdom" (which to Maria, seems to mean overcoming a hardship by the grace of God) she could finally declare herself at home in the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Later, she was appointed the Matron of the Freedman's Hospital, which was not only a hospital but a refugee camp for formerly enslaved people. Then in 1878, a law was passed which gave pensions to widows of veterans from the War of 1812.[188] Maria used some of this money to publish the second edition of her speeches, which was published in the year of her death. In 1879, she died in the hospital in which she lived and worked in the last years of her life.

Though this brief account does not give us much detail about the whole course of her life, it does provide insight about the type of information that was important to Maria. As Valerie Cooper states "Stewart herself seems intent upon obscuring the details of her own life story except for those that solidify her credentials as a Christian woman of good character."[189] For Maria the messenger was not important, other than that she was credible as a Christian woman; it was the message that integral to Maria's goals and mission in life, which was to bring about God's justice in the world.

[187] Ibid, 24.
[188] Ibid, 9.
[189] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*. Pg 2.

In this chapter I argue that Maria Stewart's creation of Protestant nationhood combines the goal of racial uplift with a firm belief in God's favor for Black people to predict a wholly Black future for America, and one that women bear a special responsibility in creating. The primary source material for this chapter will only be "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality," as it contains a wealth of material which relates directly to her use of Protestant nationhood Each section in this chapter will highlight a specific aspect of Maria's thinking on the subject.

Maria's Sacralization of American Concepts and Condemnation of America

There are many concepts which have become sacred in American culture, ones which we like to deem "American values," ideas like freedom and equality. Maria used these ideas, specifically the ways in which they had already become sacred, to her own advantage, always with the idea of racial uplift and the overthrow of the slavocracy. She was not unique in this. A number of prominent abolitionists, such as Garrison and Douglass, used these values to fight against slavery.[190] But Maria is unique in that she took those concepts and tied them more explicitly to the Christian God than to America. By separating these concepts from their national ties, Maria was able to more effectively argue for Black nationalism (which will be dealt with in the next section) and it also allowed Maria to wholeheartedly condemn America, and Americans, for their actions. In addition to separating the concepts from America, Maria also separated

[190] One of the most relevant examples is Frederick Douglass's speech to the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society of Rochester in 1852. In "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," (Also called "What to the Slave is Fourth of July"). Douglass asked "are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?" He asked his listeners to think about what the causes were behind the Revolution and specifically what principles were guaranteed by that document. He held America up to its past promises and asked if they had been fulfilled. Douglass's resounding answer was no. Full text from Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor, *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Review Press, 2000), 188-206.

Black people from Americans. Throughout "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality" she referred to her own people as "daughters of Africa" or "Ethiopians." When she used the term Americans, she meant white people.

One of the first concepts that Maria used was the idea of independence. Early in "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality" she wrote "From the moment I experienced the change, I felt a strong desire with the help and assistance of God, to devote the remainder of my days to piety and virtue, and now possess that spirit of independence."[191] The change she referred to was her born-again experience. It was after she was born again that she possessed, among other things, the spirit of independence. Piety and virtue[192] were already religious concepts, so it is not surprising that her born-again experience reiterated those for her. But, as Valerie Cooper points out, the idea of independence is not found in the King James Version of the Bible and can only be "Stewart's elevation of the democratic rhetoric of American civil religion to the level of God-given gift."[193] Rather than this spirit of independence coming from more traditionally American places, like the Declaration of Independence, Maria argued that her spirit of independence came directly from God.[194] As will be discussed in more detail later, this is similar

[191] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."
[192] Virtue here is not Mercy's classical republican idea of virtue. Rather for Maria it was the religious and gendered concept of right femaleness and demeanor, similar to concepts of the Cult of True Womanhood, to be explored later in the chapter.
[193] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*. Pg 43.
[194] It is important to point out that the Declaration of Independence itself signaled that the unalienable rights of humankind came from the Creator. Of course among these is the right to liberty, which is similar to independence. However, Gregg Frazer argues that the authors of the Declaration did not ascribe to that belief in any Christian manner, but rather, as theistic rationalists, the Creator was a god of nature and truths were self-evident rather than revealed through scripture. Regarding the wording, Frazer argues that "Jefferson and the others wrote the Declaration 'artfully' to appeal to both rationalists and to the more conventionally religious." [The Religious Beliefs of America's Founders: Reason, Revelation, and Revolution (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 217.] They wanted it to seem more Christian than they actually believed it to be. So the Declaration of Independence partially signals the way that people in early America connected the idea of liberty with God, in that the authors felt the need to cater to them. Thus the idea of a sacred freedom did not come entirely from the sacralization of the Revolution.

to the concept of freedom. It had achieved a holy status due to its place in American ethos, rather than any concrete connection to the Bible. However, while Maria didn't outright reject the Declaration of Independence, she did show that it wasn't necessary to her understanding of independence. God gave it to her directly, without the need for America as a middleman.

Maria was entirely devoted to the Bible, and she presented it as her primary source of knowledge (though she was no doubt influenced by many other forces, like her community, print culture, even American history). While this reliance of the Bible was not uncommon in the U.S. at this time, especially for Evangelicals, Maria's extensive use and understanding of the Biblical text rivalled that of a preacher.[195] An entire chapter in Cooper's book is devoted to Maria's intricate and deliberate use of biblical passages. But this phrase "spirit of independence" has no biblical origins. So it was Maria's own theological understanding which brought her to that place. And not only was it a generic theological basis, it was a distinctly evangelical one. Just as one had to be born-again to fully experience Christ, one also had to be born again to truly know the spirit of independence.

Maria did not pluck the word "independence" out of the void, however. While, of course, independence is not a strictly American concept, the famous document with that name had already become a sacred object. Peter Gardella explains that after the War of 1812, "after that first challenge to American independence has been met…Americans turned to the Declaration with even more reverence."[196] While this is a somewhat over-broad statement, Gardella does show the ways in which at this time period, the language of independence was especially strong in American rhetoric and culture. Gardella argues that during the 1820s and 1830s, the

[195] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*, 11.
[196] Peter Gardella, *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 102.

sacredness of the American revolution really started to coalesce. July 4th had become a holy day and "the Declaration was its central scripture."[197] So not only was the word independence, as specifically tied to that document, becoming sacred, but the very idea of the American Revolution, that idea of independence, was becoming sacred as well. Maria was no doubt influenced by the increasing sacralization of the concept of independence within American culture. But she took that trend and redirected it.

However, the moment of American Revolution did not appear to be sacred for Maria herself. In all of her writing about freedom and independence she does not mention the Revolution or any of the founding fathers. The only vague reference to American history comes when she wrote, "The Americans have practiced nothing but head-work these 200 years, and we have done their drudgery."[198] She acknowledged that America had been around for 200 years, but it is a history that only contained only the drudgery of Black people, nothing sacred. There are several reasons why Maria would not have found the Revolution or the Declaration of Independence to be part of a sacred history. The first is that despite language which sounds universal, the Declaration did not guarantee freedom for Black people. Many of the founders believed that these God-granted rights belonged to white people, not Black. After all both Washington and Jefferson enslaved people throughout their lives. Even if the founding fathers did not explicitly state the racial makeup of those with unalienable rights, their silence on the matter allowed slavery to continue. As Peter Gardella argues in *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred,* the vagaries of the document allowed pro-slavery advocates to make the argument that "human equality and rights had no necessary connection with the sacred cause of

[197] Ibid, 102.
[198] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."

American independence."[199] Interestingly, Maria might have agreed with that statement. The sacred events and documents of American history, despite the 200 years of head-work, had done nothing for Black people, so how could it possibly be sacred to Maria? Rather than independence and being sacred because of the American Revolution, it was sacred because it came directly from God. Though Maria did not provide us with a definition of independence, we can assume, based on both the cultural meaning of the word and her nascent Black nationalism, that she means a Black independence from America.

A related concept that Maria takes from the American ethos and turns it into a religious one is the idea of freedom/liberty. Freedom, like independence, is not an exclusively American concept. But it had taken on a distinctly American flavor and became a sacred ideal. As Byrd explains in *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, Galatians 5:1[200] became a rallying cry for patriots during the Revolutionary War, who interpreted the verse to mean that freedom and liberty were the very spirit of the gospel.[201] However, as both Byrd and Cooper point out, these words are only rarely found in scripture. Nevertheless the concept of freedom as a sacred Biblical ideal became inextricably tied with the birth of the American nation. Then second part of Galatians 5:1, which promises that God's people will never again be under the "yoke of bondage," leads us to another sacred understanding of freedom.

Just as patriots made their need for freedom from Britain a holy action, so too did enslaved and free Black people see their hoped-for freedom as holy, and in doing so separated it from white people. David Walker showcases one of the best examples of this understanding of

[199] Gardella, *American Civil Religion*, 104.
[200] "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Galatians 5:1, KJV.
[201] James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 129-130.

freedom. He wrote the not so succinctly titled *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America.* One of the primary goals behind this piece was to convince his fellow Black people that freedom was intrinsically theirs, given by God, not something that was exclusively the right of white people. He wrote, "Should tyrants take it into their heads to emancipate any of you, remember that your freedom is your natural right. You are men, as well as they, and instead of returning thanks to them for your freedom, return it to the Holy Ghost, who is our rightful owner."[202] This line shows a reclaiming of freedom. It is not something slaveholders or even politicians could bestow upon Black people, as if they owned freedom. It is the Holy Ghost who grants humankind their freedom and therefore it equally resides in all people. If that was not enough of a connection between freedom and God, Walker encouraged his fellow man to "fight under our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in the glorious and heavenly cause of freedom and of God—to be delivered from the most wretched, abject and servile slavery."[203] Here he made clear that freedom and God were intricately connected. It would be Jesus Christ himself who would lead the battle against slavery. To Walker, God never intended his people to be enslaved and he would do what was necessary to make that right, and in that argument, Walker made freedom a holy cause.

Maria showed an understanding of both types of sacred freedom in "Religion and Pure Principles of Morality," and she played off one to encourage the other. One of the more controversial parts of Maria's speech is when she praised white culture and people and pleaded with her own Black community to emulate them. She noted that after "taking a survey of the

[202] David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, DocSouth Books ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Library, 2011), 70.
[203] Ibid, 18.

American people [recall that "American" to Maria equals white] in my own mind," she saw them thriving in culture, religion, and morality. It is due to this thriving that they were able to be politically successful. Maria understood the connection that white people made between religion and politics and even credited their political success to their dedication to religion. The point behind this message through was to tell her Black audience to do the same. If they did, then "their souls would become fired with a holy zeal for freedom's cause."[204] She was trying to build up a successful Black community based on the principles of how white Americans thrived.

However there is a problematic extension to her argument, in that she essentially blames Black people for their position in society. In her mind, if only they would do better, and emulate the way that white people had embraced religion and politics, then Black people would be able to raise themselves out of their position. If they are the ones who can lift themselves out, then by extension they were the ones who put themselves in that position to begin with. While this is certainly an extension of her thinking, I posit another reason for her situating Black uplift in Black people and not in society as a whole. Today, in the BLM movement for example, fighting racism revolves around fighting white supremacy as a whole, by fixing the way that systems perpetuate harm, death, and persecution. These movements, rightly so, place the blame for racism on white people.[205] However for Maria, white America is beyond hope, as will be discussed in the next paragraph. There is no hope for them to change and soon God will reign down his judgment upon them. Therefore the responsibility for racial uplift must fall to Black people. I posit that Maria's stance does not come from a place of victim blaming but rather one of extreme faith in her community, and in the God who backed them.

[204] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."
[205] See https://blacklivesmatter.com/blm-demands/ for more information.

Once Maria had untangled "American" concepts, like freedom, from white Americans and made sure that her audience understood them to be God-given and not the exclusive property of white people, she was free to make her condemnation of America. Some of the strongest language in "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality" comes near the end when she laid out America's sins and predicted God's punishment on the nation.

> Oh, America, America, foul and indelible is your stain! Dark and dismal is the cloud that hangs over you for your cruel wrongs and injuries to the fallen sons of Africa. The blood of her murdered ones cries to heaven for vengeance against you. You art almost become drunken with the blood of her slain; you have enriched thyself through her toils and labors; and now you refuse to make even a small return. And you have caused the daughters of Africa to commit whoredoms and fornications; but upon you be their curse…
>
> You may kill, tyrannize, and oppress as much as you choose, until our cry shall come up before the throne of God; for I am firmly persuaded, that he will not suffer you to quell the proud, fearless and undaunted spirits of the African forever; for in his own time, he is able to plead our cause against you, and to pour out upon you the ten plagues of Egypt. We will not come out against you with swords and staves, as against a thief; but we will tell you that our souls are fired with the same love of liberty and independence with which your souls are fired. We will tell you that too much of your blood flows in our veins, and too much of your color in our skins, for us not to possess your spirits. We will tell you that it is our gold that clothes you in fine linen and purple, and causes you to fare sumptuously every day; and it is the blood of our fathers and the tears of our brethren that have enriched your soils. And we claim our rights. We will tell you that we are not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that can do no more; but we will tell you whom we do fear. We fear Him who is able, after he has killed, to destroy both soul and body in hell forever. Then, my brethren, sheath your swords, and calm your angry passions. Stand still, and know that the Lord he is God. Vengeance is his, and he will repay. It is a long lane that has no turn. America has risen to her meridian. When you begin to thrive, she will begin to fall.[206]

I have included the quote almost in its entirety to ensure the full effect of Maria's word is clear. However I will only be closely examining the parts which reference her connection between God and America.

[206] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."

Firstly, using Valerie Cooper's work on Maria's biblical connections, there are two distinct places in which Maria uses biblical language to essentially cast the actors in the play of American judgement. First, when Maria argued that America was "drunken with the blood of her slain," that is a reference to Revelation 17:6.[207] Cooper argues that with this connection Maria "links the nation's behavior to that of the opponents of Christ who are described in the book of Revelation."[208] So America's actions against Black people not only make America morally bad, but they make America the very enemy of Christ. In doing do Maria elevates the crime of slavery beyond a political or even a moral crime, it is a religious crime that goes against Jesus Christ.

So if America is the evil from Revelation, who then are Maria and her community of Black people? Maria's statement that her people's "cry shall come up before the throne of God," is a reference to Exodus 2:23,[209] and serves as a clear connection between Black people and Israelites. I will save the complete unpacking of this connection for the next section, but for this section it serves to show that Maria trusted that God would act on behalf of her people. Just as God liberated the Israelites from bondage, so too will God liberate her people from slavery. By using both of these biblical allusions Maria made her point crystal clear. Whether it be in the Old or New Testament, America is always the force of evil, in opposition to God's will. This overall speaks to Maria's evangelical understanding of the bible. Biblical time was not a separate and distinct historical truth. Rather the bible is a document which was eternally true; it spoke directly to Maria's time and to the experiences faced by her and her people. This is why she could speak with such confidence about what God would do, because her evangelical worldview collapsed

[207] "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." Revelation 17:6, KJV.
[208] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*, 80.
[209] "And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage." Exodus 2:23, KJV.

biblical time and the present. Due to this outlook, Maria could confidently say that God would judge America.

However that judgement is a specific kind of judgement which connects America's future, or lack thereof, with the future of Black people. In the last lines of this quote, Maria prophesied that America has reached her zenith and she will now start to fall. But more than that Maria said that once her people started to rise, that act would precipitate America's fall. This relates to a wider understanding of the Ethiopic prophecy in America. This relates to the various understandings of Psalm 68:31.[210] Roy Kay explains in his book *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters* that this verse, being one of the most quoted in Black American writings, was used in a plethora of ways to fight for freedom, uplift Black people, and encourage Black independence. Though there is certainly not one understanding of the Ethiopian prophecy, Kay states that David Walker, Maria's mentor, understood it in a "typical" way: "the narrative of the fortunate fall, of an idyllic national past, a national fall due to sin, and a future national redemption through Christ."[211] Being so closely aligned with Walker, Maria followed a similar understanding of how the Ethiopic nation (of course not Ethiopia the country, but Ethiopia as a name for all Africans in America) fell but would rise again, and her writing echoes his own prophetic language. However, Maria added one important part of this prophecy: the fall of America. So as the Ethiopian prophecy is fulfilled it not only means that Black people in America would rise, but it would also mean that white Americans would fall. This is nowhere in the verse itself or in any common understanding of Ethiopic prophecy, Maria added it all herself.

Why though? What in Maria's understanding of Protestant nationhood necessitated America's fall? Vengeance. Black people were God's chosen people (as will be discussed more

[210] "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." Psalm 68:31, KJV.
[211] Roy Kay, *The Ethiopian Prophecy in Black American Letters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 122.

thoroughly in the next section) and white Americans committed horrible atrocities upon them, not only slavery but as Maria hinted at in this section, sexual trauma and countless other sins. So the only way that God's people could rise was if their oppressors were punished. To use another one of Maria's favorite Biblical metaphors, just as the Egyptians had to be punished to free the Israelites, so too would America need to be punished, and fall, in order to truly free the Ethiopians. Maria trusted in this fully; she knew that God would bring down his holy wrath upon the American people, quoting Roman 12:16, "vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord,"[212] to prove her point. It was God's special relationship with Black people that meant he would take action to fashion the country in the way it needed to be.

Maria's Black (Religious) Nationalism

Maria is an interesting figure in this dissertation because only she (and later in chapter 6, Lucy French) espouse what can be rightly classified as a form of religious nationalism. That is that, bound up within her work to create a Protestant nation, she believed that God had a special relationship with Black people. Recalling Gorski's definition of religious nationalism, he says that it means the belief in a "righteous nation charged with divine commission to rid the world of evil and usher in the Second Coming."[213] In Maria's case the nation is not America, but rather the Black nation. So, Maria rhetoric not only shows a Protestant nationhood similar to our other authors in her attempt to create a society governed by the rules of Protestant Christianity, but she also explicitly defined that society as one chosen and directed by God. The foundation of Maria's Black religious nationalism is the belief that God had a special relationship with Black people.

[212] "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord," Roman 12:16, KJV.
[213] Gorkski, *American Covenant*, 3.

Her writing is rife with references to how much God loves the sons and daughters of Africa and how much Black people are chosen in the eyes of God. One of the most direct references to this is a comparison to Genesis:

> Many think, because your skins are tinged with a sable hue, that you are an inferior race of beings; but God does not consider you as such. He hath formed and fashioned you in his own glorious image, and hath bestowed upon you reason and strong powers of intellect. He hath made you to have dominion over the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea. He hath crowned you with glory and honor; hath made you but a little lower than the angels; and, according to the Constitution of these United States, he hath made all men free and equal.[214]

Here, Maria used the chosenness of Black people to directly confront racism. She did this by reiterating Genesis 1:26[215] but specifying that it is true for Black people, not only white people as others have assumed. This is the point in one of the two creation stories in Genesis in which God creates the first humans. By using this verse Maria showed that Black people were chosen by God because they were included in the very creation of the world. Thus Maria, as Cooper argued refuted, "those who argued that Africans were the result of a second, inferior creation. Stewart includes them in those created by God 'in the beginning.'"[216] They were created in God's image (which creates the potential for God to be Black as well, but she did not take this particular point further) and they inherited the Earth. So, from the very beginning of time, God was the God of Black people and he created the world for them.

This is certainly not the only reference to the way in which Black people were chosen by God. The very phrases she used to reference her people time and time again show a connection

[214] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."
[215] "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Genesis 1:26, KJV.
[216] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*. Pg 45.

with the chosen communities in the Bible. Cooper expertly draws out the various verses which Maria used to reference her community:

> Stewart invokes this imagery, similar to daughters of Zion (Song of Solomon 3:11, Isaiah 3:16, 3:17, 4:4) daughters of Judah (Psalms 48:11, 97:8) or daughters of Israel (Deuteronomy 20:17, Judges 11:40, 2 Samuel 1:24) when she calls out to the "daughters of Africa" as a new chosen people, a people of promise before God.[217]

Cooper sums it up nicely by saying that just the phrase "daughters of Africa" makes Black people another in a distinguished line of chosen groups. This is so real for Maria because of her belief in the extension of Biblical time into the present, so it only makes sense that Black people would belong to this line of chosen people. But it is not only the name which connects Black people to the Biblical communities; Biblical context also exists in the present time. This means that America became Babylon and Egypt just as Black people became the Israelites.

This speaks to the primary argument behind Eddie Glaude's *Exodus!,* in which he explores the consistent use of the Exodus narrative among Black communities, and the meanings behind that act. He writes: "the idea of political freedom was constructed, to some extent, within a language that linked biblical figures to postbiblical persons, places, and events. If we only read the story of Exodus and its analogical application as examples of community of faith awaiting an act of God, then we miss, I believe, the full significance of this mimetic act and its powerful hold on the black political imagination."[218] In other words, pulling on the Exodus story is not just a simple analogy, or a comparison of situations, it is way to signal both to the in-group and the out-group, that Black people are holy and chosen.

However, Maria's conception of Black religion nationalism had a hitch, a rather serious hitch, which makes her sometimes difficult for modern Black audiences to read. While Black

[217] Ibid, 49.
[218] Glaude Jr., *Exodus,* 4.

people were certainly God's chosen people, God's justice was not without conditions. Maria continually encouraged her community to improve themselves, even going so far as to call her own people ignorant. She wrote, "truly my heart's desire and prayer is, that Ethiopia might stretch forth her hands unto God. But we have a great work to do. Never, no, never will the chains of slavery and ignorance burst, till we become united as one, and cultivate among ourselves the pure principles of piety, morality, and virtue."[219] In other words, it was only by working towards being more Godly people that God would exercise his justice in order to liberate. That means there is a threshold for Godliness and right living that must be met in order for God to free his people. Again we see the hint of victim blaming in Maria's words, in that Black people must reach that threshold in order to obtain God's justice.

However problematic and difficult to read as that is, it is very characteristic of the rhetorical form that Maria followed in *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality:* the jeremiad. The jeremiad, at its core, is a speech to a people chosen by God that chastises (to varying degrees) that group of people for their failings, specifically their failings to God. If they do not come back into the proper covenantal relationship with God, terrible consequences would ensue. But if God's chosen people did do better, a bright hopeful future is almost guaranteed. The jeremiad has become a quintessential part of religious nationalism. Starting with the Puritans, the white occupants of this land have seen themselves as God's chosen people, given this land by holy declaration. However, around this time in American history, a new version of this rhetorical form was starting to arise, and Maria was part of it: the Black jeremiad. The Black jeremiad followed a similar structure but was specifically concerned with the judgment that was

[219] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."

to come for the sin of slavery.[220] It re-read the chosen people narrative, casting Black people as chosen rather than (or sometimes in addition to) whites. The Black jeremiad saw America not as a land of promise and opportunity, but a place that was almost doomed because of the sins it has committed against Black people. It was an important abolitionist tool that continued through the Civil Rights era, with Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech being perhaps the most famous example. Maria Stewart was at the forefront of the creation of this rhetorical style. Her mentor David Walker is considered to be one of the first authors of a Black jeremiad, followed by Frederick Douglass and Maria Stewart.

Understanding Maria's words in the form of jeremiad might not fully take away their sting, but it does help us see her overarching meaning. It is yet another way for her to show that Black people are a people chosen by God. But that chosenness, like with the Puritans before her, was not simply given, it came with a covenantal responsibility. Maria took it upon herself, as a vehicle for God's word, to communicate the terms of that covenant with her people. So Maria's sometimes brutal honesty about the shortcomings of her people were part of Maria's jeremiad structure. The chosen people had to be reminded of their failings in order to truly fulfill God's promise for them. After all, chosen people even in the Bible were never perfect. Maria wrote "I really think we are in as wretched and miserable a state as was the house of Israel in the days of Jeremiah."[221] But the Israelites never stopped being God's chosen people. Their covenantal relationship with God made it so they had a sacred future, as long as they fulfilled the covenant. The same was true for Maria's Black audience.

[220] David Howard-Pitney, *African American Jeremiad: Appeals for Justice in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 11.
[221] Stewart, "Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart," 28.

The terms of Black people's covenant with God were often related to both living up their full potential and living according to Godly principles. Frequent references to ignorance (and how they were kept in ignorance by others) show that education was a significant part of that covenant. No matter how the ignorance had come upon them, it was the task of Black people to seek their own education. Maria was also insistent that Black people had the capacity for education, and this was a powerful abolitionist stance. Jane Duran states that "Stewart takes a strong stand against those who believe that the natural place of Africans is slavery by citing both the accomplishments and the educational level of many Africans."[222] So while Maria on one hand castigated her own people, she also fully believed in their intellectual capacity and in doing so refuted the argument that Black people were naturally inferior. Another part of the covenant was behaving in a Godly manner. Parents were expected to more "faithfully discharge [their] duty," because Maria observed that "tender babes are tainted as soon as they are born."[223] Maria believed children were straying from Godly actions and thoughts early in their life, so it was up to the parents to do better at raising Christian children.

Finally, to combine the conclusions between this section and the previous one, there are really two jeremiads at work here. One is as I just laid out: God's chosen Black people need to fulfill their covenant to engage God's justice. The second relates to Maria's condemnation of America. It is a condemnation that is rife with meaning, not only that which was explored in the previous section, but in terms of its function in the jeremiad structure and history. Almost all Black jeremiads similarly call America to task in such terms. The main idea is that white Americans broke their covenant by enslaving their fellow citizens and continued to do so by

[222] Jane Duran, "Maria Stewart: A Black Voice for Abolition," *Feminist Theology* 29, no. 1 (September 1, 2020): 6–17.
[223] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."

treating them so horribly. Unless and until they fixed that broken relationship, they would continue to get further to their own destruction. However, most abolitionist Black jeremiads held out hope for change, largely due to a strong belief in Protestantism. David Howard-Pitney argues that "the interconnected development of a strong commitment by African Americans and Anglo-Americans to evangelical Protestantism in the two generations before the Civil War encouraged black leaders to believe that Northern whites would respond to their denunciation of the sin of slavery as declension from the promise of a Christian America."[224] So in many Black jeremiads there was a harsh denunciation of America, but there had to be some hope for change so that things could get better. However, Maria broke from that mold. There was no hope for change. America had already sealed their fate for the atrocities they committed. In doing so she argued for a full supplanting of whites as the chosen people. "Stewart's speeches point to divine approbation towards blacks as evidence of the coming judgment of whites. In her speeches, blacks, not whites, are the children of God's promise."[225] Maria's two jeremiads come together to show that Black people were the only future people of America, as the true chosen people of God.

Women's Place within Maria's Black Protestant Nation

Before delving into what *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality* says, we must place Maria's public speaking and publishing in context, because her actions seem to send different messages than her words do. First, I argue that her writing and subsequent public speaking are sermons. Though she never called them that, the overt religious purpose and her

[224] Howard-Pitney, *African American Jeremiad*, 11.
[225] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*, 174.

expert use of scripture place these works undeniably in the category of sermons. That means we can analyze her actions within the context of 19th century female preaching. There were many hinderances for women who wanted to preach in this time period. They had to overcome the social imperatives which said that women should stay in the home. Evangelicalism offered a small window through which women could call upon biblical precedent and equality of spirit in order to justify their preaching. But, as Catherine Brekus notes, women who preached, and the evangelical congregations who allowed them to do so "vividly symbolized their opposition to the dominant values of their culture."[226] Even though Maria was not backed by a congregation, she still preached publicly and doing so required her to transgress prescribed gender roles of domesticity and silence.

Additionally, Black women had an even harder time than white women did in justifying their actions. They not only faced racism and sexism from white society, but also sexism within Black religious organizations. One of the most obvious examples comes from the life of Jarena Lee. Having received a tumultuous and emotional call to preach she became convinced of her path in life as a preacher. She sought out Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, explained her calling, and was rejected on account of her gender. It was only after she spent many years working to prove her power and passion in preaching that finally Allen finally authorized her to preach, despite the fact that the rules against women preaching in the AME church had not changed.[227] Jarena had to prove, not just to anyone but to the leader of AME, that she was extraordinary in order to receive authorization, and even then she was an exception. Jarena exemplifies the lengths Black women had to go to in order to justify their participation in

[226] Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 120.
[227] Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee: Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel.* (Philadelphia: Printed and published by the author, 1849).

the public sphere. This means that, as Brekus notes, "even more than white women, black female preachers insisted that their authority to preach had come directly from the Holy Spirit."[228] They couldn't rely on any societal authority to preach and so they needed to get their authority directly from God. That is exactly what Maria did, almost to an extreme. I agree with Cooper in her argument that "Stewart herself seems intent upon obscuring the details of her own life story except for those that solidify her credentials as a Christian woman of good character."[229] While it is not uncommon among Evangelical obscure details of one's life, Maria does it on a somewhat extreme scale. That act makes Maria's very body and spirit, her Black female body and spirit, a holy vessel. It is a powerful claim that argues for the equality and power of women as spiritual actors, albeit indirectly.

However, Maria's direct stance on women's proper place in society somewhat goes against that powerful claim of spiritual equality. *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality* focuses heavily on the qualities that were prized by the Cult of True Womanhood: domesticity, piety, purity, and submissiveness.[230] In her writing Maria bemoaned the actions of African daughters, saying "and our daughters, where are they blushing in innocence and virtue?...Where is the maiden who will blush at vulgarity…Did the daughters of our land possess a delicacy of manners, combined with gentleness and dignity; did their pure minds hold vice in abhorrence and contempt?"[231] By highlighting things like gentleness and innocence Maria upholds a one-dimensional image of how women were supposed to act. Her descriptions closely align with the Cult of the True Womanhood, which was a 19th century code of values in the that dictated that a woman's highest achievement and happiness was to be obtained in the home and with a

[228] Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 183.
[229] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*, 2.
[230] Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151–74, 152.
[231] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."

demeanor that was meek and pure. It was a system strongly rooted in Protestant Christianity and the belief in women's natural piety and morality. Barbara Welter, the preeminent scholar on the topic even argued that "if anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God," and that women were cast as "another, better Eve, working in cooperation with the Redeemer, bringing the world back from 'its revolt and sin.'"[232] It was both a social and religious system through which men and women could police female gender roles, because it was believed that without women acting in this very specific manner, society itself would crumble and they would invite damnation. In so explicitly connecting her own descriptions of women's activities with the Cult of True Womanhood, Maria upheld a femininity that was at odds with the power that was required of her in order to preach/speak publicly.

There are several possible reasons for this, all tied up with the way that the Cult of True Womanhood was at its core a white concept. One of the core ways that this ethical framework was white-centered is how it privileged the home as the best and safest place for women. However for many Black women, both those who were enslaved and those who were engaged in paid domestic work, the "home" was one of the most dangerous and harmful places they could be. With the rampant sexual and physical abuse that Black women were subjected to in the home it was a far cry from the safe, happy place that white women experienced. Additionally the focus on female purity is a very white concept. Black women were (and still are) stereotyped as licentious. For these reasons, and many more, Black women could not attain the ideal of the Cult of True Womanhood. So why does Maria uphold it as a standard? It could be a kind of respectability politics, an attempt to fit into a white womanhood in order to fit in white society

[232] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," 152.

generally. However, that would not fit with Maria's overall message that Black people will inherit America.

I argue, alongside Valerie Cooper, that Maria's use of the Cult of True Womanhood is an appropriation that goes towards her work of racial uplift. Maria worked to "undermine white women's positions of privilege," by showing that they were not the exclusive proprietors of the Cult of True Womanhood. And by calling Black women to act in this way "she hopes to provoke African American women to take the places of privilege and honor they have earned."[233] In other words, the standard of womanhood still existed, but Maria used it in such a manner as to show that it was not white women, but Black women who could achieve it. While Maria still adhered to a strict, conservative definition of womanhood (though) she didn't always follow herself, she used it to serve her overall goal of racial uplift.

For Maria, racial uplift was intricately intertwined with Protestant nationhood. It was the duty of Black people to claim their kingdom, but the only way that they could do so was by bettering themselves according to the principles of Protestant Christianity. She believed in an entwined destiny for Black and white people in America. This is evident when she wrote:

> Stand still, and know that the Lord he is God. Vengeance is his, and he will repay. It is a long lane that has no turn. America has risen to her meridian. When you begin to thrive, she will begin to fall.[234]

Maria believed that God would bring vengeance upon white American for the sin of slavery. But in keeping with her covenant theology, Black people had to do something to bring that about. The last line gives us a clue as to how that could happen: "when you begin to thrive, she [meaning America] will begin to fall." When Black people start to rise up and claim their rightful place in society, then white America will finally face its retribution from God. It is only through

[233] Cooper, *Word, Like Fire*, 131.
[234] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."

racial uplift that America would come to her end and the Black nation could truly begin. Since the Cult of True Womanhood was at its core a Protestant Christian framework, it fit within Maria's understanding of Godly behavior for women. Thus, the Cult of True Womanhood was a guide through which Black women could live Godly lives, and in doing so they could elevate themselves and prove themselves to be the true inheritors of God's kingdom on earth.

This theme of using white standards for Black racial uplift, and therefore Black nationalism, continues in the way that Maria discussed motherhood. Not only was racial uplift necessary to create a Black future, but women had a special place in bringing that about. There was no doubt in Maria's mind that a woman belonged in the home, raising her children. But the way they raised their children had profound implications. The first place in *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality* in which she made clear her thoughts on motherhood is when Maria referenced another chosen people as an example:

> Could I but see mothers in Israel, chaste, keepers at home, not busy bodies, meddlers in other men's matters, whose adorning is of the inward man, possessing a meek and quiet spirit, whose sons were like olive-plants, and whose daughters were as polished corner-stones.[235]

This quote speaks more to how the mothers are supposed to act in this work, which aligns with aspects of the Cult of True Womanhood. She must be meek, quiet and chaste and not mess in other people's affairs. Moreover Maria compared this behavior with the mothers in Israel, which is yet another connection between Black Americans and the Israelites. In doing so Maria makes proper motherhood, and by extension proper womanhood, an integral part of Black chosenness. It is a somewhat indirect A=B and B=C, so A=C comparison. Israelite mothers act in a certain way, and Israelites are chosen by God, so mothers must act in this way to be chosen by God.

[235] Ibid.

While it is not Maria's most direct reference to Black Protestant nationhood, this quote does show the actions of a mother have implications for a whole nation.

Maria makes this concept even more clear in the two places in the pieces which she called specifically to her female readers, almost begging them to understand why the role of motherhood bears such importance.

> O, ye daughters of Africa! what have ye done to immortalize your names beyond the grave? What examples have ye set before the rising generation? What foundation have ye laid for generation yet unborn?
> …
> O, ye mothers, what a responsibility rests on you! You have souls committed to your charge, and God will require a strict account of you. It is you that must create in the minds of your little girls and boys a thirst for knowledge, the love of virtue, the abhorrence of vice, and the cultivation of a pure heart.[236]

Here Maria explains how important mothers are in God's grand scheme. There is a great amount of responsibility that rests on mothers to raise Godly children. But, Maria, like many Black public speakers, talks about Black people as one big family. Just as "daughters of Africa" means the children of a whole race, so too does Maria's reference to children go beyond just the children of one family. This means that any calls to mothers is call to mothers on a grand scale. In order to make this grand call Maria first set up a sense of tension with the first quote. She asked women generally what they had done for the next generation. She made her readers think about a Black future and asked what they had done to contribute to it, no doubt making some feel less than adequate, as was her point. Then she almost seems to answer her own rhetorical question later in the piece by telling mothers what a responsibility they have for the next generation. She said that God has a grand plan for them and to that they must raise not only Godly but intelligent and curious children. In setting up these two quotes in such a manner Maria

[236] Ibid.

makes mothers an important, if not the most important, piece to fulfilling the promise of a Black future in America.

This concept may sound familiar, especially in reference to Mercy Otis Warren from the previous chapter; it is very similar to republican motherhood. However, it is not republican motherhood as Mercy practiced it (or espoused it rather). Wilma King was the first to note the similarity between Maria's writing and the Kerber's republican mother concept. King writes that "Stewart envisions black women as teachers of the race and nurturers, 'racial mothers,' who socialized children to be good citizens who in turn would elevate their people. Ultimately, they and the society would benefit."[237] While she did not use this term, King seems to be describing a Black republican motherhood. That is, the concept of raising good citizens to benefit society is the key component of Kerber's republican motherhood.

However there are some key differences between Black republican motherhood and the now commonly understood republican motherhood, or should I say white republican motherhood. The first is the idea of being a *racial* mother. As Eddie Glaude explains in *Exodus*, race was a concept that was created in America to legitimate the subjugation of Black Americans. White Americans in this time period understood themselves as a nation, one that was still coalescing. But as a society they needed to find a way to justify their perceived superiority, and the concept of race began to develop. This means that white people did not see themselves as a race. Maria showed a shrewd understanding of race when she differentiated between "Blacks" and "Americans," because that is how many white people saw themselves. Kerber's definition of republican motherhood is based on the concept nation rather than race, even though nation in this sense was coded white. Women in this time period who adhered to republican motherhood

[237] King, *Essence of Liberty*, 91.

would not have seen it as white republican motherhood but rather American republican motherhood. So Maria's use of the concept is different in its distinct racial element. The power of motherhood was for Black people and Black people only.

A second difference between Kerber's concept and Maria's Black republican motherhood was specifically how children should be raised, depending on their gender. The concept of republican motherhood as it has been understood by Kerber and others is more about the responsibilities of raising male children rather than female children. "The Republican Mother was to encourage in her sons civic interest and participation…But she was not to tell her male relatives for whom to vote. She is a citizen but not really a constituent."[238] The intersection between white women's private roles and the public practice of politics was in her sons. Her role as a mother became important because she raised boys to participate in society, specifically in electoral politics. Female children were less important, and they were raised essentially to do the same thing as their mothers: support their male family members. These women were to be educated, but only as much as was required to perform those roles, and never for their own benefit. In her Black republican motherhood, however, Maria made very little distinction between the ways that boys and girls should be raised. Black mothers needed to "create in the minds of your little boys and girls a thirst for knowledge." Both genders[239] needed to not only be educated but to *want* to be educated. Black republican motherhood was about helping all of their children raise themselves up, coming back to the theme of racial uplift. Overall, Maria understood motherhood as a sacred way to support and encourage all children in both religion

[238] Kerber, *Women of the Repbulic*, 283.

[239] I say "both" in reference to how gender was understood at the time. Now we know that there are many genders, but when this was written anyone who identified as a non-binary gender would have been closeted and/or would not have had the language to describe their identity.

and education so that they could build a promising future for Black people as a community and as a race.

Conclusion: What is Maria Stewart's Brand of Protestant nationhood?

Overall, Maria Stewart's Protestant nationhood relates to the covenantal relationship between God and Black people, and at times takes on an air of religious nationalism. Black people need to fulfill their end of the covenant for God's will to be enacted. This comes from a firm belief that her community is chosen by God. In order to prove that claim, Maria used her extensive biblical knowledge to connect the Black community with a long line of biblically chosen people, thus making biblical time manifest in her time period. Additionally, she used the argument of chosenness to fight against the racist ideas and people who tried to separate Black people from both their political rights as Americans and from their religious inheritance as Christians.

However, according to Maria, being chosen came with certain responsibilities. Her main message was to encourage the Black community to fulfill these covenantal obligations. For Maria it came down to racial uplift. She strongly encouraged Black people to achieve their full potential both in education and in their ethical behaviors. The burden for this uplift fell more strongly on the shoulders of Black mothers, but in making this rhetorical move Maria created a new version of sacralized motherhood. Even though it created an extra burden on women and reflected poorly on her community, Maria truly believed she was doing holy work to help bring about God's future of America.

That future was an exclusively Black future. Maria believed that white Americans were on the precipice of feeling "the wrath of the lamb," due to their "cruel wrongs and injuries to the

fallen sons of Africa." There was a "dark and dismal cloud" hanging over them.[240] White Americans had just about squandered their opportunity to inherit God's kingdom. In fact it is when Black people start claiming their sacred future that white America will start it descent: "America has risen to her meridian. When you begin to thrive, she will begin to fall."[241] However, in order to salvage some important parts of American society, Maria worked to separate whiteness from concepts she deemed holy, like freedom and independence. For Maria, these were not concepts created by white people but rather were gifted to America by God. As such these ideals could survive while America itself was condemned. And if Black people could hold up their end of the covenant, God would provide for them a prosperous future.

Ultimately, Maria's work is important because her Protestant nationhood foreshadows Black nationalist thought. However, she is all too often ignored in the histories of Black nationalism. Lora Romero argues that this is due to her gender, and the gendered nature of her approach. Maria's "womanist idiom of social housekeeping does not enjoy the same degree of political intelligibility that Douglass's [and many other male Black nationalists] masculinist vocabulary demands."[242] Lora goes on to argue that Maria's approach not only highlighted the role women must play in racial uplift, but also eschewed violence as a method to accomplish freedom (which is one of the largest gaps between herself and David Walker). In other words, Maria's approach was distinctly feminine because it played to the strengths women were perceived to have societally: family and religion. Romero argues that it was due to the way that Black nationalist historians have privileged not only male authors, but the male perspective, that Maria has been underappreciated or outright ignored in this field. Uplifting the powerful voice of

[240] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."
[241] Ibid.
[242] Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 65.

Maria Stewart is not only important to the history of women's Protestant nationhood, but to the history of Black nationalism as a whole.

Chapter 5: Angelina Grimké

Though she grew up to be a staunch abolitionist and women's right activist, Angelina Grimké's upbringing couldn't have been farther from the ideals that became the center of her life. She was born on February 20, 1805 in Charleston, South Carolina, the youngest child of Judge John Faucheraud Grimké and Mary Smith.[243] Her father was slaveholder, politician, and one of the most prominent leaders of Charleston's white society. His two plantations and spacious townhome were the sites of Angelina's childhood, surrounded by slaves and luxury. While her father "earned" them fabulous wealth on the backs of enslaved people, her mother lived a life of Southern wifely duty. As she oversaw the various households, managed the enslaved people who labored in the home, and contributed to charity work and church activities, she also had to be a mother to her eleven children. However by the time Angelina was born, "the novelty of motherhood had long warn off."[244] So, Angelina was raised by her older sister Sarah, even to the point of calling her "mother." With her father's death when Angelina was in her early teens and her mother's indifference, she was allowed a freedom of belief that most young girls in her situation did not have. As Sarah was already forming opinions about equality, it is not surprising that her little sister started to form similar opinions at a young age. Her dependence on Sarah, for emotional, religious, and ethical support would continue throughout her life, making the sisters nigh inseparable.

[243] Carol Berkin, *Civil War Wives: The Lives and Times of Angelina Grimké Weld, Varina Howell Davis, and Julia Dent Grant*, Kindle Edition (New York: Alfred AKnopf, 2009), 20.
[244] Ibid, 21.

One of the few times they were separated was when the 28-year-old Sarah fled Charleston, and her family's dependence on enslaved labor, for the free city of Philadelphia, to become a Quaker.[245] During that time, Angelina went on a spiritual journey of her own. First, she left the Episcopal faith of her upbringing to join the Presbyterian church because she believed it to be more equitable. It was through this faith, and her newfound mentor Rev. William McDowell, that she developed her beliefs around her family's societal values, namely slavery. However, whereas Rev. McDowell was content to pray for the repentance of South Carolina, Angelina "felt compelled to testify against their sins."[246] After coming to this realization, Angelina spent most of her time trying to convince her family, namely her mother, of the sin of slavery, and of her own sin in perpetuating the system. Though her pleas fell on deaf ears, these were important formative years for Angelina, who grew to believe she was called to a holy purpose. Due to her opposition to slavery, she quickly became an outcast in her family and in Charleston broadly. Soon, she followed her sister to Philadelphia, never to see her mother again.

In Philadelphia, back with her sister and among the company of Quakers, Angelina felt a freedom that she never had before. The Quaker religion seemed to offer more equality than Episcopalianism or Presbyterianism and to be in a city without the luxury of Southern society was a breath of fresh air. About five years after her relocation, Angelina became involved in anti-slavery movements. It started with her voracious reading of *The Liberator*, soon to be followed by attending the meetings of the Female Anti-Slavery Society. However these were private events where she blended into the crowd. It was in August of 1835 when her life stopped being the private affair she had been groomed to believe was appropriate for a woman. Angelina had

[245] Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 41.
[246] Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 23.

been inspired by one of Garrison's pieces in *The Liberator* and wrote an impassioned private response to him in which she wrote eloquently about slavery as a sin and compared America with Egypt and Sodom. However, without her permission, Garrison printed her letter and her foray into public life was irrevocable.[247] While the abolitionist community lauded her letter and it was soon reprinted in many other papers, the Quaker community was not ready for that kind of radicalism. They demanded that she write a retraction, which made her relationship with the Friends turn tenuous.

As both Sarah and Angelina struggled with their relationship to their new religion, they took a trip to New England to sort through their thoughts and ideals. Angelina didn't know what to do with her newfound public status and struggled through it via writing. It was on this trip that Angelina wrote one of her most famous works, *Appeal to the Christian Woman of the South*, which was printed in September 1836.[248] Angelina used both the Bible and America's founding documents to make a case that slavery was not in line with either Christianity or American values. Additionally, she argued that women have a specific role in dismantling the system of slavery due to their role as the moral and religious leaders of the Southern household. While this important work did not reach its target audience, as most abolitionist literature was banned or destroyed in the Southern states, it was read voraciously in the Northern states.[249] It was her letter to *The Liberator* that started her foray into public life, and it was *Appeal* that solidified her status as a public figure. Only a year after *Appeal* was published, Angelina began her career as an abolitionist speaker, associated with the American Anti-Slavery Society. Eventually, on February

[247] Stephen H. Browne, *Angelina Grimké: Rhetoric, Identity, and the Radical Imagination* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999),11.
[248] Angelina Emily Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, [3rd ed.]. (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836).
[249] Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 51.

21, 1838, Angelina was invited to speak against slavery before the Massachusetts Hall of Representatives, making her the first woman to address an American lawmaking body.[250]

Over the course of her speaking career, issues of gender became inseparable from issues of slavery. Merely having a woman speak publicly was still radical, and audiences were strictly separated by gender. A few years into her speaking career she did speak before a "promiscuous" audience of Black men and women, but that was a rare occurrence. As her gender became a reason for people to disparage her own intelligence, she recognized more and more the similarities between the plight of women and the plight of Black people (though for her womanhood remained largely a white concept). Over the course of her speaking career, her beliefs about women's equality and racial equality "wove together, and arose from, her profound belief in the Christian tenets of universal moral capacities and the fundamental principles on which the American public was founded."[251]

Throughout her speaking career and her work with the American Anti-Slavery society, she gradually developed a relationship with the prominent abolitionist Theodore Weld. After a somewhat tempestuous courting, they eventually married in May of 1838.[252] Their marriage was considered radical for several reasons. Firstly, they were public figures and many people in the abolitionist movement believed it detracted from the movement to engaging in such a selfish practice as marriage.[253] Secondly, their wedding celebration was multi-racial which was radial for the time. After their marriage, Angelina was determined to prove that women could in the words of today, "have it all." One of her arguments about gender was that women did not have to choose between a private and public life, but that she could have both. She had a prominent

[250] Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina*, 3.
[251] Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 66.
[252] Ibid, 96.
[253] Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina*, 168.

public career, and after her marriage, she set about to create a successful domestic career as well. She and Theodore had two sons and one daughter, and Angelina was a doting mother. But other aspects of her domestic life, such as household skills, were challenging for a woman raised in a household where enslaved people did all the manual labor.[254] But she, and her constant companion Sarah, did their best and eventually came to be somewhat content with the work. Though they remained invested in the work of abolition and women's rights, Sarah and Angelina gracefully let other leaders come to the fore of the work.

When the Civil War broke out, the Weld/Grimké household was not surprised. Sarah, Angelina, and Theodore had long seen war as the only possible way to defeat the slave system.[255] They all fully committed to the Northern cause, despite the fact that they, like many families at the time, had family members on both sides. Angelina and Sarah had never formally cut ties with their siblings in Charleston, despite the fact that they never renounced slavery. In terms of their immediate family, Angelina and Theodore were heartbroken when their oldest son, Charles, rejected any and all causes that his parents cared about and refused to fight in the war.[256] While they didn't want him injured or killed in the fighting, his rejection of everything they had dedicated their lives to was a blow. For their own parts, Theodore committed to a speaking tour to rally Northerners around the Union cause and the Grimké sisters attended the National Women's Rights Convention in 1863 as representatives of their home state of South Carolina,[257] to make clear that Southern women needed to advocate for enslaved people.

Angelina, her sister, and husband continued their advocacy throughout the Civil War and eventually saw its end, and the end to the system they fought so hard against. After the war

[254] Ibid, 179.
[255] Ibid, 244.
[256] Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 129.
[257] Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina*, 252.

Angelina discovered that she had two nephews, children of her brother Henry and an enslaved woman, Nancy Weston. Deeply embarrassed, but not unfamiliar, with the sexual assault and rape that occurred on a plantation, Angelina and Sarah supported their nephews, Archibald and Francis, as family.[258] The sisters developed great pride for the accomplishments of their nephews, who in many ways were better sons than Charles. In terms of their other children, Theodore, called Sody, succumbed to a mysterious illness that left him indifferent to the world and he had to receive treatment at a special facility. But Sarah Grimké Weld became very invested in the reforms that were so important to her parents and became a source of great pride.

After dedicating their lives to the work of women's right and abolition, Sarah and Angelina passed away in the 1870s. Sarah died first, on December 23, 1873, breaking her sister's heart. After suffering a series of strokes, Angelina herself died on October 26, 1879, at the age of 74. Her writings live on as powerful testaments to the impact of the written word and her own personal dedication to the principles of freedom and equality. Angelina Grimké's overall goal with her writings was to create a nation that was loved by God and aligned with God's morality. The main action that was needed for that to occur was for slavery to be eliminated and Angelina believed that women had a Christian duty to work towards that goal of reforming America.

Angelina's Letter to the Liberator

After a series of pro-slavery mobs in New York, Connecticut, Philadelphia, and Charleston, William Lloyd Garrison wrote a passionate appeal to the citizens of Boston to condemn and refrain from mob violence, especially upon the arrival of prominent abolitionist

[258] Ibid, 262.

George Thompson.[259] Upon reading that powerful message in *The Liberator*, Angelina felt compelled to write a letter in return, praising and supporting Garrison for his support of the abolitionist cause. This letter was her first foray into a more formal and organized view of abolitionism, particularly where it fit within her religious schema. After reading it, Garrison was so impressed by her letter that he published it, without her direct permission. However that didn't seem to be a problem for Angelina, and it launched her career as a prominent abolitionist in her own right.

Since it was the first document published by Angelina, it is important to explore what religio-nationalist themes she posited in this piece. First and foremost, she made it clear that abolitionism, and opposition to slavery generally, was a holy cause. In her first paragraph of the letter she wrote "The ground upon which you [Garrison] stand is holy ground: never—never surrender it. If you surrender it, the hope of the slave is extinguished, and the chains of his servitude will be strengthened a hundred-fold."[260] She had no doubt that abolitionism was a cause backed by God. Put in other words, she believed that God was opposed to a political and economic system: slavery, but it goes deeper than that. She believed that as abolitionists (and as Christians, but she doesn't go into that here) she and her companions had a duty to make the world into one that God would approve of, i.e. one without slavery. They could not back down from their holy cause. It was their duty to carry out God's will on Earth. This type of Protestant nationhood is almost the exact opposite from Maria Stewart, who believed that God had chosen the nation (in her case the Black nation) and they had a special covenant relationship. Angelina believed that America was not special because of a specific relationship with God, but rather that America was important because its citizens got the privilege to play a part in God's plan. In

[259] Ibid, 85.
[260] Angelina Emily Grimké, "Slavery and the Boston Riot," *The Liberator*, 1835, Library of Congress.

other words, Angelina believed that the nation, and its citizens, needed to be actors in materializing God's plan. But that didn't give them a special covenantal relationship God; it was simply what they were supposed to do as good Christians.

Another interesting part about Angelina's letter was her frequent reference to martyrdom and glorification of becoming martyrs for such a noble cause. One area in particular captures her general attitude towards the role of martyrs and how abolitionists are called to act:

> [after reading Garrison's appeal] My heart was filled with thanksgiving and praise to the Preserver of men; I thanked God, and took courage, earnestly desiring that thousands may adopt thy language, and be prepared to meet the Martyr's doom, rather than give up the principles you (i. e. Abolitionists) have adopted…But let no man take your crown, and success is as certain as the rising of to-morrow's sun. But remember you must be willing to suffer the loss of all things—willing to be the scorn and reproach of professor and profane. You must obey our great Master's injunction: "Fear not them that kill the body, and after that, have nothing more that they can do." You must, like Apostles, "count *not* your lives dear unto yourselves, so that you may finish your course with joy."[261]

In other words, the cause of abolitionism was so important that abolitionists must be prepared to place the cause even before their own lives, just as Jesus instructed the Apostles. Even if they turn into martyrs, it will be worth it because ultimately their success is guaranteed by God. In communicating this message, she ensured that abolitionism could be read as nothing but a holy cause. As Stephen Browne argues in *Angelina Grimké: Rhetoric, Identity and the Radical Imagination*, "Grimké redefined the terms of the situation from their secular to their sacred contexts. Garrison's status as a reader exemplified this process of redefinition. From profane dissident to honored martyr, he was recast within an utterly different language and thus took on a new aspect all together."[262] Essentially, Angelina's words put Garrison into the role a martyr. She took what was, on its face, a secular activity and turned it into a sacred one. This "new aspect"

[261] Grimké, "Slavery and the Boston Riot."
[262] Browne, *Angelina Grimké*, 46.

was one of Protestant nationhood. Recall my definition of Protestant nationhood as the belief that Protestant Christianity is the best way to create the ideal future for the nation and the belief that the state should be governed by the dictates of Protestant Christianity. Angelina used the language of Christianity to not only make sense of her world, but to argue for why it should be changed. She believed that the United States, in allowing slavery, was not governing based on the principles of Protestant Christianity. Thus slavery was no longer a question of human/profane concerns; abolition was a sacred cause. It is because abolition was sacred, i.e. coming from God, and American citizens should lay down their lives for it. They needed to participate in making the country more Christian, at any cost.

At this time in her life Angelina was still a part of the Society of Friends, though she may have been questioning her place in that religion, she was still influenced by its mythologies and theologies. Using martyrdom to denote something as sacred and important, while not exclusive to Quakerism, is a strong Quaker trait. As Carla Gardina Pestana and Jon Pahl both note, the Quaker martyrs of Boston of the mid-late 1600s quickly became a powerful part of Quaker history and mythos.[263] It not only cultivated the reputation of the Friends as pacificists but also communicated the historical importance of standing one's ground, even in the face of persecution. While Angelina eventually did leave the Society of Friends, her heavy use of martyrdom in this letter communicates that she was drew upon Quaker history to validate her cause and to prove its righteousness before God.

[263] Jon Pahl, "Founding an Empire of Sacrifice: Innocent Domination and the Quaker Martyrs of Boston, 1659-1661," in *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence Across Time and Tradition*, ed. James K. Wellman (Rowman & Littlefield, 2007) and Carla Gardina Pestana, "The Quaker Executions as Myth and History," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 2 (1993): 441–69.

In addition to her reliance on Quaker history, she appears to also have been influenced by the religio-nationalist rhetoric of enslaved people. Late in her letter she emphatically calls upon elements of the Exodus narrative to make her point.

> If persecution is the means which God has ordained for the accomplishment of this great end, Emancipation; then, in dependence upon Him for strength to bear it, I feel as if I could say, LET IT COME; for it is my deep, solemn, deliberate conviction, that this is a cause worth dying for. I say so, from what I have seen, and heard, and known, in a land of slavery, where rests the darkness of Egypt, and where is found the sin of Sodom. Yes![264]

The important line for the sake of this argument is the last one, where Angelina connected the Southern slave states to the biblical land of Egypt. As previously discussed throughout this dissertation, Eddie Glaude has proven the various ways that enslaved people utilized the rhetoric of the Biblical Exodus narrative to both make sense of their situation and to provide hope grounded upon God's favor.[265] At the time that Angelina wrote her letter, the exodus narrative was starting to transition from one told secretly on plantations to one that became a public organizing and motivating principle of Black nationhood. Glaude traces this change largely to the era of the National Negro Convention movement, which started in 1830, with the first convention, and ended around 1861.[266] While the meetings occurred in a variety of cities over the course of its tenure, the first meeting of the National Convention was in Philadelphia, the same city in which Angelina resided in at the time.[267] We cannot know exactly where Angelina first heard this comparison between Egypt and the South, but given her Southern childhood (and documented interaction with the people her parents enslaved), her location of Philadelphia at the time of the first National Negro Convention, and the timing of her piece being only 5 years after

[264] Grimké, "Slavery and the Boston Riot."
[265] Glaude Jr., *Exodus.*
[266] Ibid, Pg 17.
[267] Shirley Yee, "National Negro Convention Movement (1831-1864)," April 1, 2011, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-negro-convention-movement-1831-1864/.

that first convention, there is a strong possibility that Angelina here was repeating a narrative she heard from free and enslaved Black people.

By utilizing the Exodus narrative to make her point, Angelina drew upon a piece of rhetoric that has clear and documented themes that connect to all the varied and related phenomena of civil religion, religious nationalism, and Protestant nationhood. Even beyond connecting a biblically evil place to a real location in the United States, the history of the narrative itself carries implications of a people with a divine purpose. As discussed in chapter 3, the exodus narrative has a long history of signaling, both overtly and covertly at different times, that Black people are a powerful and sacred nation.[268] Calling upon the exodus narrative is a way to communicate a sacred connection between God and his chosen people. While it is highly unlikely that Angelina understood the full context of the exodus narrative when she referenced it, it does show that the exodus story had already become a prominent way to communicate God's hatred for slavery, and thus by extension, his favor for Black people.

Overall, Angelina's letter to *The Liberator* used two prominent themes of Protestant nationhood, martyrdom and the Exodus narrative, to make an impassioned case against slavery. It was not simply a political or even a religious wrong, it was a combination of the two. In order to right that wrong, and thus create a nation that would be loved by God, Angelina was willing to do anything, including speak directly to her Southern community.

An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South

Just a year after her letter was published, Angelina published what is arguably one of her most famous works, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*. Though her *Appeal* did not

[268] Glaude Jr., *Exodus,* Chapter 3.

reach the Christian women of the South whom Angelina wanted to convince, it became a powerful rhetorical piece used by many subsequent abolitionists. In the *Appeal,* Angelina discussed three main topics related to Protestant nationhood: the validity of American law, based both on the Bible and on America's founding documents; the specific role of Christian women can play in changing the laws; and how slavery was a key component of bringing about the millennium. All of these themes are intertwined to make for an argument that slavery is not only anti-Biblical but anti-American, and that Christian women, based on their moral superiority and on Biblical examples, are the best people to fight against it.

First, Angelina set up her entire argument by discussing that ultimate morality is found in God and any human attempts to control it will always be futile. In a highly poetic comparison to Babel, Angelina said that Southerners had attempted to build a metaphorical wall around the Southern states to "shut out the light" of God's morality. In other words, Southerners, through one way or another, have attempted to remain ignorant for as long as possible. But "moral, like natural light, is so extremely subtle in its nature as to overleap all human barriers, and laugh at the puny efforts of man to control it."[269] Despite human attempts to ignore it, there is nothing that can keep out the light of morality. In this argument, Angelina not only set up her own purpose, as someone who helps to disseminate that light, but showed the larger issue at hand: that Southerners must know how terrible slavery is at this point. To not know is to ignore God. Thus any further attempt to enslave people is a willful act against God.

This also sets up one of the main components of Angelina's Protestant nationhood. Believing that Christianity and the nation should be connected is one thing, but it is important to explore the nature of that relationship and how and why they are connected. For Angelina, God's

[269] Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, 2.

will was so strong that governments, as constructs of humans, could not help but be influenced by it. Her metaphor of light is very apt to describe her view of Protestant nationhood. The light of God's morality will pervade everywhere it possibly can, influencing people and their creations, even toppling human creations if necessary. So rather than understanding certain human governments as directly inspired by God, Angelina's Protestant nationhood understood God's morality to be so strong as to influence all human creations. So Americans were not necessarily a chosen people, as Maria Stewart and other proponents of religious nationalism often argue. Rather God's morality would eventually force all people to conform. Rather than the U.S. being sacred because God chose them, America is sacred because they get to play a part in God's plan. The plan wasn't tied to any particular nation. America, presumably was one of any nation or human creation that could carry out God's plan. As she wrote, "Will the wheels of the millennial car be rolled onward by miraculous power? No! God designs to confer this holy privilege upon man; it is through his instrumentality that the great and glorious work of reforming the world is to be done."[270]

After setting up her argument in such a way, Angelina moved into a further explication of how God's higher morality should always take precedent. Except in this part of her argument, God's morality is aligned with the founding documents of America. Just as God's morality will overcome all human barriers, so too does the spirit of America overcome any petty issues of legality. Specifically Angelina cited the Declaration of Independence, and the founding fathers, to make this point.

> We must come back to the good old doctrine of our forefathers who declared to the world, 'this self-evident truth that all men are created equal, and that they have certain inalienable rights among which are, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' It is even a greater absurdity to suppose a man can be legally born a slave under our free Republican Government, than under the petty despotisms of barbarian Africa. If then, we have no

[270] Ibid, 27.

> right to enslave an African, surely we can have none to enslave an American; if a self-evident truth that all men everywhere and of every color are born equal, and have an inalienable right to liberty, then it is equally true that no man can be born a slave, and no man can ever rightfully be reduced to involuntary bondage and held as a slave, however fair may be the claim of his master or mistress through wills and title-deeds.[271]

It was not uncommon, either for abolitionists or for the select women in this dissertation, to call upon the Declaration of Independence as a guarantee of freedom. In fact it would be more noteworthy if she didn't use it at all. However there are two parts of this quote that speak to Angelina's specific audience and message: the comparison to Africa and her recognition of the legality of slavery. In order to convince Southerners that slavery was against the will of the founding fathers, Angelina had to do more than just bring up the Declaration of Independence. This is because many Southerners believed that they carried on the true vision of the founding fathers. As James McPherson writes "North and South alike in 1861 wrapped themselves in the mantle of 1776."[272] Even some leaders of the Confederacy believed that they were perfecting the vision of the founders by rejecting certain aspects of the Declaration. These leaders "critiqued the U.S. government for being based on the principles of human equality rather than on what they believed to be clear racial differences."[273] So in many ways bringing up America's past would only make Southerners dig in their heels to defend what they viewed as their rightful inheritance, whether or not they believed the Declaration was correct or not. However Angelina cleverly played to her audience, or attempted to at any rate, in the way she used this important piece of history.

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[271] Ibid, 2-3.
[272] James M. McPherson, *The War That Forged a Nation: Why the Civil War Still Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2015), 9.
[273] John R. Vile, *The Declaration of Independence: America's First Founding Document in U. S. History and Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2018), 93.

Most white Americans at this time, but especially Southerners, believed themselves superior to non-white countries and continents. It was closely tied to the idea of Manifest Destiny and the belief that they were chosen people of God (which as stated earlier, it is not clear whether Angelina shared that view.) However this took on special significance when applied to the enslavement of Africans. One of the arguments for slavery was that things were better for African people in America than in Africa. First, Africa was seen as a monolith with no country distinction and second it was seen as an uncivilized place with no culture or religion. Many slaveowners even believed that Africans would die out if they were freed because they had no culture.[274] This was not an opinion only espoused by Southerners, there were plenty of racist Northerners and even abolitionists who believed this. But for slaveholders this mentality was part of the "benevolent" paternalism which they used to justify slavery as an improvement for enslaved Africans. This is most likely what Angelina was trying to get to the heart of with this comment. She asked her readers to think about the morality of the founding fathers, and their vision for American society, then she coupled that with a direct comparison between America and Africa, with America being the more "uncivilized" of the two because people can be born into slavery. This pokes a deep hole in the slaveholder's logic that argued they were saving Africans from a terrible fate in Africa. In this way, Angelina called upon the universal belief in the Declaration of Independence to remind Southerners of the legacy they upheld, and then accused them of not being true to that legacy. Not only were they not true to the legacy, but they were worse than Africa. This cut to the heart of slaveholders' paternalism and would also have been a blow to their ego.

[274] Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90.

Annette Gordon-Reed and Peter Onuf describe this paternalistic attitude well in their monograph on Thomas Jefferson. It was a belief in a benevolent control over one's domain. But with that control came great responsibility. Since Jefferson had control over his plantation, he had a responsibility to protect all of his assets, which included the people he enslaved. He viewed it as a kind of reciprocal relationship, in which the enslaved did things for him and he protected them and made them happy. In his mind, "an 'enlightened' patriarch could make a difference, could make peace between the master and the enslaved."[275] While Jefferson was a complicated figure (He believed that slavery was a stain on American society, and yet he participated in it his whole life and did not release the people he enslaved upon his death like Washington did.) he still is an excellent example of a paternalistic attitude that Angelina was trying to address. Patriarchs believed that they gave the best possible opportunity to enslaved people because they were fundamentally better people. Jefferson even took that a step further in claiming that he was better than other slaveholders because of his enlightenment attitudes, but that is another argument. Thus the idea that Americans were actually the uncivilized ones means that paternalism had no foundation.

In addition to showing Southern women that their paternalism, or perhaps maternalism in this case, didn't fit with the ideals of the founding fathers, Angelina went on to argue that the legality of slavery also didn't fit with those ideals. The last line of that previous quote is where we can see this most clearly: "no man can ever rightfully be reduced to involuntary bondage and held as a slave, however fair may be the claim of his master or mistress through wills and title-deeds."[276] This sentiment reflects a shift that occurred in the abolitionist movement in 1820s. As

[275] Annette Gordon-Reed, *"Most Blessed of the Patriarchs": Thomas Jefferson and the Empire of the Imagination / Annette Gordon-Reed, Peter S. Onuf.* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017). Pg 60.
[276] Grimke, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, 3.

Richard Newman explains in his book *Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* that before this time, many abolitionists tried to use the law to free individual slaves and fight the system from within the system, so to speak. However starting in the early 1800s, leaders like William Lloyd Garrison and Amos A. Phelps led the charge to shift the abolitionist movement to a focus on higher-order rights and not reaffirm the legality of slavery.[277] Angelina's words reflect this shift, although not perfectly. First she admitted the "fair" legality of owning slaves, which might be a nod to slaveholding women. By recognizing the legality, it might have helped these women to not feel attacked and defensive. But then Angelina asked these Southern women to look beyond that legality in the name of the founding fathers. Basically she was trying to take Southern women along the same route that abolitionists took: it might be legal, but let's look at bigger issues. For her, and she hoped for Southern women, those bigger issues were the morality of the founding fathers and of the morality of the world they hoped to create. In other words, it doesn't matter if its legal, she wanted Southern women to think about whether or not the spirit of America, and the light of God's morality which shines through it, condones slavery.

So while Angelina's appeal to the Declaration of Independence looks, on its face, as though it is not overtly religious (apart from the natural religiosity of the document itself), it is her understanding of God's influence over humans that makes this Protestant nationhood. The way Angelina constructed her argument, by talking about God's morality as a light and then immediately discussing the Declaration of Independence, she attempted to show Southerners how God's influence happens. The Declaration was her example of God's morality shining

[277] Richard S. Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 84-86.

through. Then she tried to make the case that Southern women weren't following the Declaration, which meant that they weren't following God.

Then Angelina pivoted slightly to address what she thought would be the next natural question regarding this argument: "why appeal to women on this subject?"[278] Angelina anticipated that, if her readers had come with her this far, their next question would be related to what they can do as woman. Her main methodology on this point was to affirm some aspects of Southern plantation-class femininity, and then use Biblical examples to push women slightly beyond their typical role. One way that Angelina did this was to list a series of four actions that, in her mind, were eminently doable for Southern elite women: read, pray, speak, and act. This list started with reading and praying, two actions that already filled much of the daily lives of these women. She wrote, "Read the Bible then, it contains the words of Jesus, and they are spirit and life. Judge for yourselves whether he sanctioned such a system of oppression and crime."[279] Then after they read, and judged for themselves, Angelina asked her readers to pray with discernment to determine what to do. These two actions were within the bounds of Southern elite womanhood. Both in their private moments, and when in community with other women, reading the Bible and praying were two very common activities. As Scott Stephen writes in *Redeeming the Southern Family*, "reading the Bible and prayer made staying on the narrow path to redemption all the easier because both practices offered the believer opportunities to interpret more clearly God's designs on their lives."[280] And this is exactly what Angelina was asking her readers to do, to firmly pray and discern for themselves what God wanted them to do, specifically in terms of slavery. Surely her hope was that, especially after all the Biblical

[278] Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, 16.
[279] Ibid, 17.
[280] Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).

evidence she just laid out, that her readers would come to the same conclusion she had after fervent reading and praying.

However there is another aspect to reading and praying that Angelina might be tapping into here, which leads to her empowerment of Southern elite women. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese specifically speaks about how praying and reading the Bible were part of Southern women's acts of benevolence towards those less fortunate.[281] She argues that these acts of benevolence were just as much about plantation women's own inflated sense of self-worth and aggrandizement as they were about religion. But it still shows the how central reading the Bible and praying were to the construction of plantation womanhood. Importantly it shows how religious comfort was a way to stay within the confines of femininity while also venturing out. In this way, religion was the way that elite women were able to enter a different kind of public, not the kind of public sphere that included electoral politics or manly warfare, but the kind of public that was outside of the plantation. Due to the belief in the fragility and frailty of Southern plantation women, leaving the house was a fraught activity and almost always required a male escort.[282] But benevolent religious activities that centered around reading the Bible and praying, though supervised by a pastor, gave Southern elite women a reason to leave the house, and leave the spaces of their class, in a protected manner. So in starting with "read and pray" Angelina was doing two things at once: leaning into Southern elite femininity by asking them to engage in activities they do every day, but also hinting toward activities in which women had some degree of power. Rhetorically, she started somewhere familiar, with the intentional to take her readers on a journey from there to the unfamiliar.

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[281] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household [Electronic Resource]: Black and White Women of the Old South / Elizabeth Fox-Genovese.*, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 233.
[282] Ibid, 207.

That leads into the second two activities that women could do, which were a bit beyond the confines of plantation class womanhood: speak and act. Angelina asked her readers to speak "through the tongue, the pen, and the press" and to act in the form of setting their slaves free, or at least paying them. So it was not a broad mandate which her readers could interpret as they saw fit, but a series of very specific requests. Now speaking and acting were not inherently outside of elite women's gender norms, but it was these specific requests that were nigh impossible for elite Southern women. Angelina essentially wanted her readers to disseminate information about their political opinions (which most probably didn't even share) in the public sphere. While women were free to share their political opinions in their private diaries, and even some in private correspondence, they could not interfere with politics publicly. Even most Southern men and women "who shared the assumption of women's special nature, recoiled at the prospect of women's meddling in politics."[283] As far as freeing slaves, that was even more impossible. While authors like Thavolia Glymph showed that plantation mistresses had much more power than previously assumed, and wielded it to terrible consequence,[284] a mistress didn't have the formal power to free slaves because in almost all cases she never technically owned them. So Angelina's four actions of read, pray, speak and act moved from the possible to the impossible.

But Angelina understood all of these rules, after all she had lived them. She knew how hard it was to escape and she knew the persecution that came with it when you did. So, as she often did, Angelina tackled the question head on:

> But you may say we are women, how can our hearts endure persecution? And why not? Have not women stood up in all the dignity, and strength of moral courage to be the leaders of the people, and to bear a faithful testimony for the truth whenever the providence of God has called them to do so? Are there no women in that noble army of martyrs who are now singing the song of Moses and the Lamb? Who led out the women

[283] Ibid, 337.
[284] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage the Transformation of the Plantation Household* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

> of Israel from the house of bondage, striking the timbrel, and singing the song of deliverance on the banks of that sea whose waters stood up like walls of crystal to open a passage for their escape? It was a woman; Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Moses and Aaron. Who went up with Barak to Kadesh to fight against Jabin, King of Canaan, into whose hand Israel had been sold because of their iniquities? It was a woman! Deborah the wife of Lapidoth, the judge, as well as the prophetess of that backsliding people![285]

In this powerful quote Angelina wanted to be an encouraging and empowering force for her readers. She wanted to show them that they could accomplish the hard task she had set before them. But more than that, the manner in which Angelina encouraged them almost perfectly speaks to two important themes in female Protestant nationhood: extending women's religious superiority into the political sphere and using Biblical women to prove that women can make societal change. Angelina took the religious authority that the Bible, and society, bequeathed to women, and extended it beyond the household to advocate for societal and political change.

First, Angelina espoused the common idea that women enjoyed a moral and religious superiority in the household. This idea developed over time in the US, somewhat as a way to explain why there were so many more women in the pews, and as a way to justify religious education by mothers in the home. But this concept achieved its most concrete form in the Cult of True Womanhood. Piety was one of central tenets of this strict gender code because it was believed that women were naturally more pious than men.[286] This also meant that women had a significant role to play in ensuring that men behaved in ways that were moral. As Anne Braude argues, while domesticity stripped women of certain powers (for example, sexuality or electoral politics) it also gave them power to criticize and even control men's actions regarding morality and religion.[287] This is the central idea that Angelina was pulling from in the opening lines of this

[285] Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, 21.
[286] Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860."
[287] Ann Braude, "Women's History Is American Religious History," in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 99.

quote. She argued that their "moral courage to be the leaders of the people" gave women more strength that they thought possible. She reminded her readers of the way that they "bear a faithful testimony for the truth whenever the providence of God has called them to do so." Just as women used moral superiority to move their men in a Godly direction, so too should they use that same authority to move their country in the right direction. Angelina expanded their religious mandate to include not just their own families but the entire United States, or at least the Southern portion of it.

The second way that Angelina sought to bolster elite Southern women to the cause of emancipation was by showing them Biblical women who fought for their ideals. She raised up the example of Miriam and Deborah as two women who rebelled against tyranny and oppression and were victorious. This move to call upon Biblical women, while not seen in the four examples in this dissertation thus far, was used by several women throughout American history to instill patriotism and action in American women. One of the most prominent was Esther DeBerdt Reed, who wrote *Sentiments of an American Woman* to help raise funds for Washington's army in the Revolutionary War. In this short broadside she wrote, "I call to mind with enthusiasm and with admiration, all those acts of courage, of constancy and patriotism, which history has transmitted to us: The people favoured by Heaven, preserved from destruction by the virtues, the zeal and the resolution of Deborah, of Judith, of Esther! The fortitude of the mother of the Massachabees, in giving up her sons to die before her eyes."[288] Just as Esther did, Angelina hoped that calling upon Biblical women would push her readers to act for the benefit of America.

Specifically you will notice that both authors use Deborah, among others, in their list of Biblical women. Deborah has been a prominent figure in American religious discourse since the

[288] Esther Reed, "The Sentiments of an American Woman," Early American Imprints. First Series; No. 16992. (Philadelphia: Printed by John Dunlap, 1780).

colonial period, and thus requires a more in-depth examination. James Byrd argues in *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War* that "the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) was the most cited passage in over a century of war sermons (1675-1800)."[289] During this time, while some preachers argued that Deborah was an example of female fortitude, many argued that it was more of an example of God's power than women's power.[290] But that did not minimize her power in the consciousness of the nation. Deborah became a symbol of the connection between patriotism and faith. Preachers argued, based on Judges 5, that "spirituality reinforced patriotism and made soldiers better fighters."[291] Preachers told the people should be like Deborah and use their faith in God to push themselves to do extraordinary things for the sake of the country. Even if her gender was not often her most relevant feature during this time, Deborah as a figure still showed the ways that God could work through women to create national unity and inspire courage. Moving forward in time, Christiana de Groot argues that Deborah became a kind of "lightning rod" for women's issues in the 19th century. She analyzes six different women who wrote about Deborah, and while those interpretations naturally vary, one common theme is the recognition that God can call upon women to do extraordinary things and Deborah is an example of such a calling. The six women de Groot analyzes have varying opinions on whether or not she sacrificed her femininity by doing so, or whether her relationship with her husband was a good or bad example, but they all agree that God called Deborah to a special mission for the sake of her nation which allowed her extraordinary power.[292] Throughout American history, Deborah has been a symbol of the power of God to work through women to allow the nation to triumph.

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[289] Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War,* 73.
[290] Ibid, 78.
[291] Ibid, 81.
[292] Christiana de Groot, "Deborah: A Lightning Rod for Nineteenth-Century Women's Issues," in *Faith and Feminism in Nineteenth-Century Religious Communities / Edited by Michaela Sohn-Kronthaler and Ruth Albrecht.*, Bible and Women; Number 8.2 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 63–98.

That is the milieu in which Angelina called upon Deborah. Even if her readers had different views about Deborah's marriage or her femininity, they could most likely agree about the special circumstances of her ascension to power and God's mandate for her. In calling upon this narrative, Angelina did more than simply show an example, she tried to prove to her readers that this moment was extraordinary. This moment in time was one where God could call upon women to transcend their normal roles and act with power and resolve. This is another example, similar to when she made Garrison into a potential martyr, that Angelina made something sacred rather than secular. In this case it was a moment in time. It was a time when women, even Southern elite women, could have a Godly stamp of approval to act in a way that did not subscribe to their typical womanhood.

Finally, this leads into the millennial tone of the whole piece and some of Angelina's final words. The reason that this was a special time, in which women could transcend their roles, was that she, and other abolitionists, were ushering in the millennium. This is a somewhat nebulous eschatological belief related to the Second Coming. It relates to a millennium of peace and prosperity as a key component of this Second Coming, but depending in what kind of millennium (pre-, post-, a-, etc.) the millennium could come before, after, or during the Second Coming of Jesus. As W. Michael Ashcraft explains in his chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, many abolitionists, both during and leading up to the Civil War, believed in a form of millennialism called progressive millennialism. Progressive millennialism "believes in a 'changed' world wherein everything is in their ideal state…The "ideal" world also envisions a purging of adversaries and a divine hand behind every occurrence."[293] The abolition of slavery was required to create that ideal, and more Godly, society, thereby ushing in the millennium.

[293] W. Michael Ashcraft, "Progressive Millennialism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Additionally, by ending slavery "progressive millennialists saw no limit to what America, and Christianity, could do for the world."[294] In other words, many abolitionists believed that it was by reforming the world to become more Christian and rid itself of evil, of which slavery was the primary culprit, that the golden age of the millennium would come. This is consistent with the way most Quakers conceptualized millennialism at this time. Douglas Gwyn in his article *Quakers, Eschatology, and Time* argued that "Orthodox Friends shared with their evangelical allies an optimistic, progressive sense of history, couched in millennial terms."[295]

Angelina was one of these abolitionists. Both in *Appeal* and her other writings she spoke to this theme by talking about the eventual consequences of her work. In one of her letters to her husband she wrote "This must be the Lord's time and therefore the *best* time."[296] She believed it was her duty to make it the best time, aka the millennium, by eliminating slavery. It was her duty to usher in the best time in the history of the world, so that Jesus would return. However she took a slightly different tack in *Appeal*. She showed her readers what she believed were the consequences if the millennium was not ushered in: "I would say unto each one of you, 'what meanest thou, O sleeper! arise and call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not.' Perceive you not that dark cloud of vengeance which hangs over our boasting Republic?"[297] While Angelina's use of Jonah 1:6 is not the most common verse to call upon the millennium and end of days, it fits well with her mission of trying to "wake up" elite Southern women. Just as millennium promised peace and prosperity, the lack of it threatened the opposite. This line may seem slightly premillennialist, with the end of days nigh. But given Angelina's

[294] Ibid.
[295] Douglas Gwyn, "Quakers, Eschatology, and Time," *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Ben Pink Dandelion. (Oxford University Press; 2013.)
[296] Marshall Foletta, "Angelina Grimké: Asceticism, Millenarianism, and Reform," *The New England Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (2007): 179–217.
[297] Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, 24.

other writings which contain progressive, optimistic postmillennialism, and her fervent belief that people, and society, can change for the better, I argue that this is more of a threat aimed at these specific readers to prompt them to change. If her readers did not do their part to end slavery, God would reign down his wrath upon the people. It seems in this instance Angelina thought the stick would work better than the carrot.

Though she used fear tactics to prove to her readers what was at stake with their action or inaction, it does prove that Angelina thought the future of the world was on the line. This was not just a political issue, or even a human rights issue, this was an issue about the very future of humanity and their standing with God. Her religious outlook, though it varied from Episcopal to Presbyterian to Quaker to disaffected Quaker, impacted the way that she viewed the reality of slavery. That alone is not remarkable; people from the Revolution to today use religion to interpret their world. But for Angelina her country awaited either God's judgment or God's favor depending on what they did regarding slavery. In other words, God had a say in the social and political systems of America and Angelina wanted to ensure that those systems followed God's morality.

Conclusion: What is Angelina Grimké's brand of Protestant nationhood?

Overall Angelina Grimké's Protestant nationhood comes down to her desire to make America a country that is moral in the eyes of God. She wanted to refashion the laws and the societal norms of America so that it would be a country that God would favor. The main reason that she believed America did not yet hold a candle to God's morality was the issue of slavery. As long as slavery still existed in the country, God could not look upon the country with favor, and ultimately, the kingdom of God (in other words, the millennium), could not come.

There are several rhetorical devices that Angelina used to make this case to her readers. First, she argued that the work of abolitionism was holy work. In fact she specifically used the words "holy ground." In that way she echoed the words of other women in this dissertation who referred to America as the promised land. Except in this case, the work of abolition was the holy ground. In order to make the nation into the land of promise, total emancipation needed to happen. That is why her work was holy; she was helping to create an America that could one day live up to that promise that so many people believed it had. The work of abolition was so holy that no price was too high to ensure that it came to fruition. This leads to Angelina's second use of Protestant nationhood: her rhetoric of martyrdom.

True to her Quakerism, Angelina believed in the power of martyrs to make religious and political change. While she never put her own life on the line in a real way, she was not afraid to put herself out there and for that she did receive some threats (her multi-racial wedding party ended up inciting a riot).[298] But that didn't matter to her because the cause of abolition, and thus making America more holy and moral, was greater than any individual life. Her message, common with martyr rhetoric, was that people should not dwell so much on their body because God would reward them in heaven. If any abolitionist was killed in the work of freeing slaves and spreading abolitionist rhetoric, then it didn't matter because they could be assured that their work was favored by God and after death they would be praised and rewarded for their work. This is Protestant nationhood because it implies that God had favor on a group of people who were not joined by religious fervor, but by the desire to recreate societal and political laws.

Another important aspect of Angelina's Protestant nationhood was her belief system regarding how God's law and the law of humankind interacted. She believed that God's morality

[298] Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 100.

transcended all human boundaries, or in other words, God's law is higher than the laws of people. So, she interpreted Southern slavery as an attempt to shut out the light of God. But slaveholders could only do that for so long, and consequences loomed if they refused to change their ways. This constructs slavery as a willful denial of God. Since God's morality naturally floods all places, like light illuminating shadows, it takes a force of will to shut out that light and ignore it.

To further make the cause to slaveholders that they were wrong, Angelina used the founding fathers and the founding of America to make a similar case. Using her theology she implied that if God's morality is so omnipresent and influential, then the founding fathers were no doubt influenced by Him when creating the Declaration of Independence and other important documents. We can see the equality espoused in the Declaration as a sign of God's influence; after all, equality comes from "the creator" in the first place. So, this is an interesting use of Protestant nationhood in that Angelina didn't overtly participate in a glorification of the founding fathers, as many other authors (both women and men) have done in the course of Protestant nationhood. Rather, the founding fathers are not altogether special. They were simply bending to the will of God, as Angelina believed all people must do. So to her, the American past is still a narrative that aligns with God's will, and has Gods favor in that way, but it was not American exceptionalism. Angelina believed that all nations or constructs of human creation should, and would eventually, bend to God's will. If she had carried this philosophy through to its natural conclusion, we might call it religious globalism rather than nationalism, but thankfully she kept her argument to just the United States.

But this work is not just about Protestant nationhood, but specifically how women contributed to it, and Angelina had some very clear suggestions for her Southern readers. She

had four different methods, ranging from the comfortable to the uncomfortable (in terms of elite Southern femininity) that she encouraged women to use to end slavery. Through reading, praying, speaking, and finally acting, women could gradually increasing their participating and understanding so that they fulfilled their Christian duty to abolish slavery. And that is what it ultimately came down to, Angelina believed that she and all other women had a special duty as the carriers of Christian morality to work towards abolition. She played upon the Cult of True Womanhood, and the belief in women's natural piety, to give them power to enact political change. Angelina extended women's moral power beyond the home and into the realm of wider society and even government. While her readers would most likely not have gotten on board with that idea, even if they could read it, the point is that Angelina believed that women's natural moral superiority gave them an obligation to carry out that morality on a large scale. It was not enough to guide your sons and husbands. She believed it was her Christian duty as a woman to change the country by eradicating slavery, and to encourage other women to do the same.

It was only by bringing about that drastic change could the nation be remade into one that aligned with God's morality, thereby allowing the millennium to begin. Bringing about God's kingdom in America is Angelina's primary goal in working towards abolition. It is clear in her writing that she cared for the plight of enslaved people, but it was not her primary motivator. For her it was about Christian principles, not necessarily the lived reality of slavery. Ultimately, Angelina Grimké's brand of Protestant nationhood is one that used Christian principles of martyrdom, women's moral superiority, and millennialism to legitimate, even demand, women's work in the field of abolition.

Chapter 6: Lucy Virginia French

Lucy Virginia French was born on March 16th 1825 in Accomac County Virginia was born into an upper-class wealthy family headed by Mease W. Smith, who was a lawyer and prominent educator. He was a professor of Greek and Latin, and later the president, at Washington College (now Washington and Lee University).[299] Her mother was Elizabeth Parker Smith, the daughter of a wealthy merchant and she had a sister named Lide. However Lucy did not get to know her parents very well as her mother died when she was just one year old and she and her sister were sent to their maternal grandparents in Pennsylvania to be raised and educated. There is a slight discrepancy in the two prominent biographies about which school they were educated at, but it was either Mrs. Foster's Presbyterian Boarding School or Mrs. Hannah's School, or perhaps both over different times.[300] Regardless, we can assume that Lucy and Lide received a basic education and training in feminine arts and domestic matters. The overall goal of Southern women's education at this time was to prepare them to be virtuous wives and mothers.[301] However she did still receive an education and Lucy graduated with honors in 1846.[302] Other than her infant move and education, we know relatively little about Lucy's childhood.

After they completed their education, both Lucy and Lide moved back to Virginia to rekindle a relationship with their father. However, both girls disapproved of their father's

[299] Jonathan Daniel Wells, *Women Writers and Journalists in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[300] The American National Biography states it was Mrs. Foster's and the biography in American Women Writers states that it was Mrs. Hannah's school.
[301] Anya Jabour, "'Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated': Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Famliy," *The Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 1 (February 1998): 23–64.
[302] Tamara Horn, "French, Lucy Virginia Smith (1825-1881), Writer and Editor," *American National Biography Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.)

remarriage and found that they were not comfortable in their father's house, which had never really been their home. Together they left and moved to Memphis, Tennessee. Horn, in her biographical entry, argues that "their self-willed exodus from Virginia strengthened the bond between the sisters, who remained close all their lives."[303] After they moved to Memphis both Lucy and Lide became teachers, and Lucy started to dabble in writing. Lucy started publishing a few pieces in the Louisville *Journal* under the name L'Inconnue.[304] That launched her writing career and only a few years after, in 1852, she became the editor of *The Southern Ladies Book.* The magazine was "dedicated to Woman, as a symbol of progress," and to "the promotion and establishment of great Southern literature."[305] After this auspicious start, Lucy herself contributed to "great Southern literature" in the form of poems, articles, and books that covered a wide range of Southern topics.

Her literary career led to her marriage to John H. French, who had read some of Lucy's poetry and was so moved that he had to meet her. They were married in 1853.[306] John was a wealthy horse breeder and offered Lucy a "genteel future in Tennessee's antebellum society."[307] Lucy moved to her husband's hometown of McMinnville, Tennessee. This is the place that came to be her home, far more than Virginia and Pennsylvania ever were. Together she and John had three children: a boy and two girls named Walter Scott, Jessie Virginia, and May Lide. Somewhat uncommon for elite Southern women at the time, Lucy continued her literary career

[303] Ibid.
[304] Thelma Shinn J, "French, Lucy (Virginia) Smith," in *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present*, ed. Taryn Benbow-Pfalzgraf, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Detroit, MI: St. James Press, 2000), 76.
[305] Virginia Lewis Peck, "Life and Works of L. Virginia French" (Vanderbilt University, 1939), 5.
[306] Shinn, "French, Lucy (Virginia) Smith." 77.
[307] Connie L. Lester, "Lucy Virginia French: Out of the Bitterness of My Heart," in *The Human Tradition in the Civil War and Reconstruction / Edited by Steven E. Woodworth.*, ed. Steven E. Woodworth, The Human Tradition in America ; No. 4 (Wilmington: SR Books, 2000).

after the birth of her children. This career included editing a multitude of newspapers and magazines, including *The Temperance Crusader* and *Ladies' Home*. She was also a prolific writer, publishing a collection of poetry, two novels, a play, and a collection of legends.

Some of the common themes in Lucy's writings might come as a surprise to those who are familiar with elite Southern femininity. Lucy actively pushed against some of the gender codes that she, and others, were held to, specifically those related to sexual ethics. It is one matter for some Southern women to push in little ways against the politics of gender which governed their lives, but it was quite another to write quasi-openly about sex. To add to the scandal, Lucy often took the side of "fallen" women, as exemplified in one of her poems, appropriated titled "Sullied Name." Lucy even dared to write about prostitution in her work *My Roses: The Romance of a June Day*. The premise of the novel was that women need to help other women without any moralistic judgements about their sexual activities.[308] She understood prostitution not as something that tainted women, but as a system devised by men to enslave women. This structural understanding of prostitution was highly uncommon and scandalous. However one biographer, Mary Tardy, a contemporary of Lucy, wrote that "she takes all criticism in proper spirit, having no fear of the 'small snarlers,' little reverence for the great ones, and no ambition to become a 'serf of booksellers.'"[309] In other words, Lucy had the privilege to write about whatever she wanted and didn't pay much heed to what people said about her or her writing.

Another one of her later novels, *Kernwood; or After Many Days* is a romance set during the Civil War and relates more directly to the themes of this dissertation. The two heroines are a woman who dresses as a man to spy for the Confederate army and another woman who rejects

[308] Horn, "French, Lucy Virginia Smith (1825-1881), Writer and Editor."
[309] Mary T. Tardy, *The Living Female Writers of the South* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1872).

her suitors to become a doctor. While not about sexual ethics exactly, this novel deals with what Lucy calls "that monster Custom," and shows what women were expected to do and how limiting their prescribed roles were.[310] She imagined a past in which women could move beyond those limited boundaries and follow their dreams. Importantly, the dreams of both of the heroines revolved closely around serving the Confederacy. In other words, you could move beyond gender roles if was for a quasi-sacred cause of winning the Civil War for the South.

Relating to sacred, religion is not a prominent topic in Lucy's published works, but in her private diary it is pervasive. Through the Tennessee Virtual Archives we have access to Lucy's diary from the years of 1862-1865. She did not write as extensively as some women of her time, so it is a relatively limited document. But this source gives us important insight into how Lucy understood and made sense of the fighting that was happening around her, and as with so many people in both the North and South, religion was one of the lenses through which she interpreted the Civil War. As far as Lucy's personal religion, we know that she was married in the Episcopal Church in Memphis, and that she occasionally attended the Baptist church of a friend. Additionally, Mary Tardy, the biographer, explained that she had "healthy and well-developed hatred of all Puritanism—Puritanism, as she understands it, viz., the embodiment of hypocrisy and cant;-- radically independent in all things; doing each day 'whatever duty lies next to her,' leaving the results with God."[311] It seems that as far as religion went, the specifical denomination didn't seem to matter a great deal to Lucy as long as it was a type of Southern Christianity and there was no hint of Northern Puritanism. This fits with the overall tone in her diary, which is more focused on God's general favor for the South over any specific theology.

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[310] L. Virginia French, *Kernwood, or, After Many Days: A Historical Romance Founded on the Events of the Late War, from the Manuscript of a Confederate Spy / by l'inconnue.* (Louisville: The Author, 1867).
[311] Tardy, *The Living Female Writers of the South*, 348.

Her diary also gives us a glimpse of how Lucy and her family fared during the Civil War. In many ways her life did not change all that much. She wrote about going to church and visiting various friend's houses and generally continuing her social life. One of the main differences was that now her social life involved the occasional interaction with a Northern soldier, like in April 1863 when Union soldiers raided their home. The first, and really only, serious hardship that Lucy faced during the war was when her brother, John Walker, died. This marked a turning point in her diary where her former optimism and "normal life" came to an end. After her brother died, she grew despondent and showed a deep bitterness towards the Union soldiers (who she blamed for her brother's death) that was not present in her diary before that point. But after the war she did eventually come out of her stupor, especially considering she wrote *Kernwood* after the war, though the bitterness was never quite gone.

After publishing numerous works, editing several magazines, raising a family and surviving the Civil War, Lucy Virginia French passed away on March 31, 1881, in her adopted home of McMinnville, TN. Her writings are complex and multi-layered. She grappled with the way Southern society limited women's rights, but she was completely blind to the enslavement of Africans. She at first bemoaned secession and missed the symbols of the United States, and then after the war she fiercely defended the Confederacy and believed God would ensure that it rose again. Lucy is a perfect example of how the mythology of the Lost Cause found its most rabid supporters in Southern white women. First, she saw the ways that Southern society infringed upon the rights of women. Then during the war, women found a sense of accomplishment and achievement in being able to contribute to a cause. Soon the cause became holy, and Southern white women believed that God was on their side and there was no way they could lose. And then the unthinkable happened and they did lose; God seemed to abandon them.

Not only did God abandon them, but they lost much of the freedom that had acquired during the war. Southern white women had to grapple with a multitude of losses, but rather than examining their beliefs and ethics, they dug their heels in and fell back on what gave them power in the first place: the creation of Protestant nationhood, alongside a racist form of religious nationalism. Lucy believed that God had only been testing the South and that one day the Confederacy would rise again, with God's favor.

Civil War Diary

In addition to her published works, we now have access, courtesy of the Tennessee Virtual Archives, to Lucy's diary that she kept during the Civil War. The diary ranges from 1862 to 1865, so it just about spans the entirety of the war. In this diary, we see exactly how she understood the relationship between God and the Confederacy. Over the course of the diary we see how, for Lucy, God is always connected to the South, but the degree and nature of that connection changes as the war goes on. In the beginning of the diary, at the start of the war, Lucy's God is a God of battles and victory. However she does express some doubts. Actually before the war started, and before she started writing the diary, she didn't support secession.[312] But by the time she started writing this dairy, she whole-heartedly supported the Confederacy. Still we see glimpses of her doubts, which contrast from her highly optimistic view of God's plan for the South. As the war continued though, we see her optimism fading. By the end of her diary she was questioning how God permitted such a terrible war. This trajectory was not uncommon for white Southern women during the Civil War, but Lucy's description of God and

[312] Connie L. Lester, "Lucy Virginia French's Civil War" (Civil War in the Borderlands Conference, Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University, 2011), 2.

God's relationship with the South gives a clearer picture of how Protestant nationhood and religious nationalism played a role in these women's understanding of the war. As mentioned earlier, only Maria Stewart and Lucy Virginia French combine their Protestant nationhood with a kind of religious nationalism. This means that Lucy wanted to create a society based on the rules of Protestant Christianity and believed that the government was bound by these rules (Protestant nationhood), but she also believed that the Southern nation had a special relationship with God and that chosenness would lead to an almost eschatological belief that the South would rise again (religious nationalism).

In her entries over the first two years, her faith in the Confederacy was evident through the various references to a militaristic God who was on the side of the South. Everything, from little private celebrations to massive military victories, were attributed to God. Battles that had not yet been decided, she squarely placed in God's hands. What follows are a few entries which illustrate this:

> Every body is sanguine of our success. We don't put our trust in chariots or horses as in men. But him who rules among the armies of heaven as among the inhabitant of earth. -April 10 1862 (after the Battle of Shiloh)
>
> The left wing commanded by the veteran Price, advances from the South on Nashville, driving them before him. It is a plan to bag them all and God grant it may prove successful! -Sept 5, 1862
>
> All the troops here were ordered down immediately, & the news this morning is that a general engagement will take place to-day. Oh! how I wish it were over, & how I pray that the God of battles may give us the victory! -Dec 28, 1862
>
> This was emphatic to say the least. I could scarcely keep from crying for joy when Darlin told me the news__ I went in Mollies room, waked her up & told her. I said to her now don't turn over and go to sleep again without thanking God for it. I'm [sure] my prayers tonight were fervent & deeply grateful to Him who giveth the victory. -Dec 31, 1862 (Written after the first day of the Battle of Stones River, when it appeared the Confederate Army might be successful, but subsequent days would show a Union victory.)

> If God would in His goodness grant us a triumph at Vicksburg, & at Tullahoma__ we should have peace ere long. Oh! our Father remember us, and grant us this of thine especial favor! -March 11, 1863
>
> I cannot but fear however, that our incomparable Lee will be overwhelmed__ such are the myriads sent against him. God help him, & God defend the right. -May 22, 1864[313]

There are a number of themes that we can pull out from Lucy's various quotes. The most obvious is her fervent belief that God has a say in individual battles. This was not a distant, deist God, but one who was intricately involved in the ebb and flow of this war. More than that, the actions of God's people directly influenced how God interacted with the war. We can see this especially in the entry from Dec 31, 1862. Lucy had just heard that the Confederates had "whipped the enemy" in the first day of the Battle of Stones River, which was one of the most important battles for the people of Tennessee. When she got the news, she was so overjoyed that she went to wake Mollie, a relative who lived with them at the time, to tell her news, and specifically told her to thank God for the victory, which Lucy herself did as well. Though Lucy ended up being overeager in her assumption of a Confederate victory, (on January 2 the Union repulsed the Confederate Army, with heavy losses on both sides) her entry shows how important it was to thank God. He was the one who gave the victory (however short-lived) to the Confederate army. The simple request to Mollie not to fall asleep before thanking God makes it seem almost as if it's a chore, not in the sense of a tedious task, but meaning something that is required of Southerners. If they don't pray to God, who has a say in each individual battle, they could risk losing. Even when they did lose, which they did for this particular battle, their actions still mattered.

[313] Lucy Virginia French, "Lucy Virginia French Diary" (Tennessee Virtual Archive, 1881 1825), https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll15/search/searchterm/Diaries/field/media/mode/exact/conn/and.

This belief comes down to the fact that at this point in the war Southerners were not scared of losing the war, just losing individual battles. As George Rable argues in *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, "Reverses and sacrifices were part of any war, and at this stage pious soldiers and their families agreed that God would save the southern nation because he would surely not allow the infidel Yankees to triumph. Recent defeats were nothing but temporary set-backs, for even a Christian people could not escape history's calamities."[314] We can see this in Lucy's response to the Battle of Shiloh. After one of the bloodiest battles of the war, and a Union victory, she still said that she was hopeful for success, because she had faith in God. Her belief in the connection between God and Confederacy was so strong that that even after bloody Union victories she had hope for their ultimate success. As Rable points out, this is not a unique belief system.[315] Most white Southerners at this point were confident in their success because they believed that God was on their side. However, it is important to explore it here because it serves as a catalyst for Lucy's Lost Cause mythos later in her life.

So why was God on the side of the South? How did white Southerners get so confident in this religio-nationalist belief? One reason has to do with another common theme in this dissertation: the connection to the founding fathers. This theme has been discussed at length throughout this dissertation. The Revolution, did, and still does, function as a sacred history, and by connecting to it many people aim to show the holiness, and the Godly approbation, of their current activities. However it is a slightly different prospect when you consider that Confederate citizens, including Lucy, employed this tactic as well. Here is just one example of many in her diary entry of February 22, 1862:

[314] Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples A Religious History of the American Civil War*, 149.
[315] Ibid. For more info, see Chapter 8.

> This is the anniversary of the birth of our Great Washington & set apart for the inauguration of Jefferson Davis whom some style the second Washington.[316]

There is no question in Lucy's mind that the Confederates were the true heirs of the Revolution. Her president can be directed connected to George Washington himself. This didn't just come from Lucy's mind though; this sentiment in the very air she breathed. Almost every Confederate citizen, starting from the top with Jefferson Davis, expressed this connection to the Revolution. Anne Rubin, in *A Shattered Nation*, explains why this is such a power narrative for the Confederacy. "Nations depend on myths of origin to inspire both domestic loyalty and foreign recognition. These new Confederates had one readymade in the form of the American Revolution and they returned again and again to that deep well of national symbolism."[317] If we accept the premise that one of the most important functions of Protestant nationhood is to create a sacred story that brings people together into one unified identity, we can see why the connection to the Revolution is so important for the Confederacy. They were a brand-new nation, with no distinct history to look back to. So the only way that they could create a sacred history that would bring people together was to draw upon the one they already knew. If Confederates could cast themselves as the true heirs to the Revolution, then they could tap into all the sacred history that had already been developed.

If we go back to Marcela Cristi's conception of civil religion as ideology vs culture, we can see how the two different ideas play out. Rubin argues, using the writings of statesmen and preachers, that Confederate leaders (either intentionally or not) used the Revolution to "shift the terms of the debate" from slavery to the more palatable, and even virtuous, cause of preserving

[316] French, "Lucy Virginia French Diary."
[317] Anne S. Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868 / Anne Sarah Rubin.*, Civil War America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 14

the true legacy of the founding fathers.[318] Essentially, a war about creating the more perfect union that the founding fathers dreamt of was more honorable than a war to preserve the ability to enslave people, that only a small percentage of Confederates had anyway. So for people with cultural and societal power, like preachers and statesmen, the connection to the Revolution was largely about creating a public image, and trying to convince the world of the righteousness of the Confederate cause.

For Lucy the connection to the Revolution was far more intimate in its meaning. Looking back at her diary entry from Marcy 2, 1862, we can see that this connect was a cause for personal comfort, and a reminder that God was on their side.

> I have read 'Mount Vernon & its Associations'__ in our ^ present revolution it seems to cheer me to read the history of our former one. Both were dark days__ may we be enabled now as then to trust in God & hold out to the end![319]

Even in 1862, when she was still convinced the Confederates would win, the Civil War was full of death and darkness. After reading a book about Washington and the Revolutionary War, Lucy was comforted by that history; if they could make it through their Revolution, with Gods help, then she could make it through hers. This comfort only works because she believed in the strong, direct connection between the two events. In this way the sacred history of the Confederacy served two different purposes when we look at the gender of the authors who wrote about it. Men were largely concerned with public image, and the outward message they portrayed. For Lucy, the Revolution gave her a way to carry on and privately deal with the ups and downs of the war. However, this also shows how Lucy didn't even consider slavery when making this connection, as many men did. Internally, most Southerners did not see enslavement of other human beings as

[318] Ibid, 4.
[319] French, "Lucy Virginia French Diary."

antithetical to the Declaration of Independence, certainly Lucy didn't. She did feel the need to prove to anyone why the South was worthy of this Revolutionary legacy; it simply was.

Also directly related to gender and how it related to the Confederate cause, Lucy believed that standing up to Union officers was one of the most patriotic things that a Southern woman could do. There is an interesting moment in her diary, in March 1862, when she included a clipping of news article from the Knoxville Register that speaks about the "Sprit of Nashville Ladies." It detailed two instances of Union officers who sent up cards to high-class Southern ladies, asking to renew an acquaintance. Both women replied with an emphatic no, which was deemed patriotic by the author of the piece. The clipping ends with "Tennesseans, are you not proud of your women? Will not these noble responses nerve your arms in the hour of battle?"[320] Though this is a clipping, and the language doesn't come directly from Lucy, she expressed her agreement with the piece. Also, since she included very few clippings in her diary it shows that the message must be especially important to her. This in and of itself is not a reflection of religious nationalism or Protestant nationhood, just simple patriotism. But when viewed in combination with Lucy's own actions we can see how, for her, there is a religious element to this form of patriotism.

Later in her diary, Lucy recounted when Union officers raided her home. It was a traumatic event for her and takes up many more pages than she usually devoted to her day-to-day activities. But she did not cower or hide, she stood her ground and spoke back to the officers, even to the point of Mr. French taking a back seat. However, rather than the romantic intentions of the officers mentioned in the news clipping, these officers had overtly nefarious intentions. But the parallels are very similar. Union officers come to door and ask to enter, and it is a strong

[320] Ibid.

Southern woman who either successfully turns them away, or in Lucy's case, attempts to forbid them entry. There is clearly a connection between Southern womanhood and the protection of her home. It is up to her to keep the physical space of the home safe from the tarnish (either by social reputation or actual destruction) of Union forces. However there is more to this when you look at the language Lucy used to describe the specific Union soldier who led the charge against her home.

> They [Union soldiers] crowded to the doors, some wanting one thing and some another all talking at once, until one imp of darkness started into the house swearing he had heard we had meat hid & he was going to search the house for it. Just as he was about to pass me I laid my hand on his shoulder & looked him right in the eyes__ (the devil was just about as tall as myself and ^ one of the most repulsive countenances I ever recoiled from.) __ I stopped him & asked Are you a man?__ he hesitated a moment__ sensed surprised that I should dare interfere, and said yes.__ Are you a gentleman?__ he did not reply__ but Mr. French who was standing just by smiled… Well, said if he is a gentleman he will show it by going out of my house, & turning to another of the men who had a rather pleasant face I asked Do your officers permit you to search houses without orders? He said not__ it was strictly against orders__ adding You are loyal people? Yes__ I replied, all our sympathies are entirely with the South. His countenance fell in a moment… We have all our best things away now, except my piano__ I do not anticipate another visit from the devil soon, because they did all the mischief they came to do. - April 26, 1863[321]

You can sense how Lucy is proud of her strength and resolve in the way that she laid her hand on his shoulder and asked him direct questions and tried in every socially acceptable way to get them to leave her house. But she is even more proud of herself because it was not just a Union soldier she was standing up to: it was a representation of the Devil himself. This Union officer, who trespassed on her home, was "an imp of darkness" and a "devil." By the end of this section she said, "I do not anticipate another visit from the devil soon, because they did all the mischief they came to do." Now the devil is no longer one singular person, but "they," meaning the Union soldiers more broadly.

[321] Ibid.

Perhaps if this were a woman with a different occupation (or not occupation at all) we could overlook the references to the devil as simply hyperbole. But Lucy was a published poetess, she knew the power of words and used that power often to convey her own thoughts and values. Therefore we cannot overlook the frequent use of devil as a casual way to heighten her experiences. To Lucy, the Union was working for the forces of evil. Also, she was the only woman to use this language either. Florence Fay, who had a column in *Field and Fireside* (a North Carolina weekly paper that consisted of fiction, poetry, and politics), called Northern officers who flirted with Southern women "the Blue devil or politely speaking, bonnie Blue Beelzebub!"[322] In fact this rhetoric was common across the North and the South; Edward Blum argues in "The First Secessionist Was Satan," that comparisons to the Devil were a common way to dehumanize one's enemy and raise the stakes.[323] Thus, both women imbued the actions of all Southern women with power because they were standing up the Devil himself when they rejected Union officers. This rejection then becomes both a religious and a patriotic action. In standing up for the Confederacy she is fighting against evil. There were masculine ways to fight that evil, through warfare, and there were feminine ways to fight that evil, by rejecting Union officers and protecting your home, both physically and ideologically. In this way, the war brought them a kind of power they didn't have before.

More specifically, the manner that it brought white women power was that it allowed them to publicly transgress certain aspects of their defined gender roles. As Drew Faust, in her

[322] Florence Fay, "Florence Fay Arrows: Blue Devils," *Field and Fireside*, March 24, 1866. Though this was published a year after the war ended, Fay was recounting events that occurred during the war.
[323] Edward J. Blum, "'The First Secessionist Was Satan': Secession and the Religious Politics of Evil in Civil War America," *Civil War History* 60, no. 3 (2014): 234–69. Interestingly, Blum argues that Devil imagery was used more in the North than in the South, though it was common for both sides. One of the reasons that the North connected secession and slavery with the Devil was to enable a union to occur at the end of the war. If the cause of secession was actually the Devil whispering in Southerners' ears, then they could be forgiven and allowed back into the union. It makes the Devil the true cause of the war, not the individual people involved.

work *Mothers of Invention*, argues, as white Southern women were "largely freed from fear of northern reprisals, many women seemed liberated as well from the inhibitions that had defined their positions as ladies. In their eyes Yankees seemed to exist outside all constraints of propriety or compassion."[324] Since Union men were not considered gentlemen, and not part of these women's social circles, they were able to practice a kind of social power that they did not have before the war. They could react, talk back, and voice their minds in a way that Southern culture did not allow them to otherwise. Many women found power, as Lucy did, in these interactions.

However, we must recognize that female power is different among different spheres of their lives. In this instance elite Southern women could exercise power against Union officers, but prior to the war, white plantation mistresses already held power over the people they enslaved. Thavolia Glymph explored this thoroughly in *Out of the House of Bondage*, where she argued that the violent power exercised by Southern slave mistresses has largely been overlooked by the historical record because domesticity was not seen as a site of power and this violence seemed to transgress white female gentility, and therefore didn't make sense.[325] Admittedly we have very little information regarding how Lucy interacted with the women she enslaved. She was not a plantation mistress (there were no large planters in McMinnville and cotton was not a significant crop[326]), but she did reference some household enslaved people in her diary. She appeared to have several household enslaved women, led by Mammy, and a cook named Puss. In the few times they came up it was brief, and Lucy did not describe the interactions in detail. It was mostly restricted to their household chores being accomplished

[324] Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 201.
[325] Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage the Transformation of the Plantation Household*. This is one of her major arguments throughout the book, but you can primarily read this argument in the first three chapters.
[326] Lester, "Lucy Virginia French's Civil War."

quickly and quietly. Once she did mention Mammy becoming frustrated when the Union soldiers invaded their home, which portrayed the woman as "on her side" so to speak. The diary presents a happy home and a caring relationship (to the extent that there is a relationship) and shows the myth of the compassionate slaveowner. However, as Steven Stowe argues in *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women*, this manner of discussing/largely ignoring enslaved people in diaries is its own form of power. "Being close-mouthed about slaves in her diary was an imprint of the mask a lady wore as a mistress, a style of mastery brought to the page. Being laconic about Black people was not a break with the past but a continuation of a way of living among them."[327] For Southern slave owning women, being almost silent about enslaved people in their diaries was a form of mastery. It dehumanized enslaved people even further by showing they were barely worth mentioning; they were part of the background and the scenery. It also does not prove in any way that physical violence was not employed by the author.

The point is, though we cannot know exactly how Lucy treated the people she enslaved, she held power over them and she could exercise that power in whatever manner she wanted. One of the ways she did so was to only mention them briefly in her diary, and she could have exercised that power in more physical ways but she simply didn't document it. The difference is that she didn't recognize that as power because it was a given for her; she assumed that as a white woman she would always have power over Black people. There is a difference between Lucy's perception of power and the actual power she had. She perceived that she had more power during the war because she could transgress some of the social rules of her gender by speaking up to Union officers. It was a public display that was celebrated because it was for the cause of the Confederacy. But what Lucy didn't discuss, or likely even perceive herself, is that

[327] Steven M. Stowe, *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women*, Civil War America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 106.

she always had this power within her own household because she could exercise violence over those she enslaved.

However enthusiastic Lucy seemed about the Confederacy up to this point, she did occasionally express some sadness about the rift between her old nation and her new one. She wrote the following passage after Nathan Bedford Forests's raid on Murfreesboro in July of 1862. The almost 1200 Union prisoners were marched along the road right in front of her house, and that sight, along with the captured American flag, made her question her Confederate patriotism.[328]

> One of the Rangers showed us a flag he had taken. We took it into the parlor where a wounded soldier was sleeping & examined it. It was a beautiful banner, elegantly make of the finest silk, & embroidered__ belonged to the 9th Michigan Infantry__ presented to the commander Col. Wm. Duffield, by the ladies of Detroit. I shall never forget the scene which passed before us upon this evening. Did I ever think to see the old stars & stripes, a captive banner & not weep over it? I felt badly to see it thus I confess__ it was the old flag I had loved so long. – July 17 1862.[329]

First Lucy praised the creation of the flag, commenting on how it was beautifully made with the finest materials. Then she mentioned its lineage, what unit it came from, and specifically who gave it to them. Perhaps Lucy saw a parallel between herself and the Detroit women who supplied their men with a flag. Just as she supported her men in battle, so too did Northern women support theirs. However it goes deeper than that, Lucy was emotionally overcome by seeing the American flag as a captured banner. This was something that should have been a joyous, or at least self-righteous, affair. The prisoners were marched in front of her house and the enemy banner conquered. It would have been a visual display of Southern battle prowess and superiority. However Lucy wept at the sight. It shows that, for her, and I suspect for many other Southern women, Protestant nationhood was not a one-note song. It was complex and multi-

[328] Lester, "Lucy Virginia French's Civil War."
[329] French, "Lucy Virginia French Diary."

layered. She believed that God was on the side of the South, and yet she wept at the sight of the stars and stripes. The symbol of the flag had become so powerful to Lucy that even after she came to support secession, she still was saddened that the symbol of America had been captured.

In addition to growing sad at the capture of the American flag, Lucy also expressed doubts about Jefferson Davis. After comparing him to George Washington, as quoted earlier, she wrote "Will he prove himself such? That remains yet to be seen. If this day is to be ominous of our political future, it will be gloomy indeed."[330] Though this was not religion per-say, it shows that her firm belief that Confederate citizens were God's chosen people did not preclude her from questioning Confederate leadership. For Lucy, religious nationalism was about God's relationship with the people as a whole and the holy cause of the Confederacy. That did not mean that Confederate leaders were chosen individually by God. Her beliefs left her free to express doubt in the president of the Confederacy without diminishing her faith in the Confederacy cause. This is partially due to the interplay between Protestant nationhood and religious nationalism. Religious nationalism related to the chosenness of the Confederacy, and that didn't change depending on who was in charge. But in her desire to create a Protestant nation, she could critique certain people for not upholding the tenets of Protestant Christianity, as she does with Davis.

This expression of sadness over the American flag, and her statement about Jefferson Davis, both occurred earlier in the war, when she was still totally convinced of a Confederate victory. However, later in the war, when she and other Confederate citizens started to realize that they might lose, that small voice of doubt grew into a questioning of God's grand design and the chosenness of the Confederate cause. First, in October of 1864, a month before Lincoln was

[330] Ibid.

reelected to the Presidency, Lucy predicted what would happen if Lincoln remained president. She wrote:

> If Abe & Andy should be elected, I want to get up & leave this God-forsaken land, and go somewhere where no one has ever heard of America__ her glory or her shame! I presume the Yeyie Islands, or Borribola Gha__ have never yet experienced the civilization that dwells in Abolition & Secession__ if so either would be a good Christian place to go to & I should like exceedingly to emigrate there unto! -Oct 30 1864

At this point, Lucy was starting to admit that there was a possibility that the South would lose the war and started to grapple with what would happen in that instance. Though this passage is a bit tongue in cheek, it does show Lucy's genuine fear about the repercussions of another Lincoln presidency. If he won, God would forsake the land entirely and it would no longer be a Christian nation. Though she was not yet fully admitting that God might have abandoned the South, she believed that God's favor for Southern people would not stand up to a Lincoln presidency. This means that the actions of the North could impact and even shake the relationship between God and the Confederate people.

It is important to note that this sentiment was not exclusive to Lucy. In fact this might have been one of the most pervasive beliefs during the Civil War. Men, women, Northern, and Southern people all believed they were fighting to save Christianity. James Byrd in *A Holy Baptism of Fire and Blood*, describes how after Sherman's March to the Sea three different Northern preachers portrayed the war as a fight between God and Satan, upon which hung the fate of the Christian nation.[331] The feeling that if the North doesn't win then the nation will no longer be Christian was almost exactly the same as what Lucy expressed in her diary, except reversed. This fear overlaps with both religious nationalism and Protestant nationhood. The belief that if they lost then God would no longer favor the South relates to religious nationalism,

[331] James P. Byrd, *A Holy Baptism of Fire and Blood: The Bible and the American Civil War / James P. Byrd.* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 245-6.

but the belief that the leaders of the nation could no longer create a true Protestant nation relates to protestant nationhood. In other words, both the covenant sacred relationship and the lived reality of a Christian people were at stake. What this also means is that some forms of religio-nationalist rhetoric during the Civil War were so pervasive that everyone from Southern elite white women to Northern male preachers espoused them.

Finally, near the end of Lucy's diary and the end of the war, she had lost all faith in God's special relationship with the South.

> Poor fellows__ four long years of service__ hardship & suffering, & all for__ what? And some are sleeping here in our crowded graveyard__ and many will never even be so near even in death__ they sleep among strangers in unknown graves, on dreary battlefields. Oh! for what? For what? Did God permit this war? Shall we ever find out why it was allowed? -May 14 1865

Through this quote we can see at this point that Lucy lost almost all of her faith. If we compare this to her early quotes, especially how even after the Battle of Shiloh she was convinced of their ultimate success because she had faith in God, we can see how far that faith had fallen. By 1865 there had simply been too much death. She could no longer believe that the mission of the Confederacy was sacred. Lucy didn't go so far as to lose her religion entirely, but her perception of God here appears to be spiteful a God who never really cared about his people. She doesn't know why he allowed this war and questions whether he ever had a place in it at all. Her faith is shaken.

Many white Southern women felt this to some degree. Drew Faust explains in her chapter on religion how these women experienced many different iterations of losing faith, but the overall sentiment of loss and doubt was shared by most Confederate women. She explains that some women blamed themselves for their doubt. Rather than casting blame on God they blamed their own lack of religious conviction. So there was self-deprecation on top of grief. Other

women gave themselves permission to recognize and voice their doubts in God, but ultimately convinced themselves that God's plan was unknowable and there might still be some point to everything. Then others, especially those who had recently lost close family members, lost their faith entirely and did not believe a God could ordain the death of their loved ones.[332] However, none of these categories fully describe Lucy's outlook at the end of the war. She didn't blame herself, and she didn't completely throw the baby out with the bathwater, so to speak. There is a sense that she still recognized God might have a plan, but it is a far cry from a ringing endorsement of God's grand design. What this shows is that even among white elite women, the belief in a Protestant nation, or rather the lack of belief in a Protestant nation, is not a monolith.

Overall the war stirred up a variety of emotions and reactions from Lucy Virginia Smith. In the beginning of the war, she believed strongly in God's plan and his divine connection with the South. Alongside that divine approbation, she saw the connection between the Revolution as a form of comfort. It provided a sacred history that was a comfort for her during what she perceived as the darker parts of the war. Though the war was hard on her in some ways, Lucy did also experience some inflation of her power during this time. She construed her interactions with Union officers as a fight with the devil. This allowed her to participate in the war effort and imbued her actions with sacred purpose. However, her firm belief in that sacred purpose waned as the deaths started to pile on. She never completely lost faith in God or the Confederacy, but there is definitely a sense that she lost her mooring and her own sense of purpose. So Lucy had found a degree of power within Confederate religious nationalism and building up a Protestant nation, and then she deflated at the end of the war when she started to question God's divine plan. At the end of her diary, we are left with a Lucy who deeply questioned her true purpose,

[332] Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, 188-193.

and as many Confederate women did, both in terms of her relationship with the nation and with her own power within that nation.

"That Monster Custom:" Poetry and Kernwood

Though her diary was written during the Civil War, poetry was Lucy's first foray into the world of writing. Her first volume dealt with a variety of themes, some serious, some less so. But one poem stands out in her volume because she took on a controversial topic and had an even more controversial stance on the issues: women's sexuality. One topic that comes up many times in her later writing is the subject of women's sexual ethics, and how women are held to a different standard than men. Lucy bemoaned the customs of society that judged women so harshly. But "Sullied Name" was one of the first instances in which Lucy argued for the rights of women, in a roundabout way. This poem is about a woman who was ostracized by respectable society because she gave up her virginity to her lover, who ended up leaving her. She wrote of the deep sadness that comes from having a society reject you in the particular way that it happened in the South. The main characters name has become forbidden, and everyone is full of "fear to mention thee aloud."[333] Lucy admitted that "too much of early passion slept/ Within the dark, mysterious eye," but she didn't think that should mean that the main character should be cast out for eternity. In other words, the act of pre-marital sex was still sinful, but the punishment didn't match the crime. Lucy believed in second chances for women who had strayed in their sexual ethics.

To a modern reader this probably wouldn't sound all that radical, but for a Southern elite white woman to express these ideas it would have been shocking. To fully understand the extent

[333] Lucy Virginia French, *Wind-Whispers; A Collection of Poems* (Nashville, TN: Published by Author, 1856), 625.

of Lucy's departure, we must have a grasp on antebellum Southern sexual ethics. Victorian Bynum in *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* lays out a well-researched picture of how sex functioned for women of all races and classes in the Old South. As is evident from the title, sex for women was largely about social control rather than any personal desire. The social and legal rules around sex were used to keep women in their designated sphere and uphold the patriarchal slavocracy. Bynum also, conveniently, speaks to the exact situation of "Sullied Name" when she writes "an unmarried woman who did not remain celibate might frequently find herself in court throughout her childbearing years."[334] Chief Justice Frederick Nash of North Carolina gave us the perfect explanation as to why that was the case, when deliberating on how bastardy should be prosecuted. He argued that any allegation of the bad reputation of the mother was unnecessary because "most mothers of illegitimate children were of inferior character…nothing provided more irrevocable proof of an inner moral weakness than sexual misbehavior."[335] It all came down to the moral weakness of wayward women. In breaking sexual codes and laws, wayward Southern elite women threatened the very fabric of Southern plantation society. The patriarchal family, and the institution of slavery, are in many ways based on the chastity of white women. The morality of the household was based on the piousness of the mother; republican motherhood was still strong in the Old South. If the mother wasn't pious, how could the family truly practice Christian-based morality? White men believed they had to protect the purity of white women, especially from the perceived sexual threat of black men. If women could willingly engage in sexual activities with both white and black men, then what did white men have to protect? The issue is that when elite white women practiced

[334] Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South / Victoria E. Bynum.*, Gender & American Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 89.
[335] Ibid, 103.

sexual freedom it threatened both those institutions. For that reason, women's sexual behavior was tightly controlled, both legally and socially, by all members of elite society, men and women alike.

This is why Lucy's open support of sexually deviant women is so shocking. Most women of her race and class were so indoctrinated into the system of Southern sexual ethics that they willingly upheld the codes that kept them subservient. What is even more striking than Lucy's breaking with Southern society on this issue was that she connected her own thoughts to God's judgement, or lack thereof. She wrote "God, in mercy, did not strike / Thine image from His Book away. He kept thee from the deeps of sin—He quelled they spirit's maddening flame…For those who wronged thee cease to blame; and she who wept, has still a shrine That purifies they sullied name."[336] What she meant is that even though society may shun her, God has never rejected her. In fact God even helped her come back to the right path by "quelling" her passions. Ultimately God's love for the fallen women purifies her name so that it can be spoken again. By putting God on the side of the fallen woman, Lucy made her argument even stronger, and more radical. Much of the chastity that women had to practice came down to religion and the belief in women's natural morality and piety. Many even believed that God ordained the separation of the sexes and dictated the rules for each based on their innate qualities.[337] So in writing this poem which places God on the side of the fallen woman, Lucy argued (in a roundabout way) that Southern elite beliefs about sexual ethics, and the place of religion in upholding and enforcing them, are incorrect.

This theme of questioning gender codes in Southern society did not stop at one poem. One of Lucy's novels, *Kernwood*, deals with this theme in depth. Though the main characters in

[336] French, *Wind-Whispers; A Collection of Poems,* 625.
[337] Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 57.

this novel were not dealing with social codes regarding sexual activity, they were still dealing with a Southern society that dictated how they can and cannot act. The novel itself has many wandering plotlines that are too complex to get into, so we still focus on two characters: Corrine and Amanda. They are two Southern women who early on in the novel express interest in helping the Confederate side during the Civil War. In a chapter titled "That Monster Custom" Corrine expressed to her father that she wished she was a man so she could fight. Her father replied

> And I am very glad that you are not, for we want such capable, fearless women as yourself at home, to take care of our sick and wounded soldiers and pray to God for our success. Every daughter of the South has a duty to perform, as well as her sons, and I know you will do it gloriously. Even my little Pet must learn to dress wounds and make soups for the southern boys, and render herself useful generally.[338]

Though the father is not cast as an evil character (or he wouldn't have been to contemporary Southern readers), he still serves as the voice of "custom" in telling his daughter exactly what was needed from her. He shows how a woman's duty to care for the soldiers and tend the home was not just an obligation to her family, but to the South and to God. He is condescending, calling her "pet," and shows that all of a woman's actions are to serve a man, either her sons, father, or other soldiers. While Corrine at the time didn't fight back against her father, the name of the chapter is very telling as far as Lucy's thoughts on the matter. She saw the customs surrounding women's roles as a "monster." To provide some kind of escape, as novels so often do, both of her main characters escape from the monster. Amanda dresses as a man, literally escaping her gender, to become a spy for the Confederacy and Corrine eventually becomes a doctor.

[338] French, *Kernwood, or, After Many Days*, 43.

At the end, after the end of the Civil War, Amanda is sent to Europe with a vague mission to continue the work of the Confederacy, and Corrine chooses to accompany her, without telling her family, to follow her dream of becoming a doctor. After she left, Corrine wrote back to her family explaining her decision and this letter serves as an excellent window into the characters', and I would argue the author's, view on women's place in the world:

> I shall use my pecuniary resources to this end. I am not what you might call a thorough Woman's Rights' advocate; but, although a woman, I feel that I have rights to some extent- rights as palpable and unquestionable as those of men—and I shall assert them. I do not crave political privileges, but I desire those advantages that will place me socially and intellectually upon an equal footing with him…That man has a right arrogate to himself all the higher instruments of learning I deny; woman shares with him the common school of life, why should she be excluded from the college?[339]

This is a different kind of "women's rights" then we would find from the North at this time, and we can even see the author/character distancing herself from contemporary understandings of the term. She had no desire to be an Elizabeth Cady Stanton or Susan B. Anthony, but she did want some kind of freedom from gender roles. This was a way of trying to find a Southern way to get a measure of equality. Corrine specifically mentioned that she didn't want political rights; that would have been too radical and voting rights wasn't something elite Southern women wanted. It was social equality that Corrine wanted. She simply wanted to be allowed to do the things she wanted to do.

However, the desire to become a doctor was more radical than Corrine or Lucy let on. When elite Southern women became nurses that was a drastic shift in Southern white womanhood that many men and women were opposed to. Marie Malloy explains in her work *Single, White, Slaveholding Women in the Nineteenth-Century American South* that "some southerners perceived it [becoming a nurse] as a challenge to traditional gender roles," this is

[339] Ibid, 386.

because it "expanded nurturing roles out of the home."[340] It was not considered respectable and especially at the beginning the war there was a severe stigma around it for this class of white women. But this was, yet again, something that Confederate women found during the war that gave them power. Many Confederate nurses found a purpose in their work that they hadn't found in their prior lives, and that power came down to their sacred duty. One woman, Kate Cumming, even said that Confederate women who did not become nurses were shirking their duties as women and as Christians. Rather than nursing being unrespectable, she believed it was the Christian duty of women to care for the wounded soldiers. It was their God-given piety, Cumming believed, that compelled women to contribute in this manner. The power that these nurses found connected directly back to their religion, and how their religion compelled them to work for the Confederacy in this specific way. Though Lucy was not a nurse herself, Corrine's character expressed this feeling so well that Lucy seems to be speaking for nurses she knew. Medicine gave women power during the war and then a sense of ennui after the war when they could no longer exercise that power. However, where this feeling left Lucy despondent and lost at the end of her diary, the end of *Kernwood* shows an entirely different way that Confederate women dealt with this.

The fictional tale of *Kernwood* ends with Corrine and Amanda setting off to continue their exploits in Europe. But then Lucy breaks the fourth wall in a literary sense. She wrote "and now we have dispensed with our characters." In writing this, Lucy wanted to ensure that her readers understood she was speaking to them as herself. And as herself she had a powerful message for her readers, one that is disturbing for the modern reader:

> We have been through the war, and peace is again restored to our country; but liberty is crushed, and the "end is not yet." The justice of our defeat is known only to the High

[340] Marie S. Molloy, *Single, White, Slaveholding Women in the Nineteenth-Century American South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2018), 90.

> Ruler of the Universe and we dare not question, but submit; and, like the Grecian hero, when enveloped in unnatural clouds and darkness, exclaim:
>
> "Dispel the gloom, the light of heaven restore—
> Give me to see, and Ajax asks no more!"
>
> We are a vanquished people, but not utterly prostrate, for
>
> "There is life in the old land yet"
>
> And phoenix-like it will rise from the ashes and the past and lift its voice for redress. The rights of the southron may slumber, and evil men have power for a while, and poverty and sorrow fill our hearts, but so long as the sunbeams are bright, and fragrant flowers bloom in our sunny land, as though a soft breeze from heaven had swayed the trees of Eden, and shaken down the buds and blossoms, and the blood of heroes throbs in our veins, the southern heart will keep unshaken its trusting faith in God.[341]
>
> Let us submit to the present, and trust for the future to Johnson, the Constitution, and the God of our fathers, and we shall live to see the Puritan traitors find, as did once Haman of old, that the gallows often bears a fruit not contemplated by the builders.

The first thing one might notice is how Lucy's perception of God's plan has changed completely from the questioning desolation she expressed at the end of her diary. After *Kernwood* she firmly believed in God's plans and she readily submitted to them, despite them being unknowable. This is because the rest of this passage shows how her belief in God, and his sacred purpose for the Confederacy, had come back to her, and it was stronger than ever before. She equated the Confederacy to a phoenix that would rise from the ashes, always with God's help and backing. She said southerners had the blood of heroes and compared the South to Eden itself. Even more disturbing, she suggested that the Union built its own gallows and she was almost gleeful that she would be able to witness the fall, and death, of "Puritan traitors."

There are many aspects of the Lost Cause that we could delve into with this jarring ending to Lucy's novel, such as the references to ancient Greece, or the romantic Biblical language, but rather than re-tell common themes of the Lost Cause that have been explored by countless scholars, I will explore how this quote fits into Lucy's perceptions of gender and

[341] French, *Kernwood, or, After Many Days*, 390.

religious nationalism. Mainly, Lucy's words show that after Confederate women found power through religious nationalism during the war, they found ways to continue and even further than empowerment through a different form of religious nationalism: Lost Cause mythology. Many Confederate women didn't want to go back to the way it was before the war. Prior to the war they accepted female submission, but after their experiences, like Lucy's telling off of Union soldiers and Corrine's newfound love of medicine, these women couldn't go back to their subservient role. But how could Lucy and other Confederate women contribute? They had to go back to what gave them power in the first place, their femininity, their religion, and how both compelled them to create a better Christian nation, in other words, female religious nationalism. As Charles Reagan Wilson argues in the important work *Baptized in Blood*, the Lost Cause is a religio-nationalist mythology at its core.[342] So, it makes sense that women looking to continue in their newfound power found it in the Lost Cause.

It is largely agreed at this point in the scholarship that Confederate women took on the primary responsibility for propagating Lost Cause mythology, after all, so many of their men had died, so who else was going to do it? But few scholars have made this specific argument about finding power in religious nationalism. Marie Molloy comes close when she argues, that "in assuming the responsibility for Confederate memorialization," white southern women participated in the "the creation of the 'Lost Cause' mythology. Inadvertently it opened up another opportunity for southern women to demonstrate their ability and usefulness in the postwar context, while proving again that they were true southern women."[343] Essentially, the Lost Cause allowed women to continue to show the abilities and leadership that they gained during the war. However I would argue that it wasn't so inadvertent. I'm not arguing that

[342] Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*.
[343] Molloy, *Single, White, Slaveholding Women in the Nineteenth-Century American South*, 45.

Confederate women sat around and came up with the perfect way they could continue to have public societal power, but I don't think it was something that happened entirely by accident. It happened because they came back to the constructs that had given them power during the war. They then used the whole mythos to help shape gender in a slightly different way, while the purpose of the Lost Cause ensured that it would always be a distinctly southern form of gender.

Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber explain in their chapter "The Confederate Retreat to Venus and Mars" that an important aspect of Lost Cause mythology was to celebrate the wartime actions and sacrifices made by white Southern women. These scholars detail how many of the statues erected in remembrance of the Civil War participate in a post-war reconstruction of Southern gender. One particular statue in South Carolina was a "marble memorial [that] promised to stand as a permanent declaration that white Southern men and women shared a common experience, a unified public authority, and overlapping sets of moral virtues."[344] Wasn't this exactly what Corrine wanted at the end of *Kernwood*? She did not want a Northern kind of equality that centered on voting rights or political participation. She wanted social equality and recognition that her contributions and abilities were just as good as a man's. That is what the Lost Cause promised for Southern white women, or rather what Southern white women constructed for themselves, as it was women's societies who put up most of these statues.

Though Lucy was not a part of any of these post-war women's societies, she did participate in the construction of Lost Cause mythology through her literary work. This, argues Sarah Gardner, was one of the most important ways that women contributed to the Lost Cause mythology. Through both fiction and prose white Southern women entered this "paper battle" in which the representation of the South, and history itself, was at stake. Lucy's work fits with the

[344] Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* (Cary: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2006), 197-8.

important themes Gardner points out in these narratives. She says that Southern white women were as susceptible as any Confederate to the grandeur, emotion, and romance of the war and that as such their accounts were often over the top and celebratory. These writings were not the place to express any distaste for the war, or disagreement with Southern leadership.[345] Though Lucy's character Corrine struggled with her place in society, her ire was never directed against Southern leadership specifically. Though *Kernwood* fits with most of the tropes of female writings about the Lost Cause, the publication date of *Kernwood* is important here. It was published in 1867, right at the beginning of Reconstruction. Gardner argues that writers that during this time period, writers rarely employed Lost Cause rhetoric. It was later in Reconstruction that writers started to solidify elements of this mythology and start writing about it with more frequency. So rather than fit inside already established boundaries of Lost Cause writings, Lucy was part of creating them. This means that through Lucy's novel, she was among the first Confederate women to start to publicly espouse, and therefore shape, the religio-nationalist rhetoric of the Lost Cause.

Conclusion: What is Lucy's Brand of Protestant nationhood?

Lucy Virginia French was a complicated woman. To the modern reader she might not make a lot of sense. She believed in women's social equality and covered radical topics such as prostitution in her fight for that equality. This would seem to indicate an opposition to the construction of the Southern family. And yet she supported slavery, and the Confederacy, vehemently. Her support of the Confederacy was so strong that she believed God ordained for

[345] Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood & Irony [Electronic Resource]: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937 / Sarah E. Gardner.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). For more information see the Introduction.

the South to win the Civil War. She even publicly used her femininity in ways that transgressed Southern womanhood in an effort to contribute to the holy cause of the war. So given all of this, what was Lucy Virginia French's brand of Protestant nationhood?

It all comes down to power. Lucy was frustrated by what she perceived as a lack of equality and social power that elite Southern white women endured. What she didn't realize is that it was only public power that these women, including herself, lacked. Within the home they could exercise almost unrestrained power over the people they enslaved. Whether Lucy realized it or not, that power was private and domestic. What Lucy longed for was for white women to have public power, or freedom to behave in whatever way they chose. She, and others, found that during the Civil War. First, she bolstered and reinterpreted the religious nationalism that Confederate leaders espoused. Specifically she found comfort in the firm belief that God was on the side of the South and in the sacred history provided by the American Revolution. Second, Lucy performed her own kind of gendered Protestant nationhood in the way she described her interactions with Union officers. It became a fight against the Devil in which Lucy was the defender of her home, and by extension the Confederacy as a whole. This was a different kind of power than what slaveholding women could exercise in the home. She was publicly speaking up to a man for her rights as a Confederate woman. Even in her fictional novels her heroines found public power through their work for the Confederacy. Corrine found nursing and believed it was a holy calling, and a nature extension of feminine piety, to care for the Confederate soldiers. This fictional character echoed the real experiences of Confederate nurses. So for Lucy, the Civil War provided her with a power she did not have before, and that power was imbued with the combination of Christianity and devotion to the Confederacy.

However when the war ended, Lucy fell from that high perch. She was despondent and couldn't see a way forward. She couldn't understand how God had abandoned her. She stopped writing for a few years. But when she came back, she came roaring back, trumpeting the types of Protestant nationhood and religious nationalism that had given her power during the war. But this time it was with the rhetoric of the Lost Cause. Yes, the South had lost, but with God's favor it would rise again. The Lost Cause gave Lucy everything she had hoped for. She had faith in God and the South, and she had the power to tell the story of the Civil War in what she deemed the right way. Finally, in helping to create the Lost Cause mythology, she could participate in a reimaging of gender that allowed for more equality, but on Southern terms.

Conclusion

As we have travelled through various time periods, attitudes, identities, and writings, I hope to have shown the true breadth of how women navigated, created, and refashioned Protestant nationhood. The point of this research has never been to come up with a perfect, concise definition of what female Protestant nationhood is. After all, that almost endless search for a definition is largely why the term civil religion has become so complicated. Rather, this project has been an exploration of the ways that women throughout early American history have combined religious and political language to accomplish their own goals.

Some of the way these women navigated religion and politics is similar and recognizable because it closely overlaps with the way that men have discussed the topic. References to the founding fathers and the Declaration of Independence are such important parts of Protestant nationhood that it is not surprising in the slightest that many of these women utilize this theme to make their point. However this does tell us something very important about the history and formation of American Protestant nationhood. Much of what we have assumed to be created and shaped by male discourse has actually been shaped by women as well. But some of the ways that these six women interact with religion and nation is wholly unique to them and therefore they add a different dimension to this long-explored topic in American history. As women, they had to deal with the fact that they were working within a system that disadvantaged them. For half of the women in this dissertation they were double disadvantaged by their race and their gender. That gendered and raced experience, whether or not the writer glorified or critiqued America, added something that white men did not have to contend with. Therefore, by studying women's

Protestant nationhood in early America we can see a fuller picture of how this phenomenon developed and how it was used.

While the point, as stated, is not to create a definition of women's Protestant nationhood, it is still important to note the patterns, similarities, and differences in the ways which women discussed the nation's religious meanings and purposes. There are three main overarching themes that appear in almost every chapter and need to be discussed in more detail. Firstly, almost all of these women relied on the Revolution to make their point. However those points differ, the equalizing and democratic promise of the American Revolution is paramount to all forms of Protestant nationhood, including that practiced by these women. Second, all of these women shared a concern with legacy, either for the future of America or for their community of people. They all had specific visions for what the nation should look like. For all of them, there was a fear that the future could bring calamity and Christianity was the only way to prevent it. All of these themes come together to create an idea of what female Protestant nationhood looks like in early American history. No matter the specifics of their circumstances, Protestant Christianity was the way forward and it needed to be the governing force behind the actions and governing of the nation. The final theme is unique to women's experiences. An important part of all of these women's conception of Protestant nationhood was the expansion of women's role as the moral and religious leaders. For most of these women, they believed that it was their duty to protect not only the moral development of their family, but to guide the morality of the entire nation.

Ultimately this leads to the most important finding in this dissertation, which is the fact that women in early America used religion as a way to justify their entrance into a national conversation that was denied to them due to their gender. The societal concern with how the

nation should progress and how people were supposed to fit into it was shared by all, but women did not have grounds to comment on such matters due to the nature of citizenship being reserved for white males. But when these women realized that the Protestant future of the nation was at stake, they used their knowledge of Christianity and the societal power that they within that sphere, to justify their participation, and creation, of Protestant nationhood. All of these women believed that the nation needed to have a Protestant Christian identity, and they would do whatever it took to make that dream a reality.

The American Revolution

The American Revolution as part of American Protestant nationhood is certainly not new. The Revolution has been central to this concept throughout its many iterations. Sam Haselby, in *Origins of American Religious Nationalism,* argues that the "sacralization of origins," which is in this case the American Revolution, is one of the defining characteristics of religious nationalism.[346] While Haselby was making an argument specifically about religious nationalism this is an area of overlap between Protestant nationhood and religious nationalism. Both are concerned with the religious dimensions of the nation, and one of those dimensions is a sacred origin. But, each of these six women utilized the Revolution in their own way. In general they all focus on the democratizing and equalizing ethos that the Revolution brought. As we venture further and further away from the Revolution in terms of time period, we see a trend emerge about who is living up to the ideals of the Revolution and who are the true inheritors of America's past. In interesting theme within their discussion of the Revolution is that none of

[346] Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 19.

these women are afraid to question these so-called great men of history (or in the case of Lucy Virginia, she is not afraid to question the "founding fathers" of the Confederacy). One need only look at the fresco in the Capitol Building, appropriately titled "Apotheosis of Washington," to see the ways that mainstream Protestant nationhood has deified the founding fathers.[347] But these women are different. They were not alone to be sure; many people have critiqued the founding fathers throughout history. But the consistent critiques of the founding fathers show that this might be an undercurrent that is more prominent among women than among men. To all these women, the founding fathers were human people, who might have done great things, or they might have failed in their duty. Either way, these women agreed that the ideals and mythos of the Revolution proved that it was a God-inspired event.

In seeming contradiction to this theme, Phillis Wheatley was one of the first people in American history to participate in a glorification of one of the founding fathers, George Washington. However alongside her glorification she also pushed him to consider the contradiction of enslaving people while fighting for freedom. Since she lived at the time of the Revolution, she didn't glorify the outcome (the war wasn't over yet), but she glorified the ideals of freedom and equality that were espoused by people in power at the time. But you can see the fear that those ideals would not actualized in her poem to Washington.[348] It is important to note a difference between Phillis's adoration of Washington and the way that many men of the time glorified him. Albanese writes that most of the glorification of Washington at the time of the Revolution cast him as a deity with no faults whatsoever; his heavenly virtue was

[347] Constantino Brumidi, *Apotheosis of Washington*, 1865, Fresco, 1865, https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/apotheosis-washington.
[348] Wheatley, *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 164.

unreproachable.[349] However Phillis is an important foil to that in that she recognized Washington as a powerful person, akin to a king, but he had the potential to fail. So the primary leader of the Revolution was still sacred, but not above questioning, or at least not above being prodded in the right direction. Phillis was not sure if Washington would be able to uphold the dictates of Protestant Christianity in the formation of the new nation and she believed it was her duty to remind him.

For Mercy Otis Warren, the Revolution itself almost became her religion. Due to her classical republicanism it was of the utmost importance for people to understand their duties as good and moral citizens in the new republic. That required a quasi-religious devotion to the ideals of the Revolution. Mercy was not just concerned with ideals of freedom and independence (though those were important) as the other women in this dissertation focus on, but with the ideal of working towards the collective good.[350] For Mercy these things did not come from God in such a direct way as with Maria Stewart or Angelina Grimke. Rather the Revolution was allowed by Providence. Providence may have guided the actions of men, but for Mercy, the Revolution and the ideals it engendered, was ultimately a human activity. Additionally, for Mercy the glorification of the Revolution was about the event as a whole, not the people who participated in it. In this area Mercy went even farther than Phillis in her questioning of the founding fathers, specifically John Adams, and got in a bit of social trouble for it.[351] All in all, the Revolution was a sacred event, created by humans who were guided by Providence, but the humans involved were not sacred. The event was sacred because it was the best example of people using Protestant Christianity, and its principles of communal good, to guide and govern the nation.

[349] Albanese, *Sons of the Fathers*, Chapter 4.
[350] Zagarri, *A Woman's Dilemma*, 103.
[351] John Adams, "From John Adams to Elbridge Gerry," (Letter, April 17, 1813) *Founders Online*, National Archives.

Catharine Brown's brand of Protestant nationhood is one of the farthest from the Revolution in terms of her subject matter. But as with all of these women, she is still affected by it. Cherokees fought against the Americans during the Revolutionary War. Rather than being a sacred moment in history, the Revolution was a time of destruction and death. After the war, the Cherokees struggled to survive. It was because of this moment in history that Cherokee people reorganized their tribal organization to echo an American form of government and started to embrace certain aspects of American culture.[352] As is Catharine's primary motivation, the Cherokee people were trying to avoid the destruction that they barely avoided after the Revolution.[353] So while Catharine's did not reference the Revolution, the moment still played a part in her Protestant nationhood. For Catharine, Protestant Christianity was required to prevent the literal and spiritual destruction of her people. The Revolution almost caused a total destruction of her people and she needed to avoid a repeat of that past by converting her people to Christianity, and thus making them seem less other to Americans.

Maria Stewart's understanding of how the Revolution fit into Protestant nationhood is a bit complicated. I posit that if she were asked about the Revolution, Maria would say that white America had not fulfilled its promise to God, and was about to be destroyed, and therefore the Revolution could not be, and was not, sacred. But that is hard to tell for sure because she never mentions the event of the Declaration in her *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality.*[354] This was a point where she differed from other prominent Black abolitionist voices. Frederick

[352] Andrew Denson, *Demanding the Cherokee Nation: Indian Autonomy and American Culture, 1830-1900, Indians of the Southeast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 3.
[353] Though Catharine herself did not glorify the Revolution, her tribe did. When the American government was debating removal, Cherokee people called upon the Revolutionary ideals in an attempt to prevent it. Denson argues that they tried to "awaken American to their collective failure and to call them back to the morally upright ways of the past. For more see, Andrew Denson, *Demanding the Cherokee Nation*, 36.
[354] Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality."

Douglass often referenced the power of the Declaration of Independence and the Revolution, even to the point of calling the signers "brave men…[and] great men too."[355] Douglass participated in the glorification of the Revolution as way to remind America of its ideals and to convince them to live up to the "saving principles" found in the Declaration. However, Maria made no such claims regarding the Revolution, and yet she still sacralized the principles of freedom and independence. Most scholars argue that sacred freedom comes largely from the sacralization of the Revolution rather than the Bible, where the concept is rarely mentioned (if it is at all, depending on the translation). It is because American mythos had progressed to the point where the American Revolution had become sacred history that freedom as a concept became connected with the sacred. So, even though Maria herself does not attribute sacred freedom to the Revolution, she is a byproduct of the progression of American Protestant nationhood that made it so.

Angelina Grimke's conception of the Revolution is almost like a combination of Maria Stewart and Mercy Otis Warren. Like Maria she believed that God was the ultimate source of morality and freedom. Also like Maria, the concept of a God-given freedom was one of the most important parts of Protestant nationhood for Angelina. However unlike Maria, she believed that the Declaration of Independence was an important human document that guaranteed sacred freedom on earth.[356] Similar to Mercy Otis Warren, Angelina believed that the best way forward as a nation was to live out the ideals of the Revolution as faithfully as possible. By Angelina's time the Revolution was firmly cemented as sacred history that could be called upon to serve one's purposes, which was in Angelina's case, emancipation.

[355] Foner and Taylor, *Frederick Douglass*, 192.
[356] Grimké, *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, 2-3.

Finally, Lucy Virginia French also believed in the Revolution as a sacred history, but to very different ends. She believed that the Confederates were the true heirs to the Revolution. However for her the concept of freedom was very different and didn't take on the same sacred quality. For her, the Revolution was sacred because it showed the "oppressed" people fighting against a tyrant and God assuring victory for the oppressed. Lucy, and other Confederates, believed that God was on their side because God was on the patriots' side.[357] The Revolution was not important because of any sacred ideals but rather because it was a sign that sacred history was repeated. So actually, her conceptional beliefs about the Revolution were similar to Angelina. They both believed that God had worked through humans to create a victory for the Americans in the Revolution, and the best way forward as a nation (whether Union or Confederate) was to emulate that act as closely as possible. They only had drastically different ideas of what that emulation should look like. Angelina wanted freedom for all people, Lucy wanted to maintain racial hierarchy and therefore enslavement of African Americans.

Legacy and Future

Ultimately what Protestant nationhood comes down to for these women, and for most people who espouse Protestant nationhood, is how religion can guarantee a future for the nation. Philip Gorski argued in his work *American Covenant*, that this civic conversation around religion and nation, is ultimately "an ongoing effort to realize a set of universal political ideas from within the confines of a particular historical trajectory…[and] the course that we hope to steer

[357] Lucy Virginia French, "Lucy Virginia French Diary," April 10, 1862; Sept 5, 1862; December 28, 1862.

into the future."[358] These women shared that concern for the future, and all of them believed that Protestant Christianity was the only way to ensure that the future turned out how they wanted. However, that ideal future looked different to almost each woman. So for these six women, their "particular historical trajectory" was quite different, but their rhetorical methods were surprisingly similar: God and/or religion was required to ensure that the future turned out the right way.

Phillis Wheatley, having lived before and during the Revolution, believed in the hope of the new nation; she saw its potential as an equalizing force. So for her, the ideal future was an America in which Africans were included as equals in American society and in Christianity. Those two concepts were inextricably linked. Phillis pleaded with Washington to see the contradiction between patriots fighting against "enslavement" and the actual enslavement of African people, hoping that he would make it right. She also believed that it was Christianity necessitated the inclusion of Africans in American culture and religion.[359] Adhering to the evangelical belief of spiritual equality before God, she believed that by reminding people of the dictates of Christianity that it would create a future in which Africans were no longer enslaved and further that they were included as whole members of American society. The nation she was trying to create through religion was one of radical racial and spiritual equality, as well as a modicum of gender equality, but that wasn't her primary concern. Her vision for the future was as hopeful as her ecstatic Evangelical experience. For her, religion allowed her to see the possibilities of what a Christian nation could become. Phillis exuded hope while also recognizing

[358] Philip Gorski, *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present* (Princeton,: Princeton University Press, 2017), 222.
[359] These ideas are seen in both her poems: "On Being Brought from Africa to America" and "To His Excellency General Washington."

tragedy. Despite everything she had gone though, and everything she knew other enslaved people had gone through, she still believed that with Christianity, America could become a place of freedom and equality.

Mercy Otis Warren was not quite so optimistic. Even if the few short years following the Revolution, she believed that America had fallen from its once Edenic state. She saw around her a decline in public virtue and thus her *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the Revolution* is largely a jeremiad. However, as with most jeremiads, that is a slight bit of hope when it comes to how to escape from such a decline.[360] For Mercy that way forward is protestant Christianity. By inculcating religion in all people, the American nation could redeem its public virtue and curb its thirst for excess. It is only by doing this that the government can truly function for the good of all people. This was also, perhaps coincidentally, the realm of women. Mercy believed that women were morally superior and so it was up to them to teach their children religion and virtuosity. Although she admits that Christianity is necessary for the future of the nation, it was not as personal for her as it was for any of our other authors. She herself was religious but it wasn't an integral part of her life.[361] Mercy saw the political and societal benefits of religion and thus her Protestant nationhood was more calculated than emotional. Regardless, even without strong personal belief, she still saw protestant Christianity as the only way to ensure that the nation would work towards the public good, which was the ideal future and the only realization of the Revolutionary ideals. The nation she wanted to create was one of ordered

[360] Marta Neuff, *Words of Crisis As Words of Power: The Jeremiad in American Presidential Speeches,* vol. 77, Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2018), 133.
[361] Stuart, *Muse of the Revolution*, 10.

and restrained religious devotion that made people act in a way that benefitted all. In her case Protestantism served as a structure to govern the impulses of humankind.

Though Maria Stewart and Phillis Wheatley share an identity as Black women, their visions for the future couldn't be any more different. Perhaps this is because Phillis had hope that a new nation would fulfill its ideals and Maria saw those hopes dashed. Thus for Maria, her ideal future was a Black nation, separate from America. It was unclear exactly how she envisioned this playing out in a political sense. She didn't advocate for the back to Africa movement for example, and she didn't speak about overthrowing the government. Rather the nation she tried to create seemed to be a distinctly spiritual one, a specific relationship between Black people and God. White America was almost lost, and damnation was surely coming for them because they broke their covenant with God by enslaving Africans.[362] But Black Americans had not broken that covenant and so they were God's chosen people. But, in keeping with her covenantal theology, Maria believed that Black people had to hold up their end of the bargain to achieve that ideal future. The way to do that was through Protestant Christianity and racial uplift. Maria continually urged people to behave in a Godly manner by practicing morality and avoiding licentiousness and sin. One important form of sin for Maria was ignorance, so both for the sake of religion and for racial uplift, education was a key component of her Protestant nationhood.[363] Ultimately it was only through Christianity, and upholding their end of the covenant, that Black people could hope to escape to the chains of racism and create their own ideal future.

Catharine Brown's Protestant nationhood started where Maria Stewart's ended; she already belonged to a nation that was outside of America, but because of their status as outsiders,

[362] Stewart, *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality*.
[363] Jane Duran, "Maria Stewart: A Black Voice for Abolition," 14.

their future was threatened. Therefore Catharine's ideal future was basic survival. She didn't elaborate much more than that, simply using vague references to destruction. But given that the national conversation around Native American tribes was about trying to get their land, which of course led to the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (though the act itself was after Catharine's death, the mentality had been building during her life), the threat of destruction was very real.[364] In addition to the threat posed by land-hungry white men, Catharine was a true Christian and she saw a spiritual destruction as just as eminent as a physical one. So she used her religious knowledge and her leadership to try to steer her people towards survival. There is no doubt in her mind that protestant Christianity was necessary for that survival. So, the Cherokee people becoming Christian ensured their spiritual survival and it also gave them an education which made them less "other" to white Americans. That in turn would help to avoid a physical destruction as well as a spiritual one. However adopting Christianity was not taken as a wholesale acceptance of white culture. Catharine wanted her people to retain their Cherokee identity.[365] So, the very survival of her people was at stake, and Christianity was the only way to ensure that Cherokee were both spiritually and physically safe. However, it was also important that Cherokee people retained their cultural traditions and identity. For Catharine the ideal future might have been a Christian one, but it was not white. The nation she worked to create was almost a blended nation within a nation. Catharine advocated for a melding of two different cultures to create a third unique culture that was recognizable to both. In essence, Catharine was one of the earliest women to advocate for a "hyphenated" identity: Cherokee-American.

[364] Vine Deloria, *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America*, 172.
[365] See Perdue, *Cherokee Sister,* and Gaul, "Visions of Revitalization," for more.

Angelina Grimke's vision for the ideal future of America was based on women's rights and abolition, but in this dissertation, abolition is the focus. While she didn't have quite as pessimistic view as Mercy as to call it a fall from Eden, she did feel that America, specifically the South, needed a reminder of the ideals of the Revolution, which were ultimately Christian ideals. In Angelina's mind, by continuing to enslave people the South threatened American's standing with God.[366] Angelina firmly believed it went against the Christian faith to enslave people and it was her duty do something about it, not only for the sake of enslaved people but also to ensure that the future of the country would be a moral one. Therefore she tried to convince Southern women of the wrongness of slavery by using Christianity as her primary argument. The only way to bring America back into God's favor, and thus ensure a future of equality, was to convince the South to end slavery. The way that Angelina went about that task was through a thorough examination of Protestant Christianity. Angelina, similar to Phillis, had high hopes for the nation; she wanted to create a place of equality based on the dictates of Protestant Christianity. But she wanted everyone on board, so to speak. It wasn't enough for the South to break off and create their own nation, one that allowed slavery, even though it would mean America remained a place of equality. Rather, Angelina tried to ensure that God's morality shone through every instance of human governance. Her goal wasn't to create an America that was free from slavery, but to ensure that every human society within her reach reflected the light of Protestant Christianity.

Lucy Virginia French is another one of these women for whom the nation at stake was not America; for her, it was the Confederacy. Her nation was fighting a war to determine its viability, and so her ideal future involved winning the war and seeing the Confederacy

[366] Grimké, "Slavery and the Boston Riot."

recognized as a separate nation. Again, religion was necessary for this to happen. One thing that makes Lucy unique though is that Confederate people didn't have to do anything, religiously, to make the ideal future become a reality. There was no call for living a more moral life or talk about living up to God's expectations.[367] She believed so strongly in the cause of the Confederacy that she thought they already had God's favor. They were simply God's chosen people, no transactional or covenantal theology required. Lucy is also unique in that she saw, during her lifetime, how her ideal future was crushed. After the end of the war brought a brief time of religious questioning, Lucy's came out strong with a similar rhetoric as she had always had.[368] She believed that the Confederacy would rise again, with God's favor. In a way more frightening than any of our other authors, Lucy shows the power of Protestant nationhood when it is combined with religious nationalism. Even after her nation was brutally beaten, Lucy still believed that the ideal Confederate future that would be brought by God to his chosen people.

Women's Roles

While these women varied in social station, race, and time period they were all concerned with their role as women and how that role connected with their Protestant nationhood. This is where this dissertation does something new. While many scholars of these phenomena (civil religion, religious nationalism, etc.) discuss individual women, there is very little discussion of how their conception of womanhood related to both religion and nation. Even a simple library search will show that we haven't had much scholarship on the subject since Linda Kerber's Republican Motherhood, which is very narrow in its focus on white women of the Revolution.

[367] French, "Lucy Virginia French Diary."
[368] French, *Kernwood, or After Many Days,* 390.

Thus it is important to discuss the varied ways that these six women viewed their gender in relation to their Protestant nationhood. The most common theme, expressed by every one of these authors, is that it is appropriate, even necessary, to transgress prescribed gender roles for the higher cause of the moral future of the nation. However, most agreed that some societal control on gender roles is also necessary for the nation. Gender rules were largely considered proper for everyday functioning of society, but when the future of the nation is at stake, the rules could be broken. More than that, the rules had to be broken. For these women their Christian identities required them to involve themselves in the future of the nation.

Phillis Wheatley had an interesting take on women's roles because she didn't philosophize about a role that she inhabited. Her primary concern in the documents examined in this dissertation was white women. This largely comes from her poem "To His Excellency General Washington" in which she discusses the figure Columbia. According to Phillis's description, Columbia is framed as white. Her hair is golden, she is "divinely fair," and she is charming and graceful. She fits all the standards of white, upper-class femininity. However, Phillis's poem does not stop there; Columbia is not a one-dimensional character. In response to France's actions during the French and Indian War, Columbia found her fury. This was not just a chaste beautiful white woman, but a woman who also had the capacity for fury. Fury and anger were very much in opposition to the submissiveness of traditional white femininity. But this fury was a righteous fury, specifically for the support of Washington and for the colonies that were on their way to becoming America. So, Phillis communicated to her readers that, even for upper-class white women, fury was acceptable when the nation, and the fate of its leaders, were at stake. In other words, it is acceptable for white women to have a role, or at least a strong emotional investment, in the future of the country.

Mercy Otis Warren was one of the women in this dissertation who prescribed strict roles for women but saw power and importance in those roles. In this dissertation, Mercy is the primary spokesperson for republican motherhood. This somewhat over-studied concept has long been seen as one of the only forms of women's Protestant nationhood. So, while it is necessary to include in this dissertation, it is also important to remember that this is just one way for women to express Protestant nationhood. That being said, Mercy is unique even in the world of republican motherhood. She believed in a form of inherent equality, specifically in terms of capability of intelligence. Women were just as capable of high-level thought and therefore deserved an education just as much as men did, both for themselves and to be able to raise knowledgeable citizens. It was for that reason that Mercy believed Providence sanctioned the Revolution. It reminded humankind of their natural equality. However, Mercy is complicated in that she believed, despite their natural mental equality, women should stay in their prescribed roles of republican motherhood. Even her own act of writing a book about the Revolution was, in her mind, a "manly" exercise. However this also shows a measure of freedom. It wasn't that privileged white women couldn't tiptoe into masculine enterprises, it was that the price for doing was to sacrifice a bit of their femininity. Ultimately Mercy believed that documenting, and in a way sacralizing, the Revolution was cause of such importance that it merited that kind of sacrifice. So, similar to Phillis, Mercy believed that white women (or at least herself) could transgress their prescribed gender roles when the cause was as great as the future of America.

Maria Stewart was another woman, similar to Mercy, who prescribed strict gender roles that she didn't always uphold in her own actions. As her Protestant nationhood was based on the Black nation, Maria's outlook on women's roles centered around racial uplift. In key ways, Maria stipulated a Black republican motherhood. Women's role was to raise and nurture

children and teach them how to be good citizens, which resulted in generational uplift for Black people. Additionally, Maria argued that there was a specific way that mothers needed to raise girls. Girls needed to learn how to be gentle, pure, and have delicate manners. It is through this conservative womanhood (in addition to respectability politics) that true racial uplift could be achieved. However Maria herself was not gentle nor did she have delicate manners. She spoke publicly and with vigor and even outright anger. Due to the societal rules against women, especially Black women, preaching, Maria needed to be fervent and loud in her assertion that her power came from the Holy Spirit. Just as with Mercy, in Maria we find a woman who held high standards for her fellow women but broke those standards in her own practices. Overall what this says, at least for Mercy and Maria, is that both normal and exceptional women were necessary to ensure the future of the nation (whether that be white America or Black America). As exceptional women they stipulated what rules were required for the everyday woman, but were not always required to follow them.

Catharine Brown faces a unique historiographical problem that comes with studying native women in this era. Theda Perdue famously discussed the way that native women are often viewed as a litmus test for how much the Cherokee people had been colonized. Her argument was that when gender roles change it is not a reflection of colonization but rather a show of resilience and flexibility. Even though Theda argued that more than two decades ago, still more recent scholars of Catharine have argued about her Christianness and how that showed colonization. Therefore it was important in this dissertation to discuss that ways that Catharine's conception of gender, as it relates to nation, came from both her Cherokee identity and her Christian one. For a brief example, the Green Corn Ceremony celebrated women's connection to the land and to prosperity and abundance, while Protestantism articulated how of women have

power within the home and enjoy a moral superiority. Based on this dual power, Catharine used gender as a bridge between Christians and Cherokees. Her gender presentation was recognizable to white Christians and so they listened. But she hadn't changed so completed so her own people also recognized her authority. Thus Catherine used gender expertly to help bring her people into what she believed was a prosperous, Christian, future.

Angelina Grimke is unique in this dissertation because she is the only one who called herself a woman's right activist. She was outspoken about women's equality, which she believed was inherently connected with racial equality. Due to this, Angelina believed that it was women's national and Christian duty to fight against slavery, and thus for the moral future of America. Therefore her conception of women's roles was the most expansive of all of our authors, she believed women should get the vote and be allowed to participate equally in all aspects of society. But she also kept some of the common beliefs about womanhood, the most important being that women were the moral and religious leaders of the home. It was that belief that she traded on in her most famous piece of writing. Angelina, similar to Phillis, spoke to a group of women that she wasn't completely part of. While Angelina grew up on a Southern plantation, she was no longer part of that society when she wrote *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*. Angelina, again like Phillis, pushed more conservative women to go beyond their prescribed gender roles in order to fight for equality. She used her knowledge of Southern culture to affirm certain aspects of plantation class femininity and then gently push her readers to go beyond. Angelina did this because she firmly believed that women were necessary to ensure that the country moved towards a moral direction.

Lucy Virginia French was exactly the type of woman who Angelina was talking about, however Lucy's view of womanhood was almost the opposite of what Angelina was hoping for.

Lucy's conception of proper womanhood was based strongly on Southern ideals of domesticity, but at the same time she was able to see systems of patriarchy that many other women of her time did not. Even within the highly regulated system of elite Southern society, Lucy found the same thing as other women in this dissertation: that for the cause of Protestant nationhood, gender rules can be broken. For Lucy that ranged from defending her home from perceived invasion to defending fallen women who were victims of the patriarchal system. For her own actions, she perceived a rejection of northern officers, or "Blue Devils," as both a political and religious action. It was not only a rejection of the Union but also of the efforts to crush the religion of the South. For that cause, Lucy took the role of defender of the home. Even though Mr. French was present, he stood off to the side. Though a relatively small action, Lucy showed that she believed women had a duty to protect their home as a symbol of Confederate nationalism. Lucy went even further with these ideas in her writings. In both her poetry and her novel she bemoaned the state of women, even saying that their assigned roles are due to "that monster custom." In her poems she defended fallen women, saying that God was on their side. In her novel, two of her main characters both literally and figuratively escaped the bondage of gender roles by fleeing America to become a doctor and a spy, both in service to the Confederacy (more so the spy, but the doctor to a lesser extent). In both her literature and her actions, Lucy Virginia French showed that even in the Confederacy, Protestant nationhood allowed women to escape their prescribed roles, even if only in a small way.

When it comes down it, women's practice of Protestant nationhood is not categorically different from men's practice of it. There is not a separate kind of Protestant nationhood based on what your gender is. Each person who used this concept had their own motivations and understandings. That is part of what makes this concept so hard to pin down; there are so few

universals to point to. But in exploring and examining the history of such a nebulous idea, it is important to discuss all the minds that contributed to it. We can't, as scholars, pin down one person as the originator of the Revolution as a sacred history. We can't say that one person was responsible for connecting Christianity with the ideal future of America. But what this dissertation has shown is that in whichever collection of historical figures we credit these ideas to, women played an integral part in the formation of Protestant nationhood in America and they cannot be left out of the conversation.

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