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“Engines of Abolition: The Second Great Awakening, Higher Education, and Slavery in the American Northwest.”

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Date Submitted: April 23, 2016

Kirmser Award

Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award - Individual Non-Freshman category, grand prize

How to cite this manuscript

If you make reference to this paper, use the citation:

Thomas, T. (2016). “Engines of Abolition: The Second Great Awakening, Higher Education, and Slavery in the American Northwest.” Retrieved from <http://krex.ksu.edu>

Abstract & Keywords

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Keywords: Protestantism; Abolitionism; American Northwest; Second Great Awakening; Oberlin College; Lane Seminary; Ohio Wesleyan University; Olivet Institute; Hillsdale College; Granville College; Knox College; Illinois College; McKendree College; Beecher

Course Information

School: Kansas State University
Course Title: Advanced Seminar in History
Instructor: Charles Sanders

Semester: Spring 2016
Course Number: HIST 586

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“Engines of Abolition: The Second Great Awakening, Higher Education, and Slavery in the American Northwest.”

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Major Professor: Dr. Charles Sanders

Publication Date: 2016

Engines of Abolition:

The Second Great Awakening, Higher Education, and Slavery in the American Northwest

History 586

Section B

Professor Sanders

Trevor Thomas

March 1, 2016

On September 13, 1858, two young men in Wellington, Ohio observed federal agents and slavecatchers escorting a captured runaway slave towards the area's railroad station. The men quickly departed Wellington and took this news to the nearby town of Oberlin, where "in fifteen minutes the square was alive with students and citizens armed with weapons of death. Revolvers slid quietly into their place, rifles were loaded and capped, and shot-guns, muskets, pistols and knives bristled or peeped on every side."¹ The armed crowd hastened to Wellington, forcing the slavecatchers to barricade themselves in the Wadsworth Hotel, where the angry Oberliners placed them under siege. After their demands for the slave to be freed went unanswered, they stormed the hotel and forcibly wrested the man from the grasps of the slavecatchers. The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue became a national sensation, especially when several of the Oberlin students were forced to stand trial for their involvement.² But how did Oberlin, a once insignificant town in the Old Northwest Territory, become the most famous abolitionist community in America? The answer lies in Charles Langston's testimony during the trial, in which he boldly proclaimed that "under the laws of God" the slave "had a right to his liberty."³ At Oberlin and similar institutions, religion, politics, and education mixed to form a potent blend of abolitionism that profoundly affected the northwest United States.

"Tell me not of bigotry and sectarian jealousy. Conscious of our integrity and liberality, we fear no righteous opposition; and trusting in God and our own right arms, we dread no unrighteous one."⁴ So declared Edward Thomson, Ohio Wesleyan University's president and Methodist bishop, in his speech at the institution's 1846 commencement. Thomson's speech was characteristic of the new attitudes that began to form in the first half of the nineteenth century in America, particularly in the states that formerly made up the Northwest Territory. Protestant educational institutions in the Northwest, born from and baptized by the revivalism of the

Second Great Awakening, began to reject bigotry and slavery in the name of a benevolent God. Colleges and seminaries like Oberlin and Cincinnati's Lane Theological Seminary were well-known as anti-slavery centers in the antebellum era. However, many lesser-known institutions in the Northwest with ties to Protestant churches also showed similar sympathies to abolitionism. This paper will argue that fired with the moral mandates of the Second Great Awakening, institutions of higher learning founded by evangelical abolitionists in the American Northwest often became centers of anti-slavery sentiment.

The Second Great Awakening was a religious revival that occurred approximately from the turn of the nineteenth century until the onset of the American Civil War in 1861. During this time, Protestant theologians began forming and debating new doctrinal ideas, ministers traveled among congregations to spread the revivalist message, and religious participation increased throughout the country. The movement was founded on the emotional aspects of religion and was a stern rebuke to the cold theology of rationalism and the Enlightenment. At the core of the new revival was a benevolence that was noticeably lacking in its eighteenth century predecessor, the First Great Awakening. Far from Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Second Great Awakening revivalists espoused a view of the Bible and God that encouraged evangelism, the active spread of Protestantism. There was a new concern not only for the soul of the individual, but also for the entire country. Charles Grandison Finney, the preeminent figure of the Second Great Awakening, described this new attitude as "a longing desire for the salvation of the whole world."⁵ As a result, American Protestantism became intimately involved with combating the sins of the nation. This led many ministers to support the social reform movements that were quickly gaining momentum during the time period such as temperance, prison reform, and abolitionism.

