God's Brush Arbor:
Camp Meeting Culture during the Second Great Awakening, 1800-1860

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Dedication

To Laura and Kelsey, my beautiful and funny redheads.

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Abstract

In reference to the early national and antebellum eras, the term "camp meeting" signifies a rural Protestant revival held over several days and nights, wherein participants utilized temporary living accommodations--typically wagons or tents--and prepared food on the grounds in order to attend multiple outdoor services. Eventually dominated by Methodists and Cumberland Presbyterians, camp meetings routinely attracted several thousand people, thus creating temporary communities larger than most permanent ones in many regions. Considering the scarcity of such sizeable, collective events in the country's rural areas during this period, the assemblies inevitably generated an exciting array of social opportunities and served as momentous occasions in many nineteenth century Americans' lives.

This dissertation examines the popular outdoor revivals in terms of their physical, temporal and liturgical structure, their worship practices, conversion experiences and spiritual meanings, along with their famously ecstatic devotions. Fundamental to all of this stood the meetings' establishment of a sacralized sphere on what many perceived as a threshold of the divine world, a sphere of fecund possibilities for religious transformation and putatively supernatural occurrences. Defining and expressing themselves not only in the gatherings' holy rituals, but likewise through their social activities, participants embraced identities that conferred meaning and purpose on individual, collective and cosmological levels. Moreover, camp meetings included pilgrimage, an often celebratory atmosphere, dramatic rites of passage, and avenues for

earning prestige otherwise unattainable for many people. All this produced a unique, powerful forum for personal change while furnishing converts with psychic and communal support for their new evangelical lives.

The project also extensively analyzes the topics of democratic sound, transitory community, plus the roles of African Americans, women and children in this religious context. Further, this dissertation explores the gatherings' diverse pursuits, including pilgrimage, enactment of familial roles, foodways, pursuit of status, conduct of business, politics, courtship and sex, drinking and liquor dealing, gambling, derision by skeptics, as well as crime and violence. More broadly, I evaluate camp meetings' implications for understanding evangelical religion and American culture not only during the period addressed, but into the twentieth century as well.

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Chapter One:
"Fishing with a Large Net": Definition & Historiography

In September of 1850, North Alabama enjoyed a stretch of cooler, dry, blue-skies weather of the sort heralding autumn's approach and generating keen appreciation among those who had endured the oppressively hot, humid summer. William Basil Wood—a successful Florence attorney who would distinguish himself as an intrepid commander in several Civil War battles and as chief officer of General Longstreet's military court—happily joined his beloved brother in law Levi Cassity to pack for a Methodist camp meeting. Wed to sisters, the two men spent much time together, but perhaps none happier than their many joyous hours at Cypress Creek's annual camp meeting, where they and their wives shared a tent each year. At the festive yet holy, exciting but restorative outdoor gatherings, these devout evangelicals worshiped, sang, prayed, testified and delighted in impassioned preaching, all the while encouraging others to accept the gift of salvation they themselves embraced. The two friends enjoyed time in the "sacred grove," a world apart yet one bearing powerful implications for life during each year's remaining fifty-one weeks. Here the men and their spouses—like thousands upon thousands of others in early national and antebellum America--witnessed remarkable manifestations of what Methodists conceived of as God's dominion, understood as the exertions of the Holy Spirit, but likewise believed to be camp meetings' profound supernatural influence: inveterate sinners and jaded skeptics

struck to the ground, wailing for mercy; brazen rowdies and mockers who came to disrupt but instead converted, often in tears; visions and epiphanies summoned along with lives radically changed.

Wood and Cassity beheld the gatherings' radically transfigurative power in other ways, too. African Americans, women and children, the poor and marginalized all attended meetings, freely voicing anguish but also expressing bedrock convictions and rapturous joy. Normally subordinate or oppressed people eagerly added their voices to song and praise, yet also emerged as leaders of public prayer and exhorters on behalf of salvation. Many even functionally ministered to their social superiors in this sacred realm where routine conventions of race, class, gender and age receded or dissipated entirely at times. Some preached the Word of God from makeshift pulpits, logs or stumps.

Like others across the land, the Wood-Cassity clan no doubt cherished familial time and opportunities to visit friends old or new, reunite with relatives, and savor well-prepared meals with fine company under the open skies. They might have ventured among the vendors drawn to the temporary but substantial community enacted by the gathering, perhaps purchasing lemonade or snacks, books, blankets, tooth powder or camping supplies. They almost certainly avoided, but likely commented upon the whiskey tents, gambling prospects, fistfights and sexual frolic that occurred nearby. Without doubt, the campers encountered local entrepreneurs promoting their businesses, and politicians seeking votes. Indeed, as a prominent figure in local and state Whig circles, Wood enhanced his reputation and probably courted voters or favors. As

perennial fixtures on the scene, the brothers-in-law generously "dispensed a bounteous hospitality" to other camp meeting participants, rich or poor, white or black. Taken as a whole, each year's camp meeting offered a deeply religious, profoundly meaningful, highly entertaining, and certainly fascinating experience that cogently defined these men, their families and thousands of others.

Sadly, Levi Cassity--described as "loving, tender and kind" as well as a "fine singer" subject to quiet weeping during emotional services—suffered a "congestive chill" the night before their departure for camp meeting and died three days later. His last words to Wood lamented their missing the religious gathering and "enjoying it as we have so often done," but characterized heaven as a celestial "meeting above" where the unity, reverence and justice they found at the communal events would never end. Cassity concluded by reminding his brother-in-law and brother in Christ: "I shall watch for you to come and join us. Take care of my family and bring them with you." William Basil Wood passed from this world forty-one years later with a sterling reputation as attorney, judge, military veteran, husband and father, occasional preacher and frequent Sunday school teacher, a devout Methodist who gave generously of his wealth and time, as well as someone shaped, indeed guided, by his devotion to camp meetings and their spiritual ideals.[1]

[1] Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 655-657.

In reference to the early national and antebellum eras, the term "camp meeting" signifies a religious revival held over several days and nights, wherein participants utilized temporary living accommodations (wagons, tents, lean-tos, rudimentary huts) and prepared food on the grounds in order to attend multiple outdoor services.[2] Esteemed religious historian Sydney Ahlstrom defined the camp meeting as "a religious service of several days' length, held outdoors, for a group that was obliged to take shelter on the spot because of their distance from home."[3]An astonishingly potent instrument for the rapidly expanding evangelical movement of the period, these multiday--and night--outdoor revivals served as the largest protracted social assemblies and most dramatic public events experienced during the lives of many American participants. Camp meetings played a major role in propelling Methodism into position as the United States' largest Protestant denomination by 1820, although forty years earlier Wesley's followers occupied a decidedly marginal spot and drew suspicion as traitors to the Revolution.[4]

Moreover, camp meetings often attracted enormous crowds of people, not infrequently several thousand, thus creating temporary towns exceeding the population

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[2] Although the number and order of days devoted to camp meetings varied, an eventually popular formula involved a four-day meeting running from Friday to Monday. Saturdays seem especially to have drawn curious and skeptical observers, as well as revelers and the infamous "rowdies." See, for example, Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: Or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 291-292.

[3] Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 422.

[4] U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: From the Colonial Times to the Present* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 8, 392. After some initial sympathy, John Wesley outspokenly opposed the American Revolution, thus casting suspicion as Tories upon his followers in America. See Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 178.

of any permanent ones in many regions.[5] Considering the scarcity of such sizeable, collective events in the country's rural areas during this period, the gatherings inevitably generated a rich array of social opportunities. While much social interaction incidental to camp meetings—family reunions, gastronomic pleasures, approved courtship--maintained and respected the pervasive religious motif, some occurred with limited reference to it. Other activities—liquor sales and consumption, gambling and prostitution, for example--clearly took place because of the meetings' numerical magnitude, yet despite of and contrary to the spiritual themes.

Essentially, my dissertation contends that camp meetings created a liminal but comprehensible and unusually negotiable context in which rural Americans constructed personal, familial, communal and denominational identities that served to counter the isolation, anomie, hardship and even desperation that plagued their lives.[6] Defining and expressing themselves not only in the religious rituals of the meetings, but likewise through their rich social activities, participants embraced identities that conferred

[5] 1801's Cane Ridge Revival, the largest of all camp meetings, perhaps and reputedly collected up to twenty thousand people in attendance at one point or another, although likely no more than ten thousand appeared upon the grounds at any one time. See Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 88; Douglas Allen Foster and Anthony L. Dunnavant, *The Encyclopedia of the Stone–Campbell Movement: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, Churches of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 165-166.

[6] 'Anomie' is used in the broad Durkheimian sense of lack of order (personal or social), purpose, meaning and direction. See Emile Durkheim and Anthony Giddens, *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); Nikos Passas and Robert Agnew, eds., *The Future Of Anomie Theory* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern, 1997); Marco Orru, *Anomie: History and Meanings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

meaning and purpose on individual, collective and cosmological levels. Further, camp meetings included pilgrimage, a sacralized yet carnivalesque atmosphere, dramatic rites of passage, and opportunities for earning social prestige otherwise unattainable for many people. All this produced a unique, powerful forum for personal transformation and furnished converts with psychic and social support for their new evangelical lives.

In the following chapters, my work examines the outdoor gatherings' physical, temporal and liturgical structure, their worship practices, conversion experiences and spiritual meanings. Fundamental to all of this stood the meetings' powerful establishment of a sacralized sphere on what many perceived as a threshold of the divine world, a sphere of fecund possibilities for transformative events and putatively supernatural occurrences. In addition, my project carefully explores the diverse social opportunities associated with camp meetings during the Second Great Awakening, including pilgrimage, enactment of sacralized familial roles, foodways, interaction within and among kinship groups, pursuit of status, conduct of business, politics, courtship and sex, drinking and liquor dealing, gambling, scoffing and derision by skeptics, as well as violence. Significantly, the religious and social aspects of these events were deeply interwoven and not easily distinguishable, with the former shaping participants' experience of the latter. More broadly, I evaluate camp meetings' broader implications for understanding religion and culture during the first half century of the American Republic. Although a number of works have delineated camp meetings' wider social context, theological expressions and denominational ramifications, no study has ever

provided an extensive historical and ethnographic analysis of these important events' entire cultural cloth. As Jon Butler and others have emphasized, full historical appreciation of a religious phenomenon's meaning depends upon understanding the "lived" religious experience of participants.

The construction of normative order—behavioral expectations, collective rules and understandings, as well as means of maintaining these—in this unusual and unpredictable situation figures prominently in my study. Through scrutiny of camp meetings, I assess the sometimes contradictory, sometimes complementary influences of antebellum evangelicalism's democratic, egalitarian ethos and the institutional imperatives of organized denominational religion.[7]Consequently, my study contributes significantly to the historiographical debate concerning the balance between democracy and order in American religion.

Likewise, I focus on the distinctive nature of the camp meeting, a setting that was in some ways almost carnivalesque, yet sacralized and often otherworldly in its mood and psychology.[8] I examine camp meetings in terms of their celebratory atmosphere, public significance, and diverse social purposes. As with carnivals and fairs, campground revivals presented a flexible, transitional setting wherein participants could experiment

[7] Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) is easily the most important study of this issue.

[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) provides an important analysis of carnival traditions and the survival of the "carnivalesque" in modern culture. See also Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 63-84; Carol Adlam, ed., *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

with social roles, challenge the arrangement of everyday life to some extent, and--in the case of camp meetings--create religious personae that augmented, altered, or even transcended their routine place in society.[9] Thus, camp meetings fashioned a unique context wherein women, African Americans, Native Americans, the poor, and even children assumed religious roles of leadership, significance and prestige. Given their accessible, public nature, the gatherings' simultaneously furnished an opportunity for evangelicalism's opponents to mock or denounce, for drink and frolic's devotees to register their dissent or at least their devotion to merriment, and for others to measure their religious convictions against those embraced in the camp meeting milieu.

My dissertation also carefully assesses all non-religious activities for an enhanced understanding of the complex structure of camp meetings, rural culture and early America. Given the arduous, lonely, sometimes tragic lives of many Americans during the early 1800's, most facets of the camp meeting—sacred and profane—must be evaluated in terms of keen and even desperate needs for self-definition, purpose, and belonging, as well as stimulation, catharsis, transcendence and ecstatic abandon of one kind or another. I have attempted to extrapolate from the sources an understanding of the social functions and cultural opportunities furnished by the range of pursuits

[9] 'Liminal' is used in the anthropological sense of a social or psychological threshold (Latin *limen* – threshold), as with Victor Turner's famous conception, most notably in his *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*'s "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," (though the idea appears in many of Turner's publications). See Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), esp. 93-111. The debate over Turner's delineation of liminality versus critics' revisions and repudiations of it figures prominently in the study of religious ritual and pilgrimage, and thus occupies a place of relevance to this study. See Timothy L. Carson, *Liminal Reality and Transformational Power* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997).

associated with camp meetings, as well as the relationship of these pursuits—expressive, complementary, dialectical, or antagonistic--to the religious motif of the gatherings.

Although the periodization and collective naming of arguably disparate religious events can be a controversial enterprise, many historians conceive of the Second Great Awakening as occurring between the 1790's and the 1840's. As a religious and social movement, the Awakening manifested in astounding numerical growth for Methodists, Baptists, and other evangelical groups; in widespread revivalism; through profound changes in the national religious discourse; in idealistic and far-reaching efforts to reform society; through an impressive expansion of Christian publishing; and in increased devotion by legions of Americans to evangelical beliefs and enhanced personal piety.[10] Many historians would add the proliferation of camp meetings, especially in rural areas, to this list of attributes.[11] Indeed, Robert Fuller acclaims camp meetings as "the distinguishing ritual feature of the Second Great Awakening."[12]

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[10] William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), esp. 98-140; David W. Kling, "Second Great Awakening," in *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America,* ed. Michael McClymond (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 384-389; John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996); Hatch, *Democratization*; Edwin S. Gaustad, *Religion in America: History and Historiography* (Washington, D. C.: American Historical Association, 1973); John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Ahlstrom, *American Peop*le, 429-509.

[11] My dissertation contends that camp meetings are better understood as a rural phenomenon than as a characteristic of solely "the frontier," although they were quite common in frontier areas. The conception of them as *only* occurring in frontier situations comprises a hallmark of earlier historiography on the subject.

[12] Robert Fuller, "Cosmology," in *Religion in American History*, ed. Amanda Porterfield and John Corrigan (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2010), 130; Steven Mintz, "The Promise of the Millennium," in *Critical Issues in American Religious History*, ed. Robert R. Mathisen (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 201; Robert Mathisen, "Charles G. Finney," in *Critical Issues*, ed. Mathisen, 210. Robert Mathisen terms camp meetings "the soul of earlier Second Awakening days."

Typically characterized by fiery preaching, dramatic testimonials, fervent prayer, moving hymns, and intense exhortation of the unconverted, camp meetings appealed powerfully to the emotions and conscience while creating decidedly theatrical venues for the proselytization of "lost souls" and spiritual renewal of faithful ones. In these traits, camp meetings clearly expressed virtually all essential features of Second Great Awakening revivalism, sometimes in a fashion unparalleled in any other setting. Thus, my holistic evaluation of camp meetings substantially expands our understanding of revivalism, evangelical movements, the Second Great Awakening, and early American culture.

Camp meetings additionally offered an incomparable performative venue wherein some of the Second Awakening's most important preachers earned fame and notoriety, a process highlighting the aforementioned dialectic between American Protestantism's democratizing tendencies and the patriarchal, even sometimes authoritarian role of religious leaders.[13] My analysis of the extraordinary popularity gained by itinerant religious leaders through camp meeting appearances further illuminates the development of celebrity in American culture.[14] Moreover, since they typically involved abundant personal testimonials, public prayers and vital exhortation

[13] See esp. John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Hatch, *Democratization*; Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857).

[14] Wigger, *American Saint*; On Dow, see especially Hatch, *Democratization*, 128-133; see also Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 241; Mark Teasdale, "Peter Cartwright and the Emerging National Identity in Antebellum America" in *Methodist History* 46, no. 2 (January 2008): 101-113; Cartwright, *Autobiography*; E. Merton Coulter, *William G. Brownlow: Fighting Parson* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

by lay attendees, camp meetings provided a rare opportunity for rural people to present themselves in a large public gathering and to "perform" religiously in a uniquely dramaturgical setting.

With origins in Scotland's Presbyterian holy fairs--also known as communion fairs--in Methodist love feasts and quarterly conferences, as well as the clandestine outdoor meetings of African American slaves, camp meetings were particularly necessitated by the lack of suitable edifices for worship and the scattered nature of settlement in many parts of early America.[15] No doubt, a number of outdoor gatherings among Methodists and Presbyterians in the Carolinas during the 1790's stand as early but incomplete models for the phenomenon, while even the Pennsylvania Germans' *Grosse Versammlungen* should be regarded as an influence.[16] However, the Gasper River, Kentucky outdoor revival of July 1800, led by New-Side Presbyterian James McGready, presents for many scholars the true prototype for camp meetings of the early nineteenth century, while the extraordinary occurrences at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in August of 1801

[15] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Frank Baker, *Methodism and the Love-Feast* (London: Epworth Press, 1957); Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 87-97; Charles Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 25-40, 99; Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 211-228; Anthony B. Pinn, *The African American Religious Experience in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 1-29. Methodists commonly combined camp meetings with quarterly meetings occurring in late summer and early autumn. Wigger provides an excellent explanation of both love feasts and quarterly meetings, while emphasizing the influence of the latter on the development of camp meetings.

[16] Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground, Too: The Camp Meeting Family Tree* (Hazleton, PA: Holiness Archives, 1997); Kenneth O. Brown, "Camp Meetings," in *Religious Revivals*, ed. McClymond, 75-81; Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 27-32. Brown stresses the importance of recognizing camp meeting prototypes during the late eighteenth century and argues for origins in Georgia and the Carolinas during the 1780's.

constituted the largest and most famous example.[17] Camp meetings of the type I examine herein continued in popularity through the 1850's, although 1811 witnessed the highest proportion of Americans in attendance, as about fifteen percent of the nation's population visited the events that year.[18] Although Presbyterians likely initiated the first true camp meetings and their foremost antecedents, Methodists certainly joined them at Gaspar River and other early examples. While Baptists and many who would join the Restorationist, Shaker, Millerite and Mormon movements also participated during the early years' prevailing ecumenical spirit, most Baptists and Presbyterians retreated from support of camp meetings well before the end of the nineteenth century's first decade. With the notable exception of Cumberland Presbyterians' continued support, the gatherings subsequently became a distinctive province of Methodist proselytization and played a major role in that denomination's success in America.[19]

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[17] See especially Boles, *Great Revival*, 36-89; and Conkin, *Cane Ridge.* Boles contended that the term "camp meeting" originated in 1802 and rapidly gained currency across the Southern United States (88). The term certainly appears in primary documents concerning the very first actual camp meetings, but those accounts were written some years after the initial meetings. Conkin stipulates that Cane Ridge's revival--the biggest, most famous of all camp meetings to many--actually failed to merit the term "as church people later used the label," due to the gathering's poorly planned nature.

[18] Hatch, *Democratization*, 49, 257. Francis Asbury conjectured in a letter to Thomas Coke that between three and four million Americans attended camp meetings that year, which would have constituted over half of the population of about 7.5 million American citizens in 1811. See Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury: In Three Volumes. The Letters, Volume 3,* eds. Elmer T. Clark, et al. (Norwich, U. K.: Epworth, 1958**),** 455. Hatch believes this number to be a considerable exaggeration, but estimates a number in attendance of around 1.2 million, which I calculate to be 16% of the 1811 population.
See http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1810.html for population figures.

[19] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 31; Boles, *Great Revival*, 87-100; Dickson D. Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 36-45; Russell E. Richey, "Methodist Revivals," in *Religious Revivals*, ed. McClymond, 272-276. As a rule, Baptists refused to participate in shared communion with Methodists and Presbyterians. Bruce sees Presbyterianism as hindered by a class division whereby many ordinary, rural people in the South were Scots-Irish and traditionally Presbyterian, but felt alienated from Presbyterianism's elitist leadership, as well as its policies, theology, and ties to the planter class.

