

# Welcome to Week 7

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- As you enter class this week please
  - Get yourself some snacks and coffee
  - Fill out a name tag and introduce yourself to others at the table
  - Read through the primary sources for this week.

# Christian History in America



Visions, Realities, and Turning  
Points

Class 7: Skeletons in the Closet:  
Manifest Destiny and Slavery.

# Class 7 Goals

- Examine some of the contradictions that developed in Protestant America between the ideals of the Gospel message and the realities of American Life.
- Explore the legacy of Manifest Destiny for America and the Church.
- Study the debates about the morality of slavery that were held in the Churches and the Nation.
- Ask how American Christians were able to reconcile their faith and slaveholding.

# Opening Question

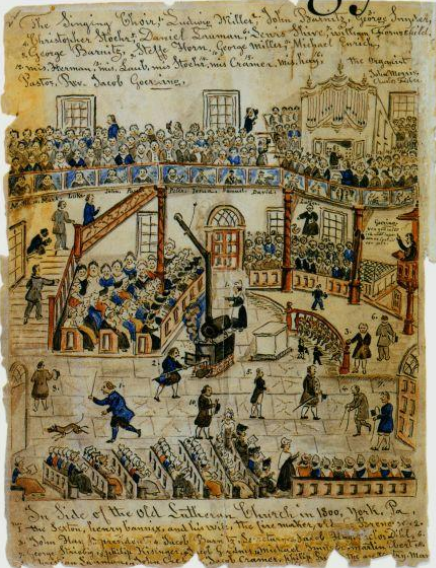
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- As people who claim to base our lives around the Bible, how can we be sure that we are using it properly?
- In what circumstances or situations are we most likely to misuse or even abuse the Scriptures?

# Suggested Readings

"Magisterial. . . The definitive chronicle of an essential aspect of American religious and intellectual history." —*Atlantic Monthly*

## Theology



## in America

*Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans  
to the Civil War*

E. Brooks Holifield

## Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass

An American Slave

Written by Himself  
with Related Documents

Edited with an Introduction by David W. Blight



DAVID HEMPTON

## Evangelical Disenchantment

9 PORTRAITS OF FAITH AND DOUBT



# John Quincy Adams on July 4 - 1837

- “Is it not that, in the chain of human events, the birthday of the nation is indissolubly linked with the birthday of the Savior? That it forms a leading event in the progress of the Gospel dispensation? Is it not that the Declaration of Independence first organized the social compact on the foundation of the Redeemer’s mission upon the earth?”
- “Freedom to the slave! Liberty to the captives! Redemption! Redemption forever to the race of man from the yoke of oppression!”

# Frederick Douglass on July 4, 1852

- What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license ... your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy--a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages ... You boast of your love of liberty, your superior civilization, and your pure Christianity, while the whole political power of the nation ... is solemnly pledged to support and perpetuate the enslavement of three millions of your countrymen ...



# Frederick Douglass Continued

- You can bare your bosom to the storm of British artillery to throw off a three-penny tax on tea; and yet wring the last hard-earned farthing from the grasp of the black laborers of your country. You profess to believe “that, of one blood, God made all nations of men to dwell on the face of all the earth” [Acts 17:26], and hath commanded all men, everywhere, to love one another; yet you notoriously hate (and glory in your hatred) all men whose skins are not colored like your own ... The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretense, and your Christianity as a lie.”



# Horace Bushnell

- ▣ “The wilderness shall bud and blossom as the rose before us; and we will not cease, till a Christian nation throws up its temples of worship on every hill and plain; till knowledge, virtue, and religion, blending their dignity and their healthful power, have filled our great country with a manly and happy race of people, and the bonds of a complete Christian commonwealth are seen to span the continent.”

# John L. O'Sullivan

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- “. . .by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federative self government entrusted to us.”

# Tecumseh's Complaint

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- "Brother, I wish you to give me close attention, because I think you do not clearly understand. I want to speak to you about promises that the Americans have made.

# Tecumseh's Complaint

You recall the time when the Jesus Indians of the Delawares lived near the Americans, and had confidence in their promises of friendship, and thought they were secure, yet the Americans murdered all the men, women, and children, even as they prayed to Jesus.

The same promises were given to the Shawnee one time. . .

# Tecumseh's Complaint

- It was at Fort Finney, where some of my people were forced to make a treaty. Flags were given to my people, and they were told they were now the children of the Americans. We were told, if any white people mean to harm you, hold up these flags and you will then be safe from all danger. We did this in good faith. But what happened? Our beloved chief Moluntha stood with the American flag in front of him and that very peace treaty in his hand, but his head was chopped by a American officer, and that American officer was never punished

# Spotty Lincoln

- During the debate over the Mexican War Lincoln demanded to know the spot where Mexican Troops fired on American Troops on American Soil.
- He was defeated for reelection.

# Legacies of Manifest Destiny

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- ▣ Justifications: In the name of God, Democracy, and Freedom.
- ▣ Displacing Native Americans from traditional lands?
- ▣ Picking fights with weaker neighbors to gain land?
- ▣ Spreading the institution of slavery into new areas?
- ▣ Promoting quick exploitation of natural resources instead of sustainable uses?



# The Emergence of Anti-Slavery Theology

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- 1700 Samuel Sewell publishes the Selling of Joseph.
- Mennonites and Quakers adopt antislavery positions and expel slaveholders.
- Southern Methodists and Baptists begin to follow suit but are pushed back by social, political, and economic pressure.