Slavery became antithetical to Northern revivalism due to a particular set of Protestant beliefs that found human bondage to be contrary to God's will. Many found the enslavement of other humans to be an act committed purely for economic profit. Lorenzo Dow, one of the most famous traveling preachers of his time, claimed that a desire for and love of money "led the nations of Europe to enslave and destroy the poor blacks of Africa, and the miserable Indians of America."⁶ American Protestantism, with its historical emphasis on Puritan discipline, found such extravagance repulsive. The Second Great Awakening also featured a renewed call from prominent revivalist ministers to lend a hand in curing the ills of the world. Finney and Jonathan Blanchard, an abolitionist minister and the eventual founder of Wheaton College, articulated the belief that even though most Protestants believed in salvation through grace alone, attempting to change society, particularly by abolishing slavery, was proof of being among the saved.⁷ Reform became a very important tenet of Christian duty, and it was often extended to the plight of the slaves.

Like the rest of the country, the states of the former Northwest Territory, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, also experienced the revival, though in a fundamentally different manner. Unlike in the Northeast or South, the Northwest was still sparsely populated, with few existing institutions in existence to serve as the backbone of Christianity. For this reason, ordinary preachers were not responsible for the Second Great Awakening's spread to the Northwest. Rather, the responsibility fell to Methodist "circuit-riders" and missionaries from other denominations who were willing to travel long distances to service the fledgling congregations that were quickly sprouting up throughout the region. Two of the most prominent frontier ministers were Francis Asbury, the acknowledged founder of American Methodism, and Peter Cartwright, the famous frontier preacher and appointee of Bishop Asbury. Both produced

writings that reveal the doctrinal tenets that led to the development of abolitionist thought in the Northwest. Asbury speaks in his autobiography of his own opposition to slave-holding and the resistance he faced in the South because of it.⁸ Asbury viewed slavery as one of the greatest evils he encountered in his travels throughout the country, noting that “If the Gospel will tolerate slavery, what will it not authorise?”⁹ Cartwright declared it a “domestic, political, and moral evil” that encouraged sin among slave, slaveholder, and the slaveholder’s family.¹⁰ It was through traveling preachers like Asbury and Cartwright that the Second Great Awakening first permeated the former Northwest Territory, accompanied by abolitionist sympathies.

Although the former Northwest Territory was sparsely populated at the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, the region, along with the rest of the country, grew rapidly in the first half of the nineteenth century. As an example, Illinois’ population rose from a meager 55,211 people in 1820 to over 1.7 million by 1860.¹¹ Other Northwest states followed similar trends. As the states grew, local communities realized they needed institutions of higher learning to provide teachers and ministers for their people. The citizens of Delaware, Ohio sent a delegation to the local Methodist conference and proposed to “donate to it ten acres of ground, embracing the Sulphur spring, and the present college edifice, on the condition that it should... establish thereon a collegiate institution.”¹² The school that resulted from this transaction was Ohio Wesleyan University. McKendree College and Illinois Wesleyan were both founded with the help and support of the United Methodist Church, which was making at the time a concerted effort to found seminaries and colleges throughout the Northwest to accommodate the growing population.¹³ Lane Seminary, meanwhile, was founded in Cincinnati with the purpose of training ministers to serve in the West. Though initially tiny and without great support, it eventually earned the backing of Arthur and Lewis Tappan, a pair of wealthy East Coast merchants who

were both abolitionists and devout Presbyterians.¹⁴ Many other communities appealed to religious organizations in order to secure funding and support for universities, colleges, and seminaries, and for the most part they found receptive audiences.