In assessing this evolution, I am quite interested in understanding Methodism's remarkable congruence with the religious aspirations of rural Americans in developing regions. Evidence affirms that camp meetings produced many conversions to Methodism among Americans of Scots-Irish or Scottish origin and thus nominally or formerly Presbyterian.[20] Obviously, this connects Presbyterian holy fair traditions with Methodist revivalism, and helps to explain divergences between American and English Methodism in ways other than the standard recourses to political climate, class, church polity and demography. Theologically, this entailed a controversial transition from Calvinist to Arminian principles, a transition that offers valuable insights about early nineteenth century American thought and culture.

Camp meetings also included many black participants, slave and free, educing key questions about African/African American influences on worship styles, conversion experiences, and the development of American evangelicalism.[21] As Lincoln and Mamiya write: "…it was the spiritual romance of the camp meetings of the Awakening that first

[20] Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Holy Fairs* (citation above) provides a thorough (for Scotland) and suggestive (for America) portrait of the Presbyterian tradition of outdoor services, while Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) marshals impressive evidence of Lowland Scots/Scots-Irish influence upon revivalism during the First Great Awakening. Further, the outlawed Covenanters of seventeenth century Scotland were frequently compelled to meet clandestinely in outdoor settings. Many of them eventually made their way to America, particularly South Carolina, as political and religious refugees.

[21] In 1800, Methodism already embraced some 20,000 African American adherents, a figure that would increase to 210,000 by 1860. See Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54; Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 28; Hatch notes that camp meeting ministers "encouraged uncensored testimonials" by all present, including African Americans (*Democratization*, 50). Raboteau contains a useful discussion of these issues in *Slave Religion*, 55-75.

stirred the religious imagination of the black diaspora, and brought thousands of displaced African Americans and their descendants into meaningful Christian communion for the first time."[22] Many prominent elements of camp meetings require a very attentive examination of African American religious influences. These elements include the vocal involvement of the crowd during services, improvisatory contributions to music and worship, bodily expressions of spiritual ecstasy, as well as the trance-like, quasi-possessed states that gripped some participants. This concern also demands careful analysis of the meaning of these activities for African Americans in the context of slavery and in a much larger cosmological frame, something Chapter Six undertakes extensively.

Of course, no investigation of camp meetings, particularly one concerned with the creation of order and meaning in an unusual, creative and liminal situation, can ignore the colorful reports of strange conduct and putatively supernatural occurrences associated with these revivals.[23] Throughout, I evaluate the nature of this behavior with particular attention to Catherine Albanese's thesis that converting sinners embraced ecstatic abandonment as a sort of passage into greater spiritual or moral order and meaning.[24] I have also followed Ann Taves and Wayne Proudfoot's methodological

[22] Charles Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 348.
[23] Though a variety of accounts exist regarding this topic, perhaps none exceeds in vividness and details those of Reverend Barton Stone, a leader of the Cane Ridge Revival and the Restoration Movement. See Barton W. Stone and John Rogers, *The Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself: With Additions and Reflections* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Co., 1986).
[24] Catherine L. Albanese, "Savage, Sinner, and Saved: Davy Crockett, Camp Meetings, and the Wild Frontier," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 482-501.

prescriptions encouraging attention to culture and context in analyzing religious phenomena, as well as their phenomenological, constructivist approach. Hence, I credit camp meeting events as experientially rea to the people involved, endeavor to understand the experiences as the actors understood them, avoid any judgments about their ultimate religious or scientific "truth," but also move beyond the actors' conceptions in analytically situating camp meeting activity historically, culturally and sociologically. [25] Particularly, this facet of camp meetings provides considerable illumination regarding the sociology of early American gatherings, the rural mentality of the period, and many people's efforts to transcend constraints of race, class, gender and age. Some of the most physically demonstrative worship and deepest credence regarding 'supernatural' events were unique to American experience, especially rural areas, while other elements descended from the British Isles or Africa. [26] Intriguingly, Raboteau emphasizes that the realms of "ecstatic behavior and magical folk belief" held rich possibilities for "mutual reinterpretation and syncretism" between "African and European religion."[27]

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[25] Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).
[26] Here again, Westerkamp's *Triumph of the Laity* is extremely helpful in its comparison of religious behavior among eighteenth century "Scots-Irish" in America and the British Isles, as is Raboteau's *Slave Religion*, 43-92, for its discussion of African cultural survivals and the famed Herskovits-Frazier debate on that topic. See also Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990); E. Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America/The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Church Beginnings: The Long-Hidden Realities of the First Years* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 1-97.
[27] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 59.

Historiographically, camp meetings have elicited a broad array of interpretation, following a turbulent course that illustrates a great deal about evolving perspectives on religion and common people within the discipline of American history. Furthermore, the history of writing about camp meetings reveals much about denominational rivalries and concerns for middle-class respectability in American religious circles, along with issues of innovation and tradition, emotionalism versus reason, and individualism as balanced with community. Contemporary accounts of the meetings generally lacked objectivity and either condemned or praised the events according to the theological and sectarian loyalties of the authors. A Presbyterian observer in 1846 denounced the outdoor revivals as "a system of fanaticism and confusion," while a Methodist minister writing two years earlier acclaimed them as "originated by divine Providence." [28] Such polarized declarations abounded during the first half of the nineteenth century. [29] Defensive Episcopalians derided the meetings' extemporaneity and passion, preferring propriety and devotion to the *Book of Common Prayer*.[30] Unitarians argued for rationality in religious matters and deemed revivalists' emotional appeal highly suspect and intrinsically

[28] C. Washburn of the American Home Mission Society, Personal Letter, 6 September 1846; Charles Giles, *Pioneer: A Narrative of the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Charles Giles*; both are quoted in Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 3.

[29] See Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 3-7, 229-241; Keith J. Hardman and Michael J. McClymond, "History and Arguments of Anti-Revivalism," in *Religious Revivals*, ed. McClymond, 20-25.

[30] John Henry Hopkins, *The Novelties Which Disturb Our Peace: Letters Addressed to the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: James M. Campbell & Co., 1844), 32; John Henry Hopkins, Jr., *The Life of the Late Right Reverend John Henry Hopkins: First Bishop of Vermont, and Seventh Presiding Bishop* (New York: F. J. Huntington & Co., 1873).

offensive.[31] Unitarian leader William Ellery Channing even declaimed the revivalist movement as a "contagion" afflicting those of insufficient mental strength.[32]

Resolute Calvinists decried the Arminian theology bulwarking camp meeting salvation, while social conservatives repudiated the gatherings' practice of allowing women, children and minorities to pray and offer testimony publicly, even to exhort and preach.[33] Some conservative critics compared rural Wesleyan behavior and ideology to the radical Reformation, foreseeing religious, social and political anarchy in the chaotic, egalitarian camp meetings.[34] In so many ways a rebel within his own Congregationalist denomination, thoughtful Horace Bushnell opposed the apparent suddenness of camp meetings' salvific rites of passage, along with the overwrought state in which so many professed their conversion. Further, Bushnell warned that God's complexity and nuances received scant attention in what he deemed the bombastic, intense style characterizing camp meetings.[35]

Adding to these negative perceptions, popular travel writers and regional novelists frequently embroidered their depictions of the forest gatherings with

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[31] Quoted in Robert Bruce Mullin, *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2002), 109.

[32] William Ellery Channing, "On Associations," in *The Complete Works of William Ellery Channing* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), 146-147.

[33] The charismatic Lorenzo Dow famously ridiculed Calvinist theology in response as, "You can and you can't—You shall and you shan't—You will and you won't—And you will be damned if you do—And you will be damned if you don't." Quoted in Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 18.

[34] Mullin, *Puritan as Yankee*, 110; Hardman and McClymond, "Anti-Revivalism," 24; See John Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench (*Memphis: General Books LLC, 2010, 1844); and Richard E. Wentz, *John Williamson Nevin: American Theologian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[35] Horace Bushnell, "The Spiritual Economy of Revivals of Religion," *Quarterly Christian Spectator* 10 (1838), quoted in Hardman and McClymond, "Anti-Revivalism," 24; Mullin, *Puritan as Yankee*, xi.

outrageous, melodramatic and salacious details, crafting a popular association of camp meetings with backwoods barbarism, emotional excess and sexual abandon.[36] Though travelers' accounts of the camp meeting phenomenon constitute a valuable source for this study, they have been assessed carefully with attention to bias, condescension and misunderstanding, as well as for their significant contribution to the early history of cultural tourism.[37] In some ways, this literature contributes to a representation of America, or the American West, as a domain of marvelous oddities and transformative possibilities, not unlike the camp meetings themselves. However, as Charles Johnson conceded about contemporary accounts of the gatherings, "Their distorted and florid portrayals, often colored by strong bias, were rendered plausible by the fact that there really was much that was absurd and irreligious to be reported."[38] Of course, all of these accounts exerted an enormous impact on subsequent historical writing about camp meetings.

As the century continued, church historians paid far more attention to camp meetings than others writing about the nation's past. Generally, Methodist scholars interpreted their movement's extraordinary popularity and numerical success as an

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[36] See especially Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832). Even the more sociologically reliable Harriet Martineau wrote of "the insanity of camp-meetings and revivals" in Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, Vol. 2 (Saunders and Otley, 1837--reissued by Cambridge University Press, 2009), 333.

[37] John K. Walton, *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity and Conflict* (Clevedon, Buffalo and Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2005); Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1999); James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[38] Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 4.

unfolding of God's providence and as evidence of Methodism's divinely sanctioned pragmatism.[39] Thus, camp meetings' obvious role in that success demonstrated the hand of providence along with God-given Methodist talent for innovation and adaptation. Writing in the early 1840's, Methodist historian and former itinerant minister Nathan Bangs affirmed:

> Camp meetings were not the result of a previously digested plan, but like every other peculiarity of Methodism, were introduced by providential occurrences, and were embraced and followed up by God's servants because they found them subservient to the grand design they had in view, namely, the salvation of the world by Jesus Christ.[40]

By mid-century, many Methodists moved into the mainstream of American religious life, established dignified churches in urban centers, and sought middle class respectability in a variety of ways. Increasing numbers of Methodist leaders earned advanced degrees in theology and absorbed new currents of European religious thought such as higher criticism. Correspondingly, some denominational historians began to depict antebellum-style camp meetings as relics, albeit heroic and heaven-sent ones, of frontier times and the adolescent growth of their church.[41] In itself, this signaled one

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[39] Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, "'Everything Arose just as the Occasion Offered': Defining Methodist Identity through the History of Methodist Polity," in *American Denominational History: Perspectives on the Past, Prospects for the Future*, ed. Keith Harper (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2008), 95-119. Of course, Southern and Northern Methodists were divided from 1844 to 1939 into two separate general conferences, the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) and Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The Methodist Protestant Church operated separately from 1830 until the 1939 merger of all three groups.

[40] Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. 2* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1839), 62.

[41] See John Atkinson, *Centennial History of American Methodism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston & Snowe, 1884); James M. Buckley, *A History of Methodism in the United States* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1898); Halford Edward Luccock and Paul Hutchinson, *The Story of Methodism* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1926).

element of a growing rift within Methodism, since those coming to be known as the "Holiness" wing of the church still celebrated camp meetings as extremely viable religious experiences and would maintain them into the twentieth century in various forms and eventually under various new sectarian banners.[42] However, postbellum meetings often involved much more established locations—many of which featured permanent worship buildings and accommodations—than those before the Civil War. Meetings of this period focused increasingly on sanctification and other themes associated with the Holiness Movement such as divine healing, while distinctly middle class "camp meetings"--such as the "Queen of Religious Resorts" at Ocean Grove, New Jersey--acquired many of the trappings of Victorian vacation spots and emphasized education for the faithful as much

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The legendary frontier preacher Peter Cartwright enjoyed sufficient length of life (1785-1872) to reflect nostalgically on the days of the classic camp meetings. Tait writes that Cartwright became "distrustful of Methodism's growing respectability…emphasizing the theme of Methodism's fall from a heroic age when it better understood its purpose." See Tait, "Methodist Identity," 99. At the end of his autobiography, Cartwright directly links the decline of camp meetings in the 1850's to the Methodist Episcopal Church having become "numerous and wealthy." See Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 339.

[42] Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Randall J. Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008). For a superb study of the life of one Methodist/Holiness minister and postbellum camp meeting proponent, see J. Lawrence Brasher, *The Sanctified South: John Lakin Brasher and the Holiness Movement* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

as conversion.[43] Johnson characterized the latter as "modern vestiges" bearing "only faint resemblance to their frontier predecessors."[44]

By the early 1900's, secular scholars from the emerging fields of sociology and social psychology focused on antebellum camp meetings, typically issuing negative, culturally condescending appraisals. Sociologist Frederick Davenport's revealingly titled *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals* employed the era's social evolution concepts to detect much backwardness in early camp meetings' emotional displays and collective behavior. Linking class and morality with religious fervor, the author noted that the "Southern crackers" who produced "generations of violent and hardened criminals" and "an even greater number of shiftless, lazy, cowardly cumberers of the earth's surface…were the first to be laid low by the sturdy spiritual blows" of the outdoor revivals.[45] Diagnosing it all as "an infectious disease," the author underscored the "difficulty of control" that was "accentuated by the very considerable measure of ignorance, superstition and fear that actually existed in the population," and further linked spiritual abandon to "grave

[43] Troy Messenger, *Holy Leisure: Recreation and Religion in God's Square Mile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Wayne T. Bell, *Ocean Grove* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000); Brenda Parnes, "Ocean Grove: A Planned Leisure Environment," in *Planned and Utopian Experiments, Four New Jersey Towns*, ed. Paul A. Stellhorn (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1980), 28-47; Glenn Uminowicz, "Recreation in America: Ocean Grove and Asbury Park, New Jersey, 1869-1914," in *Hard At Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 8-38; Cindy S. Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102-111. Although sanctification had long been an issue in Methodism, Jon Butler points out that divine healing was not at all a significant aspect of the American Methodist tradition and entered Holiness circles from other sources. See Butler, *Sea of Faith,* 236-237.

[44] Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 251.

[45] Frederick Morgan Davenport, *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals: A Study in Mental and Social Evolution* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1905), 65.

charges…with respect to camp meetings in many parts of the country, of the extraordinarily free companionship of the sexes."[46] Davenport concluded that camp meetings did an "incalculable amount of harm," and "played their unworthy part in rendering that section of our country peculiarly susceptible to highly emotional outbreaks of prejudice, passion and even criminality."[47]

During the first half of the twentieth century, many secular historians routinely delivered negative evaluations of camp meetings' impact on frontier society, the West, or the South.[48] In her popular 1944 work, Alice Tyler characterized frontier religion and camp meetings in terms of ignorance, childish excitability, anti-intellectualism, and comically absurd behavior. The author called the meetings "drastic measures" for the "godlessness of the backwoodsmen," and maintained that revivalist Christianity on the frontier "found its natural habitat and ran riot in every extreme of emotion and in primitive abandon," while evangelical sects "succeeded in inverse ratio to their intellectual attainments and in direct ratio to their emotional appeal."[49] Pronouncing

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[46] Quotes are, in order of use, Davenport, *Primitive Traits*, 79, 84, 81.
[47] *Ibid,* 86.
[48] Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment--Phases Of American Social History To 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Publishers, 1944); Clement Eaton, *Freedom of Thought in the Old South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1940); Walter Brownlow Posey, *The Presbyterian Church in the Old Southwest 1778-1838* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1952); W. B. Posey, *Frontier Mission: A History of Religion West of the Southern Appalachians to 1861* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966); *The Development of Methodism in the Old Southwest: 1783-1824* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Weatherford Printing Company, 1933); *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); James G. Leyburn*, *Frontier Folkways* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935); Herbert Asbury, *A Methodist Saint: The Life of Bishop Asbury* (New York: Knopf, 1927). *Leyburn was a sociologist who wrote on historical and religious themes. This paragraph is indebted to a bibliographic footnote in Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 299.
[49] Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment*, 35-45.

frontier ministers "often as illiterate as those who listened to them," Tyler echoed social scientific judgments about the meetings' collective enthusiasm: “So much alone, the frontiersman was peculiarly susceptible to crowd psychology; leading a violent life, he reacted violently to the vigorous preaching of the frontier evangelists," {while} "hysterical preachers had a hypnotic effect upon the people, and their ranting was often the signal for mass hysteria.”[50]

Popular historical writer Herbert Asbury denounced the camp meeting as "a religious orgy," while Yale's prominent historical sociologist James Leyburn offered his verdict that the phenomenon "was even more psychopathic than the witchcraft mania in early New England."[51] A review of Walter Posey’s *Frontier Mission* concluded that its influential author regarded most frontier "spirituality" as not constituting "'religion' in any important sense…Posey presents an extremely strong case for the epiphenomenalism of the 'religion' he is studying."[52] Finally, a famed historian of the South censured camp meetings as promoting "a strong flavor of intolerance" among the region's common folk and emphasized the "extravagances of the camp meetings and the ignorance and uncouthness of the Methodist and Baptist exhorters.”[53]

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[50] *Ibid*.

[51] Asbury quote from Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 3; Leyburn, *Frontier Folkways*, 197. Herbert Asbury somewhat dubiously claimed Francis Asbury as his great-great Uncle.

[52] Robert D. Cross, review of *Frontier Mission: A History of Religion West of the Southern Appalachians to 1861*, by Walter Brownlow Posey, *The American Historical Review* 72 (1967): 692-693.

[53] Eaton, *Freedom of Thought,* 282; Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 14. Eaton's *A History of the Old South* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1966) served for many years as a very popular textbook for college courses on the Old South.

A legendary force in the study of American religion, William Warren Sweet created a powerful counterpoint within academia to these depreciatory views of rural Christianity.[54] Under Sweet's influence, scholarship on American religious history became decidedly more objective, eschewing the "triumphalism" and teleology of denominational writers as well as the condescending judgments and caricatures often penned by secular scholars. Further, Sweet insisted that methodology and standards of evidence for church history match or exceed that in other areas of historical research.[55] While at The University of Chicago, the indefatigable researcher compiled and published an enormous amount of documentary evidence on frontier religion.[56] Although his almost exclusive focus on the frontier has persuaded many that Sweet was an ardent Turnerian, his biographer convincingly denies this:

> But his synthesis of American religious history directly challenged Turner's frontier thesis. Sweet ascribed to Protestant influences many of the American qualities Turner ascribed to frontier influences. Unlike Turner's frontier of virgin innocence and individualism, Sweet's frontier was a moral wilderness on the verge of barbarism, desperately in need of the civilizing influences of Protestant Christianity. Thus for Sweet, Protestant Christianity,

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[54] William Warren Sweet, *Circuit-Rider Days in Indiana* (Indianapolis: W. K. Stewart Co., 1916); *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1930); *Makers of Christianity - From John Cotton To Lyman Abbott* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1937); *Revivalism in America - Its Origin, Growth and Decline* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944); *The American Churches: An Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1948); *American Culture and Religion: Six Essays* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1951); *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840* (New York: Scribner, 1952); *Methodism in American History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954); *Virginia Methodism, A History* (Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson, 1955).

[55] James L. Ash Jr., "American Religion and the Academy in the Early Twentieth Century: the Chicago Years of William Warren Sweet," *Church History* 50, (1981): 450-464.

[56] Among other such volumes on various denominations, see William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier*, *Vol. 4, The Methodists: A Collection of Source Materials* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1964). Nathan Hatch wrote, "William Warren Sweet has done more than any other single scholar in the twentieth century to promote the serious study of Methodists and Baptists on the frontier." (Hatch, *Democratization*, 223).