# The Pro-Slavery Argument

- Genesis 9:25-27 (Curse of Canaan applied to Africans?)
- Genesis 12:5, 17:13 (Abraham Owning Slaves)
- Lev. 25:44-46, Exod. 21:20 (Surrounding nations described as slaves – punishment for sin)
- Eph. 6:5, Col. 3:22, 4:11, Titus 2:9-10, I Pet. 2:18 (Slaves obey your masters, but just and equally?)
- Philemon (Paul returns a run-away slave to his master, but to be received as a brother)

# Abolitionist Arguments

- Exod. 21:16 (Death penalty for stealing people, but only for Hebrews?)
- Deut. 7:1-2 (Slavery only as a result of punishment for sin.)
- Lev. 25 (Concept of the Jubilee – Freedom for Slaves)
- Deut. 23:15-16 (Forbids Israelites from returning runaway slaves, but only from non-God fearing masters?)
- Acts 17:26 (Equality by Creation)
- Gal 3:28 (In Christ there is neither bond nor free.)

# For Table Discussion

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- What do you do when an important question of Biblical interpretation can't just be resolved by looking at proof texts?
- What happens when, "The Bible says it, I believe it," doesn't settle it?

# The Hermeneutical Turn

- Hermeneutics (From the Greek God Hermes – Messenger of the Gods.) – Principles of Biblical Interpretations
  - Rely on most important principles– the ethic of Love. (Some Biblical passages are more important than others)
  - Progressive Revelation – God revealed more of himself over time – anti-slavery principle appears later. (But does the Gospel “adjust itself to the times?”)

# Hermeneutics II

- Historical Hermeneutic
  - Examine the time period and historical context in which the command was given.
  - Then determine which commands are eternal and which are time bound.
  - Both pro and anti-slavery polemicists make enormous use of historical arguments to support their positions.
- What role do cultural assumptions play in Biblical Interpretation?
  - Especially notions of racial superiority?
  - Ideas about hierarchy?
- If we question Scripture's view on slavery, what else will we question?

# The Tragedy of Theodore Weld

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- Descended from Puritan Ministers.
- Converted by Finney to Evangelicalism in 1826.
- Became a passionate revivalist anti-slavery activist.
- Married Angelina Grimké

# Theodore Dwight Weld II

- Hired as a Whig party activist to battle slavery in DC.
- Became disillusioned with the slow pace of reform.
- Began to doubt that moral suasion and evangelical appeals alone could counter entrenched systemic sins like slavery.
- Eventually drifted away into Unitarianism and heterodoxy believing that Evangelicalism had failed in its promise to transform the world.



# The Tragedy of Frederick Douglass

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- Born a slave in Tuckahoe, Maryland.
- Eventually became educated and escaped to freedom.
- Excerpts from his Autobiography

# Douglass' Autobiography

- “For of all the slaveholders with whom I have met, religious slaveholders are the worst. I have ever found them the meanest and basest, the most cruel and cowardly, of all others. It was my unhappy lot not only to belong to a religious slaveholder, but to live in a community of such religionists.”
- “In August, 1832, my master attended a Methodist camp-meeting held in the Bay-side, Talbot county, and there experienced religion. I indulged a faint hope that his conversion would lead him to emancipate his slaves, and that, if he did not do this, it would, at any rate, make him more kind and humane. I was disappointed in both these respects.

# Douglass' Autobiography

It neither made him to be humane to his slaves, nor to emancipate them. If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his conversion than before. Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slaveholding cruelty. He made the greatest pretensions to piety. His house was the house of prayer. He prayed morning, noon, and night. He very soon distinguished himself among his brethren, and was soon made a class-leader and exhorter. His activity in revivals was great, and he proved himself an instrument in the hands of the church in converting many souls. His house was the preachers' home. They used to take great pleasure in coming there to put up; for while he starved us, he stuffed them.

- What I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the "slave holding religion" of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper; for, between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference--so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of the one, is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slave holding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed.

# Douglass' Autobiography

- I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels. Never was there a clearer case of "stealing the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in." I am filled with unutterable loathing when I contemplate the religious pomp and show, together with the horrible inconsistencies, which every where surround me. We have men-stealers for ministers, women whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church members.

# The Tragedy of America

- When America was most heavily influenced by Evangelical Protestant people and values and with the consistent support of many ministers and believers.
  - (despite consistent protest from both the most radical and most liberal believers)
  - Development of a form of National Patriotic Idolatry
  - Pursuit of territorial expansion and displacement of Native Americans and Mexicans without considering the cost
  - Entrenched a system of racial slavery in search of profit and feelings of racial superiority.

# Challenge Application Question

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- Have we adequately repented of these corporate sins of both the church and the nation?
- What areas of moral blindness or mis-application of scripture might we be struggling with as a church or as a nation today?

# *Broken Churches Broken Nation*

- Major denominations which had provided powerful cultural glue for the young nation fractured over the morality of slavery.
  - 1845 – Baptists split over whether slaveholders could become missionaries.
  - 1837-1861 Presbyterians split first over theological issues, then slavery, then with the Civil War
  - 1845 Methodist churches split of Slavery (divide the largest denominational infrastructure in the nation.



# Lincoln's Second Inaugural

If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Inaugural II

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

# And Remembering . . .

- The Development of “Lost Cause Ideology”
  - Painted a portrait of contented slaves and a Christian Civilization in the South destroyed by Northern Aggressors.
  - Down played slavery as a cause for the war
  - *Gone with the Wind, God’s and Generals.*

# Southern “Redemption?”

- With the end of Reconstruction in the 1870's white supremacists “redeemed” the south from “carpetbag” rule.
- The rise of Jim Crow instituted a system of segregated churches and pro-segregationist theology.
- Often black ministers and churches were forced to acquiesce in this system in exchange for white financial patronage.