Direct financial backing helped ensure the role of the church in higher education in the Northwest, but it was through the schools' faculties that the Second Great Awakening's attitudes towards slavery crystallized, leading those institutions to become centers of the abolitionist movement. By observing the faculties of the new institutions, the evangelical East's influence on Northwest education is obvious. Lane Seminary was headed by New England's Lyman Beecher, a Yale-educated theologian and one of the most well-known ministers in the country. Though his opposition to radical abolitionism later threw Lane into turmoil, it is worth noting that Beecher was guided by the desire for "spiritual purity, material abundance, democratic freedoms and socio-political tranquility," concepts that lend themselves to at least a principled opposition to slavery, if not an active one.¹⁵ Both Oberlin College and Olivet College in Michigan were founded by the Reverend John J. Shipherd, who after being educated in Vermont, began his ministry and the work of founding schools in the East.¹⁶ One of the primary factors in the rise of abolitionism at institutions of higher education in the Northwest was the influence of ministers and theologians from the East that came to serve at the new schools, thus spreading their abolitionist messages.

A multitude of colleges, universities, and seminaries throughout the Northwest developed under the influence of the Second Great Awakening and its abolitionist predispositions. Two of the most famous examples are Oberlin College and the Lane Theological Seminary. The Lane Debates of 1834 and the ensuing controversies inextricably linked the two schools, leaving one to become the preeminent center of abolitionism in the Northwest and the other to flounder. Lane

Seminary's history began with the donation of \$4,000 from Ebenezer Lane, who wished to found a Baptist labor school.¹⁷ However, the Baptist church was unwilling to support the endeavor, so he turned to the Presbyterian Church, which agreed to assist in the school's founding on the grounds that it become a seminary instead.¹⁸ The new seminary and abolitionism suddenly intersected with the intervention of the anti-slavery businessman Arthur Tappan, who gave \$20,000 to Lane so that it could pursue the revivalist minister Lyman Beecher. Beecher accepted the invitation to become the seminary's president in 1832.¹⁹ Within two years, the seminary was embroiled in a series of debates between students, faculty, and outsiders from all over the country. The fiery exchanges revealed the student body's abolitionist nature and its determination to stand for what it believed in despite faculty opposition. When Lane's governing committee attempted to stifle free speech at the seminary, the students responded by resigning from Lane. The debates, which were spearheaded by student Theodore Dwight Weld, were unquestionably evangelical in nature. One of the speakers predicted that the revivalism of the time "will soon, by its glorious moral forces alone, melt down the icebergs of prejudice, and proclaim to the sable captives of all lands, in the inspiring language of Montgomery: Thy chains are broken! Africa, be free!"²⁰ The speaker also declared that even declining to take an active role in the fight against slavery is morally wrong and "quite unworthy of a Christian."²¹ The implication of such a statement is that Christians must vigorously combat the sins of the world, especially slavery. The constitution of Lane's anti-slavery society demonstrates a clear link between abolitionism and the evangelical Christianity that the Second Great Awakening inspired. Slavery was an abomination according to the constitution's writers because the slave, despite being "constituted by God a moral agent, the keeper of his own happiness," was deprived of this

privilege by the slaveholder.²² In other words, slavery was a direct affront to God's decision to give man free will.

At the center of the controversy that ended with the departure of many of Lane's students for Oberlin was the complicated figure of Lyman Beecher, president and professor of theology at the school. Beecher has earned a somewhat dubious reputation among historians due to the manner by which he handled the Lane controversy and his initial lukewarm support for abolitionism in general.²³ However, Beecher too is an example of the transformative effects of the Second Great Awakening. Beecher never expressed anything except disdain for slavery, but instead of outright abolitionism, the minister initially supported the transportation of freed blacks to Africa, a solution known as colonization.²⁴ More than anything else, Beecher preferred peace and thoroughly disliked radicalism of any form. This placed him in an awkward position during the Lane Debates. Theodore Dwight Weld proved to be a force beyond his capacity to control, and the consequence was the near collapse of the seminary altogether, as Weld led a majority of the young men enrolled in the seminary to depart for Oberlin.²⁵ Beecher held great resentments towards abolitionism after the debacle, which frequently showed in his dealings with the Tappans and the famous anti-slavery activist William Lloyd Garrison through the rest of the 1830s. However, as time passed, Beecher became much more sympathetic towards outright abolitionism, and he is described as a proponent of "conservative abolitionism" by Christian historian J. Earl Thompson. Thompson credits Beecher's change of heart to the continued inability of the Protestant churches to settle the issue of slavery with doctrine, which also led to several splits in Protestantism's largest denominations.²⁶ In this way, Beecher realized that slavery and the tenets of the Second Great Awakening were fundamentally irreconcilable, and the anti-slavery forces in the United States gained a valuable ally.

The primary beneficiary of the mass departure from the Lane Theological Seminary was the Oberlin Institute, a school in northern Ohio founded in 1833 by Reverend John J. Shipherd and Philo P. Stewart, both Presbyterian ministers raised and educated on the East Coast.²⁷ Though much is owed to the infusion of anti-slavery sentiments held by the Lane students for Oberlin's fervent support of abolitionism, it is clear from the college's founding creed, the Oberlin Covenant, that piety and charity were tenets of an Oberlin education. "Special efforts" were to be made "to sustain the institutions of the gospel at home and among our neighbors," and Oberlin in many ways perfectly embodied the outreach evangelism that the Second Great Awakening encouraged.²⁸ One example of this was Oberlin's commitment to educating poorer students, a decision that led to many financial difficulties down the road but ultimately strengthened the institution's Christian reputation. Women and men alike could have all their educational expenses paid for in exchange for working four hours per day in service to the community and the college.²⁹ Oberlin's abolitionist reputation was established after 1835, but its evangelical influences were present prior to that. Shipherd, motivated by "the same restless impulse to hasten the coming of God's kingdom," helped bring the revivalist spirit to Elyria, Ohio, and then Oberlin.³⁰ Stewart, meanwhile, spent the first part of his career spreading Christianity among the Choctaw tribe in Mississippi.³¹ Oberlin's founders were closely involved with the Second Great Awakening's spread, and they brought this zeal to Oberlin.

The Lane Rebellion changed the entire makeup of Oberlin, both from an abolitionist and evangelical standpoint. Several months after the students' departure from Lane, Shipherd traveled to Cincinnati to offer them a place at Oberlin.³² In addition, Oberlin secured the arrival of the Reverend Asa Mahan to be the college's first president, along with Charles G. Finney and John Morgan as professors. Mahan was a trustee of Lane who resigned after it became clear the

seminary would not support the students' abolitionist activities, and Morgan was a professor there who was dismissed for the same reason.³³ The former students and faculty of Lane, as well as Finney, agreed to join Oberlin on the condition that students be admitted to the college irrespective of color, an agreement that was facilitated by the generous funding from the Tappan brothers, ever-present in Northwest abolitionism and education.³⁴ In a short amount of time, many of the country's most prominent present and future abolitionists and revivalists were gathered at Oberlin, transforming the school from a relatively minor institution to one that "had begun sending out a phalanx of abolitionist-missionaries across the North in numbers unmatched by even the largest eastern cities."³⁵ The influence of ministers and abolitionists born and educated in the East is evident when examining the genesis of Oberlin College, and these figures continued to be highly influential both through funding and teaching.

Like other institutions of higher education in the Old Northwest, the Oberlin abolitionists were guided by the Christian principles of the Second Great Awakening. Asa Mahan, both president of the college and professor of moral science and theology, was known for his writings on the ideal of "Christian perfection." From a doctrinal standpoint, Mahan insisted that Christians strive to follow God's commands as closely as possible to reaffirm the individual's salvation, a common line of thinking by religious scholars at the time.³⁶ An important part of Mahan's philosophy is described as the "full and perfect discharge of our entire duty, of all existing obligations in respect to God and all other beings."³⁷ Since "all other beings" extended to slaves and other oppressed groups, Mahan thus defines the original Oberlin Covenant in Christian terms. With Mahan and other like-minded professors educating the youth of Oberlin, the school became a renowned center of anti-slavery thought. Institutions of higher education

such as Oberlin fused abolitionism and Christian doctrine until they became virtually inseparable in the eyes of its students and professors.

Oberlin's radicalism manifested itself early due to the arrival of the former Lane students and patronage from eastern abolitionists such as the Tappans. As early as 1840, the school was famous even across the Atlantic Ocean, where British abolitionists took note of the importance of Oberlin as a catalyst for change.³⁸ Adding to its importance for the abolitionist cause, the college and its faculty were largely unaffected by the frequent schisms and conflicts that wracked the movement in the years after Oberlin's founding because "rather than following any particular leaders or strictly adhering to any narrow ideology, Oberlin reformers selectively adopted whatever abolitionist means they believed offered the greatest hope for success."³⁹ After Mahan departed from Oberlin, the school selected Charles G. Finney as its second president, ushering in an era of escalating opposition to the South's attempts to protect slavery. The selection of Finney, the leading minister-abolitionist of America, was a reaffirmation of both abolitionism and evangelical Protestantism. Oberlin's opposition to slavery meant that the school and town became closely involved with the Underground Railroad. Incidents like the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue, in which members of the Oberlin community dramatically stormed a hotel to free a slave captured under the Fugitive Slave Act, earned the school international renown.⁴⁰ One student even traveled to Kentucky in 1845 to encourage the slaves to leave their masters, though he was quickly arrested and sentenced to serve 11 years in prison.⁴¹ At the core of Oberlin's abolitionism was a deep commitment to the Protestant ideals upon which the school was founded.

Reverend John Shipherd, encouraged by Oberlin's success, if not its profitability, set out to found another institution of higher education in the same mold as Oberlin. Olivet Institute, founded in 1844 by Shipherd and a number of students and faculty from Oberlin, was established

in Michigan as another manual labor school.⁴² Shipherd imbued the school with the same revivalist values that he did at Oberlin, since his purpose was to “surround the future seminary with a moral and religious atmosphere so genial and healthful as to effectually restrain the wayward tendencies of young students, and...secure in them obedience of heart to the claims of religion.”⁴³ However, Michigan at the time was still largely untamed compared to Ohio. Beset both by environmental and financial challenges, the Olivet Institute frequently relied on church organizations for support. Among these, the most prominent were the Presbyterian Church and the Congregational State Association.⁴⁴ Given that it was a direct offspring of the experiment at Oberlin, the Michigan legislature was reluctant to support the school given Oberlin’s radicalism relative to the rest of the country, especially when the school began to show signs of following in Oberlin’s footsteps. Reverend Reuben Hatch, a man with self-described “anti-slavery pluck,” and the president of Olivet after Shipherd’s death, attempted to secure a charter for the fledgling institute from the state of Michigan but received a cold reception.⁴⁵ According to the legislators, Olivet was “tainted with abolitionism.” Thus, a charter was denied because the state feared Olivet would become a center for the “propagation of anti-slavery views” as Oberlin did.⁴⁶ Even in statehouses across the country, revivalism was quickly becoming associated with abolitionism.

In the same year as Olivet’s founding, Michigan Central College was established by the Freewill Baptists, a Protestant sect that rebelled against the Calvinist concept of predestination in the early eighteenth century.⁴⁷ The Freewill Baptists were very active in New England and the Old Northwest during the Second Great Awakening, and Freewill Baptist preachers crisscrossed the region in order to spread the faith.⁴⁸ The religion, which emphasized man’s ability to freely accept salvation, seemed naturally opposed to the ideas behind slavery. In fact, the Freewill Baptists openly called for a “holy war against slavery,” and refused to administer communion to

any slaveholders.⁴⁹ Michigan Central College, which became Hillsdale College several years later, was founded with these principles in mind. The school first selected the Oberlin graduate Daniel Graham to be its president, which only increased its ties to the abolitionist movement.⁵⁰ Like Oberlin, Michigan Central College allowed black students to attend the school, a policy that was far more progressive than most institutions in the country, and President Graham felt no qualms about offending pro-slavery students as he railed against slavery from the pulpit.⁵¹ By the time Edmund Burke Fairchild assumed the presidency of Michigan Central College in 1848, the institution's opposition to slavery was already well established through the religious convictions of the faculty and students. Fairchild led the school to become more closely involved with abolitionism in the years before the Civil War, until eventually Hillsdale became one of the prominent centers of abolitionism in the state of Michigan. Fairchild had an active role in the founding of Michigan's Republican Party, which earned Hillsdale College more recognition as a place where anti-slavery activism and religious revivalism worked hand in hand.⁵² Hillsdale, like Oberlin and Olivet, was not just an isolated pocket of abolitionism without dynamism or consequence. It was an actual center, where anti-slavery thought coalesced and then spread to a community that did not always share the same sentiments. These centers were founded due to the evangelical outreach from the Second Great Awakening and the revivalist ministers that took part.

The Baptists also made their mark on higher education in the Old Northwest, founding the Granville Literary and Theological Institution in 1831. The school was founded with inspiration from "the missionary impulse that had led so many religious sects to found colleges in America," and like similar institutions, it became a home for anti-slavery thought.⁵³ At Granville, a scenario similar to the one at the Lane Theological Seminary played out. The

faculty, which “consciously cultivated the revival spirit” but “avoided the moral crusades nourished by religious evangelism,” preferred to see gradual change instead of sudden upheaval much like Lyman Beecher at Lane.⁵⁴ However, taught by the anti-slavery professor Asa Drury to view moral reform as a necessary function of evangelism, the students rebelled. The result was an actual riot in 1836, during which the abolitionist students of the institution clashed with the pro-slavery townspeople of Granville.⁵⁵ Even after Drury’s departure, a large segment of the student population remained committed to fighting the evils of slavery, especially after receiving a religious education from Granville.

Though it was common for different denominations to compete for church membership, cooperation between Protestant sects often bore fruit for all involved. Knox College and Illinois College were two Illinois institutions born out of the cooperation between the Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches. Illinois College was founded in 1829 by John Ellis, a traveling missionary of the Presbyterian faith. He established the institution with the help of a number of Congregationalist students from Yale, who assisted Ellis in creating the college for “the cause of education and religion.”⁵⁶ The support Illinois College received from the East was instrumental in its future success. In fact, when it came time for the fledgling college to select its first president, the faculty left the decision in the hands of its benefactors from the East. The result of this was the selection of Edward Beecher, the son of Lyman Beecher and a notable theologian in his own right. The selection of Beecher significantly changed the trajectory of the school and placed it at the forefront of the slavery debate in the state of Illinois.

The New York-educated Beecher viewed the West as supremely important to the future of the United States, both from a religious and political standpoint. In a sermon delivered in 1850, Beecher predicted that the key to future American prosperity resided in the lands beyond

the Appalachian.⁵⁷ As such, it was of extreme importance to Beecher and likeminded theologians to secure the Northwest for Protestant Christianity and to spread the values of the Second Great Awakening there. This included a stubborn opposition to slavery. In 1829, Beecher invited William Lloyd Garrison to deliver a sermon at his church, an offer that Garrison accepted.⁵⁸ Though Garrison was not yet the firebrand abolitionist he later became, the speech at the Park Street Church marked an open embrace of abolitionism by Beecher. Beecher continued to show an open preference for abolitionists that visited the college after he assumed its presidency, once inviting the abolitionist minister and newspaper editor Elijah Lovejoy to stay at his house.⁵⁹ Though his form of anti-slavery thought tended closer to his father's conservative abolitionism than Garrison's beliefs, Beecher often and loudly declared that "abolition was sanctioned by God."⁶⁰ A number of historians have even claimed that Harriet Beecher Stowe, Edward Beecher's sister, used his thoughts on slavery and theology in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.⁶¹ Through his position as president of Illinois College, Beecher oversaw the growth of one of the most fiercely anti-slavery colleges in the state of Illinois.

Beecher, along with professors Jonathan Baldwin Turner and Julian Sturtevant, infused the young college with a great amount of anti-slavery energy. This was despite the fact that the college was located in an area with strong pro-slavery sentiments, and many of its students were similarly pro-slavery.⁶² However, the influence of Beecher, Turner, and Sturtevant, all former students of Yale and vigorously abolitionist, eventually turned the students against the concept. Judge Thomas J.C. Fagg, the son of a Missouri slaveholder and a member of the college's 1842 graduating class, credits Illinois College for his eventual denouncement of human bondage and his future attempts to rid Missouri of slavery.⁶³ Beecher and other close associates of the college were responsible for establishing the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society when pro-slavery forces

in the surrounding area attempted to muzzle the school's abolitionism.⁶⁴ Because of the institution's proximity to the slave state of Missouri, the school was often accused of meddling in the neighboring state's affairs. In addition, the school regularly came under attack from pro-slavery newspapers both in Missouri and Illinois for its abolitionist views, which only intensified as Illinois College became closely involved with the Underground Railroad. Under the direction of Professor Turner, escaped slaves from Missouri were hidden in Jacksonville safe houses where they could further plan their routes to Canada.⁶⁵ Headed by agents of the Second Great Awakening, Illinois College became one of the most influential and powerful anti-slavery institutions not only in the state but also in the entire country.

Knox College was also not located far from the Missouri-Illinois border, and like their counterparts in Jacksonville, Galesburg abolitionists enjoyed antagonizing the pro-slavery forces to the west. The founder of the Knox Manual Labor College, George Washington Gale, was a revivalist preacher from New York who also acted as a mentor for Charles G. Finney.⁶⁶ Gale brought with him numerous other preachers who had been swept up by the revivalist fever of the time and shared his vision of a school in Illinois. The institution's first president was Reverend Hiram Huntington Kellogg, a revivalist from New York who had close connections to Charles G. Finney and the anti-slavery "clique of New York reformers" that opposed slavery in the name of God and included men such as Theodore Dwight Weld.⁶⁷ Like those at Illinois College, the faculty at Knox openly participated in anti-slavery activities despite the opposition of the locals, especially towards the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society. At a time when the majority of the population throughout the United States was reluctant to support absolute abolitionism, the ministers at Knox embraced it. At the heart of this support was the unwavering belief that slavery contradicted the teachings of God and so needed to be struck from the earth.

The religious teachings of Knox College translated into actual political support for the anti-slavery movement. Gale himself was closely involved with the founding of the abolitionist Liberty Party in 1840, and some of the school's trustees either ran as Liberty candidates or oversaw the party's conventions in Illinois.⁶⁸ Knox also became active in the Underground Railroad. From Galesburg, Underground Railroad operatives transported escaped slaves north to Andover and eventually to Canada, where they found freedom from slavery.⁶⁹ The many activities of Knox College's faculty and student body earned the institution a reputation as a radically abolitionist school, and Knox became known as the state's "sun of reform."⁷⁰ No other school in Illinois could boast the kind of abolitionist composition that Knox had. In the form of "student debates, orations, and literary publications," the slavery debate was hashed out again and again on campus, focusing not on whether slavery ought to be abolished, but rather how it should be done.⁷¹ The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 inspired a new urgency in Galesburg since the new law specifically targeted Underground Railroad hubs like Knox College as slaveholders attempted to stem the tide of escaping slaves. President Jonathan Blanchard, himself a revivalist, offered a ringing denunciation of the Act. Blanchard declared that the Fugitive Slave Act not only violated the laws of God, but also federal law because it infringed upon rights afforded to all men.⁷² Like at Oberlin and other colleges founded during the Second Great Awakening, the students and professors of Knox interpreted the teachings of Protestant Christianity to be diametrically opposed to slavery. The school's support for the cause generated sympathy within the surrounding community for anti-slavery principles, which helped cement abolitionism in the makeup of Illinois.

Ohio Wesleyan University, though it did not display the same abolitionist zeal as Knox College or Oberlin College, nonetheless demonstrated the effect revivalist evangelism had on

softening previously stalwart defenders of the status quo in America. Ohio Wesleyan was founded on the suggestion of Delaware, Ohio's pastor, Reverend Adam Poe, who urged the town's residents to seek support from the Ohio conference of the Methodist Church.⁷³ Since the Methodists lacked an institution in Ohio for training ministers at the time, they assented, and in 1842 the college was established. The institution's first president was Edward Thomson, a minister that recognized the beneficial effects of education on society, who stated in a speech to the college that "in the region of the college, there is a gradual elevation of the whole platform of society."⁷⁴ Described as a "firm anti-slavery man," Thomson ensured that the university remained opposed to fugitive slave acts and that any attempts by outside forces to meddle in the institution's teachings for political reasons were rebuffed.⁷⁵ While the university lacked the eye-catching anti-slavery exploits of some of the other colleges previously mentioned, Ohio Wesleyan's support for the abolitionist cause was fully revealed at the outbreak of the Civil War. The students, "by a large majority Republican, anti-slavery and Unionist," held numerous ceremonies denouncing the Confederacy and condemning its supporters within the institution as "Copperheads."⁷⁶

McKendree College was another institution of higher learning that displayed its dedication to the Unionist and anti-slavery causes when the Civil War began. Like Ohio Wesleyan, McKendree was founded with the support of the Methodist Church, and numerous influential ministers and preachers were involved in its creation, including Peter Cartwright.⁷⁷ For most of its early existence, McKendree was not large enough to directly influence the slavery debate from its campus. At times, the school was only graduating several students every year. Despite their limited numbers, McKendree's graduates had a disproportionately large impact on the proceedings of the slavery debate in the years leading up to the Civil War. John Locke

Scripps, the only McKendree graduate of 1844, wrote a highly favorable biography of Abraham Lincoln for the *Chicago Tribune*. The biography swayed enough voters in the 1860 election that Scripps received some credit for Lincoln's selection.⁷⁸ During the Civil War, a large number of McKendree students and graduates volunteered to serve in the Union Army. Risdon Moore, the professor of mathematics at McKendree, became commander of the 117th Regiment, known as the "McKendree Regiment" due to the number of volunteers from the college.⁷⁹ The McKendree Regiment fought valiantly in numerous engagements throughout the Civil War in the name of abolitionism. While schools like Oberlin and Knox College vigorously defended the Northwest against slavery, others like McKendree and Ohio Wesleyan quietly helped build support for initiatives against slavery before and during the Civil War.

The revivalist institutions in the former Northwest Territory played a crucial role in the development of abolitionist sentiments, but the Second Great Awakening was not limited to New England or the Northwest. In fact, the revivalist movement swept through the Southern states with as much energy as it did in other regions. Institutions founded in the South, however, did not display the same abolitionist tendencies that their Northern counterparts did. Part of the reason for this was that many prominent Southern figures were dependent on slave labor as the basis of their income and were reluctant to welcome any views that threatened their way of life. Another factor was how Southerners interpreted the Second Great Awakening's message. Where Northerners saw in Christian doctrine a call to abolish slavery, Southern slaveholders found justification to educate and convert slaves instead of freeing them. In the words of William Harper, one of the South's foremost social theorists, "the institution of Slavery is a principle cause of civilization."⁸⁰ The slaveholders saw it as their duty to cure "the improvidence and utter recklessness of the savage," which according to them, was a symptom of not being Christianized

in the Protestant tradition.⁸¹ While some Southerners acknowledged the implicit immorality of human bondage, others viewed slavery as a moral good because of its supposedly civilizing effects. The rejection of evangelical abolitionism that occurred in the South in favor of paternalistic slavery prevented abolitionism from spreading on a wide scale to Southern institutions of higher education.

In addition to the paternalistic argument, some Southerners countered Northern objections to slavery by pointing to the immoral system of labor that the North employed. Instead of slaves, the industrial North employed masses of unskilled laborers that worked long hours for low pay. Many of the laborers worked under extremely dangerous conditions with little insurance for themselves or their family if an accident were to occur. Southern intellectuals such as U.S. Senator John C. Calhoun argued that slavery was actually more moral than the industrial system of labor, because the slaves were at least fed and cared for regardless of their ability to work. Calhoun described the “forlorn and wretched condition of the pauper in the poorhouse,” as opposed to the slave, who was “under the kind superintending care of his master and mistress.”⁸² In this way, Southerners argued slavery did not defy the tenets of the Second Great Awakening because the institution of slavery actually provided care for those who were unable to provide for themselves. The split in philosophy between the revivalist North and South had a damaging effect on the unity of the religions. The Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians, among others, split along regional lines in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Institutions of higher education in the Northwest followed a unique path in their history that differed from schools in the East and South. The Second Great Awakening inspired a number of talented individuals to abandon their religious and educational positions in the East in order to establish and support institutions of higher education in the Old Northwest Territory.

The faculties of these new schools, already composed of highly influential people, were often adherents to abolitionist revivalism. Protestant revivalists occupied presidencies, pulpits, and professorships in the new schools, which enabled them to spread the central message of the Second Great Awakening to their students, that God was calling them to fight the evils of the world. The institutions became engines of abolitionism, churning out the Northwest's newest educated class that went on to play a formative role in antebellum society. Colleges like Oberlin, Knox, and Hillsdale were home to some of the most radical abolitionists in the entire country. Pro-slavery communities within areas of Ohio and Illinois found their hegemony suddenly challenged by students and professors that assisted runaway slaves, founded anti-slavery organizations, and politically supported abolitionist causes. Though the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 specifically forbade slavery in the region, it was an uphill battle to keep it that way. With backing from the East, institutions of higher education in the Northwest played a vital role in mobilizing anti-slavery forces all over the country, ultimately changing the character of the entire nation.

Endnotes

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