> typified by Methodism, was the defender of democracy, the guarantor of social stability, the foundation of morality, and the provider of education and manners--in short, the bearer of American culture.Turner's thesis was only incidental to Sweet's view of history because it left out Sweet's fundamental causal reality, the structures and religious dynamics of Protestant Christianity.[57]

Clearly, Sweet believed that American civilization succeeded in western and rural regions of the country through, above all, the agency of revivalist Protestantism, an interpretation that placed camp meetings in a position of considerable national importance. Indeed, the historian even employed the title "Barbarism vs. Revivalism" for a chapter in *Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765-1840.*[58]

Evenhanded in his analysis of camp meetings and cognizant of their faults, Sweet saw the outdoor revivals as exerting an exceptional influence on American religion, as well as exhibiting admirable creativity and social progressivism. Sweet rejected depictions of American Methodism as an anti-intellectual movement devoted only to manipulative and emotional religion, writing in 1964:

> It has been assumed quite generally that Methodist leaders gloried in ignorance and actively opposed an educated ministry...But education as such was never opposed. The…Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 directed the preachers to study five hours a day and to preach at intervals on the subject of education.[59]

Anticipating eminent historian of Methodism John Wigger's complaint, Sweet acknowledged that historians sometimes overstated the camp meeting tradition's

[57] Ash, "William Sweet," 460.
[58] Sweet, *Development of American Culture*, 129.
[59] Sweet, *The Methodists: Source Materials*, 65-66.

influence--especially its more sensational aspects--to the neglect of less exciting, but more structural and didactic elements of frontier Methodism such as class meetings and church discipline. Nonetheless, he classified camp meetings as "the most important social institution of the frontier."[60]

In 1955, Sweet's doctoral student Charles Johnson published the first academic monograph ever devoted entirely to the topic, *The Frontier Camp Meeting*.[61] Following his mentor's example, Johnson utilized a substantial, varied body of sources, assessed his subject with graceful objectivity, and wrote a very valuable book. Tracing camp meetings from the 1790's origins through the 1840's decline, Johnson rooted his explanation in frontier exigencies and largely appraised the phenomenon as beneficial. The work includes an extremely helpful set of notes and bibliography, as well as excellent descriptions of the frontier setting, worship services, itinerant ministers' roles, and revivalist hymnody. The author also penned a brief but suggestive chapter entitled "Sociability in the Tented Grove," which helped inspire this dissertation. Despite Johnson's excellent work, my project is warranted not only by the passage of sixty years since his book appeared, but also because I focus heavily on aspects of the camp meeting--sociability, sound, race, class and gender--that Johnson's study covers rather briefly and descriptively. Moreover, my approach benefits from the last half-century's proliferation

[60] *Ibid*, 68.
[61] Johnson, *Camp Meeting*. No comparable work has been published since.

of conceptual tools in social and cultural history, sociology, anthropology and American Studies.

Published in 1974, Dickson Bruce's *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845*, received considerably more praise from anthropologists and folklorists than from historians. The original research, other than that devoted to camp meeting hymnody, was quite limited. Richard Bushman referred to it as "armchair anthropology," while John Boles issued a particularly derogatory review, writing that Dickson's "first two chapters summarize a handful of standard books…to emphasize that the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians were the denominations favored by the plain folk…Description and labeling, though useful, hardly make for reinterpretation."[62] Relying on secondary sources for his profiles of the frontier and its religion, Bruce's original contributions to the field are an analysis of conversion that employs (albeit too rigidly and narrowly) Turner's liminality concept, and an innovative reading of camp meeting hymns.[63] Essentially, Bruce conceptualizes the revivalists as Frank Owsley's yeoman farmers of the Old South, plagued by planter dominance and the socially disintegrative impact of geographical mobility and an individualist ethos.[64] For Bruce, camp-meeting conversions signaled renunciation of individualism and embrace of community. Though Bruce's interpretation of conversion is persuasive, he neglects the

[62] Richard Bushman, review of *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845,* by Dickson D. Bruce, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 7 (1976): 171; John Boles, review of *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, by Dickson D. Bruce, *The Journal of Southern History* 41 (1975): 258-259.
[63] Bruce, *Sang Hallelujah*, 65-95, 96-122.
[64] Frank Lawrence Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1949).

social dimensions of camp meetings and their many implications for this important rite of passage. Arguing that a careful reading of revival hymnody provides an understanding of the plain folk's religious beliefs that is otherwise unavailable, Bruce extrapolates a gloomy, fatalistic worldview balanced by a theology of hope in the afterlife. Though valuable, this analysis largely ignores the fact that some "plain folk" participants (a category that includes most itinerant ministers) were quite literate and left many additional sources regarding their worldview and theology. Bruce's analysis of camp meeting hymnody—a field that has been thoroughly plowed by a number of scholars--remains a major accomplishment, however, one to which I defer.

John Boles' *The Great Revival* endures almost four decades after its publication as an extraordinarily influential work. Concentrating especially on the first half decade of the Second Awakening (1800-1805), the author rightfully insists that the revivals comprised a good deal more than mere public exuberance and involved considerable theological complexity worthy of serious examination. The exhaustively researched book details Southerners' high hopes for the Awakening (including a Second Coming), the negative reactions and disillusionment regarding camp meetings and revivals, as well as the eventual conservative backlash. In Boles' view, the Revival effectively guaranteed the dominance of an evangelical worldview, Biblical literalism, and doctrinal conservatism in the South. As he wrote, "This awakening at the turn of the century helped set into

motion the diverse forces that by the decade of the 1830's had created an orthodox South, a South resistant to change and criticism in every form."[65]

In an issue of particular importance for the meaning of camp meetings, Boles argues that Southern evangelical theology was exceptionally individualistic, emphasizing the conversion of the lone sinner and the convert's subsequent pursuit of "sanctification" or moral perfectionism on the individual level.[66] According to Boles, this theology ultimately connected with Southern conservatism in a shared reluctance to address social ills through a collective or structural mentality, positing that only individual change and God's grace could reform society. Thus, he states that the revivalists "had no overarching purpose beyond the development of individual Christians… [They] were devoted to awakening individual souls to a dependence upon God. The communal thrust was subordinated to the personal…This personal, inward, pietistic theology has characterized the dominant religious beliefs in the South since at least the Great Revival itself." [67] Boles' reading of revivalist theology provides a compelling and instructive argument, particularly with regard to understanding Southern political attitudes. However, it diminishes the profoundly communal nature of the camp meeting, its role in revising people's self-conception from individualist or kin-oriented to sectarian, and neglects converts' subsequent dependence on a network of evangelical support initiated at the revival. Further, Boles' depiction of the camp meeting

[65] Boles, *Great Revival*, 183.
[66] *Ibid*, 125-142.
[67] *Ibid*, 125.

overemphasizes the pursuit of individual morality through a personal relationship with God at the expense of noting the collective consciousness and mutual assistance established among converts through the camp meeting experience.

One of the most astounding efforts in the historiography of American religion, Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* generates a host of important considerations in this dissertation. First, Hatch notes that historians have frequently "failed to appreciate the influence of popular religion in a culture shifting from classical republican values to those of a vulgar democracy and entrepreneurial individualism."[68] To amend this, Hatch appropriately shifts the focus of early Republic religious history from the declining mainline churches to emerging sects that often appeared in a markedly revivalist mode. My project rests on Hatch's assertion that early nineteenth century evangelical revivals have much to reveal not only about religion but culture and society in America during their heyday and ever since. Moreover, Hatch offers a significant corrective to Boles' overemphasis on individualized experience, reminding us that, "if nothing else, these movements were collective expressions of self-respect, instilling hope, purpose, meaning, and identity in thousands of persons whom the dominant culture had defined as marginal."[69]

As Robert Abzug observes, *Democratization* "reinterprets the period of the 'second great awakening' as not only, or even primarily, a time of conservative reintegration, but

[68] Hatch, *Democratization*, 222.
[69] Hatch, *Democratization*, 58.

rather as dominated by spiritual dissent, democratization of access to religious Truth, and delegitimation of traditional churchly authority." [70] Thus, Hatch identifies the Awakening's enduring effects quite differently than Boles, in a way that strongly informs my perspective: democratic insurgency against traditional institutions and authority, innovative pursuits of sacredness, as well as radical experimentation in worship styles, context and religious personae. Hatch underscores the role of paternalistic, visionary leaders (such as Francis Asbury) and charismatically populist preachers (like Lorenzo Dow) in fomenting democratic religious movements (as with the Methodists). These groups utilized new formats (like camp meetings) and settings (such as nocturnal services in the forest) wherein democratized pursuits of revelation (as with testimonials, public prayer, exhortation, visions and preaching by ordinary people, plus emotional public conversions of a mystical but performative, transfigurative yet didactic nature at the center of worship) occurred while they increasingly harnessed the emergent print media for the evangelical cause (as in the literature disseminated at camp meetings).

Indisputably central to any historiographical discussion of evangelical religion in early America, Christine Leigh Heyrman's *Southern Cross* somewhat bridges the gap between the positions of Hatch and Boles. For Heyrman, eighteenth century evangelicalism exhibited the insurgent and transformative qualities that Hatch ascribes to it. *Southern Cross* argues that this early version of evangelicalism contradicted Southern

[70] Robert Abzug, review of *The Democratization of American Christianity*, by Nathan Hatch, *Journal of the Early Republic* 10 (1990): 108-109.

culture in salient regards, however, thus alienating potential converts and supporters while creating social difficulties for its adherents. In order to placate the South's patriarchs and earn a more secure place in its social order, evangelical groups modified over time their incendiary positions on superstition, hierarchy and deference, race and slavery, gender and family, as well as social leveling in general. In Heyrman's view, much of this evolution was well under way by 1800, though not complete until around 1830, after which time the accommodationist variety of evangelicalism increasingly dominated Southern religion and culture. Of course, this later conservative version closely resembles Boles' triumphant Southern religion.

Juxtaposing Heyrman's analysis with the camp meeting phenomenon elicits incongruities but also important points of accord. First, Heyrman's argument expends little time addressing camp meetings directly, yet the Southern religious transformation she posits would have contextualized them significantly. The sharpest incongruity appears in connection with the timeline for evangelicalism's journey from insurgency to respectability. Whereas Heyrman believes much of this shift was accomplished by 1800, the evidence regarding camp meetings indicates a later shift, consistent with Hatch's thesis as well as Butler and Wigger's judgments.[71] Camp meetings' first two decades coincided with the first twenty years of the nineteenth century, and reflected many of the evangelical challenges to Southern norms concerning gender, race, age and hierarchy that

[71] See Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: the Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1997), 254-255; Butler, *Sea of Faith*, 241; Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 173-195.

Heyrman locates in the eighteenth century. Indeed, Heyrman's own account regarding the harassment of camp meetings by "rowdies" depends upon the meetings being countercultural, yet the camp meeting phenomenon did not occur until after 1800.[72] The accommodations to Southern culture Heyrman emphasizes are not particularly evident in the early history of camp meetings, suggesting that an evangelical counterculture persisted longer than her temporal model stipulates, or evangelicalism was not as countercultural for many as her work assumes. Heyrman's paradigm tends to stress a Southern transition from Anglican dominance to evangelicalism, a change that was culturally dramatic. However, this neglects the presence of large numbers of at least nominally and culturally Presbyterian Scottish and Scots-Irish settlers in the backcountry of the South, where camp meetings occurred in abundance after 1800. Given their religious and cultural background as described by religious historians Marilyn Westerkamp and Leigh Eric Schmidt, these Southerners would have perceived evangelical norms and camp meeting behavior as being decidedly less countercultural or innovative than Heyrman's model suggests.[73]

This incongruity in the timeline educes another vital question as to the relationship between evangelicalism's success in gaining adherents and its ultimately accommodationist stance in the South.[74] Did accommodation produce numerical success,

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[72] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 231-232.
[73] Westerkamp, *Scots-Irish Piety*; Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*. See also Deborah McCauley, *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995).
[74] See John Wigger, review of *Southern Cross: the Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, by Christine Heyrman, *Church History* 69 (2000): 447-449.

as Heyrman mostly argues, or did success inevitably lead to accommodation for evangelicalism as its upstart sects became mainstream denominations and its adherents gained wealth and social standing? Though insistence on too stark of a division between these positions is unwarranted, my view based on camp meeting evidence tends toward the latter position. Certainly, however, the later (1830's to 1850's) camp meetings do somewhat reflect Heyrman's delineation of an evangelical journey from countercultural to accommodationist, as many—though certainly not all--of the outdoor revivals became tamer, more orderly and mainstream events. In this connection, her model, adjusted for the time difference, offers many relevant considerations.

In this consideration, significant questions emerge regarding how much evangelicalism changed Southern culture, as well as the reverse position principally endorsed by *Southern Cross*. In comparing *Southern Cross* with Hatch's work, John Wigger has usefully noted, "where Heyrman focuses mainly on points of conflict between popular religion and popular culture, Hatch looks primarily at points of agreement between the two. While Hatch looks mostly at the creators of post-Revolutionary popular religion, Heyrman focuses mainly on its critics. Of course, we need not choose…."[75] Further, Charles Reagan Wilson has highlighted the persistence throughout the nineteenth century of many insurgent elements in evangelical culture, affirming that "evangelicalism is a broad tradition in the South, and plain folk churches continued long

[75] Wigger, review of *Southern Cross,* 449.

after the 1840s, existing in tension with many hierarchical expectations of mainstream southern society after Heyrman's transformations had occurred."[76] My work agrees heartily with this observation, given how many plain folk—black and white—continued to celebrate at camp meetings of the 1840s and even 1850s in ways reminiscent of the phenomenon's early days. Indeed, Holiness camp meetings of the late 1800s and early 1900s retained many of these features, thus indicating class, racial and regional variations in the Wesleyan movement. Historians clearly should not apply one temporal model of embourgeoisement or accommodation to all Wesleyan groups. Finally, the enduring affinity that many Southerners of wealth, power and prestige maintained for Episcopalianism and orthodox Presbyterianism suggests the incomplete triumph of accommodation in evangelical circles.

In other regards, Heyrman's exploration of the relationship between evangelical and Southern culture offers a valuable frame in understanding camp meetings. *Southern Cross*'s well-documented emphasis on the friction between converted and unconverted Southerners supports one of my project's principal contentions about camp meetings, their function as dramatic rituals demarcating a convert's old life from the new.[77] Camp meetings conferred a vivid journey into faith that was much more difficult to forget or renounce than a less remarkable rite of passage would have been.[78] Conversions

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[76] Charles Reagan Wilson, review of *Southern Cross: the Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, by Christine Heyrman, *The American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 563-564, quote on 564.
[77] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, see especially 5-9, 16-22, 26, 32-40, 117-154, 180-184, and 210-217.
[78] Heyrman speaks of a psychic strength derived by evangelicals from "participating in a cosmic spiritual drama, an ongoing struggle between God and the Devil." See Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 40. My project

undertaken in such public and momentous spectacles furnished unforgettable personal stories that imparted new and sustaining identities for converts who faced resistance in their evangelical course and who struggled with the demanding discipline of the revivalist sects. Further, camp meetings fostered a network of relationships with other evangelicals who could support the neophyte in the challenges that lay ahead, whether those entailed social, familial, or personal hurdles. Of considerable importance for my study, camp meetings afforded an alternative sociability to Southerner evangelicals who abandoned for religious reasons what Heyrman calls "the familiar settings of sociability in rural counties, horse races and taverns, barbecues and balls."[79]

Heyrman's attention to the patriarchal nature of Southern society buttresses my argument that camp meetings featured especially valuable and otherwise rare occasions for women to build relationships within their gender and to express themselves publicly, even to the extent of serving as spiritual leaders. Significantly, the camp meeting served as an available alternative to the household-oriented worship that Heyrman notes. In this connection, *Southern Cross* underscores evangelical threats to the privacy of Southern households when worship, ministers and church oversight entered that domain.[80] However, the camp meeting ritual elicited a public exhibition of the household, transferring it temporarily from its normal locus and repositioning it on a threshold of

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contends that there was no better place to witness—*and participate in*--a highly theatrical and moving manifestation of this drama than a camp meeting.

[79] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 18.

[80] *Ibid*, 184-193, 250.

the sacred realm—where understandably, conventional roles and rules could be challenged—and transformative possibilities embraced. Since attendees expected camp meetings to conjure an otherworldly, carnivalesque inversion of everyday life, the leadership of young, unmarried itinerant ministers that Heyrman sees as deeply problematic for Methodists would have been much more acceptable.[81] Similarly, in this rarefied camp meeting atmosphere, the supernaturalism *Southern Cross* regards as diminishing after 1800 much more easily endured, a continuance the evidence staunchly affirms.[82] Thus, Christine Heyrman's magnificent book serves as a source of many questions and insights for any historian of Southern evangelicalism and camp meetings, a provocative work of lasting significance.

Ellen Eslinger's *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* offers—despite the title--a relatively brief analysis of camp meetings themselves toward the end of the book, devoting most of its pages to a detailed, convincing delineation of the Kentucky scenario that invited their success during the early 1800s. Specifically, Eslinger identifies camp meetings' genesis in people's reaction to the diverse socio-economic and political anxieties afflicting early Kentuckians, such as traumatic and all too recent memories of persistent warfare with Native Americans, the British and settlers loyal to Great Britain, as well as bitter, selfish political squabbles on the local, state and national level. The author disagrees with historians who have posited the frontier and

[81] *Ibid*, 77-116.
[82] *Ibid*, 28-76.

poverty as central socio-economic themes in creating the revivals, depicting instead a post-frontier society with distressingly volatile economic conditions of sharp competition, individualist rather than collectivist pursuit of success, and difficulties in acquiring land because of speculators' dominant role. *In toto*, this created a surfeit of what legendary sociologist Emile Durkheim designated as "anomie," referring to a lack of order, direction, meaning, and certainty. Hence, camp meetings provided ostensibly divine, supernaturalized, spiritual direction, meaning and purpose in response to society's lack of these reassuring traits. The holy gatherings thus conferred order and harmony upon a socially atomistic situation afflicted with a deficit of both.[83] This motif draws considerable affirmation from one of the monumental books ever written in the sociology of religion, Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy*, which employs Durkheimian and Weberian theory to contend that humanity above all turns to religion for protection from the haunting absurdity and troubling questions generated by anomic situations or cosmologies.[84]

At this point, a number of other books of great relevance to my dissertation merit brief mention. Ann Taves' *Fits, Trances, & Visions* provides a compelling analysis of the

[83] See Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999). Also see Emile Durkheim and Anthony Giddens, *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); Nikos Passas and Robert Agnew, eds., *The Future Of Anomie Theory* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern, 1997); Marco Orru, *Anomie: History and Meanings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[84] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990, 1969).

meanings assigned--religiously and culturally, experientially and observationally, as well as by ordinary people and elites —to exuberant physical worship and altered states of spiritual awareness in American religion.[85] This masterful volume informs my analytical perspective in Chapter Four quite thoroughly. Jon Butler's revisionist landmark, *Awash in a Sea of Faith,* suggestively demonstrates the value of historical attention to popular religious beliefs and practices, particularly in their interaction with official systems. Like Hatch, Butler stresses the significance of canny leadership and coordinated mobilization for the success of "democratic" religious movements. In a parallel vein, Frank Lambert's *Inventing the Great Awakening* elegantly explains how religious leaders and promoters can self-consciously and effectively "produce" movements through print culture, letters, advertising, celebrity, and adroit use of language.[86] In addition, Butler's model of Methodist syncretism provides an intriguing avenue for conceptualizing the interplay between popular religion and popular culture in camp meetings.[87] Taves and Butler both valuably emphasize the persistence and vitality of supernaturalism, magical belief, and religious mystery among nineteenth century Americans.

Five works have proven very helpful in understanding Methodism during this period. John Wigger's *Taking Heaven by Storm* will prevail for some time as the definitive book on Methodism's journey from outsider status in eighteenth century America

[85] Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[86] Frank Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
[87] Butler, *Sea of Faith*, 236-241.

through populist movement during the early Republic to conventional American faith by the middle of the nineteenth century. Of exceptional value to anyone studying early Methodism, *Taking Heaven* explains the many aspects of Methodism that contextualized, shaped and interacted with camp meetings. In addition, Wigger's recent biography of Francis Asbury constitutes a triumph in the genre and an extraordinary guide to the astoundingly dedicated visionary who ultimately deserves foremost credit for the camp meeting phenomenon.[88] Russell Richey's small but nuanced *Early American Methodism* presents an understanding of the denomination rooted in careful analysis of language and institutional organization, while it also reveals the decidedly Southern nature of Methodism.[89] Both Wigger and Richey demonstrate the importance of Methodist quarterly meetings for the development of camp meetings. For a delineation of Methodist countercultural beliefs and practices in the post-Revolutionary South—especially regarding race, gender and class--Cynthia Lyerly's *Methodism and the Southern Mind* offers an unsurpassed work of history.[90] Addressing Methodism's trajectory from countercultural sect to mainstream denomination in the Old Northwest, sociologist Gregory Schneider's *The Way of the Cross Leads Home* issues an intriguing analysis of

[88] Wigger, *American Saint*.
[89] Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
[90] Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind: 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Methodism's relationship with primal honor, the domestication of women and Victorian culture.[91]

Finally, three notable books on religious history especially influence the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Patricia Bonomi's *Under the Cope of Heaven* accentuates the salutary effects of sectarian competition upon eighteenth-century religion and underscores the centrality of voluntarism in the remarkable religious growth of the period. She attributes particular importance to the divisiveness of the First Great Awakening and its creation of competing factions in various denominations and regions. In this highly contentious atmosphere, people learned to articulate their beliefs, challenge authority and tradition, operate as partisans of particular factions, and generally transform institutions.[92] To me, this conceptualization of eighteenth century religion—which has much in common with Jon Butler's views--helps enormously in explaining early nineteenth century camp meetings' dynamism and aggressiveness, their insurgency and eventual sectarianism, as well as their significance for participants' self-definition. In *Religious Outsiders*, R. Laurence Moore argues that successful religious movements have pursued "strategies of differentiation" to construct meaningfully distinctive positions in American society, a process I see cogently expressed in the dramatic and controversial camp meeting ritual. As Moore writes, "one way of becoming American was to reinvent

[91] A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).
[92] Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

oneself out of a sense of opposition."[93] Thus, my work conceives camp meetings as an assertion of useable, meaningful identity within the contested fields of American religion and culture. Last, Robert Orsi's magnificent *The Madonna of 115th Street* provides my work with a touchstone model of religious and cultural history combined with the virtues of "thick description" and the importance of pursuing the "lived" meaning of religious events.[94]

Historiographically, my dissertation makes a new and significant contribution. No published work has ever provided a detailed ethnographic, phenomenological portrait or "thick description" of the structural, worshipful and social aspects of camp meetings, much less analyzed the activities critically and theoretically for their value as keys to understanding American religion and society.[95] Historians have for the most part only treated the social dimensions of the events casually, tangentially and with inadequate focus on their interrelationship with the overtly religious elements of camp meetings. My project supplies a gestalt interpretation of the richly interwoven cultural fabric that constituted the entire camp meeting experience and thus fills a significant lacuna in the historiography of religion, rural life, and culture during the first decades of the nineteenth

[93] R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1987), 33, 45. Sydney Ahlstrom, Martin Marty and Edwin Gaustad all emphasize sectarianism and division as sources of American religious vitality. Moore's book provides a remarkably insightful extension of their collective thesis.
[94] Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
[95] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation Of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), esp. 3-54, 67-141, 193-233, 412-454; *Local Knowledge: Further Essays In Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

century. As the largest and most meaningful social events attended by many Americans during this period, camp meetings merit such a careful study.

Chapter Two:
A Peculiar Mingle and Parade

In 1799, a Kentucky farmer lacked sufficient horses for each member of his family to ride separately to a highly anticipated event. This practically minded citizen decided to accommodate everyone in his covered wagon for the journey, a decision affording the opportunity to load up on provisions and to sleep perhaps more comfortably within their mode of conveyance while away than on the frontier's "dark and bloody" ground.[1] Two decades later, a young African American woman fretted over the many miles between her New Jersey home and a religious gathering she fervidly wished to attend. She also worried about her lack of suitable clothing for the occasion, and the need of a tent for her and a number of like-minded friends to use. Somehow, all her problems resolved one after another, through kind offers, gifts and loans from various pious acquaintances.[2] During the first decade of the 1800s, a group of steadfast itinerant ministers in Tennessee carefully selected favored foodstuffs—strong coffee, finely ground corn meal, "beef's tongue" and "sea biscuit"--for a dangerous and harrowing expedition down the Natchez Trace through central Mississippi, a route transgressing territory still held by the

[1] John McGee, Rev. Thomas L. Douglass, "Commencement of the Great Revival of Religion in Kentucky and Tennessee, in 1799," Published Letter, 23 June 1820, in *The Methodist Magazine, for the Year of Our Lord 1821,* Volume IV, ed. Rev. Ezekiel Cooper (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1821), 191.
[2] Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of The Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour* (London: Self-Published, 1846), 42-44.

Choctaw Nation and beset with bandits.[3] Over one decade later, a solemn, determined throng on horseback followed their formidable Methodist elder and his "mammoth horse" over a rugged Adirondack landscape en route to an outdoor revival.[4] Sometime in the summer of 1807, a young minister faithfully executed the demanding labor of turning several acres of raw Kentucky wilderness into an outdoor tabernacle of worship.[5] During the year 1825, in what remains today a rural and heavily wooded area of Southwestern Ontario, an Ojibwa hunting party dutifully entered the ancient forest in pursuit of venison, just as their ancestors had done—with perhaps different weaponry—a millennium earlier. Their earthly pursuit, however, carried a deeply religious purpose: provisioning an imminent camp meeting.[6]

All of these situations, whether involving primeval pursuits or fashionable new clothing, a trip through New Jersey's well-tended farms or Mississippi's towering pine forests, nights spent securely with loving family in a covered wagon or excitedly among friends in a finely crafted tent, centered upon camp meetings, America's foremost get-togethers of the age. All across the country during the years stretching between Jefferson's first election and the Civil War, from the sultry Gulf Plains to the chilly North Woods, from hardscrabble Maine farms to wealthy South Carolina rice plantations,

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[3] Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: Or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 209.
[4] Rev. F. W. Conable, *History of the Genesee Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Conference* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1885), 145.
[5] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 196-197.
[6] Reverend Peter Jones, *Life and Journals of Kah-ke-wa-quo-nā-by: (Rev. Peter Jones), Wesleyan Missionary* (Toronto: Anson Green, 1860), 34.

Americans planned and prepared for camp meetings. And they traveled. They traveled on horseback or on foot; they rode in fabulous carriages, journeyed by wagon, or pushing a modest barrow laden with family goods, out of small but growing towns, off little farms only recently carved from wilderness, or from vast estates where they toiled or ruled. Some, like the slaves in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of the Swamps*, begged to go, while others, like Reverend Alfred Brunson's mother, begged loved ones to attend for the sake of their soul.[7] Whatever the campers' rationale for attendance, devoted clergy and lay supporters made ready, broadcasting word of coming revival, carving campgrounds from forest or field, and erecting rudimentary worship structures under bemused American skies. All this combined in the foremost public spectacle of early America, camp meetings, where faithful and curious alike trekked, camped, ate, worshiped, and fashioned a uniquely American style of social event, one whose template endured in so many gatherings throughout our history.

Prior to the first camp meeting in a new location (many sites came to be used annually for meetings), organizers selected or secured land for the event, whether through temporary appropriation of unclaimed public land, permission from land owners to use a propitious setting, leasing or purchase of property, or from permanent

[7] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, 1856), 221; Reverend Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden; New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1872), 82.

site donations to the evangelical cause.[8] British investigators in 1834 noted that land for a camp meeting they visited in Virginia's Northern Neck was purchased "as a permanent station," and occupied a location surrounded by the property of faithful supporters, "so that they could control riotous and intrusive conduct, if it should appear."[9] Anson West recollected an ardent Methodist camper's generous donation of land for an enduring, scenic meeting locale in 1840s Alabama.[10] While many gatherings took place in locations remote from population centers, promoters tried to select spots accessible by existing roads, trails or waterways, and located centrally within a denominational circuit.

New campgrounds could require extensive communal effort to prepare for a meeting, frequently requiring from a single day to a week or more set aside for the purpose as the appointed time approached.[11] Nonetheless, many campgrounds transformed from raw wilderness to sacred locale with astonishing speed, as reflected in

[8] N. A., "A General Camp-Meeting in Worcester County, (Md)," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), August 4, 1808; Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 218, 559-561, 675; Richard Beard, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some of the Early Ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874), 310-312; N. A., "First Camp Meeting," *The Nashville American*, August 29, 1899; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 169, 266-267; Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814), 250; Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *The Recollections of a Long Life* (Richmond, Va.: The Religious Herald Co., 1891), 153; Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Volume 1* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 203.

[9] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 203.

[10] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 675.

[11] John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 107; Hiram Atwill Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter: The Noted Parson of the Texas Frontier* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1888), 211-215; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 196-197. Obviously, the time required to build a campground depended upon its size and the number of men preparing it. A number of early sources seem to suggest a few itinerant ministers doing all the work themselves.

an itinerant's declaration: "Having cleared the ground with our own hands, built a pulpit and made seats, we commenced operations on Friday, and held it till Wednesday. This meeting resulted in great good."[12] Renowned camp meeting warhorse B. W. Gorham decreed in his late antebellum *Camp Meeting Manual*: "Our grounds must be selected with care, and be thoroughly prepared. We must render the grove inviting and delightful."[13] To encourage the labor required for this, the *Camp Meeting Chorister* provided a hymn "to be sung on clearing the ground, and erecting the Stand for a Camp-Meeting." Sacralizing the chosen space before its transformation began, adherents sang: "This sacred spot, O Lord to thee, We consecrate by prayer; While we prepare and clear the ground, O Lord, our hearts prepare; And while we pitch our tents around, Lord, spread thy glory there.[14]

However consecrated the ground, practical concerns of access to pasture, fresh water and firewood remained essential in selecting campsites.[15] After Cane Ridge's massive gathering, attendees reported that the horses, mules and oxen consumed all of the grass for miles around, while the water supply proved critically insufficient.[16] One old-timer noted that subsequent meetings sought out "a supply of good spring water, and a running brook for the use of horses…."[17] A Missouri revival of 1829 depended

[12] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 157-158.
[13] Barlow Weed Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual: A Practical Book for the Camp Ground; in Two Parts* (Boston: H. V. Degen, 1854), 163.
[14] John Clarke, ed., *The Camp-Meeting Chorister, or, A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs (Philadelphia: J. Clarke, 1830), 295.*
[15] *Ibid*; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 266-267; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 250; N. A., "A Western Camp Meeting," *Nashville Republican & State Gazette*, January 23, 1834; Jeter, *Recollections,* 158.
[16] Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 78-86.
[17] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107.

upon "a good spring in the river bottom," whereby attendees "enjoyed a real camp meeting."[18] Howe poetically commended the importance of "some sparkling stream or gushing fountain, which supplies the host with wholesome water for man and beast."[19] Architect of the U. S. Capitol, Benjamin Latrobe, visited an 1809 camp meeting in Virginia's Fairfax County, whereby he drew the layout, carefully noting the camp's favorable position within the broad V formed by two streams converging at one corner of the gathering.[20] Another minister acclaimed a long-term Alabama site for its "bold Spring (sic), the never-failing waters of which are ever clear and cool."[21] In 1808 Ohio, pastor and pioneer Jacob Young traveled into the Midwestern forest a few miles from St. Clairsville, where he and a group of companions "cleared off a large camp-ground, opened two fine springs, and made preparations for camp meeting."[22] Planning a camp meeting in a Massachusetts area dominated by "federal presbyterians" who were "much prejudiced against the methodists [sic]" and who refused Wesleyans use of their wells, Lorenzo Dow deemed a remote site upon a wooded hill viable upon confirmation of an ancient spring that local lore claimed Indians had once treasured.[23] High ground also conferred safety from the problems associated with sudden downpours, as well as—

[18] W. S. Woodard, *Annals of Methodism in Missouri* (Columbia, MO: E. W. Stephens, 1893), 124.
[19] Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan and Co., 1852), 304.
[20] Benjamin Latrobe, "Plan of the Camp" (Drawing), *Journal of Benjamin Latrobe*, *August 23, 1806 – August 8, 1809*, Latrobe Papers, Manuscript Department, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, http://www.learnnc.org/lp/multimedia/9745 (accessed November 10, 2015).
[21] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 230.
[22] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 266-267.
[23] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 250

hopefully--fewer mosquitoes and snakes than found on lower terrain.[24] A forthcoming Maryland meeting of 1819 in low-lying, brackish-watered Dorchester County proclaimed its prospective site as "high and pleasant," plus "well-supplied with excellent water, and everything necessary for the comfort and convenience of those who may attend it."[25]

Of course, the forest itself furnished wood for heat, cooking and campground structures, as well as the natural ramparts of camp meeting worshipers' woodland cathedrals.[26] One sojourner descriptively hailed the aesthetic and spiritual components of the forest context: "Toward night...the vast sylvan bower of the deep umbrageous forest is illumined…and the majestic forest with an imposing effect…elevates the soul to fit converse with its creator, God."[27] Another remembered how a vibrant camp meeting's "groans of the wounded and the shouts of the saved resounded through the forest of tall hemlock and beech-trees."[28] Attendees who slept, ate and met in small worship groups or prayed in the tents and wagons surrounding the central worship scene also benefited comfortably from the forest canopy above them during hot days or rainy weather.[29] Because of meetings' notoriously unpredictable attendance, adjacent woods often served

[24] N. A., "Two Camp Meetings," *Boston Courier*, August 16, 1830.
[25] N. A. "Communicated: Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer* (Annapolis), July 15, 1819.
[26] See, for example, the selection of an oak grove in Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 310-312, as well as the drawing in Latrobe, "Plan of the Camp," *Journal of Benjamin Latrobe,* n. p.; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans, Vol. 1* (New York: Whittaker, Treacher & Company, 1832), 139; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107.
[27] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 308.
[28] Conable, *History of Genesee*, 145.
[29] William Brown, *America: A Four Years' Residence in the United States and Canada* (Leeds: Kemplay and Bolland, 1849), 43-44; Bishop Matthew Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel; or, Face to Face with God*, ed. A. McLean and J. W. Eaton (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1869), xviii; Elaw, *Memoirs,* 30; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107.

as a scene of worship. Beard emphasizes how an 1837 Tennessee meeting's crowd so exceeded the prepared shelter that devotions spilled into the "beautiful oak grove" surrounding the proceedings, "all over the woods," wherein "every log became a mourner's-bench and every stump a pulpit."[30]

Structurally, camp builders took logs and branches from the forest, fashioning the famous "brush arbors" principally from what it provided.[31] Some observers mention the conveyance of wooden planking to sites for use as building material and particularly as flooring for potentially muddy grounds, while others note campground sawing of planks from trees felled prior to meeting.[32] The open-air brush arbors themselves typically utilized pillars, framing and rafters constructed of logs or beams, with a "roofing" of branches to protect worshipers from the sun or rain, although builders also employed planking at times. In order to avoid anyone staring into the sun, the longer axis of brush arbors, or "sheds" as many called them, customarily ran from north to south, with a horseshoe shape frequently appearing as the general configuration.[33] English travelers

[30] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 310-312.
[31] John Atkinson, *Centennial History of American Methodism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston & Snowe, 1884), 493-494; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 245.
[32] N. A., "Camp Meetings," Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer (Annapolis), September 11, 1823. This source refutes claims that meeting promoters profited by selling the used boards after. Based on inquests, the newspaper argues that--although collections at the gatherings defrayed some of the costs and the boards sold afterwards—promoters generally accepted a financial loss on construction materials as part of their Christian duty. Atkinson notes on-site sawyering in his *Centennial History*, 493-494.
[33] David Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1903), 104; West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 560-561; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 245; Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 306; Rev. A. P. Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness* (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 48; N. A., "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 187-188.

reported worshiping in a picturesque brush arbor of living trees "trimmed up to aid the sight, so that they resembled the beautiful pillars of a cathedral; while their lofty heads, unpruned by the hand of man, united, and made a foliated ceiling, such as no cathedral could approach…."[34]

Presiding over the crowds assembled within the shed's shelter and beyond, the preachers' "stand" with improvised pulpit on top and altar before it drew the eye to the source of sermons, Bible readings, much prayer and the leadership of camp meeting song and praise.[35] At less physically structured meetings, the stand merely rose in the open air of a central gathering point, whereas particularly large meetings boasted multiple preachers' stands.[36] Attending an Indiana gathering, one British visitor dismissed the stand as no more than "a rude platform," though it accommodated fifteen preachers.[37] However, many stands benefited from dazzling illumination at night, rendering them more august in appearance, especially when graced by charismatic performers.[38] Occupying the large area before the preachers' stand and altar area, rough-hewn benches supplied seating for congregants, sometimes thousands. Herein, a gendered division

[34] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 188.
[35] H. M. Rulison, *Brother Mason, the Circuit Rider: or, Ten Years a Methodist Preacher* (Cincinnati: Queen City Publishing House, 1858), 45; Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 45; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 245; Bremer, *Homes of the New World,* 306; Mead, *Manna*, 48; Turpie, *My Own Times*, 104; West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 560-561; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Stephen Allen, *The Life of Rev. John Allen, Better Known as "Camp-meeting John"*(Boston: B. B. Russell, 1888), 21; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 187-188; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 19-20.
[36] John M. Duncan, *Travels through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 & 1819,* Two Volumes, Vol. II (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1823), 370-371; Brown, *A Four Years' Residence,* 43-44; Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiii.
[37] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 140.
[38] Elaw, *Memoirs*, 20.

normally prevailed to the left and right, with a broad, open avenue to the altar and stand separating the two sides.[39] Often constructed of logs from the surrounding forest or the aforementioned planking brought to camp meeting sites, these Spartan seats dispensed with backs and afforded minimal comfort for the hopefully attentive worshipers who spent a good deal of time standing.[40] Participants also divided into segregated areas according to race in most cases.[41] One European writer depicted the scene at a camp meeting she attended in 1850s South Carolina: "In the middle of the wood is an open space, in the centre of which rises a great long roof, supported by pillars, and under which stand benches in rows, affording sufficient accommodation for four or five thousand people. In the middle of this tabernacle is a lofty, square elevation, and in the middle of this a sort of chair or pulpit."[42]

An altar, sometimes of logs or wood planks and railings, while other times simply an area of straw, predictably lay in front of the preachers' stand within an open space sometimes referred to as "the pen," though many writers use the terms altar and pen fairly interchangeably.[43] An experienced circuit minister recorded: "The altar in material and construction is much in keeping with life in the woods. Poles securely fastened to posts three and a half feet high, form a railing on three sides. It is left open next to the

[39] Cartwright, *Autobiography,* 180-181; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107; Jeter, *Recollections,* 158; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 20; Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 215.
[40] Allen, *Life of "Camp Meeting John,"* 21; Mead, *Manna*, 48; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 62-64; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 195-197; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 157-158; Jeter, *Recollections,* 158.
[41]Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiii; Reed & Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 187-193; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307-309.
[42] Bremer, *Homes of New World*, 306-307.
[43] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560.

stand." Reflecting the rustic, impromptu nature of camp meetings' physical components, good-humored Reverend A. P. Mead underscored the altar's significance, but then admitted that some would "smile at the sacred name that is given to so rude and primitive a construction," and accordingly refer to it as the "pen."[44] Of a Western New York campground circa 1820, a proponent acknowledged, "Everything was rude and primitive; but God was there. The work of awakening and conversion soon commenced…."[45]

Occasional sources also speak of a "pen" or "glory pen" that stood somewhat apart from the altar and into which worshipers under conviction--a transitory state that ideally led to conversion but might involve violent, temporarily disabling or even quasi-comatose physical manifestations, to say nothing of noisy exclamations—could be placed for safety. Latrobe visually depicted the pen off to one side of the stand and altar area, adding a verbal description of it as "a boarded enclosure filled with straw, into which the converted were thrown that they might kick about without injuring themselves."[46] Usually part of the altar/pen area, the "anxious bench" or "mourners' bench" also offered a special venue for those under (perhaps less physically demonstrative) conviction, affording ministers and exhorters ease of access to those most in need of soteriological guidance, admonition or encouragement. Of course, a participant's highly conspicuous presence on the anxious bench exerted tremendous

[44] Mead, *Manna*, 48.
[45] Conable, *History of Genesee*, 145.
[46] Latrobe, "Plan of the Camp," *Journal of Benjamin Latrobe*, n. p.

social pressure on behalf of conversion while eliciting outward conformity to exhibitive norms of spiritual anguish and ecstatic transfiguration. Indeed, this highly visible arena of religious struggle and deliverance involved a remarkably intense concentration of essential camp meeting characteristics: a liminal, sacralized and theatrical space wherein sinners seeking God's redemption and pious neighbors' approval undertook a dramatic rite of passage into Christian fellowship, while ideally experiencing a transformative epiphany of divine grace.

Moreover, the anxious bench and pen involved some of camp meetings' most intimate spiritual interaction across genders and races.[47] Inevitably, many critics identified particular fault with these devotional elements. Some decried conversion under pressure as specious while others criticized the impropriety of interracial mixing--especially as apparent equals before the Lord—and male preachers' or exhorters' intimacy with female congregants in a vulnerable state.[48] Again, many accounts conceptually or terminologically conflate the altar, pen, and anxious bench, an unsurprising fact given that they customarily shared the same space before or near the preachers' stand and fulfilled evangelical purposes of conversion rather than ceremonial functions of sacrament.[49]

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[47] Susan Hill Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 62.
[48] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit,* 203; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 142-145.
[49] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 308-309.

Consistent with successful efforts during the First Great Awakening and future American commerce, camp meetings fruitfully employed a variety of advertisement, whether through newspapers, handbills, posted notices or announcements in churches.[50] One frontier traveler during the 1820s reported: "The village papers on all sides contain printed notices, and written ones are affixed to the public places, notifying what are called 'meetings.' A traveller [sic] in a clerical dress does not fail to be asked, at the public houses, where he stops, if he is a preacher, and if he wishes to notify a meeting."[51] Advertisements generally appeared anywhere from two weeks to three months prior to the revivalist event and of course identified the camp meeting's place, ordinarily with brief directions via roads, waterways, landmarks or well-known farms. They indicated the starting date, with most beginning on a Thursday or Friday, often with arrivals during Thursday and initial services on Friday. Notices specified a duration of at least three days, most commonly four, next most commonly five, but sometimes longer or open-ended according to optimism, success or momentum. In many cases, advertisements noted the presiding superintendent, ideally a prominent Methodist elder, minister or even bishop, and perhaps notable preachers who would be attending.[52] Some featured a

[50] Elaw, *Memoirs*, 19. See also Frank Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

[51] Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States: Or the Mississippi Valley, Vol. 1* (Cincinnati: E. H. Flint, 1828), 218.

[52] N. A., "A Camp Meeting," *The Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), July 11, 1810; N. A., N. T., *Nashville Republican and State Gazette*, July 24, 1834; N. A. "Camp Meetings," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA), July 21, 1828; N. A., N. T., *Republican Banner* (Nashville), September 1, 1845; N. A., N. T., *Nashville Whig*, August 20, 1825; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 218-220; "Two Camp Meetings," *Boston Courier,* August 16, 1830; N. A., "Camp Meeting," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), September 2, 1818; N. A., "Camp Meetings," *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser,* September 20, 1811; N. A., "Camp-

commendation of the site's suitability, accessibility or salubriousness, while others reminded campers to bring appropriate items or arrive prepared to camp on the grounds.[53] Occasionally, a particularly needed item--such as poles for the tents or wooden planks for construction--received attention in the notice.[54] Others pointedly stipulated their gathering as intended for the pious, serious or earnest, whereas some—although clearly sponsored by Methodists in most cases, Cumberland Presbyterians within their region, or various Presbyterians, Baptists and other groups during the initial half-decade or so—adopted a purposely ecumenical or strategically evangelical tone of openness and welcome toward seekers from beyond their denomination.[55] A representative entry from 1810 Ohio reads:

> A CAMP-MEETING will commence on Friday the tenth day of August, under the superintendence of the rev. Mr. SOLOMON LANGDON, the preacher who has the charge of Deer-creek circuit; the meeting will be held about one mile from Chillicothe, between the Limestone road and the residence of gen. Worthington, and continue for the three or four succeeding days [capitalization sic].[56]

Meetings," *Scioto Gazette and Fredonian Chronicle* (Chillicothe, Ohio), June 4, 1819; "A General Camp-Meeting in Worcester County, (Md.)," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), August 4, 1808; N. A., "Camp Meetings," Maryland Gazette, July 5, 1809; N. A., "A Camp Meeting," *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser,* April 16, 1807; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 19; Allen, *Life of "Camp-meeting John*," 31; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 316-317. A British visitor observed that some gatherings endured up to two weeks, while Anson West reported an 1846 Eutaw, Alabama meeting of twenty days' duration. Peter Cartwright asserted that some in early Kentucky lasted "three to four weeks." See Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 44; West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 668; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 45.

[53] "Two Camp Meetings," *Boston Courier*, August 16, 1830; "A General Camp-Meeting in Worcester County, (Md.)," *Maryland Gazette*, August 4, 1808.

[54] "Camp Meeting," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), September 2, 1818.

[55] "Camp Meetings," *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, September 20, 1811; "A General Camp-Meeting in Worcester County, (Md.)," *Maryland Gazette*, August 4, 1808.

[56] "A Camp Meeting," *The Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe, OH), July 11, 1810.

In another shrewd advertising ploy, camp meeting organizers at times submitted their gatherings' triumphs to newspapers while in progress, as in the case of a Tennessee gathering of 1851: "The camp-meeting at McKnight's campground has been in progress several days. We learn that 40 or 50 have, during the time, made a profession of religion." [57] *Ex post facto* announcements appeared as well, reporting attendance, conversions and fervor, such as the following one that relates not only Methodist achievement, but at whose expense: "The late camp meetings on the Eastern Shore have met with abundant success. At Bohemia, we are told, one hundred became converted. The proselytes are mostly of the old church, which is said to be nearly extinct in that quarter."[58] While certainly within the advertisement genre, camp meeting notices— as illustrated in the previous examples and perhaps due to the expense of printing—tended to be masterfully concise and mercifully free of sanctimony or bromides.

The pageantry, excitement and poignancy of camp meeting arrivals reach out to the modern reader perhaps as strikingly and emotionally as accounts of the electrical services. A Presbyterian who witnessed Cane Ridge's meeting wrote to a friend that what he "saw there exceeds the powers of human language to describe. There were more than one hundred wagons arrived, with families and provisions. Some of them came a

[57] N. A., N. T., *Republican Banner* (Nashville), August 25, 1851 (reprinted from *Murfreesboro Telegraph*); see also N. A., N. T., *Republican Banner*, September 26, 1853.
[58] N. A., N. T., *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), September 8, 1808. "The old church" presumably references Episcopalianism, although the Maryland context could suggest Catholicism.

hundred miles."[59] A minister who served Methodism for fifty years recalled that the gatherings "produced a great excitement among all classes of people; and they came from all parts of the country to attend…."[60] One chronicler emphasized "the eagerness of the people to attend" as so great "that entire neighborhoods were forsaken, and the roads literally crowded by those pressing forward on their way to the groves."[61]

Not a few reached meetings by boat, taking advantage of the gatherings' frequent proximity to water and availing themselves of North America's original highways. Though many of these boats would have been simple, even canoes earlier on, some camp meetings advertised access by steamboat as those multiplied along waterways, or large sailing ships on eastern rivers of Atlantic adjacency. A Maryland camp meeting of the late 1810s advertised its approachability to within "one hundred and fifty yards…by large vessels," while a New York state gathering in 1809 could be attained by taking an elegant sailing sloop up the Hudson River, leaving one morning and arriving the next.[62] Pilgrims en route to an 1804 meeting near the Hudson came most of the way under sail, and then received wagon rides from a landing to the grounds.[63] A Massachusetts meeting of 1830 drew a crowd approaching three thousand in number, many ferried there by one

[59] Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiii.
[60] James Bradley Finley, *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley: Or, Pioneer Life in the West* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1853), 202.
[61] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 217.
[62] "Communicated: Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer* (Annapolis), July 15, 1819; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251. See Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers,* 245-247 for an account of journeying to meeting by makeshift canoe.
[63] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 27-28.

of ten available sailing vessels or a Lynn steamboat named the *Byron*.[64] Never one to waste time, Lorenzo Dow preached aboard a packet ship transporting the faithful to an 1805 Long Island meeting.[65] Of course, the Gaspar, Muddy and Red Rivers of Kentucky helped determine the whereabouts of, and granted their names to, the very first true camp meetings of all in 1800.[66]

More, however, journeyed by overland means. "They consist of multitudes of men, women, and children, to the extent of several thousands, who come in vehicles of every description…," wrote one Western traveler.[67] The affluent made their entrance in luxurious coaches or chaises lined with sumptuous silks and linens, accompanied by elegantly clad slaves in permitting states. Bourgeois carriages bore the upwardly mobile, while the yeomanry rode in sturdy covered wagons full of family and provisions. Some hiked before an humble cart drawn by the family ox or propelled by human effort, on horseback or mule—perhaps riding double or even treble with children—or the earliest mode of conveyance, on foot.[68] Lorenzo Dow memorialized a penniless Virginia woman who walked thirty miles to attend one of his camp meetings, wherein she emerged as the most catalytic worshiper present.[69] Anson West recounted wealthy plantation families of

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[64] "Two Camp Meetings," *Boston Courier*, August 16, 1830.
[65] Dow, *Cosmopolite,* 249.
[66] Mead, *Manna*, 14; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 216-217.
[67] Duncan, *Travels*, 370-371.
[68] Duncan, *Travels*, 370-371; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 253; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 19, 80; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 230, 560-564, 656, 675; Bremer, *Homes of New World*, 306-307; Turpie, *My Own Times*, 104; Flint, *A Condensed Geography,* 220; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 139-142; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 304; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit,* 187, 203; Flint, N. T., *Nashville Republican & State Gazette*, January 23, 1834.
[69] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 216.

the 1840s sweeping into camp meetings with a spectacle worthy of medieval barons.[70] Always outnumbering the prosperous and celebrated, the "poor were at the Camp-meetings. With or without outfits they were there. They would pour in from the hills and woods."[71] Further, trusted slaves attended meetings independently as well as in the role of servants to owners. While some bondsman traveled and camped simply, others brought wagons or tents supplied by their masters.[72]

All this led a Vermont critic to question whether attendees truly sought religion, or rather, the thrill of assembling "a promiscuous mass of people in the wilderness" by means of a rousing "parade and show."[73] James Finley remembered camp meetings generating such excitement in Jacksonian era Ohio that Moravians forbidden to attend by their leaders did so nevertheless, adding their presence to others' fascination.[74] The appearance of celebrity ministers or bishops elicited much stir and anticipation. Lorenzo Dow usually presented himself theatrically, arriving suddenly in his trademark guise of a bedraggled, forlorn mendicant serving Christ, frequently in defiance of the elements, illness, rumors, time, or distance.[75] Reverend E. F. Sevier of Knoxville quipped that Dow "appeared as if he had come out of the ground or had been let down from the clouds."[76]

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[70] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 563-564.
[71] *Ibid*. See also Flint, *A Condensed Geography,* 219-220.
[72] Dr. J. R. S. Pitts, *Life and Confession of the Noted Outlaw James Copeland* (New Augusta, MS: Self-Published, 1909), 75-76.
[73] Christian Advocate (signed), "Religious," Vermont Chronicle (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827.
[74] Finley, *Pioneer Life*, 202.
[75] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 187, 216, 253, 261-262; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 235-236.
[76] Richard Nye Price, "Lorenzo and Peggy Dow," in *Holston Methodism: From Its Origin to the Present Time, Volume 2* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912), 44.

Though Bishop Asbury always remained a thoroughly humble man, his journeys collected an entourage and stimulated much elation everywhere he appeared and particularly at camp meetings, creating what one nineteenth century Methodist historian called "a sort of spiritual ovation, a triumphal march of the great leader."[77] A custom of groups riding into camp enveloped in song occurred in some cases, adding much to the sonic dramaturgy. Eventual bishop William McKendree left a diary narrative of such an enlivening entrance to one of the first Illinois Territory meetings, held in 1808, wherein two and a half dozen singers met the incoming preacher and his retinue. Forming a double line with the best voices out front, the group executed a grand musical procession into the camp, where ecstatic congregants received them "with open arms."[78]

Journeys of forty to fifty miles—sometimes through territory plagued by highwaymen or contended for by Native Americans—commonly brought the faithful

[77] Abel Stevens, *A Compendious History of American Methodism* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1867), 441. See also Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists, in the United State of America; Beginning in 1766, and Continued Until 1809* (Baltimore, MD: Magill and Clime, 1810; Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1974) for a sense of Bishop Asbury's following and the excitement his presence created. Bishop Asbury was, during the late 1700s and early 1800s, likely the most physically recognized person around the entire nation because of his constant travels. One could have a letter or package delivered to the eminent man simply by addressing it "Bishop Asbury, USA." See Elmer T. Clark, "Introduction," *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury - Volume 1,* Wesley Center Online, Northwest Nazarene University, http://wesley.nnu.edu/other-theologians/francis-asbury/the-journal-and-letters-of-francis-asbury-volume-i/francis-asbury-the-journal-vol-1-introduction/ (accessed February 18, 2016). Anson West and others note the contrast between Bishop Asbury's august personage and his humble modes of conveyance: a simple horse when health permitted, or a cheap carriage when necessary. For example, the leader of American Methodism arrived at an 1808 Georgia camp meeting in "a poor thirty-dollar chaise." See Anson West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 40. Asbury often suffered from exposure, not only resulting from his rigorous outdoor life, but because he frequently gave his clothing away to others in need. See Francis Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church: From August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815, Volume 3* (New York: Bangs and Mason, 1821), 206.

[78] Robert Paine, *Life and Times of William McKendree* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1922), 186-188.

and curious to the gatherings, while reports of campers traveling one hundred and fifty or more miles exist.[79] Dismayed by camp meetings' urgency and appeal, Tocqueville observed that, "Whole families—old men, women, and children—cross rough passes and untrodden wilds, coming from a great distance to join a camp meeting…Religious insanity is very common in the United States."[80] In 1813 Alabama, the frontier aflame with the War of 1812's pitting of native Creek Indians against recent settlers, frontier families nonetheless traveled to Fort Easley on the Tombigbee River's bluffs for a vigorous camp meeting. A number of these sought shelter from the hostilities, undoubtedly, but many ventured to the services from *other* forts where they might have remained secure. Led by John French, a redoubtable Irish Methodist who campaigned militarily as well as evangelically during these years, the meeting proceeded with great earnestness and even included a traditional Wesleyan love feast performed as armed men held vigil against sudden attack *and* bade welcome to worshipers.[81] One can only imagine the sense of patriarchal duty fulfilled by fathers leading their families through peril to safety and holy ground, plus the devotion and courage of women and children who accompanied. Some braved the threat of banditry on the Natchez Trace or crossed Choctaw and Creek lands en route to camp meetings in the raw settlements of the Old

[79] Turpie, *My Own Times*, 104; Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 221; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 45; Flint, *A Condensed Geography,* 219-220; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 304; ; Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiii; Atkinson, *Centennial History,* 502.
[80] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: *Volume II* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 620.
[81] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 97-99.

Southwest. Others, later, risked depredations by the Deep South states' infamous Copeland, Murrell and other outlaw gangs, or defied Comanche dominion to preach and worship at canyon camp meetings in antebellum Texas' Hill Country. Determined and resourceful, camp meeting participants trekked great distances and undertook substantial danger at times, particularly during the earlier decades.[82]

For rural folk accustomed to interaction within small groups of well-acquainted people, initial encounter with the campground bestowed a thrilling and sometimes bewildering experience. Before new arrivals lay the bustle of purposeful activity, discordant sounds emanating from every direction, a likely irresistible mixture of cooking aromas, and simply *more people* together in one place than many had ever witnessed, unless at a prior camp meeting. The gatherings routinely drew numbers in the thousands, though a camp meeting of hundreds comprised a unique and exhilarating experience for many frontier denizens. Ears unfamiliar with loud noises other than weather or large bodies of moving water—to which many turned for similes in attempting to describe the noise—heard a virtually incomprehensible din.[83] The felling of trees, hurried construction, wagons creaking, erection of tents, preparation of meals and coffee, attention to the many animals whose various sounds augmented the cacophony, and then *so many* voices talking or laughing, praying or singing all combined.

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[82] Nye, "Lorenzo and Peggy Dow," 24-25, 69-70; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 209; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 107-109; Pitts, *Life & Confession of James Copeland*, esp. 66-79 on camp meeting operations; James L. Penick, Jr., "John Andrews Murrell," in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, ed. Carroll Van West (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 2002); Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 221.

[83] Chapter Five deals with this topic in depth.

Men, women and children; black, white and perhaps American Indian; young and old, attractive or repellent, attired splendidly or in ragged homespun, a mass of people in motion accosted and fascinated the provincial eyes of newcomers.[84] Anson West colorfully evoked the day of arrival during camp meetings' heyday:

> The people poured into the encampment…They came from far and near. They came in style and without style. They came by all modes of travel. Many came in rich attire, attended by grand equipage…Even the outskirts of the encampment were thronged. One who never saw…the multitude assemble on a great Camp-meeting day, cannot have any clear idea of the peculiar mingle and parade of such an occasion…The gathering of that multitude was impressive.[85]

Fredrika Bremer, a camp meeting novice upon arrival, wrote of her 1850s experience: "We alight from the carriages and enter a fir-wood. After we have walked for an hour along unformed paths, the wood begins to be very animated. It swarms with people, in particular with blacks, as far as we can see among the lofty tree-stems. It is a perfect camp, with all the varied, party-colored life of a camp, but without soldiers and arms."[86]

After arrival, participants who planned to stay overnight or several days and nights found suitable places for their wagons and/or tents, if possible among relatives, friends, traveling or church acquaintances. One source nicely captures the bustle of activity, exclaiming, "The people were in great commotion, trying to arrange their tents,

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[84] "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Rulison, *Brother Mason*, 45; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 37, 280; Bremer, *Homes of New World*, 306-307; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 564-565; Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 493-494; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 258-259, 310-312; "A Methodist Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), September 8, 1808; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 139-140; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 19.

[85] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 563-564.

[86] Bremer, *Homes of New World*, 306-307.

and get ready for comfortable living."[87] Contemporary accounts and pictures suggest that, having learned from Cane Ridge's massive confusion, campers typically undertook this matter with careful attention to order, practical necessities, and avoiding conflicts or overtaxing resources. Reproducing the large communal worship area's shape, although in much larger scope, the ideally harmonious and symmetrical camp often assumed a large horseshoe configuration, or in some cases parallelogram or circle, beyond the space prepared for services. Depending upon the size of gatherings, the number of tents and wagons utilized for sleeping ranged from a few dozen to hundreds.[88] One visitor noted "hundreds of tents, and booths of all imaginable forms and colors, are pitched and erected in a vast circle, and are seen shining out white in the wood to a great distance…."[89] In many layouts, an "outfield" of sorts stretched between the furthest extent of benches and the initial ranks of temporary dwellings, allowing room for overflow during services, although this area also served as the habitat of those more interested in socializing than worship.[90] African Americans generally assembled their lodgings in a corner or side neighborhood of these transitory villages, reflecting racial norms of the period but unfortunately betraying the spiritual egalitarianism largely

[87] Rulison, *Brother Mason*, 45
[88] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 139-140; "Two Camp Meetings," *Boston Courier*, August 16, 1830; Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 43; N. A., N. T., *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, September 16, 1805; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 19; Rulison, *Brother Mason*, 45; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 217, 304; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 310-312; Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 502; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 169, 300-301; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 221; Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 221.
[89] Bremer, *Homes of New World*, 306-307.
[90] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107.

observed in the sacred services. Interracial visiting about the entire encampment seems to have been quite acceptable, however.[91]

Resembling small towns, the tent and wagon communities frequently included recognizable "streets and alleys," permitting the oft times heavy traffic of walking and riding humans.[92] These temporary avenues received light from the many cooking and coffee fires along them, as well as in some cases the placement of posts supporting candles that burned through the night, or lamps situated in nearby tree limbs.[93] Beyond the tents and wagons lay areas for maintaining the horses and oxen, as well as procuring wood for cooking, warmth and lighting.[94] Camp meeting planners and witnesses mention sizes of the entire camp—worship center, living areas, outer zones for wood and stock—reaching from a few acres to hundreds.[95] Beyond the community of pious tenters and wagon-dwellers, another sort of camp regularly emerged, one inhabited by those who came to drink, gamble, carouse, fight, sell liquor, disrupt or cause trouble.[96] As one itinerant lamented: "The rowdies annoyed us exceedingly. They pitched their tents on the hill-sides round about, and sold whisky, brandy, and cider."[97]

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[91] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 306-315; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* 139-145.
[92] "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 221.
[93] Turpie, *My Own Times*, 104; *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, September 16, 1805; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 221; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107
[94] Turpie, *My Own Times*, 104; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 139-140.
[95] "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 169; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 304; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 139-140.
[96] These camp meeting attendees receive extensive discussion in Chapter Eight.
[97] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 269-270.

A rough calculus for camp meetings' proportion of inhabited wagons and tents to people may be extrapolated from reports such as one from 1808 Maryland estimating an attendance ranging from five to seven thousand people—some no doubt visiting without spending the night—along with 275 wagons and tents.[98] Assuming an attendance of six thousand, with perhaps one-fifth only present for the day and another five hundred bedding or remaining awake under the stars, one still arrives at a ratio of over fifteen people per temporary abode, indicating large numbers per tent or wagon. The proportion sleeping on the ground could have been significantly larger, however, as Peter Cartwright records that while women (and presumably younger children) slept ***in*** the wagons, men sometimes slept ***under*** the conveyances.[99] Of course, family size of the era markedly exceeded that of today, while many early nineteenth century Americans routinely shared sleeping quarters with multiple others. Fredrika Bremer's newly met hostess at camp meeting thought nothing of the Swedish guest joining her and a daughter in their tent's family bed.[100] Moreover, large groups comprised of a dozen or more unmarried, younger adults would often maintain a tent together. Perhaps surprisingly, these arrangements not infrequently included both genders, with appropriate chaperoning.[101] To promote decorum, males and females in such tents customarily

[98] "A Methodist Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), September 8, 1808.
[99] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 37.
[100] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 310-312. Jacob Young describes a preacher's tent easily accommodating nine sleepers. See Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 201.
[101] Reverend S. R. Beggs, *Pages from the Early History of the West and Northwest* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1868), 270; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 64-65, 82; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 43-46.

slumbered in different columns, separated by a cloth partition.[102] Precautions failed, of course, to palliate many critics, one of whom compared such groupings to those of "the original inhabitants of the forest, or a company of wandering Arabs in the desert."[103]

Quite regularly, owners of capacious tents invited camp meeting spectators who intended a brief visit to alter plans and join them for several days and nights.[104] Large tents also united multiple married couples and their families connected through kinship or friendship; this increased as camp meetings adopted semi-permanent sites.[105] Inevitably, many tents grew uncomfortably warm given the crowding combined with camp meetings' typical season.[106] As to tent and population density in camps, an attentive North Carolina journalist counted 84 tents on three to four acres at a medium sized gathering of 1805. Figuring upon three and a half acres, that establishes about 24 tents per acre. Incorporating our earlier estimate of fifteen people per tent, that suggests around 360 people per acre, which is an extremely dense but temporarily sustainable and highly sociable scenario. For perspective, this matches population density in the United Kingdom's most overcrowded city following World War 2, Glasgow.[107]

In his illuminating book on the labor and joys of camp meeting, A. P. Mead connects the two in recommending those "wearied with the labor of pitching their tents"

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[102] Christian Advocate (signed), "Religious," Vermont Chronicle (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827.
[103] *Ibid*.
[104] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307.
[105] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 218, 656.
[106] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 310-312.
[107] Keith Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain 1870-1992* (London: Routledge, 2014), n. p., ch. 25.

to join fellow attendees at the altar, where they could "'pray themselves rested.'"[108] While putting up tents clearly required more work than bedding down in wagons, all but the smallest of tents afforded more space and movement. Indeed, many tents were quite commodious, permitting multiple comforts of home and abundant luxury items for those sufficiently moneyed. Although some tents proved Spartan upon entry, others featured fancy beds, feather bedding, full-length mirrors, lavish carpets, fine basins and pitchers for hygienic ablutions, elaborate tables and chairs, plus other luxurious furnishings and personal items.[109] Ordinarily composed of linen or cotton material with a rugged texture, tents incorporated wooden poles, boards and planks as support or flooring.[110] Jacob Young intriguingly refers to "wooden tents" in 1808, but unfortunately elaborates no further. Likely, these were wooden huts of some kind, which Lorenzo Dow mentions in connection to an 1803 Georgia meeting and Cartwright references in connection to Kentucky meetings of the first decade.[111]

A tent's capacity to turn rain counted as a manifestly important consideration, with some described as doing so "nearly as well as a shingled roof."[112] One minister boastingly averred the tents' resistance to inclemency: "True, the rain continues, but it

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[108] Mead, *Manna*, 77-78.
[109] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 315; McGee, Published Letter, *Methodist Magazine* 1821, 190; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 235, 272-273, 300-301.
[110] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer, 201,* 266-267; Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 221.
[111] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 266-267; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 187; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 45. Cartwright records that some covered their "camps…with clapboard or shingles."
[112] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 201.

only enhances the comfort of our spacious cloth tent."[113] Inevitably, some torrential downpours overwhelmed any shelter, as in this report: "The encampment was not prepared for such a deluge…To keep dry was impossible. The beds, bed-clothing, and raiment of the people were all moistened or saturated by the rain…They slept between wet sheets, and were constantly exposed to the pitiless storm."[114] A British minister endeavoring to sleep in "the preachers' tent," which he described as allotting six beds, found his accommodations highly unsatisfactory as various people came in and out, tried to share his cot, sang outside and snored within. "Still there remained the barking of the watch-dogs, the sawing of the kat-e-dids and locusts, and the snoring of my more favoured companions, and these were incessant."[115] Whatever their potential for discomfort and interrupted rest, the tents receive at least as many accolades as reproach in primary documents.[116] As a Virginia tenter exclaimed, "The weather was fine, the grounds were delightful, and the tents comfortable. Both men and women appeared to be in the true spirit of camp meeting."[117] By the 1840s, many meetings attained a sort of majesty, with the tents no exception: "The well-built shed with its grand stand and spacious altar, and the commodious tents tastefully grouped about the beautiful grounds gave an air of neatness, and indicated expenditure and aggregation."[118]

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[113] Mead, *Manna*, 187-188.
[114] Jeter, *Recollections,* 154. See also Christian Advocate (signed), "Religious," Vermont Chronicle (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827.
[115] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 193-194.
[116] See especially Rulison, *Brother Mason*, 45; Young, *Autobiography of A Pioneer,* 235, 249, 272-273.
[117] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 272-273.
[118] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561.

Of course, not only tenters but also those sheltering in wagons needed to unload and set up camp in order to transform their mode of conveyance into a place of habitation. Over the arc of camp meeting experience between 1800 and the Civil War, it seems that camping in wagons constituted the earliest and for a time predominant lodging, whereas tents became more common, larger and increasingly luxurious as the decades proceeded.[119] By the time of their early 1830s tour, two English ministers noted, cheap "carriages, or tilted light wagons…used as beds" had become associated with "poorer or less interested persons."[120] Although permanent wooden cabins at annual camp meeting sites belong mostly to the postbellum period, instances of this clearly occurred in some cases by the 1830s, at least in more settled areas such as eastern Virginia.[121] For use inside or around their wagons and tents, campers brought beds and mattresses, bedrolls and cots, quilts and blankets, various cooking vessels and utensils, along with sundry other household items.[122] Careful packing also required attention to multiple changes of clothing, perhaps rainwear, firearms for protection during the trip and possible procurement of game, plus money or goods for barter in purchasing wares sold by the vendors that camp meetings drew.[123] Sources do suggest a gendered division of labor in

[119] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 105-106; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 310-312; Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 44.
[120] Reed & Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit,* 203.
[121] Jeter, *Recollections,* 158; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 167.
[122] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 235, 272-273, 300-301; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 315; McGee, Published Letter, *Methodist Magazine* 1821, 190; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220.
[123] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 205-206. Famously indifferent to his clothing otherwise, Lorenzo Dow ordered a special oilcloth cloak made for rainy weather. See Nye, "Lorenzo and Peggy Dow," 54.

preparations, with women more clearly responsible for food, bedding and cookware, while men handled matters related to the tents, wagons and animals.[124]

The complexity and volume of packing varied widely according to the distance crossed and length of stay, of course, but likewise according to the method of conveyance, social standing, wealth and intended ostentation of attendees. Whether through deference to Christian humility or because of financial circumstances, some planned to camp, eat and dress simply at meetings while others outfitted their tents with all the conveniences of a finely appointed home, dined sumptuously and dressed extravagantly.[125] These exhibitions were not necessarily indicative of campers' normal social status, however, as accounts of elaborate displays by poor, African American and enslaved attendees reveal.[126] Again, camp meetings generated temporary communities that could powerfully define their inhabitants, at least for a quite enjoyable time. Consequently, some people exerted themselves vigorously and spent a good deal of money to engage in more impressive presentations of self or family than normally feasible. Such efforts certainly intensified as camp meeting culture matured, joined the mainstream, and came to be denominationally institutionalized. As Wigger and others demonstrate, Methodism itself tacked a course toward bourgeois sensibilities and

[124] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 64-65; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 656.
[125] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 231-232, 560-564, 655-657, 688; Stowe, *Dred*, 14-15; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 216, 242-245; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307-310, 315; McGee, Published Letter, *Methodist Magazine* 1821, 190; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220; Woodard, *Methodism in Missouri*, 124.
[126] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 141-142; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 311-315.

appearances during the century's middle third.[127] In matters of temporary lodging, accoutrements, food and clothing, camp meetings elicited fidelity to early Methodist ideals of pious simplicity in some, yet for others offered an irresistible stage for efforts to reflect wealth and social standing, or at least temporary luxury and prestige.[128] Indeed, this at times created conflict among different participating groups and a matter eliciting sharp criticism from clergy.[129]

Whether cast-iron, tin, brass, or popular alloys of the period such as pewter or "Britannia," the common cookware used by many families included Dutch ovens, pots and kettles for boiling, stewing and slow simmering. Other routine items included pans, griddles or skillets for frying and cornbread, spits and wrought iron roasters for grilling meat, plus hooks, trammels and trivets for hanging cookware over the fire. For the highly practical and popular preparation of stews, cast iron pots and Dutch ovens proved essential, as they spread heat thoroughly, simmered slowly and melded flavors appealingly. Another prized and common implement was a deep, three-legged pan known as a "spider pan," which could stand in a fire.[130] Campers also brought various

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[127] John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 173-196.

[128] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 231-232, 560-564, 655-657, 688; Stowe, *Dred*, 14-15; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307-310, 315; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 242-245; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 30; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 37, 280.

[129] John Early, "Diary of John Early, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 34, no. 3 (July 1926): 244-245; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 242-245; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 45.

[130] The flat skillet of later nineteenth century fame had not yet gained the popularity it would with the emergence of stoves. Coffee roasters also became available after 1800, though many people continued roasting their coffee beans in other kitchenware.

forks and spoons (some wooden), knives (most men carried a substantial knife), bowls, plates and saucers, along with the all-important coffee pot and cups.[131] Itinerant minister Jacob Young mentioned with pride the "Britannia tumblers" that accompanied him to many camp meetings, as well as a coffee grinder.[132] Since cooking over an open fire remained customary in homes of the era, most cookware adapted well to outdoor food preparation, especially in its inclusion of handles and hooks for suspension above a fire, and "legs" for safe placement within a fireplace or fire pit.[133]

Of course, foodstuffs that would not perish quickly during the typically warm weather of camp meeting season held great utility.[134] Hence, dried, pickled or salted beans--many versions of which flourished under the designation of 'peas', like 'black-eyed peas'--worked well, along with smoked and salted fish or domesticated meats, especially the ubiquitous pork rendered into ham, bacon and sausage. Meats could also

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[131] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 64-65; Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 43; Duncan, *Travels*, 370-371; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220; Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiii; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 304; Flint, N. T., *Nashville Republican & State Gazette*, January 23, 1834. See also Mary Earle Gould, *Early American Wooden Ware & Other Kitchen Utensils* (North Clarendon, Vermont: Charles Tuttle & Company, 1962).

[132] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 209. Britannia, somewhat like pewter, was an alloy of copper, tin and antimony. The name notwithstanding, U. S. artisans created a substantial trade in 'Britannia' that flourished from the early 1800s up to the Civil War, the exact period of camp meetings in this study. See Helen Sheumaker and Shirley Teresa Wajda, *Material Culture in America: Understanding Everyday Life* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 61.

[133] See Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1988), 283-325; Richard Barons and Devere Card, *The American Hearth* (Binghamton, NY: Broome County Historical Society, 1976); George Neumann, *Early American Antique Country Furnishings* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Bee Wilson, *Consider the Fork: A History of How We Cook and Eat* (New York: Basic Books, 2012); Gould, *Early American Wooden Ware*; Andrew F. Smith, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Donald I. Fennimore, *Metalwork in Early America* (Wilmington, DE: Henry Francis Dupont Winterthur Museum, 1996); Rupert Gentle and Rachel Field, *Domestic Metalwork 1640-1820* (Woodbridge, UK: Antique Collectors Club, 1994).

*Cast iron cook stoves did not appear regularly in homes until after mid-century.

[134] N. A., "A Calendar for 1827," *Louisiana Advertiser* (New Orleans), June 19, 1827; N. A., "Arkansas Items," *Republican Banner* (New Orleans), August 30, 1856; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 37, 280.

be "potted" or beef "corned." Wild game such as deer, forest bison, rabbit, squirrel, turkey, quail, pigeon or dove provided variation as smoked or fresh meat, particularly as autumn arrived.[135] Summoning the frontier contingency of food, pioneer minister Peter Cartwright acclaimed that itinerants "ate roasting ears for bread, drank butter-milk for coffee, or sage tea for imperial; took, with a hearty zest, deer or bear meat, or wild turkey, for breakfast, dinner, and supper, if he could get it."[136] Dry flour, oats, barley, rice (especially in the Deep South), peanuts (again, more Southern), corn meal or corn 'grits' delivered basic sustenance. Pickled or 'canned'—the latter more common after the 1810s--vegetables of diverse kinds contributed flavor and nutrition, enriching the prevalent stews and soups. Onions, enduring root vegetables such as carrots, turnips and potatoes, as well as dried or pickled fruits all figured prominently. Garlic received limited favor as a food item among rural and frontier people of the era, whereas Southerners particularly loved their sweet potatoes and if necessary prepared coffee from them, chicory or peanuts. Other staples requiring special preparation and storage in a cool space came along as well, including bacon fat or bear grease for frying and seasoning. Eggs lasted much longer if placed in water with a suitable salt and un-slacked lime combination, or

[135] Stews appeared ubiquitously, permitting multiple meats in a dish. The heyday of camp meetings coincided with the rampant hunting of North America's doomed passenger pigeon, which could be felled in ridiculous numbers with limited effort or hunting skill. See Joel Greenberg, *A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2014). The Eastern forest variant of North American bison also still roamed about many camp meeting areas during the early 1800s. See Ted Franklin Belue, *Long Hunt, The Death of the Buffalo East of the Mississippi* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996). Jacob Young mentions the availability of buffalo, along with deer and turkey, in his Kentucky camp meeting circuit of the early 1800s. See Cartwright, *Autobiography,* 243; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 31.

[136] Cartwright, *Autobiography,* 243.

if stored in various applications of fat, salt or charcoal. Unperishable honey sweetened winningly, as did abundant Southern molasses, along with various homemade jellies and jams. Freshly baked breads appeared, as did butter, which travelers glazed in salt for preservation. Valuable buttermilk could be drunk, used in cookery, and lasts much longer than fresh milk because the lactose has been turned into lactic acid. Campers also enjoyed the durable Southern and Appalachian milk-derivative known as clabber, which could function in combination with pearl ash--potassium carbonate, enjoying its heyday as a cooking ingredient during this period--as leavening in bread. The cheeses prepared on most farms as well as select fresh meats enticed palates, while campers could bring chickens to the events alive, easily slaughtering and then preparing them on the grounds. Attendees also caught and cooked fresh fish from the waterways near which the meetings often occurred.[137]

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[137] Fanny Newell, *Memoirs of Fanny Newell* (Springfield, MA: O. Scott and E. F. Newell, 1833), 53-54 (coffee); Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiii; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 30, 64-65; Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 44; West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 386-388, 688; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 34-35 (vegetables and wild game), 209, 216 (See esp. for consumption of "small beer" by devout in early years), 235-236 (whiskey in camp); Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 292; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 305-315 (coffee, diversity and richness of food); Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 221; Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 211-212 (note large-scale provision of beef for Texas camp meeting); Early, "Diary of John Early," 244-245 (alcohol abuse and voracious eating); Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 187-188, 201-202; Turpie, *My Own Times*, 104; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 105-106; Mary Randolph, *The Virginia Housewife: Or, Methodical Cook* (Baltimore: Plaskett & Cugle, 1838); Maria Eliza Rundell, *A New System of Domestic Cookery, Formed Upon Principles of Economy, and Adapted to the Use of Private Families* (Philadelphia: Benjamin C. Buzby, 1807); Susannah Carter, *The Frugal Housewife, or, Complete Woman Cook* (Philadelphia: James Carey, 1796); Eliza Leslie, *Directions for Cookery in its Various Branches* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1849); Mrs. T. J. Crowen, *Mrs. Crowen's American Lady's Cookery Book* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1847).
See also Joe Gray Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South: An Informal History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), esp. 37-51; John T. Edge, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, Vol. 7: Foodways* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), esp. 95-100, but also throughout; Frederick Douglas Opie, Hog & Hominy: Soul Food from Africa to America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 17-54; Joseph E. Dabney, *Smokehouse Ham, Spoon Bread, & Scuppernong*

Fresh fruit made welcome showings in its season, as did refreshing selections of melon. Obviously, salt maintained a position of great significance as flavoring, preservative and human necessity, though herbs and spices turned up regularly in the camp meeting larder, especially black and cayenne pepper. Applied liberally, cayenne imparted the so-called "deviled" quality to recipient foods and often found itself included in herbal medicine remedies. Other significant herbs or spices included thyme, marjoram, parsley, nutmeg, cinnamon and mint. As for potables, coffee and tea naturally found their way to camp meetings, where provisions for plentiful, clean water stood high in planning the events. Iced tea having not yet become the standard Southern libation it would become in later times, campers apparently drank more coffee than tea.[138] Cartwright, however, cites a scarcity of coffee in early Kentucky, where frontier folk instead enjoyed an "abundance" of teas made from "sage, bohea, cross-vine, spice, and sassafras…."[139] Beer, "small beer" (roughly one percent alcohol), and apple cider--the latter only procurable during certain months--received toleration in the earlier decades when Methodists principally targeted distilled spirits as sinful, but less in later decades

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Wine: Southern Appalachian Cooking (Nashville: Cumberland House, 1998); Robert L. Hall, "Food Crops, Medicinal Plants, and the Atlantic Slave Trade," in *African American Foodways: Explorations of History and Culture*, ed. Anne Bower (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); William C. Whitt, "Soul Food as Cultural Creation," in *African American Foodways*, ed. Bower; Anne Yentsch, "Excavating the South's African American Food History," in *African American Foodways*, ed. Bower; Samuel P. Arnold, *Eating up the Santa Fe Trail* (Denver: University of Colorado Press, 1990); Hilde Gabriel Lee, *Taste of the States: A Food History of America* (Charlottesville, VA: Howell Press, 1992); Alan Davidson, *The Oxford Companion to Food (*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Psyche A. Williams-Forson, *Building Houses out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food and Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Sandra Louise Oliver, *Food in Colonial and Federal America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005).

[138] *Ibid*. See also Alice Cooke Brown, *Early American Herb Recipes* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishers, 1966).

[139] Cartwright, *Autobiography,* 25.

as all alcohol increasingly earned their enmity.[140] Nevertheless, rye and bourbon whiskey, rum and hard cider, as well as the South's popular and pervasive peach brandy came into play at the gatherings as well, particularly among the less pious who attended for sociable reasons. In summation, sources make clear that--excepting certain fare consumed only in the colder months of the year such as shellfish, out of season game, or the abundant fresh meat of frosty months when processing grew safer--camp meetings included most foods that early Americans consumed at home.

Much of the rampant coming and going at Cane Ridge derived from inadequate food supplies, so future campers assiduously avoided such an unpleasant prospect.[141] As camp meetings evolved and assumed a more orderly schedule, mealtime emerged as a communally significant, carefully appointed event wherein everyone ate simultaneously in large, sociable groups.[142] Given the gendered division of labor that prevailed, skillful preparation of meals offered many women an opportunity to earn acclaim and

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[140] Concerning the permissible consumption of beer and cider among early nineteenth century Methodists, see especially Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 216. Historian Michael Quinn states, "The American church's general conference meetings did not include alcohol abstinence among their numerous regulations governing personal conduct, and also followed Wesley's emphasis by forbidding Methodists only from engaging in the sale and manufacture of distilled liquors from 1780 to 1812. Until 1848, their official Disciplines did not even mention beer or wine with regard to the rank-and-file's conduct, despite earlier restrictions on Methodist clergy with regard to alcohol." D. Michael Quinn, "Joseph Smith's Experience of a Methodist 'Camp Meeting' in 1820," *Dialogue* Paperless E-Paper 3, (December 2006). Further, evangelicals heavily supported the candidacies of William Henry Harrison, Henry Clay and other Whig politicians of the 1830s and 1840s who openly imbibed. As is well known, Harrison's campaign situated consumption of "hard cider" as central to the candidate's image, yet Methodists flocked to his standard and participated in camp meeting style rallies on his behalf. See Joe L. Kincheloe, Jr., "Transcending Role Restrictions: Women at Camp Meetings and Political Rallies," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 158-169.
[141] Conkin, *Cane Ridge*, 78-86, discusses food shortages at the Cane Ridge Revival.
[142] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107; Mead, *Manna*, 187-188; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 20-21; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 305-315.

demonstrate not only fulfillment of matriarchal duties but service to the Christian cause as well.[143] Despite the inevitable denunciations of gluttony by hardline Methodists who recollected Wesley's strictures against self-indulgence, clearly most camp meeting participants ate heartily and well, particularly as the gatherings accrued a celebratory atmosphere.[144] More than a few happily answered Psalm 78:19 in the affirmative: "Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" In the African American tents of her South Carolina meeting, Bremer witnessed tables laden with various meats prepared in diverse ways, alongside "puddings and tarts…a regular superfluity of meat and drink." [145] One visitor termed camp meetings "the most mammoth picnic available," offering "the best the land affords."[146] Bremer also noted myriad colorful booths with food and wares for sale.[147] Over time, camp meetings predictably underwent what sociologists call goal multiplication, advancing such latent functions as family, friend or church reunions, quasi-vacations and community or harvest festivals, all of which embraced convivial feasting. Moreover, the sharing of meals

[143] Mead, *Manna*, 84-85, 152-158, 187-188; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 561, 675, 688; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 64-65, 82; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307; Elaw, *Memoirs*, 29.

[144] Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 292; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 30. For an example of pious folk calling for inattention to food while at camp meeting, see Elaw, *Memoirs*, 45, wherein an elder declares: "Let this day be entirely spent in holiness to the Lord; let no table be spread; but let us abstain as much as possible from food, and see what the Lord will do for us this day; for this is the great day of battle against the old dragon and the powers of darkness." See also Early, "Diary of John Early," 244-245, wherein a minister denounces camp meeting participants who "began to eat and drink like it was a tavern and we had great confusion…."

[145] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 315.

[146] Quoted in Charles Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 215.

[147] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 306.

comprised a time-honored means of Christian fellowship that forged valuable bonds and displayed generosity.

Indeed, providing openhanded bounties of food for guests evolved into a favored activity for many meeting-goers eager to help others, host something of a religious party on the grounds, or earn notoriety for their culinary munificence. One such benefactor received accolades like the following: "Generous and genial, he dispensed a bounteous hospitality at home and at Camp-meetings for many years."[148] Even the otherwise ascetic Lorenzo Dow, who traveled about clad in donated rags and gave away any money acquired, bristled if others proved miserly with food: "[B]ut none asked me either to eat or drink, which was the greatest inhospitality I had met with for some time."[149] Camp meeting participants could shower hard working but humbly remunerated minsters with delicious food and drink to express gratitude and reward devout service. As Dow's friend and traveling companion acclaimed upon arriving preparatory to a frontier gathering: "They received us joyfully…and brought us bread and cakes, small beer, and many other good things, that we ate and drank together.[150]

Among the most forthcoming sources on camp matters not of a strictly religious nature, Anson West observed that camp meetings presented, "the grand and absorbing occasions in the sections in which they were held. There was one other thing common to all Camp-meetings of that time; the entertainment was free. The tent-holders entertained

[148] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 656.
[149] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 211, also see 206-207.
[150] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 216.

without charge all who attended."[151] A magnanimous couple, General D. C. Turrentine and his wife Caroline of Gadsden, Alabama earned fame not only as steadfast Methodists, but also for their unstinting generosity with "the crowds who had to be entertained at the Camp-meetings…as generous, and graceful a hospitality as was ever bestowed anywhere, by any one."[152] The wording of this observation from the 1840s suggests something further at work in wealthy Methodists' largesse at meetings: attraction of potential converts with a lavish fête that simultaneously promoted harmonious order and created a sense of 'elbow rubbing' egalitarianism in a markedly stratified, diverse and combustible situation. Henry David Thoreau fittingly quipped that "…a camp-meeting must be a singular combination of a prayer-meeting and a picnic."[153] One account of an 1823 meeting held on behalf of Cherokee Indians, for which many journeyed up to sixty miles, pointedly connects these facets by declaring the tribespeople to have been "comfortably lodged and generously fed…grand results followed."[154] Joining the nurturing character of food and spirituality in a felicitous metaphor for camp meetings, Reverend A. P. Mead quoted from Isaac Watts' popular hymn, "We're Marching to Zion":

> The men of grace have found
> Glory begun below,
> Celestial fruit on earthly ground,
> From faith and hope may grow.[155]

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[151] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561.
[152] *Ibid*, 688.
[153] Henry David Thoreau, *Cape Cod* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 37.
[154] West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 386-388.
[155] Mead, *Manna*, ix.

Through careful preparation, hard work and shrewd advertisement, camp meeting promoters drew the faithful and curious to the forest gatherings. Whether traveling by skiff, sloop or steam, in a luxurious chaise, rugged wagon or simple cart, legions of early Americans arrived at camp meetings with practical provisions in order not only to sleep soundly, eat well and enjoy themselves, but also to seek and worship God, to court celestial truth and eternal life. But as Mead and Thoreau remind us above, the prosaic demands of human life and the mystical exigencies of the human soul can never be fully alienated, not in this world at least. Hence, camp meeting preparation became a sanguine prayer and holy work, while journeys to the gatherings granted pilgrimage in a land far, far from Jerusalem or Canterbury and bereft of ancient Christian shrines. Effective camping and skillful cookery at the meetings earned admiration as Godly service to divinely ordained armies on the march, as well as one's family. Shared meals facilitated quasi-sacramental communion among the faithful and beckoned visitors to join the "City of God," the Wesleyan or Cumberland domain of faith and caring. However makeshift and provisional, the camp ground greeted new arrivals like a bustling, holy citadel of grace and light, one that rewarded the faithful with blessings, epiphanies, transfiguration and Christian fellowship. Further, the improvised and transitory communities established therein endowed *so many* American seekers with hope and faith, courage and conviction, as well as treasured memories that endured and sustained.

Chapter Three:
"All Things Work Together for Good": Worship Structure

For all the excitement of journeying to meeting sites, the joyous flurry of activity in setting up camp, greeting old and new friends, socializing and building relationships, or pursuing the manifold agendas ancillary to the gatherings, camp meetings' central and sacred purpose lay in worship, proselytization and affirmation of Christian faith. Toward this objective, clergy and camp meeting supporters carefully planned and advertised the events, fashioned customary itineraries and routines, refined formulas that served the sacred purposes (and discarded or discouraged ones that failed), delineated performative roles in pursuit of successful worship, and honed prayerful, sermonic, exhortative as well as musical elements of the dramatic forest services for optimal impact.[1] Although much spontaneity of spiritual expression certainly characterized camp meeting worship, these displays emerged from a typically well planned--albeit intentionally combustible and quasi-democratic--matrix. As a keenly perceptive Western traveler of the 1810s wrote:

[1] In support of these broad themes (worship, proselytization and affirmation of Christian belief), camp meetings' circuit riders maintained a relatively simple, straightforward and inviting theology. Although ecumenical to a degree (especially early on), camp meeting theology clearly acclaimed Arminian concepts such as prevenient grace, unlimited atonement and freedom of the will in accepting or rejecting God's offer of Grace made possible by Christ's substitutionary atonement. Some itinerant Methodists, such as the celebrated Lorenzo Dow, pointedly refuted and derided Calvinism. See, for example, Richard Nye Price, "Lorenzo and Peggy Dow," in *Holston Methodism: From Its Origin to the Present Time, Volume 2* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1912), 44-45.

"… none, but one who has seen, can imagine how profoundly the preachers have understood what produces effect, and how well they have practised [sic] upon it."[2]

Of course, all of this evolved in response to the phenomenon's unpredicted rise and unprecedented appeal, along with logistical problems that hampered early gatherings--such as the inadequacy of shelter, water, food and rules at the spectacular Cane Ridge event in 1801.[3] Never an official category of service within the Methodist denomination and overlapping in some traits with other types of services, early American camp meetings developed their own style, attributes, rhythm and devotional contours through relatively populist experimentation on the one hand, yet thoughtful management by evangelical leaders on the other.[4] In his genius for building a religious institution while simultaneously fomenting a powerful social movement, Methodism's indefatigable Bishop Francis Asbury (1745-1816) exuberantly supported camp meetings, encouraging publication of accounts extolling their revivalist success, and preaching at

[2] Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States: Or the Mississippi Valley, Vol. 1* (Cincinnati: E. H. Flint, 1828), 220.

[3] See Paul Keith Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 85-88. Conkin contends that Cane Ridge--the largest and most famous of all camp meetings--actually falls short of deserving the term "as church people later used the label," because of its poorly planned nature. "At a poorly located site, one lacking water, the informal campers enjoyed no prior planning, adhered to no regulations, and did not have available any tents or cabins (86)."

[4] Of course, no universally applicable style of worship can be ascribed to all Wesleyan followers of the 1800s, given services' ecclesiological, functional, situational, regional, racial, class, organizational and rural/urban diversity. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker undertook extensive study of various historical Methodist modes of worship; her conclusions emphasize Wesleyan freedom to innovate within certain expectations and consequent diversity. Moreover, her work concurs that antebellum camp meetings provided worship opportunities *particularly* suited to experimentation in structure, leadership and religious expression. See Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. 74-78.

all the gatherings he could attend during his legendary nomadic career.[5] From Methodism's bishops—Asbury's trusted corps of lieutenants--on down to the movement's resolute foot soldiers--his beloved itinerant ministers, better known as "circuit riders"— Francis Asbury charged everyone within his alternatingly democratic and managerial endeavor with promotion of camp meetings.[6] The salvific awakenings at camp meetings generated membership in local Methodist "classes," maintained by a local "class leader" and facilitated by the circuit riders when they could be physically present.[7] This growth and unification of the Wesleyan faithful eventually led to the founding of Methodist churches across the American landscape, an effect calculated by the visionary Asbury, and yet one that appeared--and truly ***was*** in many ways--quite democratic in nature.

Camp meeting time possessed structure, a structure dividing the long, golden arc of summer and autumn days--as well as deep, glowing nights of reverential song and

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[5] See William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), esp. 98-140; David W. Kling, "Second Great Awakening," in *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America,* ed. Michael McClymond (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 384-389; John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996); Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Edwin S. Gaustad, *Religion in America: History and Historiography* (Washington, D. C.: American Historical Association, 1973); John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 429-509.

[6] Along with Asbury, Methodism's ministers and bishops actually governed the denomination, whose General Conference assembled every four years and--among other functions--held the power to elect bishops. These bishops could station Methodist ministers anywhere they might help with the Wesleyan mission, and relocated them "every two or three years." See Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 23.

[7] Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814), 203-205; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 218-220.

impassioned services--into a world that bore little similarity to attendees' habitual routines, but contextualized and conferred relatively expectable temporal stations for the otherwise unpredictable outbreak of spiritual zeal and numinous occurrences. These stations of the day conducted participants from personal reflection to public expression, from the intimacy of family or small groups to the sweeping drama of large-scale devotion, from accomplishment of earthly necessities to opportunities for otherworldly transfiguration. Further, the compartmentalization of camp meeting days united participants in an intensely spiritual yet communally pursued quest, consecrated cherished moments and the span of hours or flow of days, all while creating "sacred time" that could be experienced in a way quite at odds from prosaic time. In addition, organizers often scheduled camp meetings in mid to late summer or early autumn following the "laying by" of crops or conclusion of the all-important harvest, periods associated with festivals of momentous religious and cultural significance for millennia. One legendary Methodist preacher likened the meetings to the ancient Jewish Feast of Tabernacles held just after harvest.[8] Flint and Howe relate that sponsors also preferred to undertake gatherings during the fullest phases of the moon, which of course provided light but likewise invoked humankind's ancient, timeless relationship with its eternal nighttime companion and once upon a time, celestial object of reverence and awe.[9]

[8] Bishop Matthew Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel; or, Face to Face with God*, ed. A. McLean and J. W. Eaton (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1869), xi.

[9] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 221; Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan and Co., 1852), 304; see also John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati:

Thus, camp meetings not only created sites of sacred space while attendant rituals comprised sacred actions, but also spawned sacred time. Following Mercia Eliade's famous argument about religious festivals, the forest gatherings abandoned mundane routine and pursued Christian piety in all of a day's contours, thus garbing sincere participants in the habiliments of Christ, His apostles and the early Church's 'mythical,' foundational as well as miraculous epoch, its *illud tempus*.. One sharp auditor recounted that, "It is a principal topic of the preacher to impress on his hearers the usefulness of such meetings, and to declare the similarity of them to the ancient practice of Christians."[10] Significantly, Eliade rebuked the view of such otherworldly and unique occurrences as merely escapist in nature, contending that the prosaic and everyday world received reconfiguration and proper cosmic conceptualization through participants' interaction with festivals' sacred time.[11] Accordingly, earnest camp meeting participants experienced transformation in this festival of sacred space, ritual and time, personal and collective redefinition through their encounter with Protestant Christianity's *illud tempus,* and profound reconfiguration of their and others' ordinary lives as a consequence.

The camp meeting day began around dawn with a trumpet blast (or likely something decidedly less than a blast in the case of inferior embouchures) to rouse campers from slumber, followed by another to summon them for morning prayers. Some

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Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 101; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans, Vol. 1* (New York: Whittaker, Treacher & Company, 1832), 140.

[10] N. A., "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251.

[11] See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987), 68-115 and 162-215.

meetings assembled everyone at the preachers' stand as soon as practicable, while others favored a succession of family devotions in the tents, some small group hymn singing, and then a communal gathering in the central worship area while select women prepared breakfast. Throughout the day, the trumpet—this fabled brass instrument with diverse Biblical connections--continued to signal the time for sequential activities such as worship in groups small or large, Bible study, prayer or meals, summoning not only the pious flock but also a sense of divine approbation and the urgency of evangelicalism on the march.[12]

While camp meetings' mass ceremonies naturally attracted more attention in accounts from the period and in subsequent historiography due to their unrivalled theatricality and frequently astonishing size, small assemblies played a formidable role

[12] For a fuller discussion of the trumpet's camp meeting role, see Chapter Five. For primary document examples of the trumpet's use in signaling the time for specific camp meeting activities, see Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of The Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour* (London: Self-Published, 1846), 20-21, 45; Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 312; Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: Or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 159; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107-108; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 142 & 145; Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales*, Volume 1 (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 190-191, 194; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251.
Biblically, trumpets appear first in Exodus, as a means by which God signals Moses and the Israelites: "And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice." (Exodus 19:19 KJV). In Joshua 6:1-27, the account of Jericho's fall features God commanding (Joshua 6:4): "And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets." Judges 7:1-25 presents an Israelite military victory wherein 300 trumpets combine martial and divine significance. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 references "the trump of God." A divine "last trump" holds enormous eschatological meaning in 1 Corinthians 15:52: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Finally, Revelations includes seven different angelic trumpet blasts, each portending an apocalyptic occurrence.

in camp meeting participants' spiritual journey, social interaction and self-definition.[13] In between collective rituals, smaller worship groups convened within the tents, about the campground, in pilgrims' temporary wagon homes, or in roving choruses that seem to have been virtually unceasing in many cases.[14] As Quinn and Wright recorded of the early years: "The intervals were often occupied with prayer meetings at the stand, or in several of the tents, where mourners or earnest seekers of salvation were embraced in the praying circle—cared for and pointed to the Savior of sinners."[15] According to a leading Methodist, this remained true toward the end of the antebellum period as well: "The intervals between the public services are spent, in many tents, in prayer and song and religious conversation, and those who are seeking salvation find earnest friends to aide them, counsellors to instruct them, sympathetic hearts to pray for them..."[16] Although countless dramatic conversions took place in the spectacular collective observances, many also occurred in diminutive gatherings, tent meetings, or even in private consultation with preachers, exhorters or devout fellow campers.[17] While camp meeting

[13] For a useful review of social scientific theories concerning small group behavior, see Marshall Scott Poole and Andrea B. Hollingshead, eds., *Theories of Small Groups: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004).

[14] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 190; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 169; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn,* 108; Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xviii; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251.

[15] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn,* 108.

[16] Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xviii.

[17] John McLean, *A Sketch of the Life of Reverend John Collins* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Power, 1849), 115-116; H. M. Rulison, *Brother Mason, the Circuit Rider: or, Ten Years a Methodist Preacher* (Cincinnati: Queen City Publishing House, 1858), 45-51. The last source provides a very odd account of Methodist camp meeting clergy being interrogated quite intelligently by a seemingly rough, uncouth man who turns out to be a former attorney. It nevertheless illustrates the high level of individual attention seekers received in these settings.

preachers earned much-deserved notoriety for their arduous travels, selfless grace and electrifying sermons, thousands of ordinary folks ministered to one another as well, staunchly validating the radical Protestant mission of sacerdotal democratization.

Moreover, pious exchange within constituent groups forged lasting relationships that proved critical to the larger services, future camp meetings and the growth of churches, while many unlikely female, African American, Native American and youthful leaders first found their voices in these less intimidating venues.[18] Peter Jones, also known by his Ojibwa name Kah-ke-wa-quo-nā-by, provides a superb example of this in his published journal. Although half Welsh through his surveyor father, Kah-ke-wa-quo-nā-by grew up immersed in his mother's native culture and journeyed to his first camp meeting as a spiritually yearning but frightened and timid young man. During this Canadian gathering, other participants' concern and counsel in small circles devoted to prayerful encouragement not only facilitated Jones' happy conversion to the Methodist faith but likewise elicited his triumphant voice in prayer and rejoicing. Furthermore, this propelled the twenty-one year old Ojibwa into a remarkable career as a Methodist

[18] See, for example, Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307-315; Reverend Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden; New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1872), 88; N. A., "Religious Intelligence: THE REPORT of the Committee of the Synod, of the Cumberland Presbyterian…," *Nashville Whig*, October 31, 1820; Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 489-490; Reverend Peter Jones, *Life and Journals of Kah-ke-wa-quo-nā-by: (Rev. Peter Jones), Wesleyan Missionary* (Toronto: Anson Green, 1860), 9-14; Andrew Manship, *Thirteen Years' Experience in the Itinerancy* (Philadelphia: Higgins & Perkinpine, 1856), 20. Also see Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: One World Books, 2004), 44-45, for a discussion of camp meetings' possible influence on Harriet Tubman and other militant African Americans. Also cf. Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 1977), 49-50.

clergyman, chief among his people, translator, diplomat, influential Canadian political figure and even emissary to British monarchs William IV and Victoria.[19]

Smaller assemblages conferred an intimacy of exchange that could be tender or highly charged, while also furnishing an opportunity for clerical visits, quieter reflection, Biblical teaching, testimonies, prayer, songcraft and nurturing guidance.[20] As one circuit rider averred, "A powerful work was going on in the tents…."[21] Nor did campground theatrics, exclamatory devotions or demonstrative conviction and conversion abate at tent flaps or the small circles' edges, a fact witnessed by accounts of "penitents writhing in anguish, crying aloud to God for mercy; souls just born into the kingdom shouting in ecstasies and telling their raptures all abroad…."[22] A New York journalist reported, "After the congregation breaks up, they separate into smaller circles, and continue in numbers over the ground, day and night, influenced with an equal degree of extravagant zeal. I have frequently seen from one to six in these small circles, lying sometimes motionless; and others apparently in convulsions."[23] Ever censorious of American culture, English spectator Frances Trollope found tent worship as thoroughly objectionable in its intensity as the large-scale rites, describing the roughly thirty persons

[19] Jones, *Life and Journals of Kah-ke-wa-quo-nā-by,* esp. 9-14 for the account of his first camp meeting; Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) & the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).
[20] *Ibid*; Reed and Matheson*, Narrative of the Visit*, 190; Rulison, *Brother Mason*, 45-51; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn,* 108; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 65; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307-315; Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xi-xviii; Rev. A. P. Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness* (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 52.
[21] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 65.
[22] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 108.
[23] "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251.

she discovered in a camp meeting tent as engaged in varieties of (what she depicted as) maniacal, clamorous, primitive, lascivious, "wild, and …terrible" behavior. Trollope nonetheless deigned to categorize much of this loosely as types of "praying, preaching, singing, and lamentation."[24]

Retreat to the tents also permitted continuation of observances during rainstorms and allowed African Americans to worship beyond white scrutiny.[25] Undeterred by inclement weather, a devoted proponent of the gatherings explained: "The rain continues. No public services this afternoon, but the time is not lost, neither are the brethren discouraged. There is 'Elisha's' voice in prayer…He will have a prayer meeting in his tent if it is the only one on the ground."[26] Walking unannounced into an African American tent on a sultry South Carolina evening of the 1850s, Fredrika Bremer surprised the dwelling's assemblage of black women engaged in a highly animated form of "holy dance" celebrating one of their own experiencing conversion. Evidencing the culturally African and independent nature of the dance, Bremer recorded, "This dancing, however, having been forbidden by the preachers, ceased immediately on our entering the tent."[27]

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[24] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 140-142.
[25] On rainy situations, see Richard Beard, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some of the Early Ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874), 294-295; Mead, *Manna*, 159-161, 187-188, 197, 203. Regarding African Americans, see Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life*, 19-20, 46; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 140-142; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 311.
[26] Mead, *Manna*, 159.
[27] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 311.

Autonomous African American preaching, song and exhortation clearly prevailed in these settings as well.[28]

Though some meetings featured three major services per day, many offered four. The paramount devotions of the day typically occurred at eleven (sometimes ten) in the morning, featuring the headlining clergy and their foremost sermonizing efforts, while of all the day's events most resembling traditional Protestant 'low church' services. In many meetings, an early collective assembly at 7:00 or 8:00 A. M. preceded this, while mid-afternoon (frequently 2:00 or 3:00) and evening (after dinner or beginning at dusk) ceremonies followed.[29] Whereas late morning often presented the most significant sermons and doctrinal explorations, nighttime worship elicited many of camp meetings' most intense and mystical occurrences.[30] Early morning rites seem especially to have served a unifying, inspirational and guiding purpose, setting a tone for the day, as in A. P. Mead's account:

> The lamps were lit and their welcome light gleamed through the darkness, and the people assembled in front of the stand to join in the first services. A few words of exhortation from Dr. Peck: "Let us draw near the stand and get into a devout frame of mind. Our object is to do good and get good. Let us give ourselves to prayer at once, and in right

[28] *Ibid*; Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Printed and Published for the Author, 1849), 37; Graham R. Hodges, "Introduction," *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 12-13; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 140-142; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 192-193; Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiii.

[29] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107-108; David Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1903), 104-105; N. A., "Camp Meeting," *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, September 16, 1805; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 312; N. A., "Two Camp Meetings" *Barnstable Journal*, via *Boston Courier*, August 16, 1830; Mead, *Manna*, 82, 109; "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 1809): pp. 250-251; Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life*, 81; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 195-197; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 159.

[30] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 303-305; William Brown, *America: A Four Years' Residence in the United States and Canada* (Leeds, U. K.: Kemplay and Bolland, 1849), 43-44.

> good earnest begin the meeting. It becomes us to set an example of earnestness and sobriety, that others may not be incited to levity or neglect. Let us…secure the blessing of God. For this we have left our homes and come to worship beneath these trees. It is salvation we want.[31]

Afternoon gatherings apparently adhered to a more casual and relaxed attitude, with highly democratic participation. In contrast to the clerically and sermonically-oriented late morning services (which nonetheless—like all camp meeting activities--partook considerably of congregational involvement), the afternoon assemblies often began with egalitarian handshakes all about—affirming unity and brotherhood/sisterhood—followed by dozens of short testimonies or Bible verses voiced by worshipers and then perhaps briefly annotated from the preacher's stand. As many as three or four dozen of these contributions could happen in thirty minutes, thus maximizing audience involvement and strongly democratizing this particular stretch of sacred camp meeting time.[32] Popular delivery of holy speech in this setting as well as tent or small gathering devotions certainly involved a concerted democratization of worship, yet also an effort to groom celebrants for decidedly more intense expressions of religious enthusiasm, conviction and ecstasy in the markedly supernaturalized and theatrical evening services.

Nighttime worship cogently imparted sacralization to camp meetings, as attested by an abundance of numinous and uncanny occurrences, along with reports of a deeply

[31] Mead, *Manna*, 59-60.
[32] Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times*, 104-105.

mystical mood and pervading sense of supernaturalism. Evening sermons could be shorter, with less complexity and more directness than those of the late morning gathering, more foreboding than the sanguine themes struck in the early morning or afternoon, while music and exhortation figured prominently in the urgently proselytic efforts. Even if preaching continued throughout the evening, with one pulpit performer following another as the previous one tired, nighttime sermonizing often contributed only one element of a compelling symphony of evangelical sound issuing from not only preaching, but also exhortation, song, prayer and testimony, to say nothing of the lamentation and exultation—some of it decidedly raucous albeit non-verbal—among the participants, and socializing among the less pious.[33] As a frequenter of Hoosier meetings from the 1830s forward remembered, "In the evening there was a short discourse, followed by prayers and fervid exhortations. The mourners or seekers gathered around the preacher's stand, the elder members of the church mingling with them. Their utterances were loud, irregular and much broken; there were devout ejaculations, singing and shouting."[34] Since much of what occurred during the entire gamut of camp meeting observances earned attribution as the work of God, the light of Christ and the sweeping effects of the Holy Spirit, many ministers tolerated a high degree of ancillary activity and

[33] John M. Duncan, *Travels through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 & 1819, Two Volumes, Vol. II* (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1823), 370-371; Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times*, 104-105; Hiram Atwill Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter: The Noted Parson of the Texas Frontier* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1888), 101-103; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 308; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 188-190; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 139-145; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 108.

[34] Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times*, 105.

sound.[35] Moreover, at all services but especially those after darkness fell, sermonizers expected that exhorters, elders and other clerics would supplement the evangelical preaching with personal appeals, reproach and encouragement among those under conviction.[36]

Another variation in camp meetings' temporal structure derived from the differences among days of the week. With so many gatherings inaugurated on Thursdays, the day furnished an important social occasion for rekindling established relationships and greeting new acquaintances, for setting the proper tone of religious propriety and sacred purpose, as well as dealing with various last minute issues of organization and scheduling. Fridays often witnessed the initial mass observations along with additional arrivals and multiplying crowds for worship, though with decorum hopefully prevailing even as the weekend drew nigh.[37] Saturdays brought even larger crowds but attracted by far the greatest number of casual observers, cultural tourists, mocking antagonists, hard-drinking "rowdies," and others interested in the gatherings' more secular and profane possibilities.[38] Concerning this problem, Jacob Young observed

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[35] See Chapter Five for an extensive consideration of camp meeting sound.

[36] Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times*, 104-105; Duncan, *Travels*, 370-371; Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 101-103; Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 142-145.

[37] John Atkinson, *Centennial History of American Methodism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston & Snowe, 1884), 493-494; "Camp Meeting," *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina Weekly Advertiser*, September 16, 1805; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 169; N. A., "A Methodist Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), September 8, 1808.

[38] See Chapter Eight for a discussion of the "rowdies," who attended in order to drink, disrupt, mock, gamble, race horses, fight and generally be a nuisance. Camp meetings tolerated the miscreants to an extent, however, in the interest of saving lost souls. Indeed, not a few camp meeting ministers of note first attended as rowdies. See Chapter Eight also for an explanation of less objectionable but nonetheless relatively secular activities undertaken by campers.

of an 1812 Pennsylvania meeting, "The congregation was unusually large, and on Saturday evening that class of citizens termed rowdies were very troublesome. It put the guard to all they knew to keep any kind of order."[39] Sundays generally shed many of those interested in mere entertainment or misbehavior (with some malefactors no doubt sleeping off the excesses of Saturday), evinced a calmer mood, and offered the most propitious occasion for sharing Holy Communion.[40] Mondays, Tuesdays or sometimes Wednesdays—depending on a gathering's duration—usually served as a valedictory day of buoyant but tearful departures, a day when so many journeyed homeward sustained by indelible memories, altered perspectives and new or renewed spiritual self-definitions.[41]

Like a dynamo at the core of revival, centripetally drawing participants and attention inward while impelling waves of contagious excitement and phenomenal energy outward, camp meetings' central services relied upon five basic structural elements in dialectical relationship with audience participation: Bible readings or recitations, prayer and hymn-singing, exhortation and preaching. None of this was new. Indeed, much of it dated back centuries and across an ocean to earliest Protestant circles, while some elements extended into centuries long before Martin Luther left his

[39] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 291-292.
[40] *Ibid*; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 234.
[41] "A Methodist Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), September 8, 1808; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 158-160, 196-197; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 253.

monastery or John Calvin fled to Switzerland. Yet, in the forests and fields of rural nineteenth century America, these hallowed elements combined, indeed *collided* with the deep spiritual yearnings and complex social anxieties besetting countless Americans to produce a combustible, enthralling and ferociously persuasive religious phenomenon. Historians should view these structural elements as potent ***media*** for communication and performance, with all the multifarious possibilities inherent in vibrant social media: maintenance of traditions and values, yes, but also personal expression and catharsis, cultural innovation and reconceptualization, to say nothing of socio-political experimentation of a potentially revolutionary magnitude. Not least among these appeared signal moments in the creation of a new American culture, one very different from the foregoing eighteenth century. This emerging culture—fostered by, reflected in and entwined with camp meetings--valued nimble extemporization and magnetic personalities, accessible ideas about profound issues, practical yet mystical religion, emotionally charged expression, populist leaders drawn from ordinary circumstances, egalitarian interaction and democratic participation. Much of this heralded an evolving national ethos concerning how Americans would assemble and act in groups, how they would join and conduct social movements, as well as how they would enact self-definition and embrace self-understanding.

Faithful to Protestant heritage and early American culture, camp meetings featured the Bible prominently, although preachers, exhorters and others—given the constraints of lighting and literacy—at least as often recited verses from memory as read

them. In addition to practicality, recitation from memory displayed hard-won familiarity with the Word and conferred credibility upon the performers' faith, exhortation, or preaching.[42] Some camp meeting figures earned particular fame for their ability to recall and recite felicitous passages with thespian flair and perfect timing. "Camp Meeting John" Allen drew enduring admiration with his "strikingly impressive and natural" recitations, which "seemed like new inspirations, and charmed alike the cultivated and rude auditors by the wonderful elocution not taught in schools."[43] Any effort to designate particular passages or themes as more significant than others runs considerable risk, for, as Perry Miller observed, ""The Old Testament is truly so omnipresent in the American culture of 1800 or 1820 that historians have as much difficulty taking cognizance of it as of the air people breathed."[44] We should readily accede the same to be true for the New Testament among nineteenth century evangelicals. Nevertheless, after the half decade or so of camp meetings' initial stage, wherein Calvinist Presbyterians or Baptists regularly stood alongside Methodists in ecumenical efforts, Arminian concepts of prevenient grace, free will and justification by faith constituted significant theological considerations in choosing Scripture for camp meeting recitation.[45] Beyond that, Biblical selections

[42] American Protestants overwhelmingly relied upon various editions of The King James Version, in which many white children of the early republic pursued the goal of literacy. McGuffey's and other such "classroom readers" became available during the 1830s and featured Biblical readings. Thus, familiarity with the Bible ran very high. See Christopher G. Bates, *The Early Republic and Antebellum America: An Encyclopedia of Social, Political, Cultural, and Economic History* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 135.

[43] Stephen Allen, *The Life of Rev. John Allen, Better Known as "Camp-meeting John"* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1888), 43.

[44] Perry Miller, "The Garden of Eden and the Deacon's Meadow," *American Heritage 7*, no. 1 (Dec 1955): 54.

[45] Of particular importance here, Deuteronomy 30:6; Psalms 130:8; Ezekiel 36:25, 29; Matthew 5:48, 22:37; Luke 1:69; John 17:20-23; John 3:16; Romans 8:3-4; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Ephesians 3:14; 5:25-27; 1 Thessalonians

emphasized God's majesty and love along with His righteousness and potential wrath, Christ's holy mission and atoning death, His resurrection and imminent return, all directed toward the urgent mission animating the forest gatherings: conversion of souls for salvation.[46] Sacred verses explaining God's historical role and thereby affirming cosmic order, or Scriptures recounting Biblical lessons that resonated with American life or illuminated harrowing religious struggle became definite favorites, also.[47] Pursuing salient Wesleyan themes, love of one's fellow humans and the potential for Entire

5:23; Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 3:8; 4:17 received frequent citation. For biblical as well as cultural foundations of American theologies, see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. 227-364; *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* ((Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

[46] For examples, see Job 26:1, 1 Corinthians 6:14 and Psalm 136:12 on God's majestic power. Regarding God's bountiful love for humanity, favorites seem to have encompassed Romans 5:8 & 8:35-39; of course, John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5; Zephaniah 3:17; 1 Peter 5:6-7; and Psalm 86:15. The Psalms abound with affirmations of God's righteousness, not least including Psalm 36:6, 71:19, 97:2, 111:3, 119:137 & 142, 129:4, 145:17; also on God's righteous ways cf. Deuteronomy 32:4; Isaiah 5:16, 45:21, 41:10, 51:8; Jeremiah 12:1; Zephaniah 3:5; Job 37:23; 1 Samuel 12:7; John 17:25; Romans 3:5; Revelation 15:3. God's potential anger and fierce judgment received oft-cited expression in Romans 1:18, 1:32, 2:5; Galatians 6:7; Zephaniah 2:3; Luke 3:7; Isaiah 66:15-16; John 3:36; 1 Thessalonians 5:9 & 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. Christ's mission received elaboration and confirmation in passages such as Matthew 1:21, 4:17, 20:28; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:18 & 43, 19:10, while His atoning sacrifice was emphasized through usage of 1 John 3:11-13, 4:10, 5:37-38, 6:38, 7:29, 12:31, 17:8 & 26; 18:37; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 Peter 1:18-20; Romans 5:6. Concerning the resurrection of Christ, ministers celebrated and confirmed with Luke 24:2-3; 1 Corinthians 15:12-19; John 11:25-26; Peter 1:3-4; Acts 4:33; Matthew 27:52-54. The imminent return of Christ to Earth received affirmation throughout much of Matthew 24, as well as in Matthew 16:27, 25:13 & 31-46; Mark 8:38; John 14:1-3; Luke 12:37-40, 17:28-30, 21:34-36; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 & 5:2; plus Revelation 22:12.

[47] See John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015). Cf. also Zechariah 4:6; 2 Chronicles 20:6; Isaiah 40:23; Proverbs 16:9; and Romans 8:28 on God's role in history, whereas themes of religious struggle and divine support in such times could be found in Psalms 9:9-10, 23:1-6, 27:1-3, 32:7-8; Joshua 1:9; 1 Samuel 2:26; Jeremiah 17:7-8; Isaiah 41:10; Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:10; Hebrews 6:1; 2 Peter 1:5-6, 3:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, 9:10 & 12:9-10; Ephesians 4:15; Acts 9:22; Luke 1:80; Romans 5:3-5; and James 1:12.

Sanctification (also known as the Baptism of the Holy Spirit) received support through Biblical citations frequently as well.[48]

In a heavily oral culture where many lacked reading abilities or even access to a physical Bible, camp meetings additionally provided valuable opportunities to learn Scriptural passages through hearing them. Harriet Beecher Stowe expressed this hope through one of her characters, Tiff, in *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp.* Challenged to quote something he learned at camp meeting, the enslaved Tiff shrewdly recites Matthew 11:28 on the spot: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."[49] Of course, many circuit preachers' Bible tutelage rested principally upon self-directed study or aural learning. Reverend Alfred Brunson spoke of the many evenings he spent studying the Word under any available moonlight.[50] Upon beginning his ministry, Texas' A. J. Potter could not read well and lacked any ability to write. Along with his conversion, however, arrived a "thirst for learning" that "excited zealous effort to acquire that knowledge so essential to qualify him for his future triumphs" as a legendary frontier revivalist.[51] Eulogizing the popular camp meeting preacher Daniel

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[48] For examples regarding love of humanity, see Luke 6:31, 35; Romans 12:9 and 13:10; Mark 12:31; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 4:8; 1 John 3:16-18, 4: 7-8, 18-19 & 15:13; Ephesians 5:25, 33; Colossians 3:14; Proverbs 10:12 & 17:17. On the topic of Entire Sanctification, cf. Hebrews 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 John 4:17-18; Philippians 2:5; 2 Corinthians 1:15; Acts 1:5 & 8, 2:4, 15:9. The latter list of Scripture comes from the following very useful article on the subject. See George Allen Turner, "The Baptism of the Holy Spirit in the Wesleyan Tradition," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 14, no. 1 (1979): 60. Cf. also Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996), esp. 1-77.

[49] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: a Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009, 1856), 97.

[50] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 64.

[51] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 107-109.

Asbury, who spent years of his youth among the Shawnee after capture by the tribe, a nineteenth century Methodist historian conceded,

> …of the rules of rhetoric and logic, he was as ignorant as he was of grammar. And yet he was an able expositor of the word of God. He studied the Bible most diligently and delighted especially in exhibiting its doctrinal truths…Some of his forms of expression, and his pronunciation, might have been improved, but his general style and manner in the pulpit were by no means unacceptable to persons of cultivated minds.[52]

Though most itinerants possessed literacy if not institutional education, some lacked even that. Considered one of the most rivetingly effective preachers ever to ascend a camp meeting stand, the popular Harry Hoosier neither read nor wrote, but deftly wove remembered Bible passages into his celebrated sermons.[53]

Prayer tended to be poignant, extemporaneous, and an extension of conversion efforts, plus a democratic act readily performed by many people besides the ministry.[54] Itinerant preacher John Collins even persuaded an unconverted but sincere seeker of faith to pray for another unconverted man at an Ohio camp meeting. In this experiment that would have profoundly gratified Martin Luther, the seeker essentially converted himself,

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[52] Reverend Albert M. Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), 265-266.

[53] Francis Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church: From August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815, In Three Volumes* (New York: N. Bangs & T. Mason, 1821), 294, 328 and 336; Hatch, *Democratization*, 106-134; Abel Stevens, *A Compendious History of American Methodism* (New York: Hunt & Eaton; Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1867), 246; Stephen H. Webb, "Introducing Black Harry Hoosier: The History Behind Indiana's Namesake," *Indiana Magazine of History* 98 (March 2002): 30-41; William D. Piersen, "The Origin of the Word 'Hoosier': A New Interpretation," *Indiana Magazine* of *History* 91 (June 1998): 189-96.

[54] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 88; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 263; Mead, *Manna*, 75-76, 83; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 201; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 107-108.

with--any Wesleyan parson would have stipulated—divine assistance.[55] Intense supplications on behalf of souls hanging perilously between salvation and destruction galvanized camp meetings' most climactic moments. Further, most camp meeting devotees perceived prayer as a vital means of sacralizing proceedings, of summoning God's favor and inviting the Holy Spirit into the woodland assemblies.[56] Camp meeting prayers' instrumental, performative and intentionally emotive character received apt summation in an 1850s encomium to Reverend B. W. Gorham's effective and moving style of outdoor supplication:

> Reader, have you ever felt your heart agitated with strong and singular emotions…? At such times his voice has a peculiar sweetness, and its intonations are most moving. You feel your whole being arrested. His voice rises into what appears to be a succession of climaxes…until the effects are really overpowering; and when he reaches the loftiest point…then the boldness of faith defies doubt…claims the blessing, and the responses of those who have gone up, up, up with him, tell that the baptism has come upon them—upon all.[57]

Prayer frequently provided an absorbing, collectivizing and sanctifying coda to sermons as well. As a preacher ended his message, everyone joined in a heartfelt petition to God that often included requests for the sermon to anchor in listeners' hearts and transform lives, for all present to search their souls for righteousness and divine direction, and above all for the unconverted to heed the prevenient grace at work and accept Jesus's

[55] McLean, *Life of Reverend Collins*, 91-93.
[56] Barlow Weed Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual: A Practical Book for the Camp Ground; in Two Parts* (Boston: H. V. Degen, 1854), 161; Mead, *Manna*, 97.
[57] Mead, *Manna*, 213.

salvific atonement. A visiting clergyman described the powerful scene as a sermon ended and the moment for prayer drew nigh:

> Every moment, the silence, the stillness, became more solemn and overpowering. Now, here and there, might be heard suppressed sobbing arising on the silence. But it could be suppressed no longer—the fountains of feeling were burst open, and one universal wail sprung from the people and ministers, while the whole mass sunk down on their knees, as if imploring some one [sic] to pray…The presiding pastor arose, and, throwing his arms around my neck, exclaimed, 'Pray, brother, pray!...Oh, pray, brother, pray for us!'[58]

Demonstrating the celebrity attