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**Society of souls: Spirit, friendship, and the antebellum reform imagination**

Robert Kent Nelson  
*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

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SOCIETY OF SOULS

Spirit, Friendship, and the
Antebellum Reform Imagination

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the American Studies Program
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Robert Kent Nelson

2006
APPROVAL SHEET

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Approved by the Committee, October 2006

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the central role that a spiritualized friendship played in the thought and writings of antebellum reformers. It identifies a spiritual sensibility that was widely shared by many radical New England activists of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s regardless of their specific denominational beliefs, and argues that this sense of spirituality motivated them to become activists who labored to transform their society.

Specifically, this dissertation analyzes the work and writings of a variety of reformers who believed that spirit or soul could serve as a mechanism for leveling some of the most dominant cultural and institutional power hierarchies of the mid-nineteenth century. Organized around three case studies—Theodore Dwight Weld's and Angelina Grimké's efforts to conceptualize an egalitarian marriage in 1838, white and black abolitionists' debates over the political efficacy of spiritualized friendships in the early 1840s, Elihu Burritt's struggle to destabilize nationalism and foster a sense of global community in the late 1840s—the dissertation explores the ideological centrality of spirit in the period's millennial, utopian struggles against racism and slavery, sexism and patriarchy, and nationalism and war. Believing these hierarchies to be rooted in physical, bodily differences—in race and sex and nation—the reformers of this study saw in the disembodied, immaterial soul a means for unmaking those hierarchies. An ever growing recognition of the primacy of the soul within each and every human being, they believed, could function as a political instrument that would transform society by leading to a correlative appreciation of the inconsequentiality of the body and bodily difference. Together these case studies demonstrate how this spiritual sensibility shaped the political ideology and practical strategies of abolitionists, feminists, and pacifists, investing their efforts to affect revolutionary social change with the zeal and conviction of religious faith.
SOCIETY OF SOULS
INTRODUCTION
THE IMMATERIAL CULTURE OF ANTEBELLUM REFORM

One would be hard pressed to find two public intellectuals in antebellum America whose beliefs and politics regarding race and slavery were as different as those of Josiah Clark Nott and Angelina Emily Grimké. What makes their differences remarkable was that they shared strikingly similar backgrounds. Natives of South Carolina, Nott and Grimké were born less than 150 miles and one year apart from one another—he in Columbia in 1804, she in Charleston in 1805. Their families both belonged to South Carolina's political and economic elite. Each of their fathers was a plantation owner and slaveholder, each had held political office, each had been trained in the law, and each was an accomplished state judge. For two people who started out in such similar circumstances in the same place at the same time, Nott and Grimké were to arrive at remarkably different places. Josiah Nott was to become a physician and ethnologist of international repute who argued that blacks were biologically inferior to whites and that slavery was the institutional product of a natural racial hierarchy, while Angelina Grimké was to become a famous political activist who condemned both slavery and racial prejudice as national sins.1

1 Reginald Horsman, Josiah Nott of Mobile: Southerner, Physician, and Racial Theorist (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 5-12; Gerda Lerner, The
In the 1840s and 1850s, Nott emerged as one of the most aggressive advocates in antebellum America of polygenesis: the hypothesis that the races did not share a common ancestry but instead were brought into being independently of one another. Caucasians and Negros, Australians and Indians were not part of a common human race, he argued, but were in fact distinct and distinctive species, each of which possessed unique intellectual and moral capacities. Nott's investment in this argument was not exclusively or even primarily scientific in nature. Nott looked to science as a means of debunking certain radical religious and political ideals to which he objected, contending that the answer to the question of "the common origin of races" was not merely of scientific import, but would have momentous significance regarding both "certain religious dogmas" as well as "the more practical question of equality and perfectibility of races."²

On the one hand, if all peoples shared a common ancestry, they very likely possessed the same intellectual and moral potential as members of the same human race. On the other hand, if, biologically speaking, the idea of the human race was a fiction and the existence of multiple human races was the reality, social inequality resulted not from historic—and thus plastic—cultural customs, economic exploitation, and political oppression but instead was a permanent and inescapable product of the natural order.

Nott insisted that the latter was the case. Nature did not dictate basic equality among the human race but inequality between the human races. This was undeniable scientific truth, Nott claimed, and as his evidence he cataloged the minutia of anatomical

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differences between the races, particularly differences in the shapes and sizes of what he 
maintained were representative crania and brains of each race across the millennia. 
Anatomical attention to bodies demonstrated that different races were in fact distinct 
 species. "[T]he Jew, the Celt, the Iberian, the Mongol, the Negro, the Polynesian, the 
Australian, the American Indian," Nott concluded, "can be regarded in no other light than 
as distinct, or as amalgamations of very proximate, species.... The form and capacity of 
the skull, the contours of the face, many parts of the skeleton, the peculiar development 
of muscles, the hair and skin, all present strong points of contrast."3 And as distinct 
species, the races possessed dissimilar intellectual and cultural potentials. Because of 
their respective cranial capacities, blacks were incapable of anything but barbarism, 
whites of anything but civilization. Science explained Nott's version of history: 

Lofty civilization, in all cases, has been achieved solely by the 'Caucasian' 
group. Mongolian races, save in the Chinese family, in no instance have 
reached beyond the degree of semi-civilization; while the Black races of 
Africa and Oceanica, no less than the Barbarous tribes of America, have 
remained in utter darkness for thousands of years. Negro races, when 
domesticated, are susceptible of a limited degree of improvement; but 
when released from restraint, as in Hayti, they sooner or later relapse into 
barbarism.4 

The differing intellectual capacities of different races, Nott contended, explained 
and justified the existence of chattel slavery and all the other structures of white power 

3 Nott and Gliddon, Types of Mankind, 411.

4 Nott and Gliddon, Types of Mankind, 461.
more generally in the antebellum United States. In research that has since been
invalidated, Nott contended that Africans had the smallest cranial cavity of any race, and
thus the smallest brains and least intelligence. In Nott's taxonomy, blacks shared as
many, maybe more, similarities to animals than they did to the Caucasians. The brain of
the "adult Negro" shared "a marked resemblance to the brain of the orang-outan." Almost animals, blacks required and benefited from "domestication" by whites.

Europeans' and Euro-Americans' power over Africans and African Americans was not a
product of European military and economic might, but derived from the differing
anatomies of the races. Slavery was thus merely an institutional manifestation of an
immutable natural order. It was rooted in the very bodies of whites and blacks. Unless
"their physical organization becomes changed" (and Nott insisted that was an
impossibility, that all evidence pointed to the immutability of the raced body over
millennia) the existing power relationship between the races would not and could not
change.

Through science Nott aimed to settle some fundamental cultural and intellectual
questions: Is human progress and perfection possible? What are the functional limits to
social and civic equality? What are the bonds that constitute and delimit community?
Where is personhood located? Nott's fellow South Carolinian Angelina Grimké
concerned herself with all of these same questions. The answers she offered were point

5 Nott relied in large part on the earlier craniological work of Samuel Morton. On the
invalidity of that work, see Bruce Dain, A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race

6 Nott and Gliddon, Types of Mankind, 415.

7 Nott and Gliddon, Types of Mankind, 462.
for point precisely opposite those of Nott. Whereas Nott proposed that scientific study of the body demonstrated that the institutions of slavery and racial prejudice were the products of the natural world, Grimké believed that the locating of personhood in the physical body was simply wrong, that the body was entirely insignificant compared to a person’s inner spirit, to a person's soul. In her mid twenties, Grimké's life was profoundly changed by a conversion to Quakerism that would lead her away from slave society both literally and intellectually. She resettled among her Quaker brethren in Philadelphia in the late 1820s. More important than this geographic relocation was her perceptual reorientation. Her religious conversion convinced her that the anatomical, bodily differences that so many considered of fundamental importance were, in fact, entirely superficial. She became certain that only the soul mattered. More than that, she came to believe that the presence of a soul within each and every human being regardless of race (and, Grimké would also maintain, sex) was both the source and the sign of a universal human equality that stemmed from something greater than observable nature: it was an aspect of God's ultimate design. In her activism as an abolitionist and woman's rights advocate during the 1830s Grimké labored to reveal that divine design to her fellow countrymen and women. She hoped to enable them look past their superficial bodily differences, apprehend the omnipresence of a divine soul within all people, and recognize through that apprehension that hierarchies built upon bodily differences such as slavery and patriarchy were sinful and needed to be superseded by more godly social, cultural, and economic practices.

Grimké was not alone in believing that a burgeoning religious faith in the ubiquity of soul would be the foundational source of revolutionary social and political change.
similar faith led many of her contemporaries into reform movements such as abolitionism, feminism, and pacifism. This study explores the thought and politics of a cadre of American reformers of the 1830s and 1840s who took upon themselves the task that Nott claimed was a scientific impossibility: the leveling of power relationships that were supposedly rooted in the very bodies of individuals. It argues that these reformers—activists engaged in a number of interrelated reform efforts—looked to spirituality as the means to affect radical social and political change in the United States and the world more generally. More specifically, this study argues that these reformers believed that an ever growing recognition of the primacy of the soul within each and every human being could function as a political instrument that would transform society by leading to a correlative appreciation of the inconsequentiality of the body and bodily difference. Apprehension of the primacy of the God-given soul would trump all the bodily differences—differences of race and sex and place—that alienated individuals from one another and that thus served as the foundations for a variety of hierarchies of power including racism and slavery, sexism and patriarchy, and nationalism and conquest. These hierarchies would gradually dissolve, these reformers believed, as more and more individuals came to see others in their mind’s eye—their imaginations—not as African or Euro-Americans, not as women or men, not as Americans or Britons but only as fellow Christians who possessed an inner spirit no better, no worse, and no different from their own.

In his work of the 1840s and 1850s, Nott hoped to make use of the authority of science to reinforce a culturally commonplace idea that many of the reformers of this study had been trying to undermine since the early 1830s: the idea that race served as the
thread that laterally bound individuals into a larger group and community. The reformers expelled such bodily criteria from their conceptualizations of society. Instead of being laterally bound to others because of similar skin pigmentation and sex organs and geographical proximity (and, conversely, hierarchically separated from other groups because of dissimilar skin pigmentation and sex organs and geographical distance), these reformers envisioned voluntary, affective, spirit-laden relationships that knew neither race nor sex nor place as the glue that could and would bind all people together into a larger society. Their reform activism was, at its core, an effort to cultivate and promote such relationships throughout their society.

Friendship, an elective relationship between equals, powerfully represented an image of the society these antebellum reformers wished to realize through their activism, and tropes of friendship are everywhere in their writings. For these activists, friendship functioned as a powerful figurative embodiment of the egalitarian, democratic society they sought to fashion. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century friendship had occupied an important place in public and private life in the United States. In politics, a genteel, patronizing, paternal style of leadership characteristic of the eighteenth century had been superseded by a democratic style that purported a basic equality between the voter and his representative. Candidates for political office presented themselves as friends rather than fathers of the people, equal rather than superior to them. Of course, friendship was an important referent in personal relationships, and had egalitarian implications there too. Some couples, for instance, began to see friendship as a model for romance and marriage. While marriages remained hierarchical with husbands

commanding power over their wives, a companionship that emphasized emotional intimacy and fulfillment for both partners was increasingly the ideal for middle-class couples. Antebellum reformers picked up on and sought to amplify such varied uses of friendship. They aimed to push their contemporaries, on the one hand, to live up to the fullest democratizing implication of friendship in public and private life and, on the other, to imbue friendship with a still deeper substance and meaning. For them friendship meant much more than affection and fellowship. These reformers invested friendship with a deep spiritual significance. The pinnacle of friendship, they felt, was a spiritual communion between two or more individuals, a blending of souls that erased any and all bodily differences and leveled all hierarchies of race, sex, or nation. This study traces the use of tropes of friendship in the writings and rhetoric of a number of antebellum activists engaged in a variety of reform movements, particularly feminism, abolitionism, and pacifism, in order to explore what I'll refer to as their "spirit politics" or "friendship politics": a faith that social and political equality could be realized through the cultivation of spiritualized friendships.

While I believe "spirit politics" and "friendship politics" concisely captures what has been an underappreciated dimension of antebellum reform ideology, most of the reformers would undoubtedly have rejected this characterization of their activism. Politics, by definition, is a matter of power and conflict. These reformers were not interested in refiguring power relationships, but in transcending and escaping them

altogether. A spiritually infused friendship proved an attractive instrument for these reformers precisely because they believed it represented a way to change their world that was not conventionally political as they understood politics. Through friendship politics, these activists hoped to transform their society through a shared love of man and God rather than through contentious social conflict. They imagined themselves working outside of and above conventional politics. They were not just trying to change their nation's laws but rather were working to redeem, quite literally, its very soul. Ultimately, these spiritual activists aimed to realize something greater than a just polity; they wanted to create a godly society where all people lived in peace and harmony with one another according to the teachings of Christ.10 Several years ago Ronald G. Walters noted that "The weak links in much of the historiography of American reform are the emotional, cultural, linguistic, and personal ties that bind individual reformers to the larger cause and infuse their commitments with passion and meaning."11 This study aims to make a contribution towards filling in this gap in our understanding of American reform efforts of the 1830s and 1840s by analyzing the significant roles that a spiritualized ideal of friendship played in the thought and work of many reformers of the period, investing

10 Robert H. Abzug most fully explores the religious orientation of nineteenth-century reformers in Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Abzug argues that these reformers were "bent on sacralizing all the world's order in accordance with their vision of God's plan" (4). A study that argues that belief that Christ's second coming would be preceded by a thousand years of peace (i.e. a belief in postmillenialism) was pervasive among nineteenth-century American Christians is James H. Moorhead, "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millenialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880," Journal of American History 71 (Dec. 1984): 524-542.

their efforts to promote equality with the zeal and conviction of religious faith. Its contribution to the scholarly literature on reform and religion is to explicate more fully this profound sense of spirituality that drove antebellum activists not just to fight sin but to sacralize their world. These men and women sought something more and greater than the end of slavery or war. They hoped to remake the world by attending to the divine souls in themselves and in one another, "cultivating the innate religious sentiment—remembering that it is much more important to engage in building up the beautiful and the true, than in tearing down the misshapen and the false."12

This study analyzes a number of particularly evocative and revealing episodes in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s where activists worked to cultivate disembodied spiritual friendships in efforts to achieve revolutionary social change. These reformers believed friendships of the soul would prove to be a mechanism for dissolving all alienating bodily differences. In each case they were to discover that that body was not easily forgotten. A second argument of this study revolves around the persistence of the body: as an instrument for revolutionary social change, the disembodied soul ultimately proved to be flawed and inadequate because the body possessed its own countervailing appeal. To be more specific, the body (both real and imagined) proved to hold its own attractions precisely because it signified something that the soul did not: difference.13 As imagined

12 Liberator. 2 Feb. 1849.

13 Karen Sanchez-Eppler makes a related argument in Touching Liberty: Abolitionism, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) where she proposes that the "problems of having, representing, or interpreting a body structure both feminist and abolitionist discourse" (15). Feminist abolitionists, Sanchez-Eppler argues, were determined to draw attention to the material body in an effort to critique and upset a discourse what accorded white men a disembodied personhood that authorized their political power. Because they could not claim such an abstracted
by antebellum reformers, the soul was a valuable political instrument because it was universal and undifferentiated; they believed and hoped that individuals would reach across divisions of sex and race and nation to embrace others in an egalitarian friendship when they apprehended that each of those others possessed a God-given soul that was essentially no different from their own. In their efforts to put this belief into practice, these reformers met both skepticism and resistance, both from others and in many cases eventually from within themselves. Some came to question the political efficacy of the undifferentiated disembodied soul; they found it wanting as a political instrument and proposed that bodily difference possessed its own pragmatic value in the fight for equality, justice, and social progress and thus could not and should not be denied. Others questioned the very appeal of an equality founded on the universality of spirit; for them, the surrendering of all bodily difference was too high a price to pay for equality, and they instead worked to achieve a society where all difference did not have to be subsumed for individuals to enjoy equality. Still others found spirit politics insufficiently political. Efforts to build spiritualized friendships, they argued, prioritized the spiritual and

dischembodied position, political citizenship was denied to women and African Americans. In Sanchez-Eppler's estimation, the political strategy of feminist abolitionists was not to claim disembodiment for everyone, but to deny it to anyone. While Sanchez-Eppler argument is intriguing and often compelling, it underestimates both the ideological centrality and political potential of spirit politics in antebellum reform.

In Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), Russ Castronovo makes an argument that complements both Shanchez-Eppler's and that of this study. Analyzing both canonical and non-canonical literary texts of the nineteenth-century, Castronovo explicates a cultural association—even equation—of death with citizenship. Castronovo suggests that an imagined death functioned as a consolation for, and an ultimate escape from, both social conflict and social injustice. Death was idealized, in this account, as a realm where raced and sexed identities disappeared along with political conflicts between racial groups and men and women, producing a passive, indifferent sense of citizenship.
emotional fulfillment of the individual over concrete, practical measures that might affect institutional and legal reforms that would empower the disempowered. Friendship politics, these critics felt, might change souls but would leave society relatively untouched.

The first chapter of this study explores two movements of the 1820s and 1830s that proved to be in the vanguard of the era's spirit politics: Hicksite Quakerism and transcendentalism. During the first half of the nineteenth century, American Christianity was democratized as sects like the Baptists and the Methodists rejected Calvinist predestination and championed laymen and women's right to interpret the Bible. In their similar conceptualizations of soul, Hicksite Quakerism and transcendentalism were among the movements that most fully and enthusiastically explored the most radical religious implications of this democratizing trend. Elias Hicks, a leader of and the namesake for the Hicksites, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, the premier transcendentalist, both proclaimed that in the soul each and every individual possessed an immediate and unmediated link to the divine. For both, Christ became not an historical figure to be worshiped from afar, but a living force accessible to men and women through their inner spirits. This sense of man's proximity to the divine was one of the cornerstones of antebellum reform, inspiring many to believe that they were capable of radically transforming their world for the better. The empowering ideal of soul so clearly articulated by Hicks and Emerson had extraordinary social implications, fueling the hopes and shaping the politics of a generation of activists who hoped to remake racial, sexual, and international relations.

The three chapters that follow together form the interpretive heart of this study.
They explore episodes where reformers attempted to put these spiritual principles into practice and use a spiritualized friendship to overthrow particular conventional power hierarchies of the 1830s and 1840s. Chapter two analyzes Angelina Grimké's and Theodore Dwight Weld's 1838 courtship, exploring their efforts to lay the conceptual groundwork for an egalitarian marriage. Believing that the institution of marriage was corrupted by gender conventions and sexual practices that accorded husbands potentially despotic power over their wives, Grimké and Weld endeavored to escape gender and sexuality by "forgetting sex"; they labored to see each other not as sexed bodies—as a man or as a woman—but instead only as disembodied, sexless spirits. Through acts of imagination they hoped they could transcend conventional gender relations by ceasing to perceive or treat each other as a sexed or gendered being. More specifically, both Weld and Grimké conflated their fiancé with a close same-sex friend. Their marriage, they each insisted, would not be a hierarchical relationship between a man and a woman whose gender identities separated them from one another; rather, their marriage would be very much like their same-sex friendships, a spiritual pairing of equals. This strategy ran aground upon a very radical question for the 1830s: Why did marriage occur only between a man and a woman and never between two people of the same sex? If Weld and Grimké were right in their assertion that sex was insignificant compared to spirit, why couldn't people find their soul mate among their same-sex friends? Weld and Grimké were singularly radical people, but not so radical as to envision or tolerate what we'd term gay marriage. Coupled with their physical attraction to one another, their inability to come up with persuasive answers to these questions dashed their strategy of forgetting sex—but not their larger mission to reform the institution of marriage. Unable
wholly to forget sex, the couple regrouped, redeveloping a conception of marriage that was still founded upon spirit and equality, but one which incorporated rather than denied both gender and sexual desire.

Grimké and Weld ultimately found a disembodied, spiritualized friendship wanting as both an ideal and as a means of accomplishing cultural and social change. Chapter three examines a more sustained and pointed critique of friendship politics developed by a number of African American abolitionists during the late 1830s and early 1840s. Just as Grimké and Weld hoped to forget sex, many radical abolitionists of the 1830s, white and black alike, hoped to forget race. Asking Euro-Americans to look beyond race and see blacks not as alien others but as fellow Christians possessed of God-given souls no different from their own, radical white abolitionists labored to practice what they were preaching by deeply identifying themselves with both enslaved and free blacks. They imagined they might overcome the barriers of race in antebellum American by emulating Christ and empathizing with the suffering of African Americans, intimately communing with the souls of blacks. While African American abolitionists appreciated the potential value of this spiritual compassion to turn some whites from indifference to the plight of African Americans, during the late 1830s and early 1840s more and more of the black abolitionist leadership began to question the political efficacy of empathetic identification and spiritualized friendship. A deep empathy for the suffering that blacks experienced did little to redress the structural, institutional foundations of racial prejudice and oppression that caused that suffering. Interracial spiritualized friendship benefited whites by liberating them from the sin of racial hatred, but for African Americans it accomplished too little of practical import. Recognizing the political limitations of
interracial identification and spiritualized friendship, more and more black leaders increasingly embraced and advocated political strategies that stood in marked contrast to a colorblind, religiously grounded ideal of friendship: a pragmatic racial consciousness and racially-exclusive political activism among African Americans.

Chapter four analyzes pacifist Elihu Burritt's efforts to apply the spiritualized ideal of friendship to international politics. In the major technological innovations of his age—the steamship, the telegraph, the railroad—Burritt saw providentially-provided opportunities to render distance insignificant and destroy any and all spatial limits on the individual's sense of his or her community. Letters conveyed by the steam engine would allow two individuals to build a friendship with one another though they had never and would never physically meet in person; the thousands-fold aggregation of such friendships, Burritt believed, could transform communal sensibilities across the globe. No longer would people's sense of community be delimited to their neighborhood, town, state, or nation. Instead, they would consider themselves a member of a world society, intimately connected with other people across the globe. Chapter four explores Burritt's efforts in the late 1840s to develop and promote a sense of Christian citizenship in the Atlantic world that would dissolve patriotic loyalties to particular nation-states through two reform endeavors: the Friendship Addresses Movement and the League of Universal Brotherhood. A Christian citizenship, founded upon a shared soul-connection through Christ, would serve as the foundation of a sense of global community that would have a revolutionary effect upon international politics, rendering international war a thing of the past.

This study concludes with a chapter which argues that Spiritualism

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simultaneously represented the apotheosis and accelerated the demise of spirit politics within American reform. In the 1850s tens of thousands of Americans became Spiritualists who believed that the disembodied spirits of the dead were capable of communicating with the living. Reformers, particularly those who had been Hicksite Quakers, were among the earliest and most enthusiastic adherents of Spiritualism—unsurprisingly so, as the central tenet of Spiritualism drew from and literalized ideas about spiritual communion that had been at the heart of reformers' friendship politics throughout the 1830s and 1840s. Spiritualism merged two ideas that had been central to reformers' spirit politics: a faith that individuals could receive inspiration from the divine and a belief in spiritual communion between two or more individuals. Yet Spiritualism's merger of these two ideas compromised the political radicalism of both. The messages the living received from the heavens did not spring directly from God. In Spiritualism the soul no longer served as an unmediated link to the divine; that link was instead very much mediated, made through dead spirits who were far from omniscient and whose motives were not always to be trusted. Even more problematic, in Spiritualism aspirations of spirit communion no longer focused on forging egalitarian bonds between segregated social groups, between white and blacks and men and women who were living. More often than not, mediums and clairvoyants aimed to make connections with dead luminaries like George Washington and Elias Hicks. Many reformers grew increasingly critical of Spiritualism, seeing its religious fixation on dead spirits and the afterlife as a distraction from the practical work of helping millions who were in bondage on earth. While Spiritualism was the chief target of their ire, these reformers developed a pointed critique of spirit politics more generally, gradually abandoning spirit communion.
in favor of bodily violence as a means to end the worst of their country's sins, chattel slavery.
CHAPTER ONE
"THE SOCIETY OF ALL TRUE AND PURE SOULS":
SOUL AND SOCIALITY IN THE ANTEBELLUM NORTH

For a small sect, the "inner light" of the Society of Friends shone surprisingly brightly amid the religious landscape of the antebellum North. Two of New England's best-known citizens, Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Lloyd Garrison, each felt a sense of religious kinship with the Quakers, though neither was a Friend. "I am more a Quaker than anything else," Ralph Waldo Emerson once said. "I believe in the 'still, small voice,' and that voice is Christ within us."1 Garrison felt the same affinity with the Quakers, telling a correspondent that his religious views "are almost identical with those of [early Friends Robert] Barclay, [William] Penn, and [George] Fox; ... I believe in an indwelling Christ, and in his righteousness alone."2

It was this idea of an "indwelling Christ" that attracted Garrison and Emerson to Quaker spirituality. In mid-seventeenth-century England, the founder of Quakerism, 

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1 Emerson's identification with Quakerism is one of David Greene Haskins's recollections of his conversations with Emerson in Haskins's Ralph Waldo Emerson: His Maternal Ancestors with some Reminiscences of Him (Boston: Cupples, Upham & Company, 1886), 48.


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George Fox, had recast the Christian notion of the soul, preaching that all individuals had an "inner light" or an "indwelling Christ" that enabled them to connect with God through an influx of the Holy Spirit. In his more mystical, radical moments, Fox claimed that God's revelation came neither from the church nor the Bible but from within the soul. It was this faith that each and every person had the empowering potential to receive insight directly from the divine that led Garrison and Emerson to identify with Quakerism.

For Garrison, Emerson, and many of their contemporaries, this ideal of soul was truly inspiring. It sparked a hope that men and women could look within for guidance in acting in godly ways. Men and women were not innately depraved, as traditional Calvinists maintained. Because each person possessed a God-given soul that connected him or her to the divine, everyone possessed the capacity to free themselves from sin.

The Quaker concept of an "indwelling Christ" that Emerson and Garrison were both so taken with neatly conveyed the potentially radical implications of this ideal of soul. Christ was not some unattainable, external, divine figure to be worshipped from afar but rather a source of personal insight and inspiration that everyone contained in his or her soul. To be sure, this idea that men and women were capable of significant spiritual improvement, even spiritual perfection, was deeply controversial. More controversial still were the social implications some came to see in it: spiritual progress might prompt meaningful social progress. The sins man was capable of overcoming were not exclusively individual or private but also social and public, sins like slavery and war. For some extraordinary individuals like Garrison, this empowering conceptualization of soul reshaped their sense of vocation, inspiring them to pursue careers of social activism in which they labored to create a more just, more equitable, and more godly society.
THE CONTESTED LEGACY OF GEORGE FOX

One of Garrison's connections with Quakerism was forged through Angelina Grimké. In the fall of 1835, he received what he called a "soul-thrilling epistle" from her. After much difficult soul searching, Grimké had written the abolitionist editor to express her support for and spiritual solidarity with him and his fellow abolitionists. In particular, she wanted to express her sympathy for abolitionists who of late had been the targets of aggressive physical harassment and assaults. In her letter, Grimké conveyed her "hope" that this persecution would not be in vain. The abolitionists, she believed, surely would affect the end of southern slavery through martyrdoms that at that moment seemed quite possible, even likely. Besides freeing the slaves, the abolitionists would prevent slaveholders from dying in a slave rebellion that would surely come if slavery were allowed to persist.

Eighteen hundred and thirty five was indeed a year of mob violence. In July southerners responded to a campaign to flood the region with abolitionist literature by seizing and destroying the mail; they also burned abolitionists such as Garrison and Arthur Tappan in effigy. For months it appeared that violence would not stop with those inanimate proxies. In cities throughout the North abolitionists were targets of mob violence, and it seemed quite possible, even likely, that prominent abolitionist leaders might soon be assassinated. In October Garrison narrowly escaped with his life after


being seized by a mob and dragged through the streets of Boston.

In her letter of support to Garrison, Grimké never specified exactly how the killing of abolitionists by mobs would help the slave. It was not hard to understand how such killings could be turned to advantage by the abolitionists. The assassination of anti-slavery leaders would no doubt outrage many northerners and convert them into abolitionist sympathizers. (Sadly, that soon proved to be the case when an anti-abolitionist mob killed abolitionist editor Elijah P. Lovejoy in Alton, Illinois in 1837.) That said, Grimké's belief that the murder of abolitionists would help end slavery stemmed not from this tactical calculation but from her religious faith. Grimké believed that by speaking out against the sin of slavery and being persecuted for that testimony abolitionists were following in the footsteps of Christ along a path that led to martyrdom. In her letter Grimké encouraged Garrison and his fellow abolitionists not to falter on this journey. Their bodies might be destroyed, but their souls, as well as the souls of slave and slaveholder, would be saved. "The ground upon which you stand," Grimké told Garrison, "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. 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 the Master's injunction: 'Fear not them that kill the body, and after that, have nothing more that they can do.'" If


the abolitionists adhered to their faith, sacrificing their lives just as Christ sacrificed his upon the cross for mankind's sake, how could they fail to save slave and slaveholder alike?

Garrison was heartened by Grimké's words. Her letter conveyed "a spirit worthy of the best days of martyrdom" and sentiments that were "Christ-like." He no doubt was particularly pleased with the very Christ-like portrait Grimké painted of him wearing his figurative crown of thorns, for in his abolitionism Garrison believed himself to be acting as best he could "in imitation of [Christ's] illustrious example." Though in the aftermath of his attack Garrison told Lewis Tappan that "it makes me blush to compare my lot with that of the early sufferers in the cause of truth and righteousness" and that "in these modern days, the burden of the cross is light, very light to bear," he clearly relished the opportunity to bear a cross, however light. This desire to emulate Christ and faith that they could were convictions that Garrison and Grimké shared with one another through their belief in an "indwelling Christ."

Garrison saw in the Quaker notion of an "indwelling Christ" the empowering idea that he could imitate Christ, that in his life he might take meaningful, significant strides towards the spiritual perfection that Christ alone had yet attained. Garrison's beliefs were one small indication of the waning of Calvinism in antebellum New England. Belief in predestination and man's innate depravity were by no means dead. Even among the Quakers many shied away from the spiritual empowerment that Garrison found in the

7 Garrison to George W. Benson, Sept. 12, 1835.
soul. For them, such a belief amounted to heresy and self-idolatry. Indeed, the idea that
the inner light meant that men and women possessed the potential to be like Christ
proved deeply divisive among antebellum Quakers, so divisive that in the late 1820s it
contributed to a formal schism within the Society of Friends.

In 1827 and 1828 American Quakerism split in two. For over a century following
that schism there were two distinct societies of Friends in America each claiming to be
the true, legitimate Society of Friends: the Orthodox Quakers and the Hicksite Quakers.
While the causes of the schism between the two groups were not exclusively doctrinal in
nature, the question of man's relationship to Christ was a point of heated, acrimonious,
and ultimately divisive contention between the Orthodox and the Hicksites.
Theologically, the Orthodox shared much in common with mainstream protestant
churches. The Orthodox maintained that Jesus Christ was the one and only son of God
who was crucified on the cross to atone for man's sins. The Bible was the one and only
revelation of God; as such it was unquestionable and inerrant. Seeking to align the
Quakers with mainstream Protestantism, the Orthodox, who controlled most of the
governing bodies among the Quakers, sought to formally erect these two tenets as official
Quaker doctrine.10

10 On the theological dimension of the Hicksite-Orthodox schism, see H. Larry Ingle,
Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee
Press, 1986) and Thomas D. Hamm, Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907 (Bloomington:
Indiana University Press, 1988), 15-20. Bruce Dorsey explores the connections between
the Orthodox and mainstream protestant sects in "Friends Becoming Enemies:
Philadelphia Benevolence and the Neglected Era of American Quaker History," Journal
of the Early Republic 18 (Fall 1998): 399-406. For a socio-economic analysis, see
Quarterly 17 (Spring 1965): 63-80.
The Hicksites opposed this effort to make Christ's unique divinity and the unquestionable authority of the Holy Bible official, governing doctrine among Friends. Long Island Quaker mystic Elias Hicks was the namesake for and a leader among the Hicksites. Hicks, uneducated but eloquent, insisted that the heart of Quakerism was nothing more and nothing less than George Fox's insight that unmediated spiritual revelation was personally available to all through the "inner light." Revelation, Hicks insisted, came not from without, from the Bible or even from Christ. Indeed, all must be measured against the one's own inner light, the Bible and Christ's reputed words not excepted; that was the only true source of divine revelation. "Man is a compound being," Hicks preached. "One part is composed of flesh and blood; the other part of spirit, and the immortal soul is born of spirit and power of God, it becomes a son of God." 11

Salvation and sanctification, Hicks claimed, followed from a gradual, life-long process of attuning oneself wholly to the spirit rather than the flesh. The work that men and women did to hear and abide by the promptings of their inner light enabled them progressively to become more like Christ. The agenda of the Orthodox, the Hicksites believed, threatened to destroy all that made Quakers uniquely Quaker.

Hicks and the Hicksites insisted that the Orthodox erred in believing in a vicarious atonement: the faith that Christ atoned for man's sins through his crucifixion. The Orthodox generally espoused the common Christian tenet that through his death on the cross Christ transferred his salvation to humanity. Man did not and could not earn salvation. Instead it was a gift bestowed by Christ through the crucifixion. Mankind was utterly incapable of offering God satisfaction after the fall; it was only through the

11 Berean, May 5, 1825.

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sacrifice of the divine Christ that man's debt to God could be paid. The Hicksites rejected this doctrine of the atonement. Christ did not save man; it was each man and woman's responsibility to save himself or herself. Christ did not atone for human sin upon the cross two millennia earlier. Rather, for the more radical of the Hicksites, he functioned and continued to function as an inspirational example that illuminated what all men and women might become. "The same power that made Christ a Christian must make us Christians," Hicks preached, "and the same power that saved him must save us."\(^{12}\) Christ was not the one and only son of God as the Orthodox insisted, but rather God's most accomplished son. It was Christ who had most fully lived according to the promptings of the inner light, acting according to God's will revealed through his soul. Each man and woman had the potential to be like Christ if they could fully surrender themselves to the promptings of their indwelling Christ.

This idea had important social and political implications. Saving oneself meant not just believing but actively rejecting and fighting sin in the world as best one could. Salvation followed not from faith but from works. Making this point, one Hickite distinguished between the Orthodox and Hicksites by characterizing the former as "professors" of religion and the latter as "possessors" of religion. "The professor gets his religion from books, creeds and catechisms, and deposits it in his head," this Hickite suggested. In contrast, "the possessor" gets his religion "from the manifestations of Divine Truth, opening on and convincing his understanding. It is treasured in his heart."

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The inner light infused the possessor's whole life, not only informing his or her beliefs but finding expression through actions. "The professor shows his faith by his words; the possessor by his works." Belief alone was not enough to enter into heaven. Instead, belief needed to find expression in one's actions. For Hicks, this meant being a social critic and activist. Hicks was an outspoken critic of slavery who refused to purchase or use products made using slave labor. Hicks felt it his god-given duty to make sure that he did not personally benefit from the sinful institution in even the smallest, most indirect way. An oft-repeated anecdote told of Hicks on his deathbed struggling to throw off a blanket that his friends had placed upon him. His friends quickly realized that Hicks struggled because the blanket was made of slave-produced cotton. When they replaced the blanket with a woolen one, Hicks rested easy and soon passed. For decades before his death in 1830 Hicks had implored his fellow Quakers to join him and boycott products and staples made by slave labor. This message earned Hicks many powerful enemies among well-to-do Friends whose lifestyles and livelihoods were intertwined with and dependent upon the slave system. The offense wealthy Orthodox Quakers took at Hicks's preaching against complicity with slavery was considered by many a significant precipitating factor in the crisis in American Quakerism that culminated in the Hicksite secession in 1827 and 1828.

13 "Difference between a Professor and a Possessor of Religion," Berean, Feb. 23, 1824.
15 Ingles, Quakers in Conflict, 84-86, 255 n. 17; Garrison, "Free Produce among the Quakers," 492.
When Angelina Grimké settled in Philadelphia shortly after the schism in November 1829, she found herself worshiping in a meetinghouse dominated by some of the most outspoken and aggressive opponents of Elias Hicks. She fled her home in Charleston, South Carolina, hoping to distance herself from slavery. Having come to believe that slavery was utterly sinful, living in the South in a family that owned slaves had become spiritually torturous. In Philadelphia Grimké hoped that she could live a life of calm simplicity among the Quakers whose faith she had adopted.

It was Orthodox Friends who had helped push Grimké towards more actively renouncing slavery in the late 1820s, serving as one of the initial sparks that ignited a burning enmity towards the institution that would eventually lead her into abolitionist activism. It was thus no small irony that less than a decade later Grimké would break with the Orthodox because of their indifference, even hostility, towards abolitionism, or, to be more precise, their opposition to the spiritually- and emotionally-saturated abolitionism that had emerged in the mid and late 1820s (and of which Garrison was the leading figurehead). Since the Revolution, some prominent Philadelphia Quakers had sought to chip away at the institution of slavery. Working through the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), these Quakers worked to weaken slavery through the aggregation of legal actions, hoping to establish a body of precedent that would gradually undermine slavery's legal standing in the republic. The leading historian of the PAS, Richard S. Newman, has characterized the tactics of the PAS as "deferential," "rational," and "dispassionate." This was very much in contrast to the confrontational, spiritual, and very passionate tactics adopted by a generally younger generation of abolitionists beginning in the late 1820s. The split over style and tactics between the dispassionate
"first-wave" and the romantic "second-wave" abolitionists that Newman chronicles was related to the division between the Orthodox and the Hicksites. The Orthodox championed deference of individuals to secular law and religious doctrine; the Hicksites placed the soul-inspired individual above all laws and doctrines. When Garrison published in the Liberator the letter Grimké had sent him, he inadvertently precipitated Angelina Grimké's own personal schism from the Orthodox, outing her from the Orthodox world of dispassionate deference.

Grimké first learned that Garrison had published her letter when Samuel Bettle came to her home and angrily asked her to write Garrison and recant her expressions of sympathy with and encouragement for the abolitionists. Bettle was a powerful figure in the Orthodox Arch Street Meeting to which Grimké belonged. A decade earlier, Bettle had been a prominent leader among the Orthodox in their fight against the Hicksites. At the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of 1827 where the Society broke in two, Bettle had played a particularly divisive part, refusing to relinquish the position of clerk despite the fact that the majority of the meeting clearly favored a Hicksite. He also had a more personal connection to Grimké; years earlier Bettle's son had been begun courting Grimké before his untimely death in 1832. This link did not temper the elder Bettle's reaction to the publication of her letter. Bettle upbraided Grimké for the radical act of identifying herself with the fanatical Garrisonian abolitionists.

Bettle's anger came as no surprise. Composing and sending her letter had been a difficult trial for Grimké. Given her family's prominence, she suspected that Garrison

17 Ingles, Quakers in Conflict, 187-190.
would not be able to resist publishing her letter, and she knew that its publication would undoubtedly and perhaps irrevocably alienate her Orthodox Quaker friends. Though Bettle's criticism stung, she refused to be intimidated or accede to his wishes. "I believe that letter was pend under right feeling, in the spirit of prayer," Grimké explained in her journal.

I felt it might involv me in some difficulty & therefore it was written in fear & after it was written I hardly knew whether to send it or not & therefore again implored divine direction at last I sent it to the Office & felt a degree of peace in doing so & as tho' I had nothing more to do with it than if I had never written it.\(^{18}\)

Grimké was right in suspecting her letter would cause her some "difficulty" with her Orthodox brethren. It initiated her personal break with the Orthodox of Arch Street Meeting. Over the coming year Grimké would leave Philadelphia, becoming a notable and devout abolitionist. Her break with the Arch Street meeting was an echo of the Hicksite schism of the previous decade. The Hicksites had refused to let the Orthodox leadership set any authority, whether biblical or churchly, above the promptings of their own souls. Grimké followed them, doing the same. Grimké's inner light—"divine direction" that she "had nothing to do with"—prompted her to denounce slavery whatever the personal cost. Like Hicks and like Garrison, Grimké pursuit of salvation and sanctification led her into antislavery, reformist politics. The concept of the inner light empowered her to believe that she could—indeed, that she must—sanctify the world around her.

FRIEND EMERSON

During the disputes among the Friends in the 1820s, the Hicksites and the Orthodox wrestled over Fox's legacy, each claiming his mantle. Each wanting to see themselves as the sole legitimate heirs of Fox's legacy, neither the Hicksites nor the Orthodox acknowledged that there might not be a single Fox legacy, but multiple legacies. H. Larry Ingle has argued that neither faction had a better historical claim than the other. Before the Stuart Restoration in 1660, Fox's message was mystically oriented, emphasizing the absolute primacy of the inner light; yet in the changed political climate following the Restoration, Fox and other early Friends tempered that radical claim by adopting a more traditional, conservative theology that accorded the Bible and the institutions of Quakerism more authority. The Hicksites drew upon Fox's pre-Restoration Quakerism, the Orthodox upon Fox's post-Restoration Quakerism, and each insisted that their Quakerism was Fox's Quakerism. 19

Claiming kinship with Fox was common among the religiously minded of antebellum America, not merely among the Quakers. Ralph Waldo Emerson, for one, proposed that the he and his fellow transcendentalists were heirs of seventeenth-century Friends. "The identity ... between the speculative opinions of serious persons at the present moment, and those entertained by the first Quakers," Emerson opined in 1842, "is indeed so striking at to have drawn a very general attention of late years to the history of that sect .... [O]ne can hardly read George Fox's Journal, or Sewel's History of the Quakers, without many a rising of joyful surprise at the correspondence of facts and

expressions to states of thought and feeling, with which we are very familiar.\textsuperscript{20}

To be sure, many of those Quaker-inflected "states of thought and feeling" ran throughout Emerson's own work. Identifying with the Quaker notion of an "indwelling Christ," Emerson championed something very much akin to it: the capacity in all men and women to receive divine guidance and insight through intuition or inspiration. At the heart of Emerson's transcendentalism was the message that all individuals possessed a soul that immediately connected them to God. "We know that all spiritual being is in man," Emerson proclaimed in his 1841 essay "The Over-Soul."

\[T\]hat is, as there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so is there no bar or wall in the soul, where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins. The walls are taken away. We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God.\textsuperscript{21}

Emerson echoed Hicks in proposing that to act in a holy way men and women needed to surrender their fallible human will and listen to that inner, divine voice that was the soul.

Indeed, Emerson owed much to the Quakers. In part, Emerson imbibed Quakerism from a number of histories and texts of the sect that he read attentively.\textsuperscript{22}

Before he was thirty years of age, he'd also developed a profound admiration for Quakerism from a number of memorable conversations he had with two Friends. These two Quakers, Edward Stabler and Mary Rotch, deeply impressed Emerson, and each left a mark upon his developing thought.

\textsuperscript{20} "Editor's Table: Transcendentalism," \textit{The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion}, 2 (Jan. 1842): 382.

\textsuperscript{21} Emerson, \textit{Essays} (London: James Fraser, 1841), 274.

\textsuperscript{22} On Emerson's reading of Quaker texts, see Robert D. Richardson, Jr., \textit{Emerson: The Mind on Fire} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 157-163.
In the summer of 1827, Emerson, then twenty-four, met the elderly Quaker Stabler on a Baltimore steamer. Stabler was a Hicksite partisan and a friend of Hicks. Though their chance encounter was brief and few specifics are known of it, for Emerson it was clearly anything but ephemeral. Almost ten years later, Emerson listed Stabler first among "the scattered company who have ministered to my highest wants." Emerson recurred to Stabler a number of times in his journal, drawing a comparison between Christ and Stabler as authoritative spiritual teachers in 1828 and recounting some words of Stabler in 1831 in an entry that evidences the influence the Hicksite had upon Emerson's theory of compensation (the idea that the universe always rewarded spiritually right actions).23

Emerson listed Mary Rotch on that same list of respected friends and acquaintances who had influenced him. Emerson met and got to know Rotch in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in the winter and spring of 1833-1834. Emerson found Rotch's spiritual sensibility extraordinarily impressive. Her history demonstrated an unwavering faith in her own inner light. By the early 1830s Rotch was a practicing Unitarian having been expelled by her local Quaker meeting a decade earlier. Controversies among Massachusetts Friends in the early 1820s were one and the same as those pitting Hicksites and Orthodox against one another in Quaker meetings to the south. Powerful Friends in New Bedford and Lynn, Massachusetts, grew increasingly concerned about the preaching that was happening in their meetinghouses. A number of Friends, most disturbingly a woman named Mary Newall, were espousing radical ideas, the selfsame

23 Emerson quoted in Frederick B. Tolles, "Emerson and Quakerism," American Literature 10 (May 1838): 146. On the influence of Stabler, see Tolles, "Emerson and Quakerism," 146-148, and Richardson, Emerson, 78. On Stabler's role as a Hicksite partisan, see Ingle, Quakers in Conflict, 226, 245.
ideas that Hicks preached: the inner light was the one and only true source of spiritual
authority, Christ was not uniquely divine, his blood sacrifice upon the cross was not the
instrument of man's salvation, and the Bible was not inerrant. In 1823 and 1824,
conservative Friends successfully purged their meetings of these more mystically-
oriented members, including Rotch and Newall. No longer welcome in the
meetinghouse in which she had been an Elder, Rotch led a number of like-minded
Friends into the local Unitarian church.24

Emerson was deeply impressed by Rotch's Quaker piety. For Emerson she was
living example of someone who did not choose the easy route, but always listened to her
inner light and followed its promptings. During the disputes of 1823-1824, Rotch was
"driven inward, driven home, to find an anchor, until she learned to have no choice, to
acquiesce without understanding." She didn't do what she wanted, but what her soul
revealed to be right. Rotch's surrender to the divine in that trying time and in the more
prosaic moments of her life inspired Emerson to try to do the same. "Can you believe,
Waldo Emerson," he asked himself in his journal after describing Rotch's profound faith,
"that you may relieve yourself of the perpetual perplexity of choosing, and by putting
your ear close to the soul, learn always the true way?"25

The Quaker idea of listening to the dictates of one's own soul reinforced
Emerson's own developing thought during this formative time in his career. Stabler and

24 Rotch's impact upon Emerson is analyzed in Tolles, "Emerson and Quakerism," 157-
164, and Richardson, Emerson, 157-163. The conflicts between Quakers in
Massachusetts and the disciplining of Mary Rotch are recounted and analyzed in

Rotch helped clarify and develop an idea that would be at the center of his thought for decades to come: that communion with one's own soul, one's inward Christ, was the path to holiness. Emerson's beliefs about Christ were the same as those of radical Quakers. Like Hicks, Emerson suggested that Christ was not divine because he was the son of God. He was divine because he recognized and followed the dictates of his own soul more than anyone else in human history ever had. In 1838 Emerson told the graduating seniors of Harvard's Divinity School that Christ achieved his divinity because

He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe
harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there.

Alone in all history, he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true
to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man . . . .

He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion, "I am divine. Through me,
God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or, see thee,
when thou also thinkest as I now think." 26

Like Hicks before him, Emerson preached that all humans were the sons and daughters of God. The divinity that Christ exemplified was precisely the same divinity as that which "is in you and me." Everyone, Emerson proposed, possessed the potential to achieve a Christ-like holiness if they became "true to" their own divinity by acting according to the dictates of their soul. 27

26 Emerson, An Address Delivered Before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Saturday Evening, 15 July, 1838 (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1838), 11-12.

27 Emerson shared this belief with many of his fellow transcendentalists. Theodore Parker conveyed the same message just as starkly, writing:
If Emerson shared this much with Hicks, Rotch, and like-minded Quakers, he also had much in common with many of his abolitionist, feminist, and pacifist contemporaries. He was not a committed reformer himself, eschewing engaged political activism in favor of a speculative philosophical career. Yet in his writings, Emerson conveyed the basic contours of a spiritual and social sensibility that was shared by many reformers of the 1830s and 1840s. To be more specific, in his work Emerson propounded ideas about the transformative potential of both soul and friendship that were at the core of the many of the radical reform initiatives of his contemporaries.

The mystical belief that men and women could receive divine insight through their own souls was the core of Emerson's early transcendentalism. In his first work Nature (1836), Emerson proposed that the "universe" was divisible into two parts, "Nature and the Soul." Nature included everything that was "NOT ME." In addition to "nature" (i.e. the natural world), "art," and "all other men", the "NOT ME" of Nature also

Now Jesus Christ was beyond all doubt the noblest soul ever born into the world of time. He realized the idea of human holiness. He did likewise, the most perfectly of all men, obey the conditions and laws of his being. He therefore possessed the highest degree and greatest measure of Inspiration ever possessed by man. Hence he is called and incarnation of God. If his obedience was perfect, then his reason—certain and infallible as the promptings of instinct or the law of gravitation—was the power of God acting through him without let or hindrance. His revelation, therefore was the highest and deepest ever made to man. Because he had in him so much that is common to all, and so little that was personal and peculiar, his doctrines go round the world, and possess the noblest hearts. He will continue to hold his present place in the scale of the human race, until God shall create a soul yet larger and nobler than Jesus, which shall observe the "law of the spirit of life" with the same faithfulness.

For Parker, Christ was not fundamentally different and distinct from man, but the most devout man ever born. "The Divine Presence in Nature and in the Soul," The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion 1 (Jul. 1840): 58.
included "my own body." A deep suspicion of the material body runs throughout Emerson's early work. Emerson believed that individuals made a terrible mistake when they mistook their physical body for a significant component of their true being. Only the soul was me. The body was not the root, only the effect, the epiphenomenonal shadow of the noumenal soul. Ideally, the physical body would be the perfect material manifestation of the soul. "Unfortunately," Emerson believed, each and every body "bears the marks of as of some injury; is marred and superficially defective." Because of these mars and defects, the body functioned as an impediment distracting the individual from full communion with his or her soul.

In a famous, oft-quoted passage of Nature, Emerson imagined that self-communion where he would connect to the infinite divine as a moment of disembodiment where he would escape the corporeality of his own body. In his reverie of spiritual realization Emerson fantasized about becoming a "transparent eye-ball." As a "transparent eye-ball" he would become all soul, connecting with his own inner light and becoming a "part or particle of God" through which "the currents of the Universal Being circulate." In Emerson's divine algebra, spiritual realization was inversely proportional to corporeal materiality. This rhetorical moment of spiritual ascension was predicated on an


29 Emerson, Nature, 43.

30 For another brief analysis of Emerson's thought regarding the relationship between body and soul, see Cynthia J. Davis, "Margaret Fuller, Body and Soul," American Literature 71 (Mar. 1999): 32-35.
imagined moment of immateriality where Emerson shed his body to become "nothing."  

In this passage in *Nature*, Emerson claimed that spiritual self-communion was difficult to accomplish in the "streets and villages" of civilized society. In the "woods" and the "wilderness," a man was more likely to find spiritual inspiration and escape from the false, individualized self—"all mean egotism." In Emerson's early thought, nature was a privileged part of Nature as it stood comparatively distant from man and closer to the divine. That said, Emerson's suggested that given the right spiritualized perspective the other components of Nature might also serve as vehicles for spiritual growth, even "all other men" (the third component of the "NOT ME" of Nature). So often thought of as the champion of American individualism, Emerson was deeply preoccupied with uncovering ways social relationships might be harnessed for spiritual ends.

Just as one could connect to the divine through his or her own disembodied soul, Emerson believed that connection could be made (though not as readily) through the disembodied souls of others. In his 1841 essay "Love," Emerson explored the spiritual limitations of romantic love. In part, love was dangerous because it fixated an aesthetic and sexual attention on the material body of the beloved. The passion of sexualized love encouraged "misplaced ... satisfaction in the body" and "too much conversing with material objects." The body of another was just as much of a spiritual trap as one's own; it was just as likely to block the path to spiritual realization by distracting consciousness.


32 Frank M. Meola has argued that Emerson resisted the sexual because sexual-object choice risked foreclosing some of the varied form that affection and love might take. Emerson is "queer" in Meola's account insofar as he wanted to open up and explore different possibilities and potentialities for love and friendship than were conventional in mid-nineteenth-century America. Meola, "In True Relations: Love, Friendship, and Alternative Society in Emerson," *Prospects* 26 (2001): 35-60.
away from the soul. However, if a person could see beyond that body by focusing not on
the beloved's corporeality but instead on his or her incorporeal qualities love could
become a method of connecting with God though the soul of another. When romantic
love was approached spiritually "the soul passes through the body, and falls to admire
strokes of character, and the lovers contemplate one another in their discourses and their
actions, ... and by this love extinguishing the base affection ... they become pure and
hallowed." Thus, the lover "quits the sign [i.e. the body], and attaches to the substance
[the soul]." When both lovers disembodied one another in their imagination, they would
commune with their beloved's inner spirit and recognize a shared divinity.33

In Emerson's thinking, love should function as a spiritual laboratory that would
enable the individual to distill his or her divine, perfect, God-given spirit, progressively
extracting it from its admixture with a polluting material world. In romance and marriage
a person could achieve "a quicker apprehension" and "a warmer love" of the universal
qualities of soul by seeing them in another. By intimately acquainting himself with the
divine spirit within his beloved through careful observation, a man would learn more
easily and more confidently to recognize those same qualities of divinity within
himself.34

Love was thus profoundly introspective, leading back towards contemplation of
one's own spirit. Yet it simultaneously encouraged a greater social engagement by
spurring the individual to look for divinity within more and more people. The
heightening of spiritual consciousness through communion with the beloved's spirit could

33 Emerson, Essays, 182, 186.
34 Emerson, Essays, 182.
be augmented through communion with other souls. By loving the qualities of spirit in one person, Emerson suggested, the individual soon "passes ... to loving them in all, and so is the one beautiful soul only the door through which he enters to the society of all true and pure souls." In Emerson's theory of spiritualized love there was little interest in monogamy. Having recognized itself in another, the soul became deeply promiscuous in hopes of coming closer and closer to the divine through each and every person. "[B]eholding in many souls the traits of the divine beauty, and separating in each soul that which is divine from the taint which it has contracted in the world," Emerson believed, "the lover ascends to the highest beauty, to the love and knowledge of the Divinity, by steps on this ladder of created souls."35

For Emerson, romantic love served only a preliminary spiritual purpose by acquainting the individual with the rewards that followed from communing with another's soul. But it was not an end in itself, only a means that prompted the individual towards a more promiscuous spiritual sociality. Because love conventionally denoted a monogamous relationship between two, it proved wanting. Friendship was a better trope to convey Emerson's ideal social relationships. In "Friendship," the companion essay of "Love," Emerson more fully imagined how spiritualized social relationships might lead to the divine.

Emerson idealized friendship as a sacred connection, a relationship that was not about something as earthly as affection but instead a heavenly communion of spirits. "The great God gave them to me," Emerson wrote of his ideal, imagined friends. "By oldest right, by the divine affinity of virtue with itself, I find them, or rather not I, but the

35 Emerson, Essays, 182-183.
Deity in me and in them derides and cancels the thick walls of individual character, relation, age, sex, circumstance, at which he usually connives, and now makes many one." In its ideal form friendship was the relationship where an individual came to recognize that he had no individuality but instead a soul that was wondrously undifferentiated from the souls that were the true essence of all those who surrounded him. All differences that divided individuals from one another became insignificant when friends saw only each other's spirits. In "Friendship" Emerson returned to the distinction between Nature and Soul, the "NOT ME" and the essential me, only to blur and ultimately collapse any meaningful distinction between the two. In true friendship, the individual discovered "that the not mine is mine." Everything real and of value in other people, their spirits, was already extant within one's own soul. Conversely, a person's soul was not uniquely one's own; all others possessed the same soul. A friend's spirit was no different from one's own. In the friend, a person saw "the semblance of my being, in all its height, variety, and curiosity, reiterated in a foreign form." Having recognized divinity in others, all individuality dissolved. Through a spiritualized friendship, "the individuals merge their egotism into a social soul exactly co-extensive with the several consciousnesses there present" and discover "the deep identity which beneath these disparities [of individual personality] unites them." 36

Because the ideal friends knew each other only as spirits their friendship was independent of physical proximity. In other words, they didn't need to be physically near one another in order to commune because their friendship was of their incorporeal souls

36 Emerson, Essays, 196, 210, 206, 209, 211. Jeffrey Steele thoughtfully explores Emerson's notions of a collective (as opposed to a personal or individual) unconscious connected the divine in The Representation of the Self in the American Renaissance (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 14-39.
and not their corporeal bodies. In fact, physical proximity imperiled their friendship. Here again Emerson evidenced his distrust of the physical body. "Why should we desecrate noble and beautiful souls by intruding on them?" Emerson asked. "Why go to his house, or know his mother and brother and sisters? Why be visited by him at your own? Are these things material to our covenant?" No, they clearly weren't. "You shall not come nearer a man by getting into his house," Emerson concluded; in that house you'd be closer to your friend's body, but not necessarily to his soul. One needed to dismiss the body of the friend in order to see only the soul. "Leave this touching and clawing," Emerson counseled. Instead, "Let him [the friend] be to me a spirit."\(^{37}\)

The best way to know the friend's spirit was to distance yourself from his or her physical body and know your friend through his or her incorporeal words. "[C]onversation," Emerson proposed, "is the practice and consummation of friendship." "[G]reat conversation" was the means by which individuals could accomplish a spiritual communion; it would facilitate the "absolute running of two souls into one." Given that he was an author, lecturer, and former minister, it isn't particularly surprising that Emerson believed that words, particularly the written word, were the best available proxy for the spirit.

To my friend I write a letter, and from him I receive a letter. That seems to you a little. Me it suffices. It is a spiritual gift worthy of him to give and of me to receive. It profanes nobody. In these warm lines the heart will trust itself, as it will not to the tongue, and pour out the prophecy of a godlier existence than all the annals of heroism have yet made good.

\(^{37}\) Emerson, Essays, 212.
The body's "tongue" was not to be trusted as an instrument of spiritual communication. Better were the "lines" of a letter. As signs abstracted from material reality and independent of the body, words were the best means for both conveying one's own spiritual insights and hearing the insights of another.38

Emerson realized that this spiritualized friendship was an ideal all but impossible to realize. "The higher the style we demand of friendship, of course the less easy to establish it with flesh and blood," he concluded, again suggesting an inherent incompatibility between spiritualized relations and bodily reality. "We walk alone in the world. Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables."39 The failure to connect with the souls of others led him back to a celebration of solitude. Despairing that he couldn't realize the kind of friendship his spirituality demanded, he hoped that in solitude he might find some measure of success realizing a self-communion, a connection with his own spirit. As a thinker, Emerson is inextricably linked with American individualism, and rightfully so. In his works he consistently celebrated the potential power of the individual soul, and in own his life he repeatedly distanced himself from friends emotionally.40 But that does not mean that he was unconcerned with reforming society more generally.41 His essay "Friendship" registers both Emerson's passionate longing to

38 Emerson, Essays, 208-209, 213.
39 Emerson, Essays, 215.
41 My ideas about Emerson's engagement with New England society have been influenced by Mary Kupiec Cayton, Emerson's Emergence: Self and Society in the
redeem social relationships and his grudging acceptance that that redemption could and
would not be accomplished in the here and now but in some distant future of greater
spiritual enlightenment. Other northerners shared the same hunger for spiritual
communion but not that resignation. Their frustration at the absence of pure,
spiritualized relationships in their society led them not into a solitary mysticism but
instead spurred them to become activists who labored to transform society. Through their
reform efforts these activists hoped to overcome all alienating differences—most notably
the bodily differences of sex, race, and place—that sustained hierarchies of power and, as
importantly, kept individuals from communing with one another as souls.

To be clear, the point is not to claim for Emerson a central influence upon reform
culture in the antebellum North.42 (Indeed, it would be ahistorical to suggest this;
Emerson's emergence as an influential public intellectual with the publication of his first
major works in the mid 1830s and early 1840s didn't precede but coincided with the
reform efforts considered in this study.) Rather, in Emerson's early work we find a
sustained and clear exploration of a number of interrelated ideas and beliefs that were

42 A thoughtful essay that reconsiders Emerson's relationship to nineteenth-century
reform is Albert J. von Frank, "Mrs. Brackett's Verdict: Magic and Means in
Transcendental Antislavery Work," in Transcendent and Permanent: The Transcendentalist
Movement and Its Contexts, ed. Charles Capper and Conrad Edick Wright, 385-407
(Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1999). Von Frank objects to the argument
made in many major historical studies of the twentieth century that Emerson was
disengaged from reform, taking issue with the definition of reform in those studies. He
argues that in celebrating the need for the individual to be always mindful of the ethics of
his actions Emerson propounded a philosophical position that very much made him a
reformer insofar as that position demanded of his audience a thorough moral
interrogation of issues such as slaveholding. Von Frank's study The Trials of Anthony
Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson's Boston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University
Press, 1998) enlarges this argument.
shared by some of his contemporaries, ideas and beliefs that inspired them to take upon
themselves such monumental tasks as reforming marriage, overcoming racial prejudice,
and ending international war. While Emerson's literary artistry may have been
extraordinary, the beliefs he articulated were not uniquely his own but something he
shared in common with many of his contemporaries. Faith that the essence of a person
resided in the soul rather than the body, that all people were spiritual equals because each
possessed a God-given soul, that any and all alienating social differences could be
dissolved through a communion of souls, that spiritual communion could best be
accomplished through exchange of immaterial words, that physical distance was no
barrier to such communions, and that society could be remade through such spiritual
communions: these are beliefs that Emerson explored in his writings and that the
reformers of this study worked to apply in their political activism.
In 1837, Angelina and Sarah Grimké, daughters of a South Carolina planter turned abolitionist orators, each penned a series of public letters in which they attacked the rigid distinctions that their culture drew between the masculine and the feminine. In Angelina's "Letters to Catherine Beecher" and Sarah's "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes," each sister argued that contemporary sex roles that characterized white men as political and economic actors in the public sphere while relegating white women to the private sphere of the home amounted to a perversion of God's plan. According to Angelina, notions of manhood gave men "a charter for the exercise of tyranny and selfishness, pride and arrogance, lust and brutal violence." Worse yet, ideals of womanhood "robbed woman of essential rights, the right to think and speak and act on all great moral questions [and] the right to fulfil [sic] the great end of her being, as a moral, intellectual and immortal creature." Sarah expressed the same idea: "instead of regarding each other only in the light of immortal creatures," she wrote in the fourth letter of her series, "the mind is fettered by the idea which is early and industriously infused into it, that we must never forget the distinctions between male and female." The sisters called
upon their readers to take up the heroic task of forgetting sex, defying the gender
imperatives of the culture and instead obeying a higher law by viewing both men and
women as spiritual rather than sexed beings. "When human beings are regarded as moral
beings," Angelina asserted, "sex, instead of being enthroned upon the summit,
administering upon rights and responsibilities, sinks into insignificance and nothingness."
In Sarah's words, only when "our intercourse is purified by the forgetfulness of sex"
would men and women recognize and fulfill their true roles in the designs of providence.¹

The Grimkés composed these two series of letters in the middle of a lecturing tour
of New England. In the summer of 1837 the sisters began what was to become a
yearlong tour traveling from town to town advocating the abolitionist cause before
thousands who came to hear them speak. Women's engagement in this kind of public
activism was unprecedented, and the sisters' culturally conservative contemporaries
reacted to it with a mixture of disdain and alarm. In a Pastoral Letter issued by the
General Association of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts (which Sarah
responded to in her later letters) and Catherine Beecher's Essay on Slavery and Abolition,
With Reference to the Duty of American Females (which prompted Angelina's series),
the Congregationalist clergy and Beecher (herself a daughter of a famed
Congregationalist minister, Lyman Beecher) each claimed that a rigid, social hierarchy

¹ Sarah Grimké, "Social Intercourse of the Sexes," Liberator, 12 January 1838 (Sarah
Grimké's letters first appeared in the New England Spectator in 1837; all quotations in
this chapter are from a reprinting of the series in the Liberator); [Angelina Grimké],
Letters to Catherine E. Beecher in reply to An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism,
addressed to A.E. Grimke (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 116 (Angelina Grimké's letters
first appeared in the Emancipator and the Liberator in 1837 before being collected and
published, in slightly revised form, as a tract in 1838).
that placed men above women was part of the divine order. In their responses to these attacks, as many historians have explored, the Grimkés forcefully asserted women's right and sacred duty to exercise a political voice, to transgress the boundaries of woman's sphere and publicly advocate causes that they believe were morally right.

Yet in their letters the sisters' criticism was not limited to women's exclusion from public politics. Equally radical were their critiques of men's and women's private relationships. Hyperbolic notions of gender perverted the most intimate of relationships, the sisters argued, preventing women from being godly wives and mothers. Viewing her as a sexed being rather than as "an intelligent and heaven-born creature," a husband expected his wife to satisfy his sensuous appetites rather than attend to his spiritual state. "By flattery, by an appeal to her passions," Sarah contended, "he seeks to gain access to her heart; and when he has gained her affections, he uses her as an instrument of his

2 In the Pastoral Letter, the Congregationalist clergy urged congregations not to open their churches for the sisters to use during their controversial speaking tour. Given that "[d]eference and subordination are essential to the happiness of society," these church leaders contended, women activists like the Grimkés were "unnatural" and invited "degeneracy and ruin" by assuming "the place and tone of a man as a public reformer" ("Pastoral Letter of the General Association of Massachusetts," American Rhetorical Movements to 1900, http://www.wfu.edu/~zulick/340/pastoralletter.html (accessed 22 Oct. 2003). In her Essay, Beecher argued that politics was not the appropriate sphere of women. "In this arrangement of the duties of life, Heaven has appointed to one sex the superior, and to the other the subordinate station," Beecher claimed. "It is therefore as much for the dignity as it is for the interest of females, in all respects to conform to the duties of this relation. And it is as much a duty as it is for the child to fulfil similar relations to parents, or subjects to rulers" (Catharine E. Beecher, An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism. With Reference to the Duty of American Females [Philadelphia, Pa.: Henry Perkins, 1837], 99).

pleasure—the minister of his temporal comfort." "[I]nstead of being a help meet to man, in the highest, noblest sense of the term, as a companion, a co-worker, an equal," Angelina similarly argued, "she has been a mere appendage of his being, an instrument of his convenience and pleasure, the pretty toy with which he wiled [sic] away his leisure moments, or the pet animal whom he humored into playfulness and submission." In their use of the term "pleasure," both of the sisters were alluding to the linkage between sexuality and domination in abolitionist ideology. Not only was sex tainted in its association with a hedonistic South where white planters exercised an appalling power over the bodies of black female slaves, sex was more generally suspect because it led a husband to treat his wife as a slaveholder treated his slave: as an object—"an instrument," a "pretty toy," a "pet animal"—that he controlled and used for his sensual satisfaction rather than regarding her as a spiritual companion. Only by jettisoning the "idea of her being a female," Sarah argued, would a wife be the spiritual partner God had intended her to be in making marriage a sacrament; only then would she truly be a "help-meet"—"a helper like unto himself."4

Theodore Dwight Weld no doubt had the Grimké sisters' arguments about men's and women's private relationships firmly in mind when he began to court Angelina in February 1838.5 One suspects that he was particularly taken by Sarah's promptings about "the forgetfulness of sex," for from his first love letter to Angelina, Weld began a


5 Weld and Angelina were roughly the same age, Sarah significantly older. In February 1838, Weld was 34, Angelina 32, and Sarah 45.
protracted, painstaking effort to "forget sex" in their romance. Weld had met the Grimké sisters at the 1836 agents' convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), a three-week-long intensive training convention led by Weld to prepare field workers to tour the northern states promoting abolitionism. The Grimkés were the only women to attend the convention and the first female agents of the society. In 1837 they had begun their historic speaking tour of New England, which culminated with their appearances before the Massachusetts Legislature in February 1838, the first occasions where women officially addressed a legislative body in the United States. While the sisters were lecturing, Weld too labored for the abolitionist cause. Having been an influential organizer and orator for many years, following the agents' convention Weld assumed a less visible though still significant role in abolitionism as an editor at the headquarters of the AASS in New York. While there, Weld served as the sisters' primary contact with the AASS and carried on an active, lively correspondence with the sisters. The letters Weld and the Grimkés exchanged strengthened and deepened the bonds of affection they had begun to forge with each other during the agents' convention.

On February 8, 1838, less than two weeks before Angelina's first address to the Massachusetts legislature, Weld wrote Angelina a letter, carefully marked as "Private", in

6 It should be noted while the sisters functioned as and believed themselves to be considered agents, when the sisters sought to clarify their official relationship with the AASS in the midst of their controversial speaking tour the Executive Committee chose to not label them agents but instead extended to them the nebulous status of "cooperators" (Weld to Sarah and Angelina Grimké, Oct. 1 [Sept. 1], 1837, Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844, ed. Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond [1934; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965], 1: 443).

which he confessed his love for her, declaring that "for a long time, you have had my whole heart." Weld explained that he had battled his feelings for her thinking that Grimké would not consider marrying a man who was not a Friend. Yet in the year that they had known each other his feelings had grown more intense rather than abated. Just as Angelina had justified writing her letter of support for the Garrisonians by explaining that her inner light prompted its composition, Weld appealed to his own indwelling Christ to excuse his declaration of love for Angelina. He thought she might not welcome that declaration, but in making it, he explained, he was following not his own will but God's. "I have taken this step at His bidding whose I am, and whom I serve." While Weld claimed to have no evidence that Angelina returned his feelings, he explained that he felt it "a sacred duty" to confess his love to her.8

Weld agreed with the Grimkés that courtship and marriage were essentially patriarchal institutions as they were commonly practiced in antebellum America. He knew that Angelina could not fully commit to him until she was convinced that theirs would be a singularly uncommon marriage: a feminist marriage, a union of equals. In August 1837 he had urged the sisters to stop speaking explicitly about women's rights, arguing that the resulting controversy would alienate many who otherwise might be won to the cause of the slave. He maintained that his position was one of pragmatism rather than principle. He had no doubt that men and women were morally and spiritually equal; once "Human rights" were properly understood and slavery was abolished surely the "derivative" concept of sexual equality would be readily recognized by all. As evidence of his long-standing belief in sexual equality, he described how in a debating society as a

8 Weld to Grimké, Feb. 8, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2: 533-534.
boy he had argued that a woman was as suited as a man to preach from the pulpit or adjudicate at the bar. He (wrongly) thought that even the Grimkés might find one of his beliefs shocking; he proposed that social conventions should not prevent a woman from proposing marriage to a man. (If he was trying to elicit a declaration of love from Angelina, he failed; while she very much agreed with the general principle, she replied that "I am afraid I am too proud ever to exercise the right.") Grimké had this specific evidence of his radical egalitarian ideas about courtship and marriage when Weld finally confessed his feelings half a year later. She had a deep respect for Weld, knowing his earnest, heartfelt belief in the essential equality of all human beings regardless of superficial differences such as race or sex. Yet if they shared this spiritually inspired ideal, they lacked contemporary examples of egalitarian marriages to emulate. In the letters they exchanged during their three-month courtship, Grimké and Weld worked to develop a conceptual framework of how a feminist marriage—their feminist marriage—might function. Marshaling their formidable skills as social critics, they each crafted complex letters in which they invoked and manipulated a host of richly connotative cultural tropes—particularly tropes of friendship and spirituality—in an effort to make both romantic love and marriage their own, not sites of social hierarchy but instead of spiritual fulfillment and sexual equality.9

In his first love letter to Angelina, Weld described his feelings for her as wholly spiritual in nature. After telling her he loved her, he immediately qualified himself, writing "Not supremely . . . I do love the Lord . . . better than I love you. And it is

because I love him better that I love you as I do." And if he loved God more than he loved her, he also made clear that he loved her ethereal soul rather than her physical body. His passion for her was spiritual rather than sexual. It was "not [that of] a brother nor a Sister spirit but unembodied spirit with none of the associations or incidents of the physical nature." In fact, he claimed that he had been drawn to her emotionally, intellectually, and, above all, spiritually long before he met her in person. Her famous letter to Garrison, Weld explained, had "formed an era in my feelings and a crisis in my history." The soul embodied in that letter intimately touched his own and drew him to its author. "I read it over and over," he told her, "and in the deep consciousness that I should find in the spirit that dictated that letter the searchless power of congenial communings—which I had always been pining for and of which I had never found but one (C. Stuart)—I forgot utterly that you were not of my own sex!"

Explaining the genesis of his love for Grimké, Weld did not precisely follow Sarah's lead and "forget sex." He did not say that he initially forgot which sex Angelina was, but instead said that he forgot that she was not of his own sex: he forgot that she was not a man. He was attracted to her not as a woman but instead as a "spirit," a spirit that he at one point claimed was androgynous ("not a brother nor a Sister spirit") but that he finally sexed male in his rhetoric ("I forgot utterly that you were not of my own sex!").

10 Weld to Grimké, Feb. 8, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2: 533-534. Interestingly, Angelina transcribed much of this portion of Weld's letter into a letter to her friend Jane Smith, including the passage "I forgot utterly that you were not of my own sex! The spirit, the spirit, not a brother, nor a sister spirit, but an unembodied spirit (with none of the associations or incidents of the physical nature)." This passage, she suggested, was evidence of Weld's "character" and "the purity, strength and constancy of his love for me and his religious feeling under which he disclosed it." (Grimké to Jane Smith, Feb. 22, 1838, Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké Weld Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.)
By directing his love toward a disembodied—possibly male—soul, Weld laid claim to the righteous, feminist ideal of love and marriage that the Grimkés had described in their serialized letters: a relationship where the man (in Sarah's words) discarded "the idea of her being a female" and instead saw his beloved as an unsexed equal, one where (in Angelina's words) "sex . . . sinks into insignificance and nothingness." His passion, Weld's words suggested, was not crassly sexual, nor even gendered. Instead, it was of a higher order: disembodied and spiritual. It was like that which a man felt for a spiritual brother, in fact, like that which Weld felt for a particular spiritual brother who he referred to by name: Charles Stuart.

Weld had met Charles Stuart in upstate New York in 1825 when he was 21 years old, and they quickly developed a close friendship. Stuart, Weld's senior by over twenty years, became a second father to him. Stuart was a man of staunch and at times contentious integrity. His solitary habits and disdain for authority had led him into forced retirement from the British Army in 1815; emigrating to Canada in 1817, the deeply religious Stuart had refused ordination by the local bishop because he "believe[d] him to be an unchristian overseer; a secular not a spiritual character." He was finally ordained as a Presbyterian minister after moving to Utica, New York, in 1822 to become principal of a school. Stuart's single-minded devotion to his own principles had often cut him off from close, affectionate relationships. After meeting Weld he worked to cultivate a deeply spiritual and affectionate relationship with his young friend. He helped finance Weld's education, and was one of the influences that eventually drew Weld into abolitionism. Their feelings for one another were intensely passionate and intensely spiritual. "Often my beloved Theodore," Stuart once wrote Weld, "does my soul turn to
you and contemplate you with solemn affection; sometimes it trembles for you." "If you want a father's or a brother's or a friend's assistance," he wrote on another occasion, "won't your heart always tell you in cheerful confidence of love, that as God may preserve & endow me, you have a father & a brother & a friend in C. Stuart."11

In his love letters to Grimké, Weld repeatedly wrote ardent passages about his friendship with Stuart. "His feelings toward me have always amazed confounded humbled and overwhelmed me" Weld wrote once. "It seems to me as tho' my heart would have broke from utter desolation years ago if it had not had the brother heart of Charles Stuart." Weld's relationship with Stuart had been the most intimate of his life, and he initially conceptualized and articulated his feelings for Grimké in references to Stuart. Yet Stuart was more than an understandable emotional referent for Weld as he made the transition from homosocial friendships into heterosexual marriage. Writing about his intensely loving friendship with Stuart was a way Weld could introduce a passion that was spiritual and not sexual into his love letters to Grimké, passion that he could then rhetorically redirect towards Grimké. "His hold upon my heart went to the foundations of my nature," Weld told Grimké of Stuart, "but not the foundations of my whole nature. Many a time I have wept on his neck from very love to him and yet at those very times I have felt in my inmost soul that there remained other intense necessities of my compound human nature untouched by the ministrations of his love and communion and panting for congenial affiliation. Those necessities you alone have reached and filled." If, as historian Anthony Rotundo suggests, passionate homosocial

friendships between young men served as a training ground for marriage in the antebellum North, Weld also quite purposefully played up his intimacy with Stuart in his love letters to Grimké for his own ends. Writing passages about Stuart served a rhetorical and political function in his letters to Grimké, helping him to divorce his attraction to her from issues of sex and gender. Juxtaposed passages about Stuart and Grimké suggested that Weld's passion for her was not in any way sexual. Instead it was spiritual, similar to but even greater than that he felt for his male friend Charles Stuart.¹²

As several historians have argued, nineteenth-century same-sex friendships, particularly friendships between women, were often extremely close and physically affectionate. These relationships were generally not considered by either the participants or outside observers as problematically homoerotic. Instead, they were seen as normal and often idealized as virtuous examples of platonic love. Like Weld, Grimké had intense homosocial friendships, particularly with her sister and a fellow Quaker named Jane Smith. In their courtship letters, references to these specific friendships enabled Weld and Grimké to convey to one another a sense of their capacities for love and intimacy. When Grimké wrote Weld shortly before their engagement that "Jane Smith ... was my Charles Stuart" she communicated her appreciation of Weld's bond with Stuart. More than that, her phrase "Jane Smith ... was my Charles Stuart" made "Charles Stuart" into a metaphoric referent, one which evoked a host of associations—love, emotional

support, selflessness—that were linked to the concept of same-sex friendship in Victorian culture.\(^\text{13}\)

Both Weld and Grimké wanted their relationship to evidence these cherished characteristics of same-sex friendship. By invoking their homosocial friendships in their letters, particularly Weld's deeply spiritual friendship with Stuart, they expressed their mutual desire to have a relationship that was egalitarian, essentially sacred, and only incidentally sexual. Yet if their relationship was similar to their homosocial friendships, Angelina struggled to understand why Weld's and her relationship emotionally and spiritually superseded those intimate friendships. "[W]hy does not the love of my own dear sister and of my faithful Jane satisfy, if as a human being I must have human love?" she asked Weld. "Why do I feel in my inmost soul that you, you only, can fill up the deep void that is there?" Romantic love had become more central in the emotional lives of Weld's and Grimké's generation than it had been for their grandparents living in the eighteenth century. Many coming of age in Jacksonian and antebellum America came to define their very identity in reference to their romantic relationship and considered all other relationships insignificant compared to what they had with their partner. Some, Weld and Grimké included, even feared that the intensity of their feelings for their beloved amounted to a form of idolatry and a betrayal of God. In asking Weld why the

love of her sister and friend did not suffice, Grimké was, in part, grappling with the increased significance of romantic love in her culture. Yet, she was also expressing her concerns that their love might not be transcendentally spiritual, that there might be a sinful, impure component to it. "I think I can say with you," she wrote Weld, slightly misquoting a passage from his first love letter,

"it is the spirit, the spirit, not a brother spirit, or a sister spirit but a disim bodied spirit, with none of the associations or incidents of the physical nature, which moves upon me with overcoming power." But if this is so, why do I so anxiously desire to hear from you, to see you? O! I am distressed that I should feel as I do. Am I sinning . . . [?] The conflict is great, for I want to know where I am, I want to be purified.

Grimké's ideal was that which Weld had described in his first love letter—a romance that was "disim bodied" and spiritual—so much so that she feared that her desire just to physically see her fiancé might be indicative that there was something sinful about the way they felt about one another.14

14 Grimké to Weld, Feb. 17, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:554. This same letter is a representative example of the fear Weld and Grimké, particularly Grimké, evidenced that their passion for one another amounted to a form of religious idolatry. Immediately before stating her questions about why her sister's and Jane Smith's love did not wholly suffice, Grimké asked Weld "Why my Savior and my God is not enough to satisfy me. Am I sinning, am I ungrateful, am I an IDOLATOR?" (2:553-554). Less than a week later, she asked Weld to try to provide a reassuring answer "why I find myself involuntarily applying to you the language which hitherto I had applied to my blessed Master, for instance 'I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine', etc. I shall look anxiously for a letter tomorrow, for you promised to make some suggestions on my IDOLATRY—at least I fear it is" (Grimké to Weld, Feb. 22, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:569). Historian Karen Lystra's work suggests that Weld's and Grimké's concerns were by no means unusual. In Victorian America, Lystra argues, "the personhood of the loved one, by the 1830s, had become a powerful rival to God as the individual's central symbol of ultimate significance. More and more middle-class
Grimké urged Weld to confront these concerns with her. Given that he repeatedly described his intense love and affection for Stuart in his letters to her, Grimké wanted to know why that deeply loving, deeply spiritual relationship did not wholly satisfy Weld, why she was coming to supersede Stuart in Weld's heart and soul. Weld's passionate extolments of Charles Stuart's religious character were not so different from the way he expressed his love of Grimké to Grimké. Weld told Grimké that he felt her to be "a constituent half of my own being somehow mysteriously sundered from me," when months earlier he had told Grimké that Stuart's "absence almost seems like the subtraction of a portion of my own being." If Weld's love for Grimké and his love for Stuart were both spiritual in nature, what made them categorically different from one another? This question troubled Grimké, and she asked Weld "how it is that Charles Stuart could not fill up the dark chasm of your heart, for even YOU must and DO see that he is far purer than I am." Weld's efforts to desexualize their relationship by describing their love in exclusively spiritual terms and comparing his attraction to his fiancé to his feelings for his spiritual brother drove Grimké to ask Weld for an explanation "why those of our own sex cannot fill the void in human hearts."15

Weld found Angelina's a provocative question, one that he "marvelled" he had never before considered. Prefacing his response with the claim that he possessed no more knowledge of the issue than "a little simple child" and that he would "sit down at individuals—propelled by romantic love—were worshipping in the new temple of individual selfhood" (Lystra, Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America [New York: Oxford University Press, 1989], 242).

any bodys feet and receive most gratefully the least crumb of true teaching on the subject," he sent Angelina six carefully enumerated explanations of why he believed God had designed the sacrament marriage as a union of the two sexes.16

First, Weld proposed that men and women were in some indefinable, unknown way essentially different from one another, that God had created them so in order that marriage would be a holy sacrament where they could minister to one another. "[H]uman nature of both sexes," he suggested to Grimké, "feels in itself a profound want to which, either the love of its own sex or for its own sex does not minister." The soul would only find satisfaction in union with another of the opposite sex. This argument might be seen as something of a contradiction, for less than a month earlier he had said that he had first felt a compelling spiritual attraction to her forgetting that she was "not of [his] own sex." If he had not entirely forgotten sex in that earlier letter, he went to great lengths to forget it now. Women and men, he claimed, were spiritually drawn to one another because of God-given difference, but, he insisted (in his third enumerated point), they were never consciously aware of those differences. To those in love, "the difference of sex is not a matter of consciousness, . . . it does not mingle with its associations of ideas as a subject of thought." In fact, to the lover any awareness of sexual difference was anathema; it was "an unwelcome intruder, of which the mind instinctively and instantly rids itself, feeling it to be a disturbing force, a felt non conductor, intercepting

16 Weld to Grimké, Mar. 1, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:581.
the progress of the soul toward the spirit that draws it and a veil dimming its vision of the loved one."17

Weld accepted an idea that both his religious tradition and culture considered commonsensical: that the sacred and civic union of marriage was composed of one man and one woman. At the same time he sincerely wished to build a radically egalitarian relationship with the feminist pioneer he was courting by following her sister Sarah's advice by discarding the "idea of her being a female." If their relationship was (to use a twentieth-century term) heterosexual, neither Weld nor Grimké would have been entirely comfortable with either the "hetero" or the "sexual" aspect of that description. Beyond any religious concerns about undue focus on sex being a sin, for these two abolitionists sexuality was ideologically linked with patriarchal domination. Logically, there was no way to account for the "hetero" nature of marriage without appealing to either sexual difference or gender conventions, thus accepting the "idea of her being a female." Weld's response to this predicament was clever if transparently contrived. God had made men and women different, he argued, but, he repeatedly insisted in increasingly tortured prose, he did not himself consciously think of Angelina as either a sexed or a gendered being. While "deep, chaste and intense love" was built upon "the constitutional element of sex[,]... that element... is really an auxiliary to the higher affections, ... an insensible influence pouring itself thro channels of which the mind is not aware and producing effects, the cause of which the mind has not the least consciousness of." "In a word my dearest," Weld explained to Grimké, "I suppose you and I feel for each other more absorbing affinities than tho' we were of the same sex; and we feel them not BECAUSE

17 Weld to Grimké, Mar. 1, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:581-582.
we are of different sexes, but from the fact that we are—from the law of our nature sublimely assigned by God as a reason for creating a difference of sex." Having, as best he could, addressed the political issues raised by Angelina's questions, Weld turned to their emotional significance, reassuring Grimké that she eclipsed all others, even Charles Stuart, in his heart. "I feel [my heart] turning from father and mother and brothers and only sister and from C Stuart dear dear as they are to me," Weld wrote, "and reaching out in very agony after you, and cleaving to you, feeling that we are no more twain but one flesh. Do you ask, is not this idolatry?" Weld assured Grimké that he was sure it was not, sensing as never before "Divine Approval continually smiling down upon the exercise of my emotions."18

Weld's explanations why marriage was a more spiritually significant relationship than same-sex friendships did not amount to a particularly persuasive answer to her questions. Grimké knew it, telling Weld again that "[t]his love of the sexes utterly confounds me." But if his long explanation was not totally persuasive in terms of its logic, it was politically attractive enough for Grimké to echo and reaffirm:

Yes, true love does not, cannot originate in differences of sex, and this idea is a disturbing force which the mind instinctively repels, for it is the seeking of the spirit after spiritual communion, the filling up of itself in love, the union of heart and mind and soul. This is marriage. In the sight of God we are married, even tho' we should never see each other face to face; from the moment you were assured that I loved you, we became one.

18 Weld to Grimké, Mar. 1, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:582-583.
Grimké had long feared that marriage was "sinful," because far too often "[i]nstead of the higher, nobler sentiments being first aroused, and leading on the lower passions captive to their will, the latter seemed to be lords over the former." If Weld's response left the heterosexual nature of marriage a divine mystery, it provided abundant evidence that he too wanted a marriage of equality and that he also believed that sex was too often a site of male domination in marriage rather than an act between equals. "I am convinced that men in general, the vast majority," Grimké wrote, "believe most seriously that women were made to gratify their animal appetites, expressly to minister to their pleasure—yea christian men too. My soul abhors such a base letting down of the high dignity of my nature as a woman. How I have feared the possibility of ever being married to one who regarded this as the end—the great design of marriage." Whatever its shortcomings, Weld's thoughts on the matter suggested that he shared these same concerns and loathed the idea of exercising power—sexual or otherwise—over her.19

Though Weld and Grimké often went to great lengths to divorce their romance from issues of sexuality (leading historian Ronald G. Walters to characterize their courtship as "a veritable orgy of restraint"), Weld's attraction to Grimké—or more precisely, Weld's account of his attraction to Grimké—was not always devoid of erotic charge. While often restrained and reasoned, Weld's love letters at times evidenced an almost sophomoric passion. "Unnatural and shocking as it seems," he wrote Grimké in early March, "I cannot help saying that ever since that moment which [you] told me you were mine, to think of you is pain to read your letters is pain to write you is pain—since I began this letter I have travailed with pain and anguish. As I do whenever I write or

19 Grimké to Weld, Mar. 15, 1838, Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké papers; Grimké to Weld, Mar. 4, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:587-588.
think of you or read your letters—again and again I am forced to stop and press my head and aching heart and walk my room with suppressed breath—or utter it only in stifled groanings." During their three-month courtship Grimké and Weld remained apart—she lecturing in Massachusetts and he at the American Anti-Slavery Society office in New York—except for one brief visit in late March. Shortly after their rendezvous, Weld wrote Grimké to explain some unusual behavior: "You know that very frequently I would leave you very suddenly when I had been clasping you to my bosom and not come back into the room again for some minutes." Weld, then in his mid thirties, had almost certainly had no personal sexual experience with women—he in fact had vowed not to marry until slavery was abolished—and he was understandably unprepared to handle the sexual desire that he experienced during his meeting with Grimké. "I kept an extinguisher on my spirit all the time I was with you," Weld explained in a long passage filled with fluid, erotic imagery.

At those times and at many others my feelings had such a masterless intensity it seemed as tho' I could not live, as though my very being . . . were all rushing as by rapid instantaneous absorption into yours. Oh that was a weary week to me . . . with holding in my heart (or rather with the impossibility of giving vent) and soul and mind and strength all struggling for transfusion into your own spirit. Yes, solecism as it is in words, in reality it is simple fact that though it was a week of unutterable bliss to me yet its very unutterableness and incommunicableness were agony as though it were a mighty quickening spirit, every instant filling my
being with new created life which struggled with throes and
spasms for breath—or pouring in with every instant fresh tides of
power which heaved and tossed on high only to fall back upon
themselves weary and discomfited, unable to pour all abroad their
ever swelling but still barricaded floods . . . . Though seeing you
and pressing you to my heart did minister to my spirit an element
that assuaged the lacerating violence of those emotions that filled
me before and poured a mellowing tide all over me, yet it was so
deep it was well nigh a drowning joy—and the warm wave that
bathed my swollen heart and lulled it throbblings and stilled its
moans did whelm it also in its stifling depths . . . . That while I
saw you and heard you and pressed you to my heart I struggled
with an oppressive sense of unutterable emotion that could only
vent itself in groanings, and that it was only by leaving you that my
spirit found sweet calm.

In this metonym-laden passage, Weld described his erect phallus as a "spirit" and a
"heart" that he kept an "extinguisher" on though he longed to "vent" and transfuse his
"very being" into her "spirit." He hinted at the procreative potential of the union he
desired in his reference to the "mighty quickening spirit" that "fill[ed]" his "being with
new created life which struggled with throes and spasms for breath." Despite his earlier
claim that he was attracted to her as an "unimbodied spirit with none of the associations
or incidents of the physical nature," he now felt a visceral, physical attraction to her.

Earlier he had suggested that the love he felt for her was disembodied, incorporeal. He
said he loved her long before meeting her, his feelings having been born of her letter that had appeared in the *Liberator*. Now mere words would no longer do: his intense attraction was now "unutterable" and "incommunicable," something that was of the body rather than the mind. While Weld suggested that he had kept his desire in check during their visit, referring to "the impossibility of giving vent," his "ever swelling but still barricaded floods," and the "sweet calm" his "spirit found" upon leaving the room, his language also suggests that they engaged in some variety of outercourse that resulted in an orgasm for Weld; as a result of "pressing you to my heart" (again, a metonym for his erect penis) a "warm wave . . . bathed my swelling heart and lulled it throbblings and stilled its moans" and "poured a mellowing tide all over me."\(^{20}\)

In Weld's mind, and one suspects in those of other antebellum evangelicals, sexual passion was closely linked to spiritual passion. Living in a pre-Freudian world, Weld did not conceptualize sexuality as a distinct component of his identity analogous to his gendered identity as a man. Instead, sexual desire and behavior were inextricably connected with his spiritual and moral identity. This coupling of sexuality and spirituality, in part, accounts for Weld's almost misleading use of an extended spiritual metaphor to describe his sexual desire and behavior to Grimke. Yet the fact that he felt it necessary to account for his behavior, on the one hand, and that he crafted such an intricately metaphoric passage, on the other, suggests that a tension existed within this coupling of sexuality and spirituality and that Weld suffered some guilt about what had happened between Angelina and himself. From the beginning of their engagement he

had been anxious about meeting her, fearing that he lacked "the mastery of my spirit and power to quell its wildest insurrection—the pride of self control has been one of my most frequent besetments—but your letter has taught me that I am a novice in one department of self restraint." While it is not clear in this passage if "one department" refers to sexual desire, language about mastering his "spirit" anticipates the diction of his later letter, and here "spirit" might refer to intense desire if not specifically to an erection. Weld may have felt that whatever had happened between them was potentially immoral, not an expression of their spiritual connectedness but instead of gross desires. Regardless of his own feelings about the matter, he was concerned that in retrospect Angelina might take their encounter as evidence that she had been right all along in her fears that marriage was "sinful" and that men were first and foremost interested in satisfying their "animal appetites." Anxious about this, Weld labored in his letter to shape their encounter as a spiritual event. Again attempting to "forget sex," in his letter Weld worked to submerge—to baptize—the sexual in the sacred.21

No doubt to Weld's relief, Grimké did not feel guilt or shame, but only sympathy for Weld's emotional and physical discomfort, writing him "Thou sayest, thou kept an extinguisher on thy spirit whilst thou wast at Brookline. I knew it, I felt it, and it grieved me because thou wouldst leave me when I tho't it would have been an inexpressible relief

21 Weld to Grimké, Feb. 16, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:556. Further evidence of Weld's anxieties about sexuality would be seen five years later in his efforts to break his three-year-old son Charles of the "filthy and most dangerous habit" of masturbation. (Weld quoted in Abzug, Passionate Liberator, 236). For another analysis of the connections between spirituality, sexuality, and romance among American Victorians, see Lystra, Searching the Heart, 249, and for another close reading of a mid-century correspondence where carnal desire was partially disguised by veiled, metaphorical language see Karen V. Hansen, "No Kisses Is Like Yours: An Erotic Friendship between Two African-American Women during the Mid-Nineteenth Century," Gender & History 7 (August 1995): 153-182.
to thy full heart to have unburdened itself." Responding in kind to Weld's elusive yet explicit love letter, Grimké wrote of the desires of her own "spirit," telling him "I never could get near enough to thee. If my being could have been absorbed into thine, O then I might have found rest and ease to my soul, but as it was, my soul was reaching and longing after what it seemed impossible for me to grasp—but what is the use of writing, WRITING these things? They can only be felt in the secret chambers of ones OWN heart. Thou knowest all ALL about what I mean: thou only canst know." With her assertion that Weld knew what she meant, Grimké invited Weld to interpret her words with his own erotic metonyms in mind. Grimké assured Weld that she felt an intense desire for him too, "reaching and longing" for something (an evocative "it" that lacks a clear referent, likely an orgasm of her own, though perhaps simultaneously a reference to his erect penis) that she could not "grasp." Echoing his claim, she too suggested that words were not enough, that there was no "use [in] writing, WRITING these things."

Grimké had believed that sex in a patriarchal culture was usually a sensual pleasure for the man alone. Now, she felt between a man and a woman who considered each other equals it might be a spiritual and physical pleasure for both. This discovery, no doubt, represented for her a psychological emancipation, liberating her from the limitations she had thought America's patriarchal culture universally imposed upon female sexuality. In their epistolary exchange, Weld and Grimké not only unsettled the association of sex with domination, opening up the conceptual possibility of a sexual relationship that was both sacral and egalitarian; their suggestive letters were also acts of foreplay that heightened the spiritually-steeped erotic charge between them. (Take, for example, the building, desperate urgency of Grimké's question "what is the use of writing, WRITING these
Following their rendezvous a shared physical attraction to one another was occasionally acknowledged in an unashamed, at times even playful, manner, in their letters to one another. For instance, Grimké wrote Weld of "the weary longing of my hungering and thirsting spirit" that she suspected would surprise a friend of hers who thought her love for Weld "truly Platonic." Yet, as this passage indicates, if they were increasingly comfortable with sexual desire, that desire was still expressed in terms of "spirit."  

In Grimké's and Weld's courtship letters sexual and spiritual passion were conflated: sexuality was spiritualized, and spirit was often sexualized. Seeking a radically egalitarian relationship based on Christian love, both of them had invoked cultural tropes of friendship and spirituality in their efforts to "forget sex" and depict their romance as a transcendent experience and a sacred duty. In Weld's efforts to accomplish this, he initially repeatedly referenced his relationship with Stuart, making his friend into a rich rhetorical figure—"Charles Stuart"—that could serve as a useful surrogate for Grimké in Weld's love letters. Resisting the sexual hierarchy of nineteenth-century courtship and marriage, Weld employed "Charles Stuart" rhetorically to desex Grimké, at moments even imaginatively remaking her into a man. Weld's conflation of "Stuart" and Grimké—and of sexuality and spirituality—enabled him to subtly suggest that his marriage with Grimké would evidence the equality of nineteenth-century homosocial friendships rather than the power hierarchy characteristic of marriage.

In nineteenth-century English literature, Eve Sedgwick has argued, erotic triangles involving two men and a woman functioned to produce and affirm the

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22 Grimké to Weld, Apr. 29, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:647; Grimké to Weld, May 2, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:653.

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patriarchal union of the two male participants. The two men in these triangles, Sedgwick suggests, objectified the woman and competed with one another for her as they would for a prize. Yet it was not the relationship with the woman that they valued, but instead the competitive one with their male rival. Ultimately, the woman was not won but dismissed by both; in the process the primacy of the male homosocial bond was cemented. The triangular relationship between Weld, Grimké, and Stuart had a very different political resonance than the fictional relationships analyzed by Sedgwick. In their erotic triangle the woman was neither objectified nor dismissed. Instead, it was the man Charles Stuart who was made into the rhetorical figure "Charles Stuart." Fearing that marriage was a fundamentally despotic, patriarchal institution, both Weld and Grimké self-consciously invoked deeply affectionate, loving homosocial friendships as models for their own heterosexual relationship.\(^{23}\)

Other scholars besides Sedgwick have emphasized the centrality of rivalry and inequality to conceptions of manhood in the nineteenth century. Dana Nelson, for instance, has recently argued that one pervasive nineteenth-century American ideology of manhood, which she labels "national manhood," seduced white men away from local attachments toward an abstract ideal of a fraternity of citizens. She suggests that this ideal, on the one hand, reconciled these men to the U.S.'s burgeoning capitalist marketplace and thus to class inequalities and, on the other hand, foreclosed the possibility of fulfilling, close emotional bonds between men. Weld's close relationship with Stuart—along with other friendships between male abolitionists that have been explored by historians John Stauffer, Donald Yacovone, Chris Dixon, Frederick J. Blue, \(^{23}\)Sedgwick, Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
and Lawrence J. Friedman—calls into question the totalizing force of the gender
imperatives Nelson analyzes. The bonds between abolitionist men were cooperative
rather than competitive, affectionate rather than distant. While these friendships were
characterized by a conception of manhood different than Nelson's notion of "national
manhood," these homosocial relationships, Weld's and Stuart's among them, together
provide evidence that supports the link Nelson draws between male friendship and
democratic politics (in Nelson's account it is local engagements that hold the promise of
nurturing egalitarian social practices). In The Black Hearts of Men, for example, Stauffer
argues that deep affection enabled four abolitionist contemporaries of Weld's and
Grimké's—two black and two white—heroically, if only briefly, to overcome racial
prejudice, consider each other friends, and collaborate together as political allies.24

While the work of these historians suggests that male friendship could promote
equality between men, even (albeit very infrequently) between men of different races,
Weld's and Grimké's recurring use of "Charles Stuart" in their courtship letters suggests
another facet of the political import of male friendship in nineteenth-century culture.
Male friendship could be more than a democratizing force among men; it could also serve

analysis of manhood that emphasizes rivalry, see David Leverenz, Manhood and the
friendships between male abolitionists include John Stauffer, The Black Hearts of Men:
Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race (Cambridge, MA: Harvard
University Press, 2002); Donald Yacavone, "Abolitionists and the 'Language of Fraternal
Love'; Chris Dixon, Perfecting the Family, 157-202; Frederick J. Blue, "The Poet and
the Reformer: Longfellow, Sumner, and the Bonds of Male Friendship, 1837-1874,"
Journal of the Early Republic 15 (Summer 1995): 273-297; and Lawrence J. Friedman,
Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1870 (New
York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
as a model for a new relationship between men and women. More than a social practice, it was additionally an abstract, radical political ideal.

Beyond suggesting the exemplary potential of male homosocial friendships for heterosocial relationships, that Weld and Grimké continually recurred to the figure of Stuart in their epistles both challenges and complicates our understanding of the relationship between sentiment and sex in nineteenth-century America. While Grimké had referred to her same-sex relationships with her sister and Jane Smith in her letters to Weld, the friendship between the two men proved to be a more powerful model for the love and affection they wanted to share in their own relationship than any of Grimké's relationships with women. If in her work Grimké struggled to assume some of the political privileges that were reserved for men, in courting Grimké Weld found a reason to lay claim to the realm of sentiment and affect that were conventionally associated much more with women than with men in nineteenth-century America. Weld's male world of love and ritual more than rivaled Grimké's female world as an exemplary model of love and affection.²⁵

Language acts, specifically the deployment of tropes of friendship and spirituality, were the means that Weld and Grimké used to imagine an egalitarian marriage. Grimké, Weld, and others in their community of reformers in the 1830s fought against many entrenched institutions and customs: slavery, patriarchal power, drinking. Yet the abolition of these sins amounted to only half of their agenda. They aimed not just to

²⁵ The phrase "male world of love and ritual" is of course an allusion to Caroll Smith-Rosenberg's now classic essay "The Female World of Love and Ritual." For other works on the relationship between sentiment, sex, marriage, and reform, see Lystra, Searching the Heart, Dixon, Perfecting the Family, and Anya Jabour, "The Language of Love." in A Shared Experience.
deconstruct a sinful society, but reconstruct a godly society on the foundations of spiritualized friendships. Beyond suggesting the centrality of spirit and friendship in these two reformers' political imaginations, Weld's and Grimké's courtship reveals the ideological plasticity of spirit politics. Weld initially used the term "spirit" as a synecdoche for Grimké, identifying her unsexed soul as the true her and as the object of his love and devotion, ridding her of her problematically sexed body and gendered identity. That effort at disembodiment proved wanting because it failed to privilege heterosexual marriage over homosocial friendship, forcing Weld and Grimké to change their political and rhetorical tactics, accommodating rather than denying heterosexual desire. Importantly, that failure did not lead them to accord "spirit" anything less than a central role in their romantic negotiations. "Spirit" remained instrumental as a term in their letters and as a conceptual foundation of their relationship. But instead of signifying disembodiment, they gave "spirit" a very bodily meaning. In Weld's letter it became an evasive metaphor for his phallus, enabling him to imaginatively transform a possibly carnal event into a sacred one by overlaying their physical relationship with metaphysical meaning. Convinced that sex too often proved to be an instrument of male power in marriages, whatever precisely happened between them during their visit in late March provided them the opportunity to separate their developing physical relationship from any associations with patriarchal domination and instead invest sexuality with spiritual significance. Writing about this experience was not a descriptive act of reproduction, but rather a creative act of reformulation. Through the use of the figurative language of spirit they reengineered their understandings of a particular experience, making that sexual encounter into a sacred act that they shared in and enjoyed as equals. The efforts of Weld
and Grimké to "forget sex" amounted to an assault upon the practices and conventions of romance and sexuality in nineteenth-century courtship and marriage that was every bit as radical as their antislavery work in the public sphere.26

Weld and Grimké's effort to apply friendship politics resulted in some successes. Using their homosocial friendships as models, they had negotiated a set of shared guiding values that they hoped would help them have an egalitarian marriage. They also had unsettled the connection between sex and domination and supplied sex with a host of positive spiritual associations. Admittedly, the immediate scope of these accomplishments was limited to their own relationship, and modeling their relationship on friendship did nothing by itself to change the root legal and economic structures that accorded husbands power over their wives by providing them vastly more control over property and opportunities in the marketplace. Yet insofar as Weld and Grimké's relationship indicated that the gender and sexual conventions that most in their society considered both natural and immutable were actually cultural and plastic, their courtship functioned as a journey of exploration, mapping out the unknown possibilities for men's and women's private relationships. While following their marriage both Weld and Grimké took much less active roles in abolitionist politics, they had come to see the building of an egalitarian marriage as perhaps an even more important task. Among all sinful social practices and institutions, Weld proposed that "marriage and the relations of husband and wife are perhaps . . . the most horrible perversions of all; and they must be redeemed from these perversions." Their love for one another, he speculated, might have

26 My ideas on the reshaping of the perceptions of particular social experiences through language have been particularly influenced by Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," Critical Inquiry 17 (Summer 1991): 773-797.
been providentially calculated to affect such a redemption; "who knoweth," Weld asked Grimké, "but God has brought us into this state for such a time [of crisis and redemption] as this?" Marriage would be the ultimate test of their spirit politics to determine whether they could successfully "reduce to practice what [we] have long and perhaps pertinaciously [sic] contended for in theory," using friendship and spirit to transform a conventionally hierarchical relationship into one of equality.  

On May 14, 1838, Weld and Grimké were wed in a simple ceremony in the house of another sister of Angelina’s, Anna R. Frost, in Philadelphia. Following Quaker traditions, a minister did not officiate at the ceremony; instead Weld and Grimké addressed unrehearsed, unplanned vows to one another. Describing these vows to friend and fellow abolitionist Elizabeth Pease, Sarah Grimké reported that Weld "abjured all authority, all government, save the influence which love would give to them over each other as moral and immortal beings." No doubt Sarah felt pleased that in her sister’s and Weld's relationship her vision of the "forgetfulness of sex" found some realization.  

27 Weld to Grimké, Apr. 15, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:637-638.
28 Grimké to Pease, May 20?, 1838, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 2:678.
CHAPTER THREE
"OUR FRIENDS HINDER OUR IMPROVEMENT":
SOULS, RACE, AND ABOLITIONISM'S POLITICS OF PATHOS

Writing her close friend Jane Smith in the spring of 1837, Angelina Grimké commended the man who she would come to love and marry for his capacity to extend easily the hand of friendship to those unlike himself. In her letter, Grimké told Smith of Theodore Dwight Weld's warmth and courtesy in the home of an impoverished young woman. "I hav[e] seen him shine in the Convention & in the refined circle," Grimké wrote of Weld, "but never did I admire him so much; his perfect ease at this fireside of poverty show[e]d that he was accustomed to be the friend and companion of the poor of this world." While this young woman may have been white, from this incident Grimké deduced a lesson about how race relations in the U.S. could be redeemed: whites needed to befriend African Americans. For Grimké an idealized, spiritualized friendship was not just central to the way she imagined transformed and purified relations between the sexes. She hoped that America's racial and class hierarchies could also be leveled through the practice of friendship. "[I]t is our duty to visit the poor, white & colord just in this way, & to receive them at our house according to the command of Jesus," Grimké told Smith. Grimké emphasized that this friendship could not be an act of charity dispensed to social
inferiors. Instead it had to be a spiritual act of communion that took as its model Christ's love of mankind:

To visit them as the recipients of our bounty is quite a different thing from going among them as our equals.... [Fellow abolitionist] Joshua Leavitt made an admirable remark to me sometime since, it was this, 'if we would save a people we must make ourselves one with them.' This was just what Jesus did, he took not on him the nature of Angels, for then he would hav[e] been superior to us & incapable of entering into sympathy with our condition, but he took on him the coat of Abraham, 'for our sake he became poor that we might be rich.' Here was noble self devotion, an example [for] us to follow! This is what many Abolitionists hav[e] done, hence the influence they hav[e] acquired over our color[ ]brethren & sisters. Let us dear Jane make ourselv[es] one with this injured class & seek their peace and happiness.1

In Grimké's mind, America's racial problems ultimately would not be resolved through secular political activism where whites and blacks joined forces in a coalition against slavery and prejudice. Something greater was necessary: a spiritual activism. Taking Christ as their model, whites needed break through racial barriers by reaching out to blacks and building intimate, religious connections with them. They needed to achieve a spiritual communion with African Americans, to become "one with" them, connecting soul-to-soul.

1 Grimké to Smith, 22 March 1837, Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké Papers.
Within two weeks of writing her letter to Smith, Grimké and her sister Sarah reached out to two African-American women they knew in hopes of making this spiritual connection. In the spring of 1837, the Grimké sisters wrote two members of Philadelphia's African-American elite, Sarah M. Douglass and Sarah L. Forten, asking these two women to teach them about the prejudice they experienced. Sarah conveyed the sentiment she shared with Angelina in her letter to Douglass. While Sarah realized that it might be "too painful" for Douglass to describe "the effect of steel hearted prejudice," both sisters wanted intimately to understand Douglass's pain so that they might share in it. "I pray that I may feel more & more deeply for you," Sarah Grimké told Douglass in making her request, "that thro' the grace of God, my soul may be in your soul's stead."\(^2\)

A spiritualized pathos that took Christ's as its model was at the heart of the Grimké sisters' racial politics. The Grimkés wanted to "feel" more for African Americans and really know their "pain," and they looked to Jesus Christ as the model of how to do that. The sisters sought to follow Christ's "example" by becoming "one with" African Americans just as Christ had become one with mankind. They wanted to heighten their sympathy for African Americans who were the victims of an oppressive racial prejudice, feeling "more and more deeply for" them. But sympathy alone was not enough. Ultimately they sought something far more profound: a deeper spiritual empathy where they didn't merely feel for African Americans who experienced an agonizing racial prejudice, but actually felt that agony themselves through an empathetic identification, collapsing the racial divide that separated them by connecting soul-to-soul. As Sarah

\(^2\) Grimke to Douglass, 3 April 1837, Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké Papers.
wrote Douglass, it wasn't enough to feel for her; Sarah wanted to enter into and become one with this African-American woman's spirit, locating her own "soul" within Douglass's "soul's stead." On the cross Christ suffered as a man so that he might save mankind. The Grimkés sought to imitate Christ; through spirit friendships they would internalize the suffering of African Americans, becoming "one with" them so that they might "save a people."  

This aspiration to emulate Christ was something the Grimkés shared with religious radicals like Elias Hicks and Ralph Waldo Emerson, but the sisters more pointedly invested this spiritual aim with political meaning. They hoped that their efforts to be like Christ would help affect racial equality. In this they were not atypical among abolitionists. Other white abolitionists also sought to internalize the suffering of African Americans as a way of both following Christ's example and affecting social change. William Lloyd Garrison, for instance, claimed that his activism was motivated by self-conscious efforts to feel what blacks felt. "It is my constant endeavor," he announced, "to place myself, in imagination, in the situation of the slaves; and thus I never fail to plead

3 On the role of sympathy and empathy in abolitionist politics, see Stauffer, The Black Hearts of Men: Elizabeth B. Clark, "The Sacred Rights of the Weak: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in America," Journal of American History 82 (Sept. 1995): 463-493; and Aileen S. Kraditor, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850 (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1967), 235-239. The efforts of white abolitionists to empathize with African Americans and adopt black personas has been most fully explored in Stauffer's work. In his study, Stauffer analyzes the friendship of two black abolitionists, Frederick Douglass and James McCune Smith, and two white abolitionists, Gerritt Smith and John Brown. Smith and Brown, he argues, "were virtually unique among white men in their efforts to identify themselves as blacks and to befriend Douglass, McCune Smith, and other blacks" (44). While the depth of these interracial friendships were exceptional, the Grimke sisters' efforts to put themselves in the Sarah Douglass's and Forten's "soul's stead" evidences that the impulse amongst white abolitionists toward truly befriending African American's was not unique to Smith and Brown.
earnestly. We must meditate much, to feel and act properly." Garrison believed that through acts of imagination he could make his own affective state that of African Americans. In an 1831 speech he told a black audience "My happiness is augmented with yours: in your sufferings I participate." In feeling their pain Garrison felt he was fulfilling his religious duty as a Christian by following "the golden rule of our Savior."4

While the Grimké sisters, Garrison, and other white abolitionists were working to feel black pain, the objects of their compassion—African Americans—began trenchantly to question both the feasibility and political efficacy of this spiritual, empathetic enterprise. Given the ubiquity of racism in American society, the sympathy expressed by white abolitionists was unquestionably heartening for African Americans, providing hopeful evidence that racial oppression might one day end. But exactly what did this spiritual, empathetic identification accomplish as a political instrument? In the late 1830s and early 1840s, more and more African Americans began to mount a pointed critique of spirit and friendship as political instruments for social change. Perhaps interracial friendship might enable whites to feel black pain, but how exactly would that improve the lives of African Americans? Empathetically identifying with those who suffered the effects of racial oppression, black critics argued, did little to undermine the root causes of that oppression: the matrix of social structures and institutions that constituted racial hierarchy in antebellum America.

Recently, a number of scholars have pointedly critiqued the purpose and product of sympathy in abolitionist politics. Christopher Castiglia has argued that white abolitionist identification with black suffering augmented white power. That identification evidenced white's civic "depth," thus authorizing and purifying their assumption of political influence in the public sphere of antebellum America. "Through sympathy with blacks," Castiglia argues, "white abolitionists absorbed the virtues born of private purity and public pain." This appropriation of virtues through sympathy "permitted radical reformers like Garrison to imagine 'blackness' as white interiority, as a shared, yet unmarked, bond that rendered certain whites more virtuous and ultimately more 'deep' than their opponents."5 Lauren Berlant, analyzing what she labels the "Uncle Tom form," argues that texts that produce an affective sympathy for victims of racial or gender oppression function as a form of therapy that provide emotional catharsis that mitigates and neutralizes outrage at systemic social injustice. This sympathy produces "pleasure and moral self-satisfaction" rather than social activism: "the ethical imperative towards social transformation is replaced by a civic-minded but passive ideal of empathy."6

If the advantages (whether that be power or a more benign therapeutic pleasure) that whites accrued through interracial identification have been interrogated in recent scholarship, black responses to and critiques of that imagined identification have not been as fully explored. African-American responses to the rhetoric and practice of interracial sympathy and empathy evidenced both sincere appreciation and mounting criticism,


registered black's recognition of the complexity of social, emotional, and political import of pathos. African Americans appreciated that sympathy had been and could continue to be a powerful tool for converting whites to abolitionism and motivating them to work for the liberation of the slaves and civic equality of the races. Recognizing this potential, in the late 1830s and early 1840s African-American abolitionists pushed their white colleagues to recognize that identification with the suffering of African Americans was not the end of their spiritual quest to emulate Christ but rather the beginning: as Christians they needed not just to share African American's pain, but work to relieve it though engaged political activism. Black leaders recognized that the graduation from sympathy to empathy could be an impediment to social change if the identification with black pain by whites became a spiritual end in-and-of itself. Recognizing this, African American activists developed a critique of disembodied spirituality as a political instrument and began to explore, advocate, and pursue alternative tactics. In particular, more and more African Americans turned from an ideology of spiritual consciousness to one of a pragmatic racial consciousness, from one focused on interiority to one focused on civil rights. Through racially exclusive, black-only organization, many of the leading African American abolitionists redirected their activism from issues of morality and feeling towards the structural issue of their political disenfranchisement.

PROFESSED FRIENDS

Sarah Forten's and Sarah Douglass's responses to the empathetic efforts of the Grimké sisters testify to the real emotional consolation spiritual empathy could provide blacks. These responses also register the critical recognition among blacks of the limits of pathos. Douglass's reply to the Sarah Grimké's letter appears not to have survived, but
she was clearly very moved by and impressed with the Grimkés' efforts. "We were lying wounded and bleeding, trampled to the very dust by the heel of our brethren and our sisters, when Sarah and Angelina Grimké passed by," Douglass wrote of the sisters. While the Grimké sisters took Christ as their model, no doubt they were honored by Douglass's depiction of them as modern-day good Samaritans. Douglass affirmed that they had deeply connected with blacks, taking on their pain. "[T]hey saw our low estate and their hearts melted within them; with the tenderness of ministering angels they lifted us from the dust and poured the oil of consolation, the balm of sympathy into our lacerated bosoms; they identified themselves with us, took our wrongs upon them, and made our oppression and woe theirs." Douglass didn't find fault with white empathy itself, but found real solace in it. The problem, she suggested, was the paucity of white empathy. In identifying themselves with African Americans the Grimké sisters, Douglass emphasized, were almost unique. The sisters' white fellow Quakers shared neither their sympathetic nor their empathetic impulses. While the Quakers were known for their antislavery principles, Douglass found them no less prejudiced than other whites in America. Experiencing persistent insistence upon segregation in the Quaker meeting she could draw only one conclusion: "I believe they despise us for our color." "I like their principles, but not their practice," Douglass continued. "They make the highest profession of any sect of Christians, and are the most deficient in practice."

In her reply to Angelina's request—no doubt a very similar letter to that which Sarah wrote Douglass—Sarah Forten expressed a similar frustration with the disjunction between principles and practice, in her case directing this criticism not at the Quakers but

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towards white abolitionists more generally. In her reply to Grimké's request to describe the "effect of Prejudice" on herself, Forten emphasized that her experience differed from most northern African Americans. Daughter of the African-American businessman and Garrisonian James E. Forten, Sarah L. Forten was shielded from the brunt of racial prejudice by her family's wealth and standing. Forten nevertheless painfully felt its sting. Prejudice, she told Grimké, "engendered feelings of discontent and mortification in my breast when I saw that many were preferred before me, who by education, birth, or worldly circumstances were no better than myself." She knew that most of her city's churches and lecture halls would stop her at the door. The ubiquity of prejudice in northern society would have come as no surprise to the Grimké sisters. What might have been a bit surprising and certainly discouraging was Forten's contention that white abolitionists had made little progress in befriending African Americans and overcoming racial prejudice among themselves. "Even our professed friends have not yet rid themselves of it [prejudice]," Forten informed Grimké, "to some of them it clings like a dark mantle obscuring their many virtues and choking up the avenues to higher and nobler sentiment." Forten's reply must have tempered the sisters' sanguine hopes. The Grimké sisters thought white abolitionists were successfully following in the footsteps of Christ in their relationships with African Americans. Forten frankly expressed her doubts that these whites were or even could successfully emulate Christ and overcome racial prejudice to achieve the spiritual communion with African Americans that the Grimké sisters desired. She admitted that white abolitionists meant well, but the hope that they might liberate themselves from their society's racism and become Christlike was unrealistic, almost hubristic. "Many, very many are anxious to take up the cross," Forten
concluded of white abolitionists, "but how few are strong enough to bear it." 8

Douglass's and Forten's critiques of the failures of both Quakers and abolitionists to put their condemnations of racial prejudice into practice are characteristic of a larger protest against certain facets of abolitionism offered by many African Americans in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In particular, African Americans abolitionists increasingly challenged the conviction that an imagined, disembodied spirituality could produce social equality. A generation of white radical reformers, inspired by the evangelical revivals of the Second Great Awakening, had dreamed of accomplishing a spiritual revolution in America. As Robert H. Abzug has argued, the radical reformers of the antebellum period were "bent upon sacralizing all the world's order in accordance with their vision of God's plan[;] they made it their business to clarify the ways in which the most personal and most cosmic issues interconnected." 9 These reformers were fired by the belief that they might create a heaven on earth, resolving all social problems and leveling all social hierarchies. Some believed the radical reforms of the era could initiate the millennium: the thousand years of peace foretold in the Book of Revelation that many believed would precede the second coming of Christ. Evangelical abolitionists would lead Americans to repent the twin sins of chattel slavery and racial prejudice by evangelizing their radically egalitarian religious sensibility. If American society was poisoned by racial prejudice, abolitionists would teach their white brethren to transcend race by relocating the site of interracial relationships from a sinful earth into a spiritual realm using Christ as the medium that would connect them. Race would become insignificant when individuals

8 Forten to Grimke, 15 April 1837, Letters of Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké, 1:379-380.

9 Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling, 4.
thought of and knew each other spiritually as souls. British abolitionist George Thompson pithily summarized this "spiritual doctrine of equality." Thompson proclaimed that "the abolitionists of the United States have experienced" an "anointing" by taking "the New Testament as their guide." According to Thompson, the accomplishment and promise of American abolitionism was that the abolitionists had learned to see each other not as bodies but only as spirits. "They behold all mankind as their brethren," continued Thompson. "They see only the spiritual nature and affinity of the races. They recognize one God creating all—one destiny awaiting all—their humanity and feelings of brotherhood are not regulated by the color of the skin." "[White abolitionists] have an eye that," Thompson continued, moving into verse,

Sees in his [the "Negro's"] soul, involved in thickest night,

An emanation of eternal light,

Ordain'd, midst sinking worlds, his dust to fire,

And shine for ever, when the stars expire.10

The relationships white abolitionists would build with African Americans would escape racial prejudice because they would be founded on something greater than race: spirit. These would not be relationships of corporeal, colored bodies but instead of disembodied, colorless souls.

Many African American activists of the 1830s enthusiastically joined white abolitionists in anticipating and articulating this imagined world of social equality and spiritual communion. Indeed, this spiritualized, pathos-laden abolitionism was, in part,

10 Liberator. Dec. 17, 1841. The poem Thompson excerpts is British poet and hymnist James Montgomery's "African, and her Sons."
the product of the activism of African Americans during the 1820s. As Richard S. Newman has argued, in the first decades of the nineteenth century white northern anti-slavery activists had channeled their labors into the law; they hoped that through deferential petitions and legal actions in the courtroom they could gradually undermine slavery case by case. It was African American abolitionists who changed the tone and direction of anti-slavery politics by "injected moralism and emotionalism into the fight against racial oppression" and urging "a thorough moral interrogation of the white psyche." Sarah Forten's father James thought of his anti-slavery pamphlets as "Appeals to the Heart" through which he attempted to win whites to anti-slavery by eliciting compassion and pity for slaves and oppressed African Americans more generally. The emphasis upon pathos and advocacy of a spiritualized egalitarian society by white abolitionists of the 1830s were measures of the success of these black efforts.11

Yet by the late 1830s and early 1840s more and more African Americans began to conclude that a spiritualized pathos would not be enough to overcome racial prejudice. While white sympathy for black suffering certainly converted many whites to abolitionism, that emphasis upon affect could confine the scope of white abolitionist activism to the spiritual and personal issue of souls and at the exclusion of the political and structural issues of civic and social equality. The millennial project of these white radicals, more and more African Americans concluded, translated into too little of practical import for African Americans who lived in society permeated with racial prejudice. Sarah Forten's description of white abolitionists as "professed friends" (as we'll see, she was not alone in employing that description) and Sarah Douglass's

contention that the Society of Friends failed to live by their "highest profession[s]" succinctly conveyed the gist of this larger critique. White abolitionists persistently and consistently expressed their desire to identify themselves with African Americans, to reach out to them as friends and fellow Christians. They voiced a hope and a faith that they could build profound spiritual connections with blacks. In the eyes of African Americans, those words and sentiments, however heartfelt, unfortunately translated into little beyond words and sentiment.

African American abolitionists identified many problems with pathos as a political tool. First, one fundamental problem was that small white minority of abolitionists who publicly declared their emotional identification with African Americans did not sympathize enough with blacks. White abolitionist rhetoric was extraordinary in condemning prejudice, but too often their actions were all too ordinary, typical of the racial prejudice that was the norm among antebellum Euro-Americans. Still prejudiced, white abolitionists were "professed" rather than genuine friends.

More fundamentally, many African American critics began to find fault not merely with the current state of this empathetic enterprise, they began to question the utility of the enterprise itself. Too many white abolitionists who did empathize with blacks saw that as an end in itself rather than a stimulus towards political activism that addressed the root structural, institutional foundations of racial hierarchy.

By pointing to widespread racial prejudice within the white abolitionist community, African Americans put the lie to the principles that these abolitionists believed defined them both as abolitionists and Christians. The white radical abolitionism that emerged in the 1830s distinguished itself from previous anti-slavery
movements by condemning not just the institution of slavery but racial prejudice itself.

In particular, these radical abolitionists understood and articulated their political vision in reference to the considerable more conservative variant of anti-slavery colonizationism.

The American Colonization Society (ACS), founding in 1817, proposed to end slavery in the United States by transporting African Americans to Africa. Heirs to the paeans to freedom and condemnation of slavery in the rhetoric of the revolutionary generation, colonizationists maintained that slavery was a regrettable, problematic institution in a republic. However, if the existence of slavery in a republic was a problem, the emancipation of African Americans would wreck the new nation. Protracted violent conflict between the races could only be the result of emancipation. Blacks and whites would never live in peace and harmony with one another given both their supposed inherent racial differences and the animosity that the institution of slavery had bred.

Colonizationists proposed a solution that would remove the two problems, slavery and African Americans, from the U.S.: if blacks could be transported to Africa, to their ancestral homeland, immediately or soon after emancipation, slavery could be gradually ended. Rather than facing a stifling prejudice in America, in Africa they would be able to thrive, bringing Christian civilization to the "dark" continent.²

From the ACS inception, African Americans challenged all of the core premises and arguments of the colonizationists. They disputed the idea that there existed a natural enmity between whites and blacks and argued that free blacks and whites could live in peace with one another. Pointing to the middle-class, enterprising, Christian African-American communities of northern cities, they suggested that African Americans would

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become productive and contributing citizens within the republic if freed from slavery and pervasive racial prejudice. They also developed a persuasive argument that the ACS was a proslavery rather than an antislavery organization. By maintaining that slavery could only be eradicated on the condition that blacks emigrate, colonizationists, these black critics contended, created an unresolvable problem that perpetuated slavery. Transporting millions of slaves across the Atlantic was logistically unfeasible; until the problem was resolved, according to the logic of the colonizationists, slaves could not and should not be emancipated.13

By the 1830s, the arguments of African-American activists had begun to win over some whites. William Lloyd Garrison, for instance, attributed his conversion to immediatist abolitionism to his relationship with the black community of Baltimore. "[H]is experience among African Americans in Baltimore," Paul Goodman has argued, "opened his eyes to the sinfulness of African colonization and racial prejudice and to the unflinching opposition of free blacks to removal to Africa."14 Beginning in the 1830s, the powerful emotional and moral appeals of black activists began to bear fruit. More and more whites—still a small minority in the northern states, to be sure—became convinced that African Americans were their brethren and that slavery was an undiluted evil. They denounced the colonizationists' scheme to end slavery gradually and called for immediate abolition. More radically, they found fault not just with the South's peculiar institution, but with racial prejudice that pervaded all of American society, the North as


14 Goodman, Of One Blood, 37.
Throughout the 1830s into the 1840s, the primary tactic that abolitionists, particularly white abolitionists, used in their effort to accomplish social change was moral suasion. Change, they believed, would not be accomplished through the passage of laws or use of force but through the transformation of hearts and conversion of souls. Slavery and racial prejudice were not institutional problems, but spiritual problems, and as such they required spiritual solutions. African-American abolitionist and minister Lewis Woodson conveyed this widely shared sentiment succinctly. "Slavery has its source in the corrupt moral sentiment of the country," Woodson declared in 1839, "and the great primary means, ... the almost entire means of its abolition, is the correction of this corrupt moral sentiment." The primary tools necessary to complete this "correction" were words. In speeches and newspapers, letters and petitions, abolitionists would persuade their fellow countrymen and countrywomen that slavery and racial prejudice were mutually reinforcing evils that both needed to be overcome. In their publications and lectures the abolitionists were, in essence, delivering sermons. Through their rhetoric they hoped not simply to bring about the abolition of slavery but accomplish a much larger task: the redemption of the American soul. Once that collective soul was redeemed, the sins of slavery and racial prejudice would simply wither and die. Slaveholders would experience the same spiritual epiphany that white abolitionists had. They would come to recognize that holding men as property was a sin and would repent by immediately emancipating their slaves. "A right state of moral feeling," Woodson concluded, "must be brought about, and then a right course of political action will take

place, as naturally as any other effect results from its natural cause.16

In the writings and speeches of the abolitionists, the contours of a racially egalitarian society were figured powerfully in tropes of friendship. In their lectures, essays, and poems, radical white abolitionists imagined a world where skin color was inconsequential and where Christian love would serve as the only glue—a divine glue—holding the social body together. An abolitionist woman, who simply signed her contribution "Mary," described this postmillennial, godly world of interracial harmony succinctly and clearly in a letter that appeared in the Liberator in 1832. Addressing her letter directly to Garrison, Mary conveyed her faith in the divine power of Christian love and her belief that the expansion of this love that Garrison and the abolitionists were affecting in American society through moral suasion would eventually reap a "practical reward," the end of slavery:

Love, pure, heavenly, divine love is the most free, the most expansive of all principles, for it is the source of all things; and when mankind will permit their eyes and their hearts to be opened to the perception of the profound truth, that love is life—that it is the all in all that exists in the extent of creation; then shall we gradually rise to a true understanding of first principles in their indefinite ramifications; and then will your manly and indefatigable exertions be duly appreciated and receive their practical reward—success.

Mary celebrated the awesome and exclusive power of "benevolent affection" and "holy

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sympathy," so much so that she gently and subtly chastised Garrison and other radical abolitionists for not extending that divine affection and sympathy to the colonizationists whose social program they condemned. The task before the abolitionists was to discourage enmity and divisions of any kind, to build affectionate bonds between colonizationists and abolitionists and between whites and blacks. Abolitionists must convince colonizationists, indeed all whites, that they needed to forget color, to see all African Americans as divine spirits rather than colored bodies. "Let us root from our bosoms, as the foulest of weeds, that contempt for people of color," she declared. "Let us wholly discourage in our children and youth, a thought of color, or peculiarity of feature, as of any more consequence, than a thousand other minor distinctions among men and women, with whom we are in every day friendly association and equal intercourse." If this insight was recognized in the collective American imagination, the conflicts between white and black, abolitionist and colonizationist would disappear, supplanted by a society of "friendly association and equal intercourse."17

Testifying to acts of "friendly association and equal intercourse" with African Americans became a central way whites evidenced their conversion to abolitionism and gained admission into the national abolitionist community. The capacity to see beyond, or indeed not see, skin color became central to the identity of white radical abolitionists. For instance, as an adult Theodore Dwight Weld described his conversion to abolitionism to his future wife Angelina Grimké by recounting how he befriended an African-American classmate as a young child. Slavery played no role in Weld's account of how he came to the cause. Instead Weld claimed that he became an abolitionist, at least in

17 Liberator, 27 Oct. 1832.
spirit, as a young child when he befriended an African-American classmate named George. "When about 6 yrs old he went to school in Conn. & a little black boy was introduced into the school, he had never seen a color'd person before," Grimké wrote. Weld "soon found he [George] was despised for the color of his skin, the boys contemptuously calling him niger...." Weld claimed that he shared none of his classmates' contempt, but instead sympathized with the newcomer. "Weld went the next day & asked to be allowed to change his seat. Why! Where did he want to sit said the master. By George replyd Weld. The master burst into a laugh & exclaimed Why! are you a niger too, & Theodore Weld is a niger resounded thro' the school." Instead of being intimidated, Weld said he was incensed and his resolve steeled by this ridicule. "I never shall forget he said the tumult of my little bosom that day. I went however & sat with George & playd with George & George & I were great friends & in one week I got permissions to say my lessons with George & I have been an Abolitionist ever since & never had any prejudice to overcome."18 In this anecdote, Weld depicted his boyhood self as innocently naïve of race. That he could remain colorblind as a not-so naïve grown man registered his spiritual achievement, his capacity to see beyond the body to the ethereal soul.

The importance of tropes of friendship to the abolitionists' efforts to reimagine social relations, particularly interracial social relations, is evident in their salutations to one another. "Friend" became the ubiquitous title of courtesy in both the private and public letters abolitionist exchanged. "My Dear Friend," "Esteemed Friend," "Beloved Friend," "Respected Friend," and Friend so-and-so were among the most common

18 Grimké to Smith, Dec. 17, 1836, Weld, Grimké Weld, and Grimké Papers. The word "color" is illegible in the manuscript and is inferred from the context.
salutations in abolitionists epistles. These salutations intentionally signaled the kind of society the abolitionists hoped to create: a society of equals that was bound together by nothing other than Christian love and affection. The challenge was to translate this sentiment from words into action. "In addition to speaking and writing for this doctrine of immediate emancipation, [the abolitionist] must live in conformity with it," the Declaration of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society proclaimed, "and to do so, the citizen of the United States is required...to treat the free person of the slave's despised color as a man." If abolitionists accomplished the eradication of racial prejudice in the North, that change would remake the South too. A lived equality would have powerful exemplary potential for southerners, transforming their "hearts and minds":

Let the slaveholders, who flock to the North for pleasure and for trade, find that the unjust, UNPHILOSOPHICAL, and UNCHRISTIAN distinctions, which still exist among men here on account of their different complexions, are obliterated; ... that we are no longer guilty of the American peculiarity of judging of the worth and claims of human beings by the tinge of their skin; ... that, in a word, we have entirely purged our hearts of those prejudices against the black, which have hitherto blighted his hopes, and kept him in the dust:—let these Southern brethren witness such changes among us, and who can calculate the effect on their hearts and minds of this exemplification of humane and Christian principles?19

From the perspective of many African Americans, whites had failed to meet that challenge. The problem was, these black critics contended, white abolitionists had made

so little progress in overcoming their own prejudice to say nothing of the racism that was rampant in northern society. Recognizing the centrality of friendship in the rhetoric and collective imagination of white abolitionism, black abolitionists mounted a critique of these expressions of interracial friendship. African Americans argued that white abolitionist rhetoric was divorced from reality. Sarah Forten's and Sarah Douglass's claims that white abolitionists "professed" principles in their rhetoric that they failed to practice was echoed again and again by other black critics. The verb "professed" had a deeper resonance beyond calling into question the quality and sincerity of whites' personal and public politics. It also called attention to the religious character of the abolitionist ideal of friendship in that it evoked the public profession of faith that was customary, even requisite, for individuals to make to gain admission into a covenanted church. Applicants testified to their conversion and receipt of God's divine grace in order to become full members of a congregation. The process of becoming an abolitionist in the 1830s echoed this ritualized experience. Abolitionists received divine grace too by coming to recognize that African Americans were God's children too and thus their equals. By testifying to that experience by joining an anti-slavery society, signing a petition, or writing to an anti-slavery newspaper, an individual gained admission into the larger abolitionist community—a kind of congregation writ large. Thus "professed friends" evoked the kind of society that many abolitionists hoped to realize through their activism: one that bound together all "converts" who had received the "grace" of recognizing the spiritual reality of racial equality.

In labeling white abolitionists "professed friends," African Americans called attention to the significance of friendship in both the words and faith of white
abolitionists in order to question the political efficacy of that rhetoric and that faith. That rhetoric and faith, they argued, translated into little beyond words and belief. White abolitionists testified to their belief that African Americans were their equals. But, African Americans argued, whites too often failed to live by those spiritually-infused professions. In making this argument, African Americans produced a compelling argument that disputed some of the basic premises of moral suasion. These African American critics challenged white radical faith that words and imagination and spirit—abstractions—could and would be productive of a lived social equality.  

In June 1838, African-American abolitionists and editor Benjamin F. Roberts leveled a bitter critique of white abolitionists' profession of friendship in a private letter to white abolitionist Amos A. Phelps. A month earlier, Roberts began publishing one of the earliest papers edited by an African American, the Anti-Slavery Herald. The life of the Anti-Slavery Herald was unfortunately brief; it was discontinued within six months of its launch, due in part to the hostility of white abolitionists. Phelps was one of these hostile abolitionists. He had originally provided a letter of recommendation for Roberts's paper, but quickly asked for its return. It is not entirely clear what Phelps's exact objections to Roberts and his paper were. Throughout 1838 Phelps was in the midst of a contentious public debate with Garrison over the role of women in abolitionist politics; it's unclear if Phelps's retraction of his endorsement of Roberts had anything to do with

20 It has been a commonplace of the historiography of abolitionism to suggest, as I here do, that white abolitionists emphasized stark abstractions (e.g. freedom vs. slavery), while black abolitionists did not see the world in such fixed terms (e.g. free blacks were not enslaved but were certainly did not enjoy the same freedom that whites did). Two notable examples of this argument are Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, They Who Would be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861 (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 3-16, and Stewart, Holy Warriors, 128-129.
his at times acrimonious conflict with the Garrisonians. What is clear is that Roberts felt
the need to defend the practical nature of the measures he was taking to help his fellow
African Americans. Uplift within the African-American community, he insisted in an
angry reply to Phelps, needed to extend beyond religion to the issues of vocational skills
and intellectual knowledge. He charged white, Christian abolitionists with being
halfhearted in their support of or even hostile to black efforts to affect economic and
educational uplift, and he went so far as to warn that blacks would turn away from
evangelical Christianity if that faith could not support practical measures to help African
Americans succeed intellectually and economically. "I am aware there has been and now
is, a combined effort on the part of certain professed abolitionists to muzzle, exterminate
and put down the efforts of certain colored individuals effecting the welfare of their
colored brethren .... I am for improvement among this class of people, mental and
physical," Roberts wrote Phelps. "The arts and sciences have never been introduced to
any extent among us—therefore they are of the utmost importance. If anti-Slavery men
will not subscribe to the advancement of these principles, but rail out and protest against
them when took up by those who have a darker skin, why we will go to the heathen."
The undermining of prejudice could not simply focus on ethereal, de-raced Christian
souls and spiritual empathy but instead had to be grounded in more utilitarian solutions to
the oppressions and deprivations African Americans confronted in their daily lives.
Roberts angrily accused Phelps and his fellow white abolitionists of being maddeningly
quixotic, even disingenuous, in their expressions of friendship towards African
Americans insofar as they were opposed to such practical steps towards economic and
intellectual development within the black community:
The principle ground on which the anti-slavery cause is said to be founded... are the elevation of the free colored people here. Now it is altogether useless to pretend to affect the welfare of the blacks in this country, unless the chains of prejudice are broken. It is of no use [to] say with the mouth we are friends of the slave and not try to encourage and assist the free colored people in raising themselves.

Roberts concluded his reply to Phelps by lamenting how "few [were] true to the righteous cause, and those were practical abolitionists as well as abolitionists by profession," implicitly urging Phelps to reevaluate his own sense of what it meant to be an abolitionist and a friend of African Americans.21

Four months later, a contributor to African-American editor Samuel Cornish's newspaper The Colored American argued much the same point. Posing the question "Are Abolitionists opposed to the elevation of the Free Colored Population?," this critic, who signed his letter "A Constant Reader," contended that, in general, white abolitionists worked against rather than for the welfare of African Americans. "[J]udging from the conduct of many of the professed friends of the man of color, it would certainly seem, as if an answer in the affirmative was the most proper one to be given," this "Constant Reader" suggested. He only slightly qualified this judgment, stating that there were some white abolitionists who "regard the elevation of the free people of color exactly of the

same importance as the liberation of the slaves," but these men and women were the exceptions. Echoing Forten's sentiments, this "Reader" suggested that despite their condemnations of racial prejudice, white abolitionists had not yet succeeded in liberating themselves from that prejudice. "Prejudice against color ... exists in the breasts of persons, who have but little doubt of the sincerity of their abolition principles," he declared. "It is not confined to colonizationists or pro-slavery men .... [I]ts influence is all over—everywhere—our friends not even excepted."22

"A Constant Reader" understood white abolitionists' hope that a postmillennial world of social equality could be realized. In its ineffectiveness, "A Constant Reader" found white abolitionism's emphasis upon sympathy and a spiritualized pathos something to gently ridicule:

what do I peruse in all their publications? I read, Sir, that they ...
sympathize and feel, deeply, for their down-trodden and oppressed free colored brethren, scattered up and down throughout the free states—that they mourn and weep over their wrongs and disabilities, and meet together, once a month, in public concert, for the sole purpose of praying to God for their speedy removal.

He was not suggesting that white abolitionists were insincere in these expressions of Christian sympathy. Where he did find fault was with the failure of whites to go beyond these professions to help accomplish something that would actually improve the lives of African Americans in the here and now. White abolitionists were inspired but not actuated by Christ's example. Privileging relationships between godly, de-raced souls

22 The Colored American, Oct. 6, 1838.
rather than earthy, raced men and women ended up buttressing the economic and social status quo for African Americans insofar as it satisfied whites of their spiritual righteousness rather than spurring them onto practical activism that would benefit African Americans. "I verily believe them to be good men, possessed of the spirit of Jesus Christ," this "Constant Reader" concluded, "but even good men must be consistent, if they wish to do good. The admiration of virtue is not the practice of it." To really help African Americans, white abolitionists needed to focus on more than rhetoric, imagination, and empathy. "We must be good walkers as well as good talkers," "A Constant Reader" proclaimed. "Professions in any cause, when not carried out are worse than useless. In this way we deceive ourselves and others ... OUR FRIENDS ... HINDER OUR IMPROVEMENT." 23

BODY POLITICS

By the end of the 1830s, more and more African Americans were convinced that they needed to take black "improvement" into their own hands, distancing themselves from their white abolitionist "friends." Beginning in 1840, much of the activism of African-American abolitionists was channeled through racially exclusive state conventions as opposed to integrated political action. There had been black-only conventions held during the 1830s, but the tone and focus of the conventions of the 1840s differed from these forerunners. The message of the conventions of the 1830s hardly differed from that of white abolitionism, emphasizing the importance of morality in fighting slavery and prejudice; in fact, the most notable product of the 1830s conventions was the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS). Established in 1835, the AMRS

23 The Colored American, Oct. 6, 1838.
quickly drew from some African Americans the same criticism they were leveling at white abolitionism: in focusing on abstract moral issues such as brotherly love and temperance the AMRS rendered itself impotent and ineffectual. The African-American convention movement of the 1840s, in contrast, laid much less emphasis upon the power of Christian faith and instead turned attention to political issues of practical import, particularly the enfranchisement of African-American men and the use of the African-American vote as leverage for civic and social change.24

In their "exclusive" character and their focus on practical issues such as suffrage, some white abolitionists contended that the African-American conventions amounted to a betrayal of the central principles of abolitionism. In an editorial in the National Anti-Slavery Standard (the mouthpiece of the thoroughly Garrisonian American Anti-Slavery Society), white abolitionist Nathaniel P. Rogers argued that in its emphasis on issues of "Partial improvement" for African Americans the black conventions undermined the "grand object" of abolitionism: the creation of a society where the color of the skin was insignificant. In an insensitive assertion that no doubt galled blacks who were the victims of American racial prejudice, Rogers implied that by excluding white abolitionists from these conventions African Americans assumed the role of despots and tyrants. "[I]s not the exclusion of worthy men ... on account of their complexion," Rogers asked, "the worst form of despotism—the meanest and most unjustifiable form of tyranny?" He asked "our friends" (Rogers addressed the African-American abolitionists who were the

intended audience of his short editorial as "our friends" five times) to abandon their plans for racially exclusive conventions. Again insensitively, he urged them to "Be not impatient!" They should not seek small improvements in their situations in the here-and-now, but aim toward a spiritual revolution that would transform society. Echoing Sarah Grimke's call to forget sex, Rogers asked African Americans to take up the task of forgetting color. "Teach them to forget," Rogers exhorted, "and forget yourselves as fast as possible, that you are colored men and women." By accomplishing the forgetfulness of color blacks and whites would come to realize that in spiritually they were all the same, that everyone was "the image of his God."25

Transcending the body by forgetting color was not an easy thing. White abolitionists, black abolitionist and minister Samuel R. Ward reminded Rogers in a response to his editorial, had made little progress in accomplishing that among themselves. White abolitionists, Ward contended, had not yet come to see African Americans as real friends and equals: "there are too many Abolitionists in profession, who have yet to learn what it is to crucify prejudice against color within their own bosoms. Too many who best love the colored man at a distance." Pervasive and persistent racial prejudice among white abolitionists necessitated independent action by African Americans. Ward did not question that Rogers meant well, but insofar as Rogers did not—indeed, could not—fully empathize with African Americans he could neither wholly understand the oppressive racial prejudice that African Americans confronted nor suggest effective ways to deal with racial oppression. "[T]he small share of sympathy evidenced towards us by many of our professed friends," Ward continued, "and the still

smaller amount of efficient action put forth by them in our behalf, all render it indispensably necessary that the colored people of this State should convene and act for themselves."26

If Rogers succinctly conveyed the radical idea that equality would be accomplished by imaginatively transcending bodily difference—i.e. skin color—Ward rejected that goal as an infeasible dream. Instead, he emphasized the inescapable importance of his own physical body. In doing so, Ward critiqued the core premise of spirit politics and cast doubt on the possibility of interracial empathy by claiming that neither Rogers nor any white abolitionist could ever truly understand the prejudice and oppression that African-Americans faced insofar as whites would never have the experience of having a black body. "I know your intentions are correct," Ward told Rogers, "but had you worn a colored skin from October '17 to June '40, as I have, in this pseudo-republic, you would have seen through a very different medium." No matter how hard they tried, empathetic efforts to become one with African Americans and feel their pain could never give whites an accurate sense of what it was to be black in America. Imagination was not an adequate substitute for physical experience; the presence of a soul did not negate the reality or significance of the body. Blacks and whites both had souls, but the "medium"—the body—mattered. Blacks and whites might be undifferentiated equals in the eyes of God; he saw only their spirits. But Americans of this "pseudo-republic" did not see through the eyes of God but their own eyes; they saw and were seen not as incorporeal souls but instead as very corporeal bodies that wore "colored skin[s]." And for most Americans, particularly African-Americans for whom it

has oppressive consequences each day, neither their own nor others' "colored skin[s]"
could be easily forgotten.27

The controversy surrounding the reemergence of the now more militant black
conventions in 1840 produced a debate regarding the rhetorical and strategic importance
of "colored" both as a politically-charged word and as a potential conceptual site for
amassing a movement that would fight against civic inequality. At the same moment that
white American abolitionism was fracturing over the issue of women's participation in
the movement (another instance where the political import of differing bodies became a
point of divisive tension) the wisdom of black-only conventions and racially exclusive
political action more generally was being debating both between and among Euro- and
African-American activists.

Nathaniel Rogers, for one, stuck to his argument and principles. In a response to
Ward's letter, he evidenced no compunction about imaginatively liberating himself from
his white skin and identifying himself with African Americans. He confidently claimed a
"colored skin" for himself and his white abolitionist colleagues, declaring that "had we a

27 National Anti-Slavery Standard, Jul. 2, 1840. Jeannine DeLombard has made a
similar argument that emphasizes sight and eyes too. DeLombard argues that in his 1845
Narrative Frederick Douglass calls attention to the "embodied subjectivity" of slaves and
African Americans more generally as opposed to a disembodied "transcendental of
universal subjectivity" which it was the exclusive privilege of white males to claim. Like
Ward, Douglass could not escape being seen as something more than a man of color:
"Although his own 'view' may have changed in the North, others' views of him remain, in
the North as in the South, focused on his body and its color. Like their Southern
counterparts, white Northern shipyard workers cannot see through him to his professional
skills as a calker but rather look at him as a person of color. In the North, the fugitive has
achieved freedom, but he has not attained a universal subjectivity." In contrast to Ward,
Douglass tries, albeit unsuccessfully, to seize that universal subjectivity to for himself,
depicting himself as an antislavery advocate who is "immaterial voice" rather than an
eyewitness who is "corporeal eyes." (DeLombard, "Eye-Witness to the Cruelty":
Southern Violence and Northern Testimony in Frederick Douglass's 1845 Narrative,
colored skin" transraced abolitionists would never "separate ourselves from the whites."
"[N]o man," he continued, "should see that we ever had a thought of our color." In a
jarring assertion where he rhetorically accepted Ward's bodily terms only to dismiss their
import, Rogers claimed that Ward's efforts would come to nothing "till he strips himself
of his color," as if Ward could take off the "colored skin" that he "wore" as easily as he
would a coat.\textsuperscript{28}

By no means all African-American abolitionists disagreed with Rogers. James
McCune Smith, physician and abolitionist, opposed the black-only convention on much
the same grounds as Rogers. Smith argued that while "a movement based on principle
will effect our enfranchisement, ... a movement based on the complexion of the skin, will
end in riveting still more firmly the chains which bind us" because it, in effect, endorsed
rather than rejected the idea that "there are rights peculiar to the color of a man's skin."\textsuperscript{29}
William Whipper, the chief spokesman for the AMRS, endorsed Roger's \textit{National Anti-
Slavery Standard} editorial in Cornish's \textit{Colored American}. Whipper registered his
opposition "against a Convention composed exclusively of colored citizens," maintaining
that such a racially exclusive gathering violated "heaven born principles ... of man's
equality."\textsuperscript{30}

Despite the fact that its membership was composed almost entirely of African
Americans, Whipper made a point of emphasizing that in principle "no complexional

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{National Anti-Slavery Standard}, Jul. 2, 1840.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Colored American}, Aug. 15, 1840.
\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Colored American}, Jul. 18, 1840.
distinctions have ever been tolerated" by the AMRS.\textsuperscript{31} Whipper followed his endorsement of Rogers with two letters in the \textit{Colored American} in which he expressed the same desire to forget race that was characteristic of many white abolitionists. For him, even the use of the term "colored" was objectionable and should be avoided. He argued that the use of the term "colored," whether it be in the black conventions or in the title of the \textit{Colored American}, reinforced "invidious complexional distinctions" by calling attention and thus reinforcing the perceived import of differences of "complexional cast."

What abolitionists, both black and white, needed to do to destroy prejudice was to root out the use of "the terms, 'white, colored or African,' ... grinding [them] to powder" and refuse to abide any organization whether it be a church, school, or political convention that was racially exclusive.\textsuperscript{32}

Whipper's arguments proved quite controversial among African Americans, eliciting a number of responses in the \textit{Colored American} that took exception to his arguments about the efficacy of the use of the word "color."\textsuperscript{33} The lengthiest, most developed of these responses was a four part series "William Whipper's Letters" written by a pseudonymous "Sidney," likely Henry Highland Garnet.\textsuperscript{34} In this four part series,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} \textit{Colored American}, Jul. 18, 1840.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} \textit{Colored American}, Jan. 3, 1841.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} "Sidney" is identified as Thomas Sidney in Adeleke, "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion," 135-136. This is a mistake in an otherwise thoughtful essay. Thomas Sidney had died in 1840 (\textit{Colored American}, 20 Jun. 1840); the pseudonym "Sidney" no doubt was a tribute to him. The speculation that "Sidney" may have been Garnet is not my own, but that of the editors of \textit{Witness for Freedom: African American Voices on Race, Slavery, and Emancipation}, ed. C. Peter Ripley, (Chapel Hill: The University of North
\end{itemize}
"Sidney" used Whipper's letters as an occasion to produce an incisive critique of friendship politics. Emphasis upon and faith in words, he suggested, was misplaced. "This endless clamoring about 'color,'" "Sidney" argued in response to Whipper, "is alike devoid of reason, as it is disreputable to us as a people." "The people are perishing by oppression, and our leaders ... [are contending] upon a word." "Sidney" had little patience for endless speculation about abstract principles, "idle theories"; instead, he urged African Americans to concentrate on pragmatic strategies—"living, productive action"—for social and political change. As the word "colored" was the signifier for a signified dark human skin, "Sidney" argued it was pointless to discontinue the use of that signifier given that that action would have no effect upon the reality of the signified. Discontinuing the use of the words "white" and "colored" would not in any way change the bodies of Euro- and African Americans; it would not make their skin any less white or black. To emphasize this point, "Sidney" mockingly challenged Whipper to turn his energies to the real signified body instead of an abstract signifying word. Let him try his hand at undoing and redoing God's work:

Discontinue the use of the term—does prejudice die? Oh no, Leviathan is not so tamed. But Mr. W. may say, prejudice is the result of color, and therefore we should not use the term "colored." But look again at the matter. If it is the result of color, then it does not proceed from the word; and if that (color,) is the cause, and Mr. W. desires to act upon the cause, then let him commence his operations upon the color. As for our color, as

Carolina Press, 1993), 123. They do not provide a rationale, but the attribution has two things to recommend it: Garnet was a colleague of Thomas Sidney's, so the tribute would have been understandable coming form Garnet, and Garnet was very active in and supportive of the black convention movement.
God has given it to us, thus we are pleased with it—and so must they get to be. Surely the term colored is not disgusting to Mr. W. and his friends? They cannot be ashamed of their identity with the negro race!

For "Sidney," race was not something to be forgotten, but instead needed to be acknowledged because it had a real, lamentable impact upon people of African descent living in the United States. A body politics that pragmatically accepted rather than denied the political and social salience of race in the nineteenth century held more promise, Sidney argued, in helping blacks join the body politic than the tactics of spirit politics.35

"Sidney" was not arguing for race consciousness because African Americans possessed similar colored skins; instead he was arguing that race consciousness was a necessary political expedient because African Americans shared a common experience of oppression in the U.S. that was at that moment inextricably linked to their skin color. African Americans needed to act independently of whites not because the two races had dissimilarly colored skins, but because whites had not experienced racial oppression. "Sidney" did more than critique the political efficacy of spiritual empathy; he questioned the very possibility that whites should successfully empathize with the pain that African Americans felt and the oppressions that they experienced. Making a similar point to that of Samuel Ward, "Sidney" suggested that because whites did not experience the effects of racial prejudice themselves, they could never truly understand what it was like to be black in America:

How is it possible, we ask, for men who know nothing of oppression, who

35 Colored American, Mar. 13, 1841.
have always enjoyed the blessedness of freedom, by any effort of imagination, by any strength of devotedness, by any depth of sympathy, so fully and adequately to express the sense of wrong and outrage, as the sorrowful presence and living desire of us who have drank the dregs of the embittered chalice?

Imagination, devotedness, sympathy—three of the essential components of spirit politics—would not enable whites to know what it was to be black. Whites could never, "Sidney" suggested, realize Angelina Grimke's and other white abolitionists' hope of becoming "one with" African Americans because an experiential gulf that was unbridgeable through imagination separated the two races from one another.36

Many white and some black abolitionists conceived of an idealized interracial friendship as a site where Euro- and African Americans could come together both to abolish slavery and to overcome racial prejudice. "Sidney" was not persuaded, arguing that the only route to equality lay in independent activism by African Americans. "We take the case of an individual," "Sidney" proposed. "His ancestors have been the objects of wrong and violence. In consequence, they became degraded. At the season of thought and reflection he feels a desire to escape from the degradation of his sires, and the oppressions of the many. The sympathy of friends is excited, and they make active exertions." Though those friends' "efforts and influence may be as potent as angels" they would nonetheless ultimately prove "vain." The only escape from degradation lay in independent, individual action, in self-culture. "It must exist in the man," "Sidney" declared. "The spirit that would elevate him above his circumstances, and gain him

respect and manhood, must have all the strength of personal character." "And the same it is with a people," "Sidney" continued.

Our friends, abolitionists, may redouble their efforts, they may lavishly expend their means, they may strew their pamphlets over the country .... Yet our condition will remain the same, our sufferings will be unmitigated, until we awaken to a consciousness of a momentous responsibility, which we shall manifest by giving it actuality. We occupy a position, and sustain relations which they cannot possibly assume. They are our allies—OURS is the battle.

"Sidney's" was a compelling, damning critique of friendship politics. White abolitionists, he argued, could not empathize with African Americans because their lived experience as raced individuals—one group enjoying racial privilege while the other experienced racial prejudice—were so radically different. More than that: beyond casting into doubt the feasibility of this project of interracial empathy he questioned its very desirability. What purpose would white empathy serve? African Americans did not want whites to empathize with their civic and social oppression; they wanted to escape that oppression.

"Sidney" sought to reshape abolitionism's friendship politics. Whites would not descend to befriend the oppressed; blacks instead needed to rise and befriend whites as equals:

The stirring anxieties and deep intensities, the inflexible purpose, the indomitable will and the decided action of the oppressed; give indubitable evidence to the oppressor of a common nature in both, are an emphatic affirmation of like tendencies of soul, awaken a consciousness of those
upward unquenchable aspirations, that our motherly humanity universally begets; and these brushing away the accumulated rubbish of old dusty cobweb prejudices, and penetrating the dark meshes of error and sophistry, touch the seal enclosing the sympathies and affections of our common-brotherhood, which, bursting forth into the deep stream flowing from the long pent-up but now out-gushing hearts of the oppressed, together form an irresistible current sweeping away the strong barriers, and deep obstructions of time-sanctioned oppression and aged tyranny.37

Grimké had written that what whites needed to do was emulate Jesus, becoming "poor" so that blacks might be made "rich." To Sidney Grimké had it backwards: whites didn't need to become "poor" like blacks, blacks needed to become "rich" like whites. It was pointless and patronizing for whites to try to become "one with" the racially oppressed; instead African Americans needed to become "one with" the racially privileged by improving their own circumstances through their own activism. The ubiquity of prejudice in white America, white abolitionists themselves not excepted, evidenced that the "common nature," "like tendencies of soul," and "common-brotherhood" of the races was infinitely far from a given. That common nature, "Sidney" suggested, needed to be and would be demonstrated by independent black activism; it would not be a gift bestowed by their white "friends." Whites could evidence their confidence in that common, shared nature and their faith in the equality of the races by supporting rather than condemning that activism.

"Sidney" typified the viewpoint of a more independent black abolitionist

37 Colored American, Feb. 20, 1841.
perspective that was in its ascendancy in the early 1840s. Change would not be accomplished through abstractions and rhetoric; action and activism was necessary. It would not be accomplished through disembodied, spiritualized friendship; a pragmatic racial consciousness and separatism was necessary. In pointedly critiquing the tactics of an idealized friendship and spiritualized empathy, pragmatically acknowledging the persistent salience of the raced body, and emphatically advocating the need for independent black political activism, these African-American reformers turned the basic logic of friendship politics on its head. White abolitionists, they suggested, mistook friendship as a means to be used when it was actually an end to be sought. Interracial friendship would not produce racial equality but instead would be equality’s product.
While promoting the cause of peace in Britain in the fall of 1846, American reformer Elihu Burritt dispatched a story on "The Elements and Agents of Universal Brotherhood" back to the Christian Citizen, a newspaper he had published in Worcester, Massachusetts. Burritt's article contained a short but evocative account of the growing significance in human history of the "social principle," the bonds of attachment and affect that bound individuals to one another. "The social principle has been operating upon human nature on a small scale up to the present day," Burritt contended. "It has been at work for ages, linking hearts into small societies. The boundary of a nation has hitherto been the limit of its attraction." But the scope and effect of the social principle had reached a point where it would soon create bonds of goodwill between all nations and peoples. "[T]he world has just entered a new period of its centralizing power," proclaimed Burritt. "It began with associating two hearts; and then went on associating hamlets, towns, counties, states and provinces into a nation. It has now become an
irresistible force of centripetal attraction, drawing nations together toward the Sun, Source, and Centre of Universal Brotherhood.”

These extensive and ever-extending social bonds, Burritt proposed, were being affected by a host of technological changes that were transforming transportation, communication, and commerce in the transatlantic world. The steam engine was "contracting space; reducing oceans to a river's width; bringing the compass of a continent within the travel of a day; compressing sea-divided nations into immediate neighborhood." Through the laying of telegraph wires man would soon "terminate the farthest reach of finite mind" enabling instantaneous communication across the earth, "so that in the twinkling of the eye, [a man] could thrill its entire surface, and all that dwelt thereon, with an unwhispered thought of his heart." "Paris and London will soon be brought within the same whispering gallery" by the telegraph, Burritt concluded. This, he was certain, would transform the relationship between Britain and France, indeed ultimately between all nations and regions of the earth:

the "natural enmity" between the two nations [will] be lost forever in the unbroken current of friendly conference, in the local identity, which these message wires should work out for them. On, on they are stretching the lightening train of thought; onward to the extremest Inde, over seas and deserts that have swallowed up navies and armies; knitting the ends of the earth together, and its inhabitants, too, in the net-work of consentaneous sympathies; bringing the distant and half-explored continents of humanity.

with all there tribes and tongues, and colors, and conditions, within the
converse of an hour.\(^2\)

In short, what Burritt believed he was seeing in emerging transportation and
communications networks was the end of heterogeneous local identities and the
beginnings of a single "local identity," a global community where individuals of different
nations and on different continents felt intimately connected to one another because they
could communicate so readily with one another. Global technological networks would
facilitate global social networks, "the net-work of consentaneous sympathies."\(^3\)

\(^2\) Burritt, "Elements and Agents of Universal Brotherhood."

\(^3\) Burritt, "Elements and Agents of Universal Brotherhood." A number of historians have
pointed to the same technological and commercial developments identified by Burritt as
the primary causes behind a dramatically expanded and fundamentally reshaped sense of
community within the transatlantic world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
Thomas L. Haskell, for instance, has argued that the growth of regional and international
markets in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries transformed "perception or cognitive
style," providing the conceptual preconditions necessary for humanitarianism.
Individuals could envision their actions having a moral impact beyond their local
community because they knew their economic behavior had extra-local consequences.
"For in the Age of Contract those who engaged in market transactions were, more often,
strangers, people who shared no tie of blood, faith, or community," Haskell argues.
"Such people would not have dared to do business with one another but for the growing
assurance provided them by the law and other market-oriented institutions that
[contractual] promises would be kept—even promises made to a stranger." This sense of
"growing assurance" that people's actions had consequences at a distance facilitated an
"expansion of the conventional limits of causal perception and moral responsibility that
compelled some exceptionally scrupulous individuals to attack slavery [and, one might
argue, other supposed social sins]." (Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the
Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," American Historical Review 90 [April 1985], 342;
Historical Review 90 [June 1985], 556, 563.) Benedict Anderson makes a similar
argument, suggesting that "print-capitalism" changed perceptions of time and space,
enabling individuals to see in their mind's eye people they had never met leading lives of
work and leisure somewhere else ("[The bourgeoisie] had no necessary reason to know of
one another's existence; they did not typically marry each other's daughters or inherit
each other's property. But they did come to visualize in a general way the existence of
thousands and thousands like themselves through print-language"). This capacity to
In the mid 1840s American pacifist Elihu Burritt became a dedicated, proselytizing champion of a "Gospel of Humanity" who took upon himself the task of conceptualizing and realizing a global society.\(^4\) Looking at the technological innovations of his age, Burritt believed he was witnessing the death of distance.\(^5\) The emerging capacity of individuals from different nations to communicate quickly and cheaply with one another via the telegraph and the mail meant that physical distance would soon no longer function as a barrier between any two people no matter how far they were separated from one another. Individuals in different nations might never meet face to face but could nonetheless become close friends. Personal missives transported by the technological wonders of the age—the locomotive, the steamship, the telegraph—became greater than mere words on paper. A letter could function, Burritt was certain, as a disembodied proxy of the author's personality, enabling her to communicate her inner thoughts, expose her very soul, to another distant person. Soul-laden epistles promised to serve as the building blocks of transnational spiritual friendships that could transform international relations. Once individuals in different nations formed personal, spiritual

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5 The phrase "the death of distance" is taken from Frances Cairncross's The Death of Distance: How the Communications Revolutions Is Changing Our Lives, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997). Speculating on the impact of the internet, Cairncross echoes Burritt's hopes for the telegraph a century and a half earlier: "Bonded together by the invisible strands of global communications, humanity may find that peace and prosperity are fostered by the death of distance" (297).
bonds with one another they would no longer support any enmity or war between their respective nation-states. More than that, spiritual friendships might serve as the foundation for a supranational identity. Once people began to identify with citizens of another country, national identifications would fall away. They would instead come to think of themselves as, in title of Burritt's newspaper, Christian citizens.

The Christian citizen was not the only supranational identity made possible by the emerging technologies of the nineteenth century. The same locomotives and steamships that carried letters between nations also conveyed, in far greater quantities, commercial commodities. The "social principle" might tie the citizens of different countries together affectively and spiritually, but "Commerce, with its thousand shuttles, [was also] weaving the nations together in the hempen web of coarser interests." In the course of his reform work, this chapter argues, Burritt came to the disconcerting realization that the same communication and transportation innovations that made Christian citizenship a possibility were already producing a capitalist citizenship—an identity tied neither to the nation nor to religion but instead to international trade, profit, production, and consumption. Burritt feared that these courser interests threatened to supersede those of the spirit. "If Christianity keeps pace with Commerce," Burritt asked, "will there not be a glorious brotherhood, a nice family circle of mankind, by the time these literary lightenings [i.e. the telegraph] shall be mounted and running to and fro over the whole earth?" Burritt hoped and believed that such a brotherhood would ultimately be realized, but the fact that he felt he had to frame this as a question betrays his deep anxiety that this might not happen, that Christianity was not, in fact, keeping pace with transnational capitalism. In the mid 1840s Burritt made it his mission to purposefully shape the
complex ongoing process of transnational globalization, protecting the causes of global Christianity and universal brotherhood from being smothered by an expanding global capitalism. In all his reform efforts he aimed to ensure that the communication and transportation innovations of the age fulfilled their religious potential rather than merely serving the "coarse" interest of trade.6

THE FRIENDLY ADDRESSES MOVEMENT

When "The Elements and Agents of Universal Brotherhood" appeared in the fall of 1846, Burritt had just recently become a prominent figure in the peace movement. He had first gained notoriety a decade earlier as the "learned blacksmith." Burritt had been born into a working family in the small town New Britain, Connecticut, in 1810. He'd followed in his father's footsteps, pursuing a trade himself; as a late teen he apprenticed himself to a blacksmith. But Burritt hoped—and diligently worked—for something more than life as a mechanic; when he wasn't working over an anvil he labored over books studying different languages. By the time he was thirty he was reputed to have acquired fifty languages (though his biographer Peter Tolis estimates that the total was closer to thirty). In an age that celebrated the cultural and intellectual cultivation of the individual—the age of "self-culture"—Burritt was able to use his linguistic accomplishments to win the notice of prominent intellectuals, most notably former Harvard professor and then Massachusetts Governor Edward Everett and poet and Harvard professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. These men publicly praised Burritt as a paragon of self-culture, and Burritt shrewdly parlayed this acclaim, turning his reputation as an extraordinarily accomplished autodidact into a marketable commodity,

6 Burritt, "Elements and Agents of Universal Brotherhood."
something that he could peddle in the literary marketplace and on the lyceum circuit. By
the early 1840s he had largely succeeded in liberating himself from life as a blacksmith
and made his living lecturing and writing on linguistic and cultural issues.\(^7\)

Intensely religious, during this same period Burritt was actively participating in
Congregational evangelical revivals in and around his adopted home of Worcester,
Massachusetts. These experiences fueled in him a desire to play some small part in the
advent of the Christian millennium. This, combined with his interest in lecturing,
writing, and publishing, quickly led him into reform politics, first in the temperance
movement and then more earnestly in antislavery politics. In 1844 Burritt began
publishing his newspaper, the *Christian Citizen*. While loosely associated with the
antislavery Liberty Party, in the *Christian Citizen* Burritt cast his reform net widely,
promoting a host of causes including temperance and peace. He soon became an active
member of the American Peace Society where he assumed a prominent place in
leadership of its most radical wing, which maintained that all wars, including defensive
wars, were unchristian and unjustifiable. In 1845, Burritt captured the editorship of the
*Advocate of Peace*, the official organ of the American Peace Society, from a more
conservative editor. By this point, Burritt was a one-man publishing and editing
juggernaut. In addition to editing both the *Christian Citizen* and the now renamed
*Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood*, by the mid 1840s Burritt was also sending
out hundreds of "Olive Leaves" every week to newspapers around the country. These

\(^7\) Peter Tolis, *Elihu Burritt: Crusader for Brotherhood* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1968),
1-64. For a biographical account that sharply differs from Tolis in its analysis if not in its
details (i.e. a study that generally takes Burritt at his word), see Merle Curti, *The Learned
Blacksmith: The Letters and Journals of Elihu Burritt* (New York: Wilson-Erickson,
1937), 1-7.
short articles on peace were reprinted in many papers by editors who presumably were either sympathetic to the cause of peace or desperate for copy. 

According to Burritt, he was first won to pacifism while preparing for a lecture on "The Anatomy of the Earth" in 1843. In another instance of imagining globalization, Burritt claimed he was struck by the ways different parts of the earth produced distinct crops and products. "It seemed the clearest and strongest proof that this arrangement of nature was designed to bind nation to nation, lying even in the same latitudes, by the difference and the necessity of each other's productions," he argued, "that it contained a natural bond of peace and good neighborhood between them." Burritt saw in this far more than economic and ecological interdependence. The physical ecology of the earth evidenced a spiritual ecology that united mankind into a single whole. Individuals were not isolated atoms, Burritt concluded, but part of a larger "corporate humanity." "The revelations of reason, experience and the gospel, and the irresistible tendencies of the age are developing some new and startling principles in phisiology [sic], not the phisiology of the human body, but the great body of humanity, the anatomy of mankind," Burritt suggested. He imaginatively freed men and women from their bodies by projecting their corporeality on to the planet:

the solid globe with its fathomless strata of granite muscles, with the radical heat of its internal fires, with the vital fluid of its oceans and rivers

8 Tolis, Elihu Burritt, 65-144.

9 Burritt, Ten-Minute Talks on All Sorts of Topics, with Autobiography of the Author (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1874), 17. Corroborating Burritt's 1870s account of events over thirty years earlier is the biographical sketch of Burritt written by Mary Howitt and published in 1846, which reported the same story (Howitt, "Memoir of Elihu Burritt," The People's Journal, Oct. 31, 1846).
and the adamantine osteology of its mountains, is nothing more or less than the great body of corporate humanity, and humanity the body of the soul, and the soul the body of divinity, and divinity the essence and inspiration of God. Viewed in this light, every acre of dry land becomes so much flesh of this great corporeity, every river a vein throbbing with the vital fluid, every sea an artery, and the oceans only three globes or divisions of one great heart.10

Remaking the earth into human "flesh" with bones and muscles and arteries, Burritt rendered humanity a single unified whole. In Burritt's chain of being, the totality of humanity became both the soul of an embodied earth and the embodiment of a larger collective soul. Men and women made a mistake when they took their individual bodily integrity to mean they were isolated and discrete. They were all part of the same soul, bound to one another and connected both to an embodied earth and to divinity itself.

In 1846 Burritt was fortuitously offered an opportunity to build a reform movement that would put these beliefs into practice. Having made a name in peace politics and gained a reputation as a tireless and innovative promoter of the cause, Burritt was recruited by a group of British pacifists to organize the American branch of the "International and Friendly Addresses" movement. In late January 1846, Burritt received a letter of introduction and entreaty from Joseph Crosfield, George Bradshaw, and Peter B. Alley, three Quakers active in the British peace movement, asking him to distribute an "Appeal to Merchants of the Realm" to American newspapers. With tensions mounting between the United States and Britain over their competing claims to the Oregon

territory, these reformers wanted citizens in each country to exchange "friendly addresses" with one another. They hoped that addresses expressing both goodwill and a desire for peace would calm public opinion and encourage the U.S. and British governments to settle the matter by arbitration rather than through war. Crosfield had drafted the original "Appeal" and had already distributed it to a number of British papers.  

For Burritt Crosfield's "Appeal" was the source of both hope and anxiety. Atop the "Appeal" ran a banner "Peace! or War? Commerce! or the Sword?," which seemed to suggest that as the sword was an instrument of war, commerce was an instrument of peace. There was nothing unusual in this formula; it had long been argued that a healthy international trade promoted peace insofar as nations were less likely to resort to war if that would disrupt a lucrative exchange of goods. But Burritt found the British Quakers' coupling of commerce and peace less than principled and philanthropic. He suspected that what these men—all manufacturers, members of Britain's emerging entrepreneurial and industrial elite—were primarily motivated not by a disinterested concern for peace but by their own economic self-interest. What they ultimately sought, Burritt feared, was

11 Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, March 1846, 69-70. Martin Ceadel, The Origins of War Prevention: The British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1730-1854 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 359-360. Joseph Crosfield was no doubt part of the Crosfield family of Warrington, almost certainly a nephew of Joseph Crosfield, founder of the soap manufactory Crosfield and Sons. While I have not been able to locate any biographical material on the younger Crosfield, the political argument he made in the "Appeal" (which are yet to be analyzed in this chapter) echoed the politics of his presumed uncle. The elder Crosfield (who died in 1844, two years before the publication of the "Appeal") was a Quaker manufacturer active in British Liberal politics, particularly the promotion of free trade and the Anti-Corn Law League. (A.E. Musson, Enterprise in Soap and Chemicals: Joseph Crosfield & Sons, Limited, 1815-1965 [1965; repr., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1967], 50-54, 371; David Burns Windsor, The Quaker Enterprise: Friends in Business [London: Frederick Muller Limited, 1980], 62-65.)
not to use commerce to promote the cause of peace, but to use the cause of peace to promote an international commerce that was enriching them.\(^{12}\)

The appeal of the "Appeal" clearly involved the economic self-interest of Britain's merchant class, and it was particularly being directed to the "free traders" who for a decade had been fighting for the repeal of the protectionist Corn Laws that imposed high tariffs on agricultural goods imported into Britain. The "Appeal" began with the claim "That a war with America would be a direful calamity—that it would utterly blast your prosperity—would in fact annihilate commerce, no one will attempt to deny." In framing the "Appeal" in this way, Crosfield attempted to redirect the political energies of the free traders (who were at that very moment were on the verge of winning their fight to repeal the Corn Laws) to the Oregon question. "At the present juncture the free traders have a grave duty to perform," the "Appeal" declared. "Without the blessing, the unspeakable blessing of peace, free trade were but a name." British merchants should insist upon arbitration at home, and send "friendly addresses" to their merchant counterparts in America urging them to do the same.\(^{13}\)

In the "Appeal," Crosfield redeployed some of the main arguments that had been used by Leaguers in their decade-long efforts to wrest political and economic power from Britain's landed aristocracy. British manufacturers and merchants had a straightforward economic interest in the cause of free trade. For them, free trade lowered the cost of imported raw materials they used in their factories. Working-class and Charterist radicals

\(^{12}\) Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, March 1846, 71.

contended that these manufacturers and merchants also hoped that the drop in bread prices that would result from the repeal of protective tariffs on agricultural products would enable them to stabilize, or even lower, the wages they paid their workers. Yet, as historian G.R. Seale argues, the victory that the League sought was not primarily one of immediate financial gain but rather a larger political triumph over Britain's landed aristocracy. Beyond any economic advantages they would gain from the repeal of the Corn Laws, the Leaguers saw and attacked those protectionist measures as symbols of the political power of British aristocrats; repeal, Leaguers hoped, would be a potent blow to the stature of the aristocracy. Additionally, manufacturers and merchants hoped the Corn Law issue would direct working-class criticism towards the aristocracy and away from themselves. Leaguers argued that their opposition to the Corn Laws, which artificially inflated bread prices, was clear evidence that their interests and those of Britain's laboring classes were one and the same. Economic hardships and poverty among laborers was neither the fault nor the responsibility of their employers; instead, it was caused by the unquestioned power and privileges enjoyed by Britain's aristocracy. The "Appeal" drew upon all these arguments. Implicitly alluding to the aristocracy's dominance of the army and the navy, Crosfield contended that "Wars generally have been commenced, not for the benefit of the people, but for the supposed benefit of a class whose interests have by no means been identified with the people's interests. Happily," he continued, "another aristocracy has arisen, our merchant aristocracy, who are identified with the people; whose very existence depends on the maintenance of peace; and who are destined to thus be honorably instrumental in banishing the demon war." In Crosfield's thinking, the question of Oregon would be the next battle of the free trade manufacturers and
merchants fight with their aristocratic opponents for dominance in British society and politics. Peace might replace repeal as the issue that would advance the free traders' economic and political agendas. In the rhetoric of Crosfield and his associates, free trade and peace were inextricably intertwined. Increased capitalist integration between nations, they argued, was the foundation of international peace. They claimed that there existed an "intimate connection between Free Trade and Peace." Going further, they rhetorically collapsed the two together, telling Burritt that "the TWO are TWIN BRETHREN," and that anyone "furthering the one cause" would also be "promoting the other."

While Burritt enthusiastically seized upon this new opportunity to work in the cause of peace, he was skeptical of and anxious about the British reformers' emphasis on commerce. On the one hand, he appreciated the pragmatic promise of the free trade argument. It had the potential to win many middle-class merchants and manufacturers in both Britain and America to pacifism. A mutually lucrative trade between nations might, indeed, ultimately deter war. Something of an opportunist, Burritt also no doubt recognized the personal rewards that might follow if he assumed a leadership role in the Friendly Addresses Movement. Becoming the American organizer of the movement would enhance Burritt's role in the peace movement in both the U.S. and the Atlantic world. The British Quakers' invitation was hard to resist on that score. On the other hand, Burritt feared that this rhetoric of free trade perverted the cause of peace and amounted to a betrayal of its true, Christian foundations. A peace built primarily out of shared economic interest, Burritt believed, was both crass and fragile.


15 *Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood*, March 1846, 74.
Unwilling to endorse Crosfield's free trade arguments but sensing great promise in the Friendly Addresses Movement, Burritt began a campaign to reframe the movement by displacing free trade as the project's conceptual centerpiece, replacing it with Christian love. Burritt, in short, hoped to make the Friendly Addresses Movement friendlier. His first mention of the movement in the Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood was a scathing critique of free-trade rhetoric. In an editorial "To Ministers of Jesus Christ, in Great Britain and the United States," Burritt challenged the clergy in Britain and the U.S. not to be outdone by self-interested merchants in promoting the Christian cause of peace. "Ministers of the Gospel of Christ," he asked, "will you suffer the sublime religion you teach to be outrun in beneficence by the religious code of Mammon? Will you permit the Day Book of the Merchant to outspeak the New Testament of the Son of God, in denouncing war, and proclaiming the blessings of peace?" Burritt didn't mince words, forcefully arguing that the peace sentiments of merchants regarding the Oregon question were nothing more than window dressing used to justify their pursuit of their self-interested economic agendas:

Foreseeing the ruin in which such a fratricidal war would involve the wealth of self-interest, ... the merchants of Great Britain have addressed the merchants of America, appealing to the highest principles in the religion of the Ledger, to induce them to use all the influence they can exert on their Government, to avert the dire calamity of war. In their earnest and graphic exposition of the evils of war and the blessings of peace, they say, not exactly in the language of the Bible, but in that of a commercial edition of the same Revelation, "GODLINESS IS GREAT
GAIN;" Peace, universal Peace, is universal Prosperity; the PECUNIARY benefits of having the Kingdom of God and his righeousness [sic] established throughout the world, render obedience imperative and lucrative!

In hyperbolic, mocking language, Burritt accused these merchants of being "inverse Christians," hypocritical men who "run out into the thoroughfares of the agitated people, and, with Ephesian zeal, cry, 'Great is Christianity! great is Christianity!' With their Ledgers in their hands, full of the pecuniary records of Godliness, they shout, 'Peace on earth, and good will to men!' See with what faith they resort to the principles of their commercial morality to do just what the sublimest doctrines of Jesus Christ were designed to do in fraternizing mankind! See them at work, endeavoring to tie the two great Anglo-Saxon nations together with the tow strings, the cotton yarn, of Commerce! as if they were the strongest bonds of union that could connect hearts divided by the sea!"

In this portrait of Burritt's, both the pacifism and Christianity of the merchants amounted to nothing more than tools they crassly employed in pursuit of their own economic self-interest.16

The Friendly Addresses Movement should instead be premised upon Christian love. Burritt called on the ministers to take a leading role in the movement and thus return pacifism to its spiritual foundations. Unlike the self-interested and impersonal declarations of friendships exchanged by the merchants of the two nations, Burritt maintained that the true work of God and peace would be done better if ministers in each country addressed personal correspondence to one another.

16 Burritt, "To Ministers of Jesus Christ, in Great Britain and the United States," Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, February 1846, 43-44.
Let ... the gospel Ministers, on both sides of the Atlantic, arise and shake hands across the ocean. Let not only ecclesiastical greetings be interchanged in printed communications, but letters filled with the personalities of friendship, conveyed in the hand-writing of a friend. Let Christian men and Ministers pair off, and engage in a personal correspondence on the things that belong to peace. Every letter thus interchanged, like a weaver's shuttle, will carry across the ocean a silken ligature to bind two kindred hearts, and, through them, two kindred nations.

Such an exchange between ministers would truly merit the description "friendly addresses." Instead of being founded upon crass commercial self-interest, this correspondence would be based upon a shared love of God and of one's fellow Christian. It would evidence the "divine connection" of all Christians constituted through their shared love of Christ: "For the hearts of all fruit-bearing Christians on earth are grafted into the heart of Christ, and thus are brethren by ties, by ligaments of unity, unknown to any relations of mere human consanguinity." Connections of the body, of family and "human consanguinity," were insignificant in comparison to those of the "heart," of the soul. Actual, physical blood relations were nothing weighed against all Christians' immaterial, spiritual "blood relation to Christ." Burritt challenged Christian ministers on both sides of the Atlantic to demonstrate forcefully the existence and power of these spiritual bonds through their correspondence.17

17 Burritt, "'To Ministers of Jesus Christ, in Great Britain and the United States," 44, 45.
What Burritt hoped to foment here—something that he would repeatedly advocate in the coming years and decades—was the generation of a spiritualized public sphere among pacifists and Christians more generally. The concept of a public sphere is, of course, most closely associated with the work of Jürgen Habermas, who argues that in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe the bourgeoisie developed a number of sites, particularly the institution of the press, where private individuals could communicate with one another and critique the state from the outside. In Habermas's formulation, the public sphere, at its best, functioned as a site of critical reflection where reasoned debate would result in a "public opinion" that would guide—and sometimes check—the actions of church and state. Burritt's ambitions for the Friendly Addresses Movement accorded with some of the basic characteristics of the idealized Habermasian public sphere. Burritt hoped to generate international networks of communication among the friends of peace that would constitute a public whose opinion was decidedly pacifistic. This public would be both sufficiently large and influential to be visible to different nation-states and thus dissuade those states from resorting to war. Yet the communication that Burritt envisioned differed in some fundamental respects from the bourgeois public sphere as described by Habermas. An impersonal reason was an essential element of the Habermasian public sphere. In the public sphere rank and status did not matter; instead, what counted was the rational persuasiveness of one's argument regardless of one's personal situation—an abstracted impersonality constituted through the medium of print. In Burritt's public sphere, though, the important elements of communication were not reason and impersonality. Quite the contrary: Burritt instead considered emotion and personality the essential elements of this communication.
personalities of friendship, conveyed in the hand-writing of a friend" were privileged over "printed communication"; loving Christian "hearts" were privileged over reasoning minds. What Burritt hoped to create was what might be termed an evangelical public sphere, one where public opinion would not be produced from rational, critical debate but from ever growing interpersonal ties of Christian love. This evangelical public sphere would effectively counter the bourgeois public sphere, harnessing the communications networks of the mid-nineteenth century for Christianity rather than capitalism.\(^1^8\)

Given his biting public criticisms of the "religion of the Ledger", Burritt's response to Crosfield, Alley, and W.P. Cunningham (who appears to have replaced Bradshaw as an organizer in Britain), written in late February and published in the March edition of the *Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood*, seems to be the work of a different man, for in this letter Burritt waxed enthusiastic about the beneficence of free trade, exuberantly charactering free trade as "the Commercial Harbinger of the Millennium, with its white, world-wide wings, . . . crossing the threshold of the his hate-seared world, to fuse the nations into one peaceful and happy brotherhood." "The prospect of unrestricted Social and Commercial intercourse makes my heart palpitate for

\(^{18}\) Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 27-88. Burritt inverted what Michael Warner argues were the key interrelated elements of the republican public sphere in America during the second half of the eighteenth century: reason and impersonality. For Warner’s republicans "the very printedness of [public] discourse takes on a specially legitimate meaning, because it is categorically differentiated from personal modes of sociability" (Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* [Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 1990], 39.) This inversion is one indices of the difference between the Enlightenment-inspired cultural and political perspective of late-eighteenth-century republican leaders and the romantic perspective of radical New England reformers of the 1830s and 1840s. For a study of this transformation in perspective and tactics among abolitionists from the 1790s to the 1850s, see Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism.*
joy," he told them. Yet, after echoing the rhetoric of his British colleagues in the initial paragraph of his response to them, Burritt then turned the rest of his letter into an attempt to win them (and Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood readers) to his vision of the movement as an instrument of social, and only incidentally of commercial, intercourse. While the tone of Burritt's letter was remarkably different from his appeal "To Ministers of Jesus Christ, in Great Britain and the United States," the sentiment, purpose, and much of the substance were the same. In both Burritt suggested a series of measures and goals that would make the Friendly Addresses Movement less a commercial, professional enterprise and more a spiritual, personal one.19

Setting aside the issue of commerce after the initial paragraph of his letter, Burritt depicted the addresses sent from Britain to America as the first salvo in a battle between the nations to best one another in works of love and philanthropy. "I rejoice that you have thrown down the white glove of Christian rivalry to us," he told Crosfield, Alley, Cunningham, and the readers of this public letter. "You will find that we are a 'chip off the old block,' and are ready to meet you in the field of friendship, armed and equipped according to the law of love, and there test the strength of our hearts to do each other good." Instead of adopting the British peace constituency's self-referential term "free traders," Burritt instead chose to describe them as Christian soldiers, as if that very depiction might wrest them from free trade to Christian love. "Why, you Knights of the order of Bethlehem!," Burritt warned in overwrought prose, "if you provoke us into this conflict, we will never give over until we have leveled every rampart of your national prejudice even with the ground, and planted the white, dove-winged banner of Peace on

19 Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, Mar. 1846, 79.
the tallest pinnacle of your acropolis." No doubt Burritt thought of his appeal "To Ministers of Jesus Christ, in Great Britain and the United States" as a sally in this rivalry, and would have excused the truculent tone of the article as a well-intentioned challenge to British activists to refocus on works of Christian reform.20

Crosfield's "Appeal" had urged British merchants to send addresses expressing goodwill to their counterparts in America. Burritt proposed that this plan be modified and that cities in Britain and America that shared the same name should exchange addresses with each other. This, he believed, would inject a dose of affection into the movement, making the addresses not professions of commercial self-interest but instead of true friendship. A shared name, immaterial in nature, forged a bond between two physical places distant from one another. "There is something kind and affectionate towards old England associated with the names of nearly all of the cities and towns in this country: the record of filial souvenirs, which time nor human violence shall ever obliterate," he informed the British free traders. Echoing his emphasis upon "personalities of friendship" in "To Ministers of Jesus Christ, in Great Britain and the United States," Burritt suggested that if these towns and cities with the same name were to exchange addresses, it would "make the addresses more personal . . . . It would be more like mothers writing to their daughters." As this rhetoric suggests, instead of being tied together by the coarse, impersonal bonds of commerce, Burritt conceived of the addresses as a means of creating a sense of family between the two nations, uniting the "mother-land" with "her trans-atlantic daughter" in ties of affection and love.21

20 Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, Mar. 1846, 80.
21 Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, Mar. 1846, 80.
That Burritt was not enamored by the free trade arguments of Crosfield's "Appeal" is not particularly surprising. As a blacksmith whose father was a farmer and a cobbler, Burritt was not a member of the merchant elite to whom the "Appeal" was addressed. Burritt had set up and run a small grocery in his hometown in the mid 1830s, only to have it ruined in the Panic of 1837. That experience may have left him with a particular distaste for the world of national and international commerce. More than that though, a decade after the failure of his grocery, Burritt had his own self-interested reasons for critiquing free trade arguments. As historian R. Jackson Wilson argues, being critical of the market was an integral aspect of the persona of the intellectual in antebellum America. Ironically, creating that persona was generally a requirement for success in the literary marketplace of the day. As a would-be writer, speaker, and reformer, Burritt's livelihood was in part premised upon a perception that he stood at a critical distance from the marketplace. Like his reputation as the "learned blacksmith," being an insightful critic of the materialism of the marketplace was itself a marketable commodity for Burritt.22

That said, an explanation of Burritt's critique of the "Appeal" cannot be reduced to his class identity or his own economic interests. As a devout evangelical, Burritt sincerely believed the economic arguments of the "Appeal" to be a profane betrayal of the true, religious foundations of pacifism. There was also something of American republicanism, heavily inflected with evangelical Christianity, in Burritt's response to the "Appeal". He balked at the "Appeal's" economic liberalism, its underlying assumption

that the pursuit of economic self-interest benefited society as a whole. Instead, he countered with the basic premises of republicanism: an emphasis upon virtue (of the Christian variety), disinterestedness, and the commonweal.

Yet Burritt's critiques of the "Appeal" were more than a republican retort to a liberal document. The "Appeal" exemplified what historian Albert O. Hirschman has called the "the principle of countervailing passion" as a strategy for minimizing the destructive effects of human vices. According to this social theory developed and redeveloped by a series of thinkers (Hobbes, Spinoza, Montesquieu, James Stuart among others) between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, passions could be pitted against one another (within both the individual and the state), effectively restraining one another. For instance, in an argument that the "Appeal" reproduced, Montesquieu argued that the passion of avarice would restrain the passion of conquest insofar as nations that engaged in mutually profitable trade with one another would not destroy their commercial relationship by going to war against each other. Economic interest would check the lust for conquest. Burritt objected to this strategy because it centered on restraining vices rather than focusing on fostering virtues. The focus should not be a negative one of containing aggression and avarice, but instead a positive one of celebrating and realizing peace. Burritt's righteous indignation at the merchants' self-interested pacifism harkened back to an intellectual strategy dominant before the eighteenth-century of using moral philosophy and religious precepts to repress vices. People should work for peace, Burritt proclaimed, not because they had any interest in doing so, but simply because war was utterly inconsistent with the teachings of the Prince of Peace. Beyond this moralizing strategy, Burritt did at times deploy what Hirschman calls the "harnessing solution" to the
vice of avarice. Exemplified best in the Adam Smith *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the basic idea was that the pursuit of individual economic self-interest could be harnessed for the greater social good. While it was not an idea he expressed forcefully, Burritt admitted that the interest of merchants might contribute to international peace.23

Burritt accepted this argument about the peaceful consequences of free trade for pragmatic rather than principled reasons. While Burritt's acknowledged that commerce might serve the cause of peace, his position differed from that of his British colleagues in marked and important ways. The British reformers depicted a world where individuals in different nations were personally and peacefully connected with each other through the mechanism of trade. Burritt was very much taken with this pleasing, utopian vision. But he was far from sure that commerce should be the principal agent that constituted these connections. Burritt worried that commerce might be pursued as an end in itself rather than what it properly was: a worldly means towards a greater spiritual end. In Burritt's mind, trade could only be a providentially provided tool to usher in a millennial world of peace, harmony, and spiritual awakening. Trade must never be allowed to supplant Christianity as the centerpiece of Anglo-American peace.

In his responses to the "Appeal" Burritt was not just trying to turn the Friendly Addresses Movement away from the rhetoric of free trade, but attempting to begin the greater task of reshaping the larger project that the Anti-Corn Law movement and the Friendly Addresses Movement were both just small parts of: the project of globalization. The Friendly Addresses Movement needed to be just that: friendly, premised upon a sincere love of peace and one's fellow man. A healing dose of religious devotion might

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cure the movement of the sinful disease of economic self-interest. If that were to happen, the Friendly Addresses Movement might prove a small step towards ensuring that globalization was not a secular and sinful process of economic aggrandizement, but instead a spiritual event realizing the kingdom of God on earth.

Burritt's ability to use the Friendly Addresses Movement to foster affective ties between individuals in Britain and the United States was limited by the short duration of the movement itself. The matter of Oregon was settled by arbitration in June 1846, a mere six months after the launch of the movement. The addresses exchanged before arbitration reflected, in general, the spirit of the "Appeal" more than Burritt's hope for expressions of pure, uncompromised Christian agape. Many of the addresses combined sentiments of friendship with appeals to commercial self-interest. For instance, merchants from Boston, England, wrote in an address to the city of Boston, Massachusetts, of their desire and faith "that friendship, along with commercial intercourse, will for all generations be perpetuated never to be interrupted by national jealousies, or by the horrors and crimes of war." The Huddersfield Address collapsed together appeals to "religion, consanguinity, and mutual interest," suggesting that war between Britain and the United States would be disastrous, bringing about "the severance of the nearest domestic bonds, the disturbance of our ever-growing Commercial and Political relations, [and] the disgrace of our common Christianity." This trinity of feminized sentiment, manly commerce, and religion was also invoked in the Rochdale, Lancashire, address to the citizens of Boston, Massachusetts. "[S]hall our pecuniary resources be wasted,—shall the ties of the domestic life be violated . . .,—and, above all, shall the laws of our beneficent Creator be dishonored . . . ?," they asked. Yet if many of
the addresses appealed to sentiment and religion, the maintenance and promotion of
transatlantic commerce remained the central incentive for peace in the rhetoric of most of
the addresses, particularly those from Britain. Put frankly and succinctly in the address
from Manchester, the headquarters of the Anti-Corn Law League and the free trade
movement, what merchants primarily desired was "a still closer bond of commercial
union between these two great nations."²⁴

While the "happy termination" of the Oregon crisis was cause for celebration
among peace reformers, the end of the Friendly Addresses movement was nonetheless
bittersweet for Burritt. In his mind, the movement had just barely initiated "the happier
tendency of those social influences which were brought to bear upon its settlement." For
Burritt, the Friendly Addresses Movement was only a beginning. Ultimately, he hoped
that a generation later people would be able to look back at it as "a great fact and
forerunner in the progress of international society." The issues he had engaged in his
correspondence with his British colleagues had had a dramatic effect upon his reform
goals, pushing his agenda towards the promotion of this idea of international society. If
the details of his next move were not wholly clear, the object of his work had certainly
crystallized around the notion of the "Oneness of the People." In an article of that title,
Burritt proposed that the international peace would be achieved only when the peoples of
different nations abandoned "bitter and obstinate nationalities," and "learn[ed] to
aggregate themselves into one people," coming "to think, feel, and say, We." This was

²⁴ Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, 75, 126, 76.
the work before him. "As God is one," Burritt proclaimed, "His human children ought to
be united by stronger ties than those of consanguinity in the oneness of a single family."25

If the Friendly Addresses Movement had not afforded Burritt a sustained
opportunity to promote universal brotherhood, his involvement in the movement had
been an epiphany. It afforded him a tantalizing vision of a harmonious international
society, one he now considered it his divine calling to realize. More practically, in
leading the movement he had become a recognized figure in the British reform
community. In June 1846 this son of New Britain departed for old Britain aboard the
same ship that carried word of the settlement of the Oregon crisis. It is unclear exactly
what Burritt wanted to accomplish during this trip; in his autobiographic sketch from the
1870s, Burritt claimed he left to make a three-month "foot-tour through the kingdom."
He likely did not have a specific plan worked out, but he clearly hoped to use his new
connections within the British reform community to continue the work of friendship
politics that he had begun with the Friendly Addresses Community: the work of building
an "international society" built around "the great law of love, which is to cement and bind
together in harmony all races of men."26

THE NEW ENGLAND VILLAGE WRIT LARGE

Though the Oregon crisis had ended and with it the Friendly Addresses
Movement, after he arrived in Britain Burritt continued to seize every opportunity to

25 [Elihu Burritt], The Editor, "Oneness of the People," Advocate of Peace and Universal
Brotherhood, Sept. 1846, 220-221; Burritt, "Elements and Agents of Universal
Brotherhood."

26 Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, Oct, 1846, 236; Burritt, Ten-Minute
Talks, 20; Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, Jun. 1846, 134. Tolis, Elihu
Burritt, 141-144.
foster an evangelical public sphere, encouraging Christians and reformers on both sides of the Atlantic to correspond and collaborate with one another. For instance, after learning about the formation of a Juvenile Peace Society in Edinburgh, Burritt, with characteristic zeal, wrote to the press in Britain and America and to a dozen reformers proposing a plan to put these young people in touch with their counterparts in America. "It immediately occurred to me," Burritt recorded in his journal, "that a juvenile peace society might be formed in Boston, U.S.A., to correspond with the society in Edinboro [sic], thus bringing the young of both cities into pleasant communications on things that make for peace." Reproducing the basic design of the Friendly Addresses Movement, Burritt thought that "it might be practicable [sic] to raise up 100 of these Juvenile Peace Societies on each side of the Atlantic and pair them off, like the one in Edinboro & Boston, to correspond with each other perhaps monthly." Similarly, he also enthusiastically proposed the initiation of a movement of "International Sunday School Correspondence" to a group of Sunday school teachers in Britain. If "every Sunday school in England should put itself in communication with some Sunday school in America," the teachers might accomplish the fusion of "the two divisions of the young generation of the Anglo Saxon race into one brotherhood."27

Burritt wanted people in the U.S., Britain, and the world more generally to treat each other as they would their friends and neighbors, to think of themselves as members of a shared global village. Burritt dreamed that the world might be remade in the image of the idealized New England town. A number of historians (most notably Allan Kulikoff, James Henretta, and Daniel Vickers) have argued that during the seventeenth

27 Burritt, Journal, Nov. 14, 1846; Nov. 15, 1846; Nov. 16, 1846; Dec. 7, 1846; Dec. 25, 1846, New Britain Public Library, New Britain, CT.
and eighteenth centuries an ethic of neighborly reciprocity had co-existed with and tempered a more profit-oriented economy in towns like New Britain. Kulikoff has suggested that this "system of non-commercial exchange . . . based on male householder reciprocity (and . . . upon exchanges between women) . . . was imbued with great cultural significance." Regardless of whether or not this moral economy of the New England town had ever truly existed, the ethic of neighborliness had great cultural significance. It became a valued and idealized element of the self-conception of New Englanders well into the nineteenth century, and it inspired the efforts of a host of reformers, Burritt among them. Ever an optimistic idealist, Burritt envisioned a global expansion of New England neighborliness, imagining that new communication networks might allow neighborliness to encompass the globe.

To that end, Burritt worked to foster a sense of personal connection between people separated by the Atlantic. For instance, in a September issue of the Christian Citizen Burritt published a story about a young English boy whose plight echoed Burritt's


29 Burritt was only one among a number of New Englanders who took on the task of reconstructing a sense of community and social order that they felt had disappeared with the political and commercial revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Robert H. Abzug argues in Cosmos Crumbing that beginning with Benjamin Rush's efforts to reengineer the inner identities of American citizens around republican virtues, two generations of New England reformers sought (through quite diverse programs) to morally reorder their society, purging it of disorder and sin. Two other thoughtful works that explore the complex issue of religious responses to perceived social and cultural disorder are Paul E. Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millenium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837 (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978) and Cayton, Emerson's Emergence.
own childhood: this boy was prevented from attending school because his family could not afford to part with his labor in making nails. Burritt urged young readers of this "School Room" column to help this boy as they would a neighbor in need by contributing nickels for the "Little Nailer's" education. Burritt stoked an international sentimentality, seeking to stimulate the extension of young reader's sympathies across the Atlantic. This modest effort met some success; three days before Christmas in 1846, Burritt visited this boy's family again, this time with news that children in America had collected enough money to provide for the boy's education.\(^3\)

Burritt believed a globalized moral economy would only be built incrementally from such small acts of friendship and neighborliness. Something as simple as a recipe might accomplish much. Before leaving for Britain, Burritt asked his female readers to send him their best recipes using Indian corn meal. Taking these with him to England, Burritt wrote English editors asking them to publish the recipes in their papers. Again privileging personal handwriting over impersonal print, Burritt explained that these recipes were personalized missives of goodwill, "not extracted from books, but penned by [American women's] own hands," presented with "no other motive than that of contributing to the comfort of a great many families in this country." By sharing such commonplace details of their lives as recipes, Burritt hoped that English and American women might come to think of one another as neighbors.\(^3^1\)

Superceding and embracing all these small efforts was Burritt's grand reform ambition: the creation of a new international reform organization, the League of

\(^3^0\) Journal, Dec. 17, 1846; Dec. 22, 1846; Tolis, Elihu Burritt, 161-162.

\(^3^1\) Burritt to Mr. Editor (cyclostyled), Jul. 10, 1846, Klingberg Collection.
Universal Brotherhood. The initial idea for the League had come from Burritt's pacifist colleague Amasa Walker, writing in the February 7, 1846 issue of Burritt's Christian Citizen. What was needed, Walker suggested, was an organization that could "unite all hearts, all sects, all parties, all religions" and bring together reformers who had heretofore been working in isolation on specific causes: the British anti-Corn Law Leaguers and universal (male) suffragists, Irish Catholic Emancipation activists, and teetotalers and abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic. Five months after Walker's article appeared and a few weeks following Burritt's arrival in Britain, the learned blacksmith launched such an organization, hoping it would prove "a little nucleus of an organization that might expand into a vast WORLD'S SOCIETY."

This world's society would be built upon a series of voluntary commitments by individuals to align themselves with one another through the League. The only requirement for membership was to sign a pledge that Burritt had composed, a pledge "founded upon the expanding obligations of that broad commandment: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.'" First and foremost, the pledge proscribed adherents from personally participating in war either by joining the military or, more nebulously, from yielding "any voluntary support or sanction to the preparation for or prosecution of any war." The League's pledge, however, went beyond pacifism and was designed to be an instrument for building an international community premised upon love and moral principle. A signer of the pledge vowed to "associate myself with all persons, of whatever country, condition, or color, who have signed, or shall hereafter sign this pledge." As a member of this community, a person pledged himself or herself to

32 Walker quoted in Tolis, Elihu Burritt, 143; Burritt, "League of Universal Brotherhood," Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, October 1846, 244.
acknowledge the equality of all human beings by working for the "abolition of all institutions and customs which do not recognize and respect the image of God and a human brother in every man, of whatever clime, color, or condition of humanity."

Through the language of the pledge, Burritt attempted to create a global community that would explicitly supersede all other partial communities—communities premised upon the nation, upon race, and upon Christian sect—in the hearts, minds, and souls of its members.33

The League would thus continue the work that Burritt had begun with the Friendly Addresses Movement. The League would accomplish the "fusion [of all men and nations] into one peaceful brotherhood." Once again, Burritt believed that an interpersonal, international, spiritualized affect would play a central role in creating this public sphere and this international society. Besides not participating in the military, the most specific action required of League members by the pledge was to work "for the abolition of all restrictions upon international correspondence and friendly intercourse."

For his part, Burritt worked diligently to promote "International Penny Postage," a proposal to lower the cost of transporting a letter across the ocean to a single penny. The League would be both agent and index of the growth of a socially harmonious Christian community, first on a transatlantic and later on a global scale.34

The League of Universal Brotherhood both embodied and exemplified the most visionary, millennial ambitions of the antebellum reform imagination. In the League Burritt sought literally to realize William Lloyd Garrison's motto "My country is the

33 Burritt quoted in Tolis, Elihu Burritt, 158; Advocate of Peace and Universal Brotherhood, October 1846, 243.

world, my countrymen are all mankind." The theory behind the League's pledge was undeniably romantic and perfectionist in its simplicity. By signing the pledge, an individual, in essence, proscribed himself or herself from committing any sins that would hurt his fellow men and women—first and foremost by not participating in or supporting war, but more generally by disregarding any and all "institutions and customs" that sustained false divisions and created animosity between different social groups. A member of the League would come out from all the sinful practices of society—war, slavery, nationalism—and associate himself or herself with a voluntary society committed to equality and Christian love.

In this respect—and others—the League shared some basic ideological premises and goals with communitarianism. The 1840s was the "communitarian moment" in American history. During the decade thousands of women and men helped found dozens of alternative communities throughout the United States, particularly in the northern states. In utopian communities like New Harmony, Brook Farm, and Oneida, these reform-minded individuals hoped to escape chattel slavery, class conflict, and all the other social ills that plagued American society. While communitarianism was by no means homogeneous—different communities drew their inspiration and plans from Fourierist, Owenite, and transcendentalist ideas—in general communitarians shared an agenda of creating local social practices and institutional structures premised upon cooperation rather than competition. Communitarians would practice what reformers had preached, leveling racial, class, and gender hierarchies and creating small societies characterized by social harmony and shared piety. These reformers were not escapists. Instead, in founding their communities they hoped to engineer new, better models of
social organization that the rest of American society would emulate. In their individual communities they would build a millennial world in miniature.35

The League was essentially a communitarian experiment without the commune. While Burritt wholeheartedly concurred with the larger goals of the communitarians, it is not hard to imagine that as a pacifist he would have cast a skeptical eye on the strategies they employed. By retreating to local communities, communitarians (often devoted to very specific ideological agendas like Fourierism) risked exacerbating the spirit of localism and sectarianism that divided societies from one another. Burritt shared with the communitarians the conviction that building a cooperative, loving society was the central reform project of the age, encompassing all other smaller efforts. But that society needed to be built on a global rather than a local scale. Rectifying the shortcoming of communitarianism, the League would foster universal rather than partial brotherhood, dissolving all social divisions, in the process making war an impossibility.

Conceptually, the League was the apotheosis of reform strategies of the 1830s and 1840s built around moral suasion. For two decades the tactics of many white and African American reformers (particularly of the Garrisonian variety) had been premised upon the universality of moral values. Certain core values (racial equality, non-violence, Christian love) these reformers were sure, were right, undeniably so. All that was needed to

achieve reform was to cultivate these principles. This would not and could not be accomplished by force, but instead by lovingly, if insistently, persuading people to act according to the values that they knew in their souls to be good and true. Once slaveholders and warmongers acknowledged these core universal moral values they would cease sinning and denounce slavery and war. In the League Burritt sought to bring the idea of moral suasion to its logical conclusion. Moral values were universal, and thus they could and should be fostered globally. The League of Universal Brotherhood would demonstrate that the world view of moral suasion was, literally, the world view, true for each person on the planet.

Because of Burritt's tireless efforts, thousands of individuals in Britain and in the U.S. signed the pledge, making the making the League, according to Martin Ceadel, "the world's first mass peace association." A number of notable reformers on both sides of the Atlantic had supported the League: Joseph Sturge provided a great deal of financial assistance to the League, Samuel Coues and Gerritt Smith served as vice-presidents of the American League, and noted Unitarian minister and transcendentalist Theodore Parker signed the pledge. Yet like the majority of its communitarian cousins, the League of Universal Brotherhood did not survive as a significant reform organization more than a handful of years. By 1850 the League had all but collapsed.36

BURRITT'S BODY POLITICS

As the League indicates, Burritt's friendship politics lacked nothing in terms of ambition. He aimed to transform the entire world through friendship. Burritt believed that the disembodied word, in letters, addresses, and the pledge, would link people

36 Ceadel, Origins of War Prevention, 389, 389-402.
together in bonds of affection and goodwill through they might never physically meet one another in person. Yet Burritt's universalism was compromised by moments of parochialism and racialism. In his writing he emphasized the religious bonds forged between people through Christ, not through a more ecumenical ideal of spirit. Christ was the essential connecting mechanism in Burritt's vision of an international society. Individuals could connect to one another soul-to-soul despite physical distance, but only if they were both Christian souls. Christ functioned as the link connecting them: "For the hearts of all fruit-bearing Christians on earth are grafted into the heart of Christ, and thus are brethren by ties, by ligaments of unity, unknown to any relations of mere human consanguinity." A Jew or a Muslim would thus always be spiritually distant, unknown and unknowable, to a Christian even if they lived in the same town or the same house. There was no "tie" or "ligament" connecting them. A gaping spiritual chasm separated them from one another, a chasm that only Christ could bridge.

More compromising still, his efforts to make the League truly a world's society that was blind to nation and race were undermined by his Anglo-Saxonism. Burritt's politics were contradictory and inconsistent. While he embraced abolitionism, sought to include people in his organization regardless of color, and learned dozens of languages that enabled him to reach out and communicate with non-English speakers, he simultaneously celebrated the superiority of Anglo-Saxon blood, culture, and language. At moments, Burritt suggested that the world would be drawn together not through the disembodied word but the power of very much embodied Anglo-Saxons. "The whole Continent of humanity must be Saxonized," he proclaimed. Anglo-Saxons of the U.S. and

Britain were "God's peculiar people, into which all other men will not only be blessed but absorbed; . . . they are to fill the whole earth with the light of Christianity and civilization, to fuse mankind into one race and brotherhood, until all the inhabitants of the earth shall speak the English language."\(^{38}\)

In general, Burritt sought to use the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon mission towards ends opposite its more conventional political function. By the mid 1840s (the Mexican War [1846-1848] being a particularly catalyzing event) a discourse of manifest destiny that had focused on the exemplary potential of the American republican experiment to foster political liberty throughout the world had developed into a racialist and racist ideology of Anglo-Saxon superiority over all other peoples that was used to justify conquest. Burritt sought to use the rhetoric to promote peace rather than war. Dissenting and reframing more conventional Anglo-Saxon rhetoric, Burritt argued the achievements of Anglo-Saxon Americans were not justifications for conquest in North America or elsewhere in the world. Instead, it was the responsibility of Americans peacefully to spread their religion, culture, and liberty throughout the world. Though Burritt attempted to use Anglo-Saxonism to foster the cause of peace, nevertheless at moments he was a celebrant of an ugly imperial vision, one where the spread of Anglo-Saxon Christian culture was inseparable from the spread of Anglo-Saxon peoples themselves. For instance, in his article "The Elements and Agents of Universal Brotherhood" (the article analyzed at the beginning of this chapter), Burritt proposed that the miraculous growth of the social principle was being affected by "that wonderful Anglo-Saxon race, that is diffusing itself and its genius over the world." It was their language that was "fast

absorbing or displacing all the spiritless tongues and dialects of the heathen world." "If British and American Christians do their duty," Burritt concluded, "the boy is at school who will live to see half the human family speaking the English language, and half the habitable surface of the globe covered with the Anglo-Saxon race, and blessed with its civilization."\(^{39}\)

How do we account for such glaring contradictions in Burritt's politics? Burritt, of course, was not devoid of his own prejudices. As African Americans often pointed out, even the more principled of white reformers hadn't fully overcome a sense of white superiority. In part, we can also explain the contradictions in Burritt's thought by pointing to his pragmatism. He urged Euro-Americans to reach out to people of color with the hand of fellowship while proclaiming the unique virtues of Anglo-Saxons. Similarly, he denounced merchants as "inverse Christians" while calling free trade "the Commercial Harbinger of the Millennium" in letters to merchants. In each case, Burritt compromised principles for a pragmatic reason: to receive a hearing from those he didn't wholly agree with in an effort to influence their politics, persuading them to embrace a perspective more like his own. Anglo-Saxonism underpinned a hawkish policy; Burritt used the popular rhetoric in an effort to engage Americans and transform them into doves.

Burritt's embrace of blood evidences not just the limitations of his personal politics, but the limitations of friendship politics more generally. His racialism was analogous (though unquestionably more objectionable) to the body politics of the African

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Americans active in the black convention movement. Both those African Americans and Burritt objected to racial distinctions in principle, but recognized that in practice race functioned as a potent, powerful discourse in their society, one they believed they could harness towards progressive political ends. And for Burritt, pacifism trumped abolitionism. He was willing to compromise his abolitionist politics to serve the cause of peace, willing to suggest whites were superior to all people of color in his efforts to build bonds of brotherhood between whites of different nations. Though in so many respects his career epitomized friendship politics, lamentably in his Anglo-Saxonism Burritt gave voice to a perspective that found some bodies innately superior to others, the very perspective that other advocates of friendship politics sought to transform.
CHAPTER FIVE

"THE COMMUNION OF SOUL WITH SOUL IN A MORAL EXCELLENCE":
SPIRITUALITY, SPIRITUALISM, AND AMERICAN REFORM, 1848-1858

At the same moment that Elihu Burritt was devoting all his energies to the Friendly Addresses Movement and the League of Universal Brotherhood, Andrew Jackson Davis was in New York delivering a series of 157 lectures in which he mapped a different route to the same destination Burritt aimed to reach: a union that would render "the whole world one Brotherhood." Davis was the voice but not exactly the author of these lectures. In his introduction to the printed compilation of Davis's lectures, William Fishbough (who served as Davis's scribe, recording his words) insisted that Davis—son of a shoemaker, not yet twenty-one-years old—was absolutely unlearned. His reading confined to "a few juvenile productions, fugitive essays, and light romances," the relatively unlettered young man was, in Fishbough's estimation, incapable of thoughtfully addressing the weighty issues of theology, science, and politics he spoke of in the lectures. The lessons Davis conveyed came not from but through him. For Davis was the famed clairvoyant, the "Poughkeepsie Seer." The insights he communicated from the last
months of 1845 into the first month of 1847 came from no earthly source but from wise
and well-wishing celestial spirits.¹

It is more than a coincidence that during these same years when Davis was
delivering his lectures, about 200 miles to the northeast, just outside Concord,
Massachusetts, another young man (though not nearly as young as Davis) was also
attempting to plumb the depths of the spiritual at Walden Pond. There the twenty-seven-
year-old Henry David Thoreau, Emerson's friend and student, hoped to discover ways to
live a spiritually fulfilling, intellectually substantive life by retreating into the relative
solitude of a small cabin he built near the pond on land owned by Emerson. Davis felt
the same spiritual longings as Thoreau, and in 1845 he too began an extended pilgrimage
away from human society in search of answers. While Thoreau hoped to discover
insights in Walden's waters, Davis looked considerably farther a-field, traveling not into
the woods but into the heavens. Davis left the earth behind to communicate with and
learn from the spirits of the dead.

In his introduction to Davis's The Principles of Nature, Fishbough explained in
some detail the process through which Davis accomplished such a prodigious feat. The
procedure required a two-person team: a magnetizee or clairvoyant and a magnetizer or
manipulator. The two would sit facing one another. The manipulator would perform a
series of movements to "magnetize" the clairvoyant, placing him in a trance state. In this
trance state, Davis was said to have actually accomplished what radical reformers and

progressive religionists hoped to do imaginatively or figuratively: he liberated his soul from earthly, corporeal materiality, enabling him to intimately commune with others' spirits. His "mind ... entirely freed from the sphere of the body," he temporarily became a disembodied spirit himself who could travel to a very different "sphere" inhabited by the spirits of humans who had died. During this out-of-body experience, Davis was, according to Fishbough, all but dead himself, his "condition ... correspond[ing] almost precisely to that of physical death." While Davis's spirit was away from his body communing with the spirits the manipulator served as a life support system, sustaining Davis's empty body until his spirit returned.

The faint vital forces still remaining in his system, are only sustained sympathetically by the presence of the magnetizer, whose system is by an ethereal medium blended and united with his own. If while he is in this condition the magnetizer should by any means lose connexion with him, the vital movements of the body would cease, and the spirit would be incapable of re-entering it.

Displacing his materiality on to the manipulator, Davis was all spirit, realizing the Emersonian ideal of becoming a "transparent eyeball." In Fishbough's account, the Poughkeepsie Seer actually accomplished what the Seer of Concord only dreamt of and poeticized about. "[Davis's] spiritual sight, freed from its material obstructions, now extends to worlds and systems innumerable, and he feels that he has almost ceased to be a member of the human family on earth, and is a member only of that great Family of

intelligent beings which inhabit universal space." Davis saw all and the currents of Universal Being circulated through him. If he was not exactly "a part or particle of God," he was a part and particle of a spiritual realm considerably closer to God than earthly existence.

While Emerson's description of his incorporeal experience in *Nature* was clearly metaphoric, there was nothing metaphoric about Davis's account. His was a travelogue of the heavens. In his lectures, Davis described in intricate detail a cosmological universe inhabited by progressively more divine spirits. When he left his body, he traveled from the earth to another planet peopled by beings that had once lived and died on earth. (There was an element of science fiction in Davis's account too; this planet was also populated by beings that immigrated, via death, "from the planets Jupiter and Saturn, and also from planets in other solar systems." This other planet was located in the "Spiritual Sphere," the earth in the "Natural Sphere."

The second, spiritual sphere was subdivided into three societies of progressively more enlightened and holy beings. When a human being dies, the spirits revealed to Davis, his or her soul was reborn in one of the societies of the spiritual sphere. There he or she continued a process of gradual spiritual development, migrating into more spiritually advanced societies within the second sphere. After progressing through the third, most enlightened society, the spirit would experience another death to be reborn in the first society of the third, or "Celestial," sphere. This process of spiritual advancement through societies and spheres continued until the person reached the sixth, or "Super-

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Celestial," sphere. That sphere was the spiritualist version of Christian heaven. (In his
description of the sphere, Davis alluded to the Book of John, proclaiming that "Here are
the fields of Paradise; and on them is erected the house of many mansions."\textsuperscript{5} The sixth
sphere was the ultimate destination of all human beings as they inevitably made spiritual
progress. There they dwelt not with God, but near God, who in Davis's cosmology was
figured as a sun occupying the ultimate seventh sphere. "[T]he great Spiritual Sun of the
Divine Mind ... illuminates all the spiritual worlds," shining most brightly and intensely
on the sixth sphere, least brightly on the distant second sphere.\textsuperscript{6}

Collectively, the spiritual spheres described by Davis embodied the ideals and
dreams of a generation of antebellum radical reformers. The spheres represented all that
they had hoped to realize on earth through reform. The spiritual spheres were devoid of
conflict, a ubiquitous affection prevailing throughout. "I perceive that all spirits are
engaged in loving their neighbors, and advancing their welfare; and here is good will
without distinction." Far from being alienated from one another because of bodily
differences of race or sex, the beings of the spiritual spheres were so united that Davis
had difficulty distinguishing them from one another. "They are so perfectly conjoined
one with another, and their mutual affections are so absorbing and penetrating, that it
requires a high degree of discernment to make a distinction between them."\textsuperscript{7}

This unity was possible because the spirits looked beyond the insignificant
material body to the foundational immaterial soul. Describing his senses once he had left

\textsuperscript{5} Andrew Jackson Davis, \textit{The Principles of Nature}, 671.
\textsuperscript{6} Andrew Jackson Davis, \textit{The Principles of Nature}, 672.
\textsuperscript{7} Andrew Jackson Davis, \textit{The Principles of Nature}, 655, 663.
his body to travel to the second sphere, Davis succinctly conveyed the sense of perception that Grimké, Weld, Garrison, Burritt, and other like-minded reformers sought to cultivate, one that saw through the body to the soul.

I now behold the forms of earth and the bodies of men, including my own, in a light and with a degree of perception never before presented. I discover that I can only see the forms by judging what and where they are, by the light of the spirit: for the outer body is beyond my perception, and I only see well-constituted and living spirits.

Indeed, as spirits progressed through the societies and spheres, they gradually shed all bodily materiality to become pure soul. "The nearer they approach the Fount of purity, the more transparent they become, and the more do their inhabitants appear to exist as it were without body and without external and artificial habiliments."8

Davis's messages from beyond were instrumental in inaugurating a new religion in America in the 1850s. During that decade tens of thousands would become adherents of Spiritualism. The defining feature of this new faith was a belief that the living and the dead could commune together. Death was not an insurmountable divide. Lines of communication could be and had been opened between the heavens and the earth.

Histories of Spiritualism generally emphasize the work of eighteenth-century Swedish theologian and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (a one-time accomplished scientist who turned late in life to the issue of spirit and claimed to have communicated with spirits

while in a trance state) and mesmerism as antecedents. What has not been as
appreciated in histories of the origins and sources of Spiritualism is the spirit politics of
radical reformers of the 1830s and 1840s. Spiritualism took ideas about the communion
of disembodied souls that had been circulating among reformers for decades, articulating
a detailed cosmology and a building systemized set of religious practices upon them.

As we will see, Spiritualism also took from reform a focus upon radical social
change. Davis's *Principles of Nature* exemplified this. In his lecture, Davis repeatedly
urged the adoption of the communitarian ideas of Charles Fourier, advocating "universal
industry." If society adopted a highly systemized scheme where everyone worked in one
of six associations—farmers, mechanics, manufacturers, lawyers, physicians, and
clergymen—slavery and class conflict would be put to an end. Davis ended his over 800-
page tome calling for social activism that would usher in the millennium.

To prove your superiority, your innate magnanimity and goodness of soul,
do not rest in pain while you may be active in undying pleasure. All that
has been promised in every age to this century, will be fully realized.
When distributive justice pervades the social world, then virtue and
morality will bloom with an immortal beauty. The sun of righteousness
will arise in the horizon of universal industry, and shed its genial rays over
all the fields of peace, plenty, and human happiness!10

9 For a study of Spiritualism's religious ideology and origins, see Bret E. Carroll,
Also see Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism*
(Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 5-21.

Spiritualism thus represented the apotheosis of a reform enterprise based upon spirit and friendship and the promise of social progress.

However, the emergence of Spiritualism also signaled and hastened the waning of spirit and friendship as centerpieces of the antebellum reform imagination. The spiritual cosmology described by Davis and his fellow spiritualists represented a stark articulation of the peaceful, affectionate society of souls that antebellum spiritual activists hoped to cultivate. Yet Spiritualism also accelerated a growing dissatisfaction with a reform effort that placed spirit and soul at its center. Spiritualists assured all those who were listening that everyone would eventually find themselves living in an egalitarian society of souls that was entirely free of racial, sexual, and national divisions and conflicts. Perfection for man and society was not just possible, it was inevitable. However, despite their declarations of an imminent social and spiritual revolution, the Spiritualist cosmology conveyed clearly and unmistakably a message with more conservative social and political implications, namely that perfection would not be achieved here on earth. Social and spiritual perfection were such distant goals, Spiritualism suggested, that they could and would not be achieved in this life, nor the next life, nor even the life after that. Indeed, social and spiritual perfection would require six lives moving into and through six spheres. By fixating their attention on the spirits of the dead, Spiritualists could become neglectful of the living. (The relationship between magnetizee and magnetizer exemplified this. Their relationship was one of the body rather than the spirit, with the magnetizer sustaining the magnetizee's empty body.) While many reformers were drawn to and identified with Spiritualism, as we'll see others found focus on spirits, whether...
embodied or disembodied, an unreasonable, excessively costly distraction from the very earthly work of social and political activism in the cause of human equality.

SPIRITUAL AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Light was quite literally at the center of Davis's Spiritualist cosmology. God was not personified as a Father but given physical form as a sun casting a divine light that illuminated all of the spiritual spheres. The inhabitants of Davis's worlds of wonder were all connected to the divine through the light emanating from the spiritual sun at the epicenter of the five spiritual spheres. That light sustained and nurtured each being's soul as he or she progressed from the natural sphere through the five spiritual spheres.

The divine, spiritual sun was not the only source of light in the Spiritualist universe. The departed souls of the dead who lived in the spiritual spheres radiated light too. "Their purity gives forth a radiation brighter than the brightest sun," Davis reported of the spirits of the third sphere. "It is even a light of love, of wisdom, and of celestial purity, that gives life to every spirit in the lower societies." The more advanced the spirit, the more light he or she gave off. As Davis toured the spiritual spheres moving from the second to the sixth sphere, the beings he saw were progressively less corporeal, exposing more and more of an interior light that was buried within their material bodies. This growing exposure both registered and accelerated the process of spiritual development, enabled spirits more readily to bathe in the splendor of the divine light emanating from the spiritual sun, from God. It also allowed them more effectively to share their own inner light with other spirits, especially with spirits who occupied lesser spiritual spheres. In Davis's spiritual spheres, light became the means through which

spirits ministered to one another. A light coming from God's manifestation as a sun nurtured each spirit in the universe, and the lesser but still powerful light within each of those spirits allowed them to tend spiritually to each other.

Davis literalized the Quaker metaphor of the inner light. The soul was an actual light contained within the body, and as the soul progressed spiritually, that light shone more brightly, radiating through a decreasingly material body. Davis was not unique among the Spiritualists in drawing spiritual inspiration from the Quakers. Following in the footsteps of radical reformers and transcendentalists, other Spiritualists claimed to be the heirs of the primitive Quakers. Communitarian Robert Dale Owen, for instance, singled out Quakerism as one the primary religious antecedent of Spiritualism, suggesting that "the Quakers were the Spiritualists of the seventeenth century." He pointed to the "liberal or Hicksite branch of the Society" as the sect to which many Spiritualists had once belonged. Indeed, many Progressive Quakers, a radical offshoot of the Hicksite branch of American Quakerism, became notable Spiritualists during the 1850s.

Progressive Quakerism is of interest in its own right. Like Spiritualism, the Progressive Friends were born of the intricately entangled relationship between perfectionist spirituality and radical social reform in antebellum America. The two new religions emerged simultaneously on the American scene in the late 1840s and early 1850s. At the same moment that Davis was in New York City conveying lessons from

12 Owen, The Debatable Land between this World and the Next (New York: G.W. Carelton & Co., 1872), 221, 224.

the spiritual spheres, across the state in western New York Friends who had grown increasingly dissatisfied with and alienated from the Hicksite Society of Friends withdrew from the Society to form a new "Congregational" Quaker meeting. The actions of these New York Friends set off a chain of secessions by other alienated Quakers in the upper Midwest and Pennsylvania. These Quakers established no less than sixteen new meetings, variously calling themselves Congregational Friends, Progressive Friends, or Friends of Progress.¹⁴

Ironically, in a number of respects the secession of these Friends from Hicksite Quakerism recalled and replayed the Hicksite schism twenty years earlier. Many of complaints against Hicksite Quakerism voiced by Progressive Friends echoed those that had originally led the Hicksites to separate from the Orthodox. Like the Hicksites of the 1820s, the Progressive Friends of the 1840s railed against the "despotic power" of Quaker governing bodies over individual Friends and local Quaker congregations.¹⁵ One of the leaders of the Progressive Friends, Thomas M'Clintock, must have felt a particular sense of déjà vu in the late 1840s, for twenty years earlier he had played an important role in the Hicksite schism. In the 1820s, M'Clintock was one of the chief strategists of the Philadelphia Hicksites, helping to orchestrate the schism at the Yearly Meeting of 1827. He had been a key ally to Hicks, editing the first volume of his Sermons.¹⁶ A decade


¹⁶ On M'Clintock's role in the Hicksite schism, see Ingle, Quakers in Conflict, 53, 63, 172-176; H. Larry Ingle, "The Hicksite Die is Cast: A Letter of Thomas M'Clintock, February 1827," Quaker History 75 (Fall 1986): 115-122; and Judith Wellman, The Road
later, M'Clintock became a member and minister of the Junius Monthly Meeting of Friends, Hicksite, after he emigrated with his wife and children from Philadelphia to Waterloo, New York, in the late 1830s. Having helped launch Hicksite Quakerism, he eventually came to find its institutions morally stifling, committed to sustaining peace within the society at the cost of the individual's liberty of conscience. In particular, M'Clintock, a dedicated and active abolitionist, was incensed by the harsh disciplinary punishments leveled against Hicksite abolitionists. The disciplining of abolitionist Isaac Hopper (who himself had been a Hicksite partisan in the 1820s) was an infamous, but by no means a unique, example of the hostility of the Hicksite establishment to abolitionism and other radical reform efforts. In the early 1840s the New York Yearly Meeting disowned Hopper for his refusal to disavow public criticism of Hicksites for their tepid antislavery stance. By the late 1840s the frustration of reform-minded Friends and one-time Friends who had been disowned because of their activism reached a point where a group in New York called a convention to establish a new, independent branch of Society of Friends. In 1848 M'Clintock served as the clerk of this convention, which ultimately seceded from the Hicksite Friends to establish a meeting that would respect the inviolability of the inner light and the individual's liberty of conscience. M'Clintock wrote a key document, the "Basis of Religious Association," issued by that conference, which spelled out the foundational principles of Congregational or Progressive Quakerism.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{17}\) For biographical information about Thomas M'Clintock after his emigration to New York, see Wellman, The Road to Seneca Falls, 91-120 passim. On the conflict between reform-minded Quakers and the Hicksite Society of Friends culminating in the
Like Elias Hicks before him, M'Clintock proclaimed the individual's unmediated connection to the divine through the inner light. God's revelation to man, he declared in the "Basis," was "as absolutely personal and individual as though he and God were alone in the Universe." M'Clintock and his fellow Congregational Quakers then went a step beyond Hicks and the Hicksites of the 1820s in putting that conviction into practice in their religious bodies. Unlike the Hicksite establishment, the Congregational or Progressive Quakers stripped Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings of any authority over local Quaker congregations. As "]man] has the law of God written on the conscious powers of his soul, . . . No laws, nor institutions of men, should restrict [the] individual exercise of conscious, or responsibility." Those larger meetings drawn from multiple smaller meetings should only exercise a non-binding influence solely through the mechanisms of "persuasion and love." Along with a hierarchical governance structure, the Congregational Quakers dispensed with any official religious doctrine, instead proclaiming "perfect liberty of conscience" for individual members. "]A] brother or sister might hold the doctrine of the Trinity, or of a Vicarious Atonement—might practise [sic] Water Baptism, the ceremony of Bread and Wine, and kindred rituals, or he might believe none of these, and his right should be recognized to preach his conscientious convictions of these matter in any of our meetings." Doctrines and creeds were delimiting. Progressive Quakers, like the Spiritualists, sought liberation from all limits,

seeking an unending spiritual development of the soul as the individual strove for a perfection made manifest in a practical piety.\textsuperscript{18}

Progressive Quakers' faith in spiritual progress was fueled by and in turn fueled their active engagement in social reforms aiming to affect radical social progress. The precipitating cause of the secession of eastern and mid-western Quakers from the Hicksites was the mixture of indifference and hostility of the Hicksite establishment to the radical reform movements of the age. Many individual Hicksite Quakers had long been active participants in the abolitionist, woman's rights, temperance, and peace movements. Throughout the 1840s frustration and impatience grew among these reform-minded Friends as more conservative Friends shut Quaker meetinghouses to abolitionist speakers, dismissed calls for true sexual equality in meetings, silenced Friends whose spirits moved them to stand and speak of their reform convictions during meetings, and disowned Friends who refused to be silenced for upsetting the comity of the meetinghouse. "Mingling with the chime of church bells and with the tones of the preacher's voice, or breaking upon the stillness of our religious assemblies, we hear the clank of the slave's chain, the groans of the wounded and dying on the field of bloody strife, the noise of drunken revelry," wrote the Progressive Friends of Chester County Pennsylvania in a "Exposition of Sentiments" from their first Yearly Meeting in 1853 (a exposition that Andrew Jackson Davis would later extensively quote in his 1868 \textit{Arabula; or, The divine guest} where he extolled and expressed his desire to emulate the "spirit of the Progressive Friends.") "[A]nd when, in obedience of the voice of God, speaking through the holiest sympathies and purest impulses of our Godlike humanity," the

\textsuperscript{18} M'Clintock and De Garmo, "Basis."
"Exposition" continued, "we sought to arouse our countrymen to united efforts for the relief of human suffering, the removal of giant wrongs, the suppression of foul iniquities, we found the Church in spite of her solemn professions, arrayed against us, blocking up the path of reform with their serried ranks, prostituting her mighty influence to the support of wickedness in high places." In breaking with the Hicksite Friends by establishing Congregational and Progressive meetinghouses, activist Quakers sought to build associations where spirituality and activism abetted each other.19

Progressive Friends placed reform at the center of their congregations. Thomas M'Clintock and the Congregational Friends of central New York saw "practical righteousness" as the foundation of their new meeting. It was the "cherished purpose" of the Progressive Friends of Chester County, Pennsylvania, "to restore the union between Religion and Life, and to place works of goodness and mercy far above theological speculations and scholastic subtleties of doctrine." Reform replaced theology and creed as the foundation of their religious belief and practice. A collective determination to make society more just and equitable became their religion. "We interrogate no man as to his theological belief," declared the Progressive Friends of Pennsylvania (in a passage strikingly reminiscent, in both meaning and language, of Elihu Burritt's pledge for the League of Universal Brotherhood),

but open the door to all who recognize the Equal Brotherhood of the
Human Family, without regard to sex, color or condition, and who
acknowledge the duty of defining and illustrating their faith in God, not by
assent to a creed, but by lives of personal purity, and works of beneficence
and charity to mankind .... We do not seek to bind our Association
together by external bands, nor by agreement in theological opinions.
Identity of object, oneness of spirit in respect to the practical duties of life,
the communion of soul with soul in a more excellence,—these are our
bond of union.

Salvation was not achieved only by hearing the promptings of one's inner light but
energetically acting upon those promptings, translating them into determined, purposeful
activism. Following in the footsteps of spiritual activists of the past two decades,
Progressive Friends called upon Friends and reformers to "Be true, under all
circumstances, to your highest convictions, to the voice of Duty in your own souls."20

The Progressive Friends and their Hicksite critics were both devoted to peace and
love in their community. Where they adamantly disagreed was how community should
be defined. Exactly who did Friends need to be friendly towards? Were there any
bounds to the community of believers? If there were, what defined the boundaries? The
Progressives' sense of community was expansive, encompassing their town, region,
nation, and the world. The inner light of these Friends prompted them to work to make
society at all levels more just by fighting for freedom, social equality, and international
peace. Their more conservative Quaker critics' sense of community was much narrower,

20 "Reform in the Society of Friends," Liberator, July 6, 1849; "Exposition of
limited to other Quakers of their local, Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly meetings. For these critics, the Progressives upset the peace of the Quaker community and jeopardized the bonds of fellowship by seeking to interject such controversial and contentious political issues as slavery and woman's rights into their religious meetings. The Progressives countered that such a narrow definition of religious community sustained and fueled divisions in American society. Religious sect was no different than race, sex, and nation as a socially defined difference that alienated individuals from one another, serving as a source of social discord.  

By deemphasizing any specific beliefs or doctrines, Progressive Friends set out to overcome the differences between Christian sects and create a truly inclusive series of religious associations around social reform. These Progressive Friends saw themselves as overcoming not only religious sectarianism but the failures of reform parties too. In "An Address to Reformers," penned by Thomas M'Clintock, the Congregational Friends of New York explained their aims:

Having broken the ties of party and sect, under a solemn conviction that they are incompatible with the freedom of the soul, and a mighty obstacle to the progress of the human race in knowledge and goodness, we have been drawn together for our spiritual strength and elevation, and by a common sympathy in every work of practical righteousness and a common desire to find a basis of union for all the friends of God and Humanity.

Not only did the narrowness of religious sect undermine this sought after union of friends. A narrow focus on one reform was just as much a cause for concern. M'Clintock and the Congregational Friends urged reformers not to be caught and handicapped by devotion to a single cause, to reproduce the divisions of sect in the realm of reform. Instead, they should join with forces with the Progressive Friends in their wide-ranging, liberal reform efforts. "While your associations are devoted, each specially to one or another of the various branches of Reform, ours is designed to embrace them all in one common brotherhood." "[We] exhort the friends of Reform," the Address continued, in whatever portion of the moral vineyard they are called to labor, to remember that they are one Brotherhood, and should therefore be of one heart and one mind. We are deeply impressed with the conviction that not only is an earnest devotion to one philanthropic enterprise consistent with a hearty interest in every work of Reform, but that our usefulness and efficiency in our several spheres will be proportioned to our just appreciation of the labors of others, and to our diligence in cultivating the spirit of Universal Unity.

An exclusive devotion to abolitionism or pacifism was analogous to religious doctrine. Just as a fixation on, say, the vicarious atonement hampered spiritual development, undivided allegiance to abolition delimited social progress. Single-minded preoccupation with a single reform effort mistook means for ends. After all, the Progressive Friends reminded reformers, what they ultimately aimed for was not the abolition of slavery or the cessation of war. Those were means towards, prerequisites for, the greatest end: the
creation of a society of souls where friendship, affection, and a "spirit of Universal Unity" prevailed.22

PERFECTION DELAYED

Along with Thomas M'Clintock, Isaac and Amy Post were two founding members of the Congregational Friends in New York. The Posts' connections with the worlds of Quaker and reform radicalism were both broad and deep. Amy had grown up as a member of the Jericho Monthly Meeting in Long Island, the meeting of Elias Hicks. Hicks was, in fact, a cousin to her family. With the schism of the 1820s, Isaac and Amy had become Hicksites. In the mid 1840s they withdrew from their meeting in Rochester, New York, because of frustration with the increasing conservatism and formalism of Hicksite Quakers as well as the hostility of Hicksites towards their abolitionist and woman's rights activism. Active they were indeed. Their home in Rochester was a regular stop for fugitive slaves escaping on the Underground Railroad, and they were friends and allies of many of the most renowned reformers of the age, including such abolitionist luminaries as William Lloyd Garrison, Henry C. Wright, and Frederick Douglass. They worked not just to aid the enslaved but in the cause of social equality between the races. For instance, the Posts made a point of publicly dining with African Americans. Privately, they cultivated friendships with African Americans. In addition to Douglass, Amy had a particularly close friendship with former slave Harriet Jacobs, who lived with the Posts for most of 1849; Amy played an important role in encouraging Jacobs to tell her story in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. The Posts were as much devoted to the cause of sexual equality as to that of racial equality. They long advocated

22 "Reform in the Society of Friends," Liberator, Jul 6, 1849.
true equality between men and women among the Hicksites, which they ultimately saw achieved in their breakaway Congregational Friends meeting. Along with Thomas M'Clintock and his wife Mary Ann, Amy was a speaker at the famed Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls that summer of 1848, and played a prominent role in the follow-up meeting held in Rochester that same year.23

Just as the Congregation Friends were being founded and the Declaration of Sentiments being written and signed at Seneca Falls, the Posts heard rumors of mysterious raps made in the presence of two young girls, Kate and Margaret Fox, in a farmhouse in Hydesville, a village about twenty miles outside of Rochester. First the Fox family and then neighbors were frightened by raps or knocks heard in the Fox farmhouse. Soon they discovered that the raps responded to questions requiring a yes or a no or a numeric answer (e.g. what were the children's ages). The Posts knew the Fox girls, and when they too heard intelligible rapping in the girls' presence they became convinced that this was no hoax but that they were witnessing was communications from spirits, messages coming from the dead. The Posts' Quaker background and religious liberality shaped their interpretation of the rapping. In addition to promptings from God, the inner light of the Fox girls, the Posts believed, was attuned to receive unmistakably clear, audible messages from disembodied spirits. "It was some like friends preaching," Isaac

23 For biographical information about the Posts, see Wellman, The Road to Seneca Falls, 94-100, 201; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Amy Kirby Post: 'Of who it was said, "being dead, yet speaketh," The University of Rochester Library Bulletin 37 (1984): 5-21; Braude, Radical Spirits, 10-11. On Amy Post's relationship with Harriet Jacobs, see Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), xvi-xx. The affection these two women felt for one another is evident in Post's endorsement of Incidents where she refers to Jacobs as "my highly-esteemed friend," and in Jacobs's letters to Post in which she referred to Post as "My Dear Friend," in one thanking Post for "a word of sympathy and friendship from [one] I love" (Incidents, 203, 231).
Post concluded. "They were relying on the spirit." In the same year that they helped
launch the Congregational Friends and the woman's suffrage movement, Isaac and Amy
Post also became enthusiastic Spiritualists.24

Evangelical Spiritualists, actually. At the direction of the spirits who wanted the
message of the soul's immortality to reach a larger public, in late 1849 the Posts and two
other Congregational Friends, Eliab Capron and George Willetts, helped Leah Fox, an
older sister of Kate and Maggie and a medium herself, organize a public demonstration of
spiritual communications in Corinthian Hall in Rochester. The knocks heard that night
were met by both skepticism and hostility by the audience. Several committees were
appointed to investigate the raps to discover their source. Despite thorough
investigations, no earthly source was found. Having failed to debunk the Foxes, former
skeptics were now requesting séances with the sisters, and interest was spreading quickly.
The Foxes quickly became celebrities. In 1850 they toured several New York cities
conducting public séances, finally arriving in New York City to conduct multiple séances
a day.25

One séance was attended by famed literati and intellectuals, including novelist
James Fenimore Cooper (author of the Leatherstocking Tales), poet William Cullen
Bryant (author of "Thanatopsis"), transcendentalist George Ripley (founder of
communitarian project Brook Farm), and editor and author Nathaniel Parker Willis.

24 Nancy Rubin Stuart, The Reluctant Spiritualist: The Life of Maggie Fox (Orlando,
FL.: Harcourt, Inc., 2005), 1-41; Barbara Weisberg, Talking to the Dead: Kate and
Barbara Goldsmith, Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous
Braude, Radical Spirits, 14.

25 Weisberg, Talking to the Dead, 74-115; Stuart, The Reluctant Spiritualist, 41-78.
Willis was particularly intrigued. "[I]f disembodied spirits are still moving, consciously, among us," Willis concluded, "it must soon, in the progressive nature of things, ripen to an intercourse between this and the spirit-world." The nineteenth century was witnessing not just the death of distance through the technological wonders of the age, but the death of death itself as the divide between living and dead was bridged through spirit communications. "An electric telegraph across the Styx," Willis proposed, "before they get one across the Atlantic, would make death less a separation from friends than a voyage to Europe."  

The Foxes' séances sparked an explosion of interest and belief in Spiritualism, providing the phenomenal counterpart to Andrew Jackson Davis's philosophical tome. Widely reported about in the press, the spiritual communications through the sisters eventually helped draw tens of thousands to Spiritualism. To be sure, many were interested in séances only as a novelty, as entertainment. But others were more than voyeuristic spectators. For them, evidence of immortality and hope of communicating with dead friends and loved ones made them true believers in spiritual communication. Messages from the spirit world offered particular comfort for those who lost children, not an uncommon experience in the nineteenth century. This was certainly the case with the Posts, whose three-year-old daughter Matilda had died in the mid 1840s. They found solace in the spirits' messages that "she is happy" and "is around us."  

26 Willis, "Wonders of the Nineteenth Century," National Era, Aug. 8 1850.  
27 Braude, Radical Spirits, 49-55. Isaac Post quoted in Weisberg, Talking to the Dead, 65. In his Principles of Nature, Andrew Jackson Davis provided the comforting assurance that infants who died were reborn in the Second Sphere where they had the opportunity for spiritual and intellectual growth they had been denied on earth. There
For the Posts and other reformers, the substantive attraction of Spiritualism was even greater than solace. Spiritual activists were drawn to Spiritualism because they saw in it an opportunity to receive advice directly from the heavens that would aid them in their efforts to make earth like the heavens. More than that, Spiritualism brought into stark relief certain ideas about spirit and friendship that had long fueled radical activism in the northern United States. Indeed, the central role that spirit friendships had played in the antebellum reform imagination for decades paved the way for the widespread interest in and adoption of Spiritualism by radical reformers of the late 1840s and early 1850s.

The Grimké sisters, Theodore Dwight Weld, William Lloyd Garrison, Nathaniel Rogers, Elihu Burritt and others believed through the power of imagination and faith individuals could liberate themselves from their raced, sexed, placed bodies and forge egalitarian social bonds with one another by seeing through the body to touch each other's souls. It was not a large step from this to Spiritualism. The enthusiastic interest Garrison and the Grimké's sister took in spirit communications in the 1850s attests to that.\(^{28}\) Spiritualism pushed the ideas of spirit politics to their logical end. Given that the spirit was eternal, if one could commune with the disembodied soul of another, why did that other necessarily have to be living? Why couldn't one communicate with the souls of the dead too?

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While engagement with Spiritualism among reformers was widespread, the connection between Spiritualism and activism was exemplified by no one more than Isaac Post. Initially a witness to communications from the spirit world through the Fox sisters, he quickly became a medium himself who received those communications personally. Post was a writing medium. Spirits would take control of his hand to write their communications from the spirit world. Not only an extraordinarily simple and convenient way to receive communications, writing mediumship underscored one of the basic tenets of Spiritualism: the location of personhood in the spirit rather than the body. As one spirit communicated to Post, "it is not in bones to think, nor in flesh to plan, in the blood there is no power to reason, nor yet, in the nerves, but all these qualities are contained in the spirit man." Reminiscent of language used by Nathaniel P. Rogers to convey the superficiality of the raced body, other of Post's "spirit friends" referred to humans as being "clothed with bodies" or "clothed in flesh." Physical bodies were nothing more than temporary housing occupied by spirits. As a writing medium, Post possessed the capacity to forfeit control of part of that "tenement" (another term often used by the spirits to describe the body) to disembodied spirits, allowing those spirits to briefly take up occupancy in his own flesh.29

In 1852 Post published a collection of the communications he'd received from his "spirit friends" in a volume entitled Voices from the Spirit World. Most of the communications came from people of renown in American politics, religion, reform, and literature, men and women such as George Washington, Elias Hicks, George Fox, Nathaniel P. Rogers, and Margaret Fuller. Unsurprisingly given Post's Progressive

29 Isaac Post, Voices from the Spirit World, being Communications from Many Spirits (Rochester, NY: Charles H. McDonell, Printer, 1852), 212, 45, 117, 21, 55, 199.
Quakerism, the communications of these spirits, taken together, conveyed the message that the individual's spiritual elevation and progress had nothing to do with specific doctrinal beliefs. Spiritual progress could only be accomplished by earnest, sustained effort to improve the lives of others, through a life of political activism on behalf of progressive causes that aimed to achieve social equality. In this way, Post's volume exemplified and sought to reinforce the ideological connections that were drawn between soul, friendship, and progressive social change by antebellum reformers.

Post's Spiritualism was shaped by and in turn reshaped his Quaker beliefs. Post continued to believe that everyone had an inner light that enabled them to receive guidance. However, that guidance did not come directly through God, but instead through intermediating spirits. The dead Quakers (including Edward Stabler, the old Quaker who had made a lasting impression on Ralph Waldo Emerson) who communicated to Post all drew attention to this. Elias Hicks, for example, told of his mistaken conception of the inner light while he was living. "I used to suppose that it was God that operated upon my mind, giving me what to say to the people," Hick reported. "I continued firm in that belief, until I awoke in newness of life in my everlasting home, then I found that what I had considered God's impressions on my mind, were made by Angel Spirits, by the Spirits of those that had once inhabited bodies." While the spirits were not infallible like the Almighty, their communications did have the advantage of being considerably more clear and straightforward than the nebulous promptings that Post once believed God provided him through his inner light.30

30 Post, *Voices from the Spirit World*, 93-94.
And all those spirit communications urged reform. The spirits who took control of Post's hand emphasized that they were now reformers in the spirit world. Their continued spiritual progress demanded that they repent their earthly sins by aiding those still "in the body" to do better. Indeed, their sins cost them dearly in the spirit world. This was particularly true of those spirits who had been slaveholders, none more so than John C. Calhoun. Upon arriving in the spirit world, Calhoun's spirit told Post that he was "surprised" that he did not find himself among "those whose characters I had most admired." They were "far away," "in a far happier condition," while Calhoun's happiness was limited by his aggressive defense of slavery while alive. Communicating through Post, he lamented that "mine is a comparatively low condition." "I should have been a leader in good, instead of evil," he now realized. "I should have been foremost in promoting liberty, instead of slavery."\(^{31}\)

Fortunately, the spirit world afforded everyone the opportunity to make amends. George Washington had done just that. Since his death a half century earlier, Washington had spiritually progressed to the point of becoming an abolitionist from beyond the grave. "I have left the spirit that could make merchandise of my brothers far behind; I have left the spirit that could compel my brother to labor for me without wages, far behind." "I am," Washington's spirit continued, "doing what I can to loose every fetter, so that the oppressor will see the necessity of loosening the bonds that fasten him to his bondmen." He eagerly looked forward to a time when slavery would be put to an end, a world where "the white and sable brother would live in harmony together."\(^{32}\)

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31 Post, *Voices from the Spirit World*, ix, 87-89.

In addition to advocating reforms—woman's rights, temperance, and pacifism as well as abolitionism—the spirits celebrated friendship. The spirit constantly and consistently referred to themselves as "spirit friends" and to the living as "embodied friends" throughout their communications with Post. Friendship was the rule and law of the spirit world. Contradicting the Spiritualist tenet that more enlightened spirits ministered to other who hadn't progressed as far, Post's spirits communicated that they could only associate with those of a similar nature. Thus Calhoun was for the moment trapped with the spirits of wrongdoers. In Post's account, in the spirit world there was a strict segregation where virtuous and wicked lived apart from one another. "Those of one affinity draw together, as naturally as birds of the same species associate together," Elias Hicks told Post. "Hence," he continued, "the lover of peace has no affinity with the lover of war and military glory, and they cannot be happy together. He that has done what he could to make his fellow man happy, by acts of kindness, cannot enjoy the society of him who has been engaged in spreading discord." The spirits of the dead were not instantaneously enlightened and benevolent. "[S]pirits are no more wise or better for having left their bodies" the spirits warned, urging Post to be critical of all communications as not all spirits were to be trusted.33 If Post's depiction of the heavens was not a realm of absolute equality and ubiquitous friendship, the portion of the heavens inhabited by progressive activists very much was. There they enjoyed each other's friendship without having to associate with their earthly critics of less political and moral virtue.

33 Post, Voices from the Spirit World, 29, 176.
Just because they found themselves among friends in the spirit world did not mean that the spirits were unconcerned with their still-living friends. Benjamin Franklin's late wife reported to Post that "Spirits, after leaving their bodies, linger around their friends for years, or as long as they have an affinity for remain[ing]." This was the case of no spirit more than that of Nathaniel Rogers. A contentious dispute in 1844 between the American Antislavery Society (AAS) and Roger's daughter's fiancé, John R. French, about the financial management of The Herald of Freedom—Roger's former paper, which French was by then printing—had very publicly destroyed the friendship between Roger and Garrison when Roger's backed his future son-in-law against Garrison and the AAS. The rift had not been mended when Rogers died two years later.

Spiritualists hoped that they might provide a means for the two to be reconciled despite Rogers's death. In a letter addressed to Garrison (carrying a return address of "Second Sphere" in its header), the medium Marenda B. Randall conveyed a message from Rogers's spirit in which Rogers reported his regret about their conflict. "I cordially extend the hand of love and friendship to thee," Rogers's spirit told Garrison. "[H]ow trifling those differences no seem to me which divided us!" He conveyed unwelcome political advice, urging Garrison to stop advocating immediate abolitionism and instead advocate gradual abolitionism.

While with thee, my whole soul burned for immediate emancipation. This I now see was an error, and hence I no longer desire it. While I still loathe the hideous form of slavery, it appears to me now that that gradual emancipation which must come through the operation of the love principle upon the hearts of all, is far better than to force the master—even by
words—to relax his grasp upon the throat of the victim, by clutching his own throat; for while, in this case, I would rejoice in the escape of the slave, I should be compelled to weep for the transfer of the same condition to the master, who thence becomes a slave to the power which compels him to release his slave.34

The politics of Rogers's communications through Post were quite different. Instead of advocating change, in his communications through Post Rogers urged Garrison to stay the course. "[I]t is I who have often whispered in his mental ear: Go on my friend, for there is more with us then [sic] against us—if not bodily there is spiritually." But like Randall's Rogers, Post's Rogers longed for reconciliation with Garrison. In the spirit world, Rogers discovered that "Instead of contending with my former friends, I found they deserved all the encouragement in my power to give. I very soon became as closely united to my old friend W.L. Garrison, as ever I had been. Yes, far more." "I have longed for the privilege of making him sensible of the change," Rogers's spirit told Post, using the medium to pass his warm wished along to Garrison. That several Spiritualists channeled the spirit of Rogers, conveying his regret about his falling out with Garrison, underscores the importance of friendship for reformers and Spiritualists alike.35

Of course, interest in Spiritualism was not universal among radical reformers of the 1850s. The Free Convention held at Rutland, Vermont, in 1858 both underscored the widespread connection between Spiritualism and reform in the 1850s while simultaneously evidencing how contentious and conflicted that connection could be.

34 Liberator, 17 Dec. 1852.
35 Post, Voices from the Spirit World, 47.
The convention's call placed equal emphasis upon the spiritual and political. "[T]he future is hopeful only in such proportion as it points towards a wise and well-grounded emancipation of the race from the spiritual despotisms that, on the one hand, now control thought, and the civil and social disabilities that, on the other, restrain action."

Addressed "TO THE FRIENDS OF HUMAN PROGRESS," the call drew upon ideas of Progressive Friends, aiming to solicit their participation and aid in their mission. Both the Yearly Meeting of the Progressive Friends of Chester County, Pennsylvania, and the Yearly Meeting of the Friends of Human Progress in western New York (the renamed meeting founded by M'Clintock and the Posts) sent official letters of support and encouragement to the Rutland Convention. Echoing the Progressive Quakers, the first resolution adopted by the Convention proclaimed "That the authority of each individual soul is absolute and final, in deciding questions as to what is true or false in principle, and right or wrong in practice." The liberation and freedom of the soul, most of the conventioneers believed, was a prerequisite for political and social liberation.36

However much they owed to the Progressive Friends, Quakerism was not an explicit topic of conversation at the convention. Spiritualism very much was. The majority of the conventioneers believed that Spiritualism and the radical reforms of the age abetted one another. In addition to resolutions condemning slavery, war, sexual inequality, the convention offered resolutions that "the phenomena of what is denominated Modern Spiritualism, have abundantly demonstrated the fact that an intelligent intercourse between embodied and disembodied human spirits is both possible

36 Proceedings of the Free Convention Held at Rutland, VT, June 25th, 26th, 27th, 1858 (Boston: J.B Yerrinton and Son, 1858), 5, 9, 174-177.
and actual" and that "the conviction of the possibility and actuality of spirit-intercourse is opposed to all despotism, impurity, and sensualism."37

Speeches on issues such as marriage reform, free trade, the unconstitutionality of slavery, and land reform were liberally interspersed with speeches about Spiritualism or soul more generally. The entirety of the opening speech of the convention delivered by Henry C. Wright, a Garrisonian abolitionist as well as a Spiritualist, focused on the primacy of the individual soul over any external authority. "[M]y soul is my own," Wright proclaimed, "and this no power in the universe, outside of itself, shall overawe." Going a step beyond radicals like Hicks, Emerson, and Garrison who questioned Jesus's unattainable divinity and instead presented him as an exemplary, but human figure example who could be emulated, Wright pointedly rejected any and all authority for Christ. "Speak and act from your own soul, not from the soul of Jesus," Wright urged, "think your own thoughts, not the thoughts of Jesus, except as his thoughts become yours. So with your feelings. Never try to feel as Jesus feels; never seek to imbibe the spirit of Jesus because it is the spirit of Jesus, except as his feelings become a part of the love-life of your own soul." Wright's lecture was followed by one from Spiritualist editor S.B. Brittan in which Brittan argued that personhood was not located in or attached to the corporeal body. As evidence, he pointed to the material renewal of the body every several years as food was used to replace deteriorating cells. "This indicates in a most significant manner, that the law which individualizes a man, does not attach alone or most essentially to his body. If it did, his identity would be lost as often as his body changed." "[I]t is rendered obvious," Brittan concluded, "that our individuality inheres in

37 Proceedings of the Free Convention, 9.
the spirit, and that our identity cannot be destroyed or impaired by the disasters that overtake the body."38

Andrew Jackson Davis gave, unsurprisingly, a lecture that more explicitly focused upon Spiritualism. Borrowing language from abolitionism, Davis claimed that far from being a terror, death "disenthralled" men and women, enabling them to "to think better thoughts, and to feel nobler sentiments." "Spiritualism is a great Emancipator. It has a liberalizing influence," Davis declared. Linking Spiritualism and reform rhetorically but doing little to elucidate any underlying logic substantively connecting them, Davis maintained that "My belief in Spiritualism is simply the door to my acceptance of the various reforms for which this Convention has assembled; and I trust that to you all Spiritualism is a broad and glorious triumphal archway leading in all directions into freedom, and a universal enjoyment of a heaven in the world."39

Two trance speakers addressed the convention on its first night. Like Davis, trance speaker A.W. Sprague (or rather, as she would have maintained, the spirit who spoke through her) drew a connection between freedom and Spiritualism. "The true reformer lays his hand upon the human soul," she proclaimed. Freedom accomplished civically and politically would mean comparatively little if not accompanied by a greater spiritual liberation. "The fiat of the nation may go forth, saying, 'Thou art free;' and if it comes only from the outer, the shackles are binding the human soul still," Sprague preached. "But if the human soul sends out its fiat, if it comes out nobly from its very


depths, and speaks the word Freedom, it echoes from land to land, and from sea to sea,
and freedom finds her true and rightful place in the human soul."40

The kind of declarations made by Davis and Sprague did not pass without
critique. While the majority of the conventioneers accepted the decades old connection
between reform and spirit, some at the convention dissented from that commonplace
perspective, pointedly questioning whether Spiritualism in any way substantively abetted
the reforms of the day. For them, the place of spirit in the antebellum reform imagination
had become less an inspiration that propelled individuals into careers of activism and
more an end in itself. Reform-minded Spiritualists like Isaac Post spent countless hours
communing with the spirits like Washington and Hicks. Exactly what did that
accomplish? For critics it amounted to little more than a self-congratulatory exercise
where these Spiritualists imagined spirit luminaries extolling their political and religious
convictions. Wouldn't the cause of reform be better served if Spiritualist reformers spent
less time basking in the acclaim of spirits and more time working to accomplish social
and political change?

Polish-born woman's rights activist and atheist Ernestine L. Rose thought so. She
was sharply critical of the time and attention devoted to Spiritualism and religious issues
at the Rutland Convention. Far from aiding reform efforts, attention to the spiritual
distracted the reformers from valuable political and social activism. Echoing the African-
American critics of spirit friendships two decades earlier, Rose considered the focus on
the spiritual as undermining meaningful social and political activism. "I say, no matter
about religion," she bluntly declared, "take it for granted that it is true; no matter about

40 Proceedings of the Free Convention, 184, 182.
gods,—take it for granted that they exist. If they are infinite and independent, they do not need our services. But who does? You and I. We need each others' services, each other's kindness and love .... Let us do our duty to humanity here, and when we reach another state of existence, we will attend to the duties of that state." Wright, Brittan, Davis and the many other Spiritualists at the convention could insist that Spiritualism would forward the reform movements of the day, but Rose saw nothing more than pointless, blathering rhetoric. "If the Convention is not called for the benefit of man, it is useless; if it is, the moment we come together, the time is not ours to discuss the duties of life hereafter and neglect the life here." She called upon the conventioneers to cease talking about the heavens and instead focus their attention on "mak[ing] the heaven that ought to be here on earth." They should labor not to glimpse the beauties and happiness of the heavens from afar, but instead devote their energies to political and social reforms that might make the world they lived in now such a place that instead of welcoming their passage into the spirit world at death all could instead feel that "it is really a pity to leave this beautiful earth entirely." 41

Abolitionist Parker Pillsbury felt much the same, expressing frustration with the amount of time devoted to spiritual questions at the convention. "I am out of patience sometimes," Parker declared, "when I see, as here last evening, hour after hour used up and passed into the great eternities, bearing no better record than the utterances of lisping girls [i.e. the trance speakers]." Late in the convention he was furious that his speech on antislavery was limited to ten minutes when "we have been compelled to listen to pretty

long harangues, coming from this world or the other, and not always of any great
practical interest to the objects of this Convention." For Pillsbury as for Rose,
Spiritualism was a distracting siren song to which he refused to succumb. "I will not
become so enraptured with anticipations [of the heavens offered by Spiritualists] as to
allow my ears to be stopped or my heart hardened against the cries and wailings of four
millions of slaves," he declared. Pillsbury found it unconscionable for self-declared
reformers and political activists to spend their precious time debating questions about
disembodied spirits when millions of very much embodied people were held by other
people as property.\

So did Stephen S. Foster. "I am told you are all anti-slavery here, and ready to
act. In God's name, why don't you act?," he asked the reformers of the convention.
Responding to someone who said they were ready "to give the pound of flesh, but no
blood"—i.e. that they would make great sacrifices to affect the end of slavery, but not
through violence—Foster attempted to turn conventioneers' attention away from the spirit
to the body. "Yes; and what is that flesh?," Foster retorted, "that pound of flesh is the
slave." It was their bodies that were enslaved, and anti-slavery advocates might have
physically to confront the slaveholder to free them. "Some will say, 'This will result in
blood.' Very likely it will. What of it? I ask you, is not every one ready to spill oceans
of blood, if necessary, to secure his own freedom?" Foster turned the Spiritualists' belief
in immediate rebirth upon death against them. If death was nothing to fear, why not die
in a righteous cause? "You pretend to be Spiritualists, and believe in a future life; and
yet, you are so attached to this, that you dare not repudiate the pro-slavery, man-thieving

42 Proceedings of the Free Convention, 82, 88.
government, because it may cost a drop of blood, a scratch on the face!" Again focusing attention toward the material body, Foster tauntingly urged the largely Spiritualist audience to attack slavery right now by any means necessary no matter the costs. "You believe in Spiritualism? Why, I have more Spiritualism in my little finger than you have in your whole bodies. With all my non-resistance, I do not shrink from the thought of blood as you do .... What matters if I die, so that I die battling for the right?" 43

In his critique of spirit as a reform instrument and his reluctant advocacy of force, Foster was closer to the mainstream of the anti-slavery movement in the 1850s than were the Spiritualists of the Rutland Convention. The 1850s saw more and more reformers focus their efforts on the body and away from the spirit. This was particularly true of abolitionists who increasingly turned to violence and the ballot box, both realms of men, in their efforts to end slavery. The most spectacular example of this was John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. Less than year after the Rutland Free Convention, in June 1859, Brown arrived in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, intent on initiating an insurrection among the slaves that he'd hoped would overthrow slavery in the South. This insurrection was quickly put down and Brown executed, but Brown's failed crusade did far more to fuel northern hostility towards the institution of slavery than the Rutland Free Convention. While Brown certainly was not the typical abolitionist, more and more of them were increasingly embracing violence as a means to end slavery. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, in particular, changed abolitionist tactics, undermining friendship politics. With the Fugitive Slave Law, slavery became more of a local issue for many northerners. Feeling they would be personally complicit with slavery if they allowed fugitives to be

43 Proceedings of the Free Convention, 97-99.
captured and returned, many abolitionists saw it as their duty to offer physical resistance to those who sought to capture fugitive slaves who had escaped to the North and return them to bondage in the South. For instance, in 1854 a group of Boston abolitionists stormed the courthouse, killing one guard, in an effort to liberate fugitive slave Anthony Burns. John Brown's actions in Kansas and Harper's Ferry and the effort to rescue Burns were two extraordinary episodes of the 1850s that typified an emerging acceptance of violence among reformers. This embrace of violence, culminating in the Civil War, was the final, ultimately devastating, critique of the friendship politics of mid-nineteenth-century radical activists.

Slavery was not ended through friendship or through spirit, but by a violent conflict that saw hundreds of thousands of bodies destroyed or maimed. Indeed, as Frederick Douglass observed in 1880, "History does not furnish an example of Emancipation under conditions less friendly to the emancipated class than this American example. Liberty came to the freedmen of the United States not in mercy, but in wrath, not by moral choice but by military necessity, not by the generous action of the people among whom they were to live, and whose good-will was essential to the success of the measure, but by strangers, foreigners, invaders, trespassers, aliens, and enemies." Yet the friendship politics of radical reformers of the era should not be dismissed because it failed to accomplish the objective these reformers considered most critical: the end of chattel slavery. Whatever its limitations—and limited it surely was—a heartfelt belief in the power of spirit and friendship fueled an extraordinary political and moral engagement, motivating a generation of reformers to denounce inequality, to demand

justice for the disempowered, to extend love and kindness to the weak and friendless. While it cannot be denied that antebellum spiritual activists failed to accomplish the revolutionary ends they sought—the abolition of slavery, the recognition of men and women's equality, and the advent of international peace—their faith in bonds of affection inspired careers of activism that, beyond question, exemplified and embodied the better angels of our nature.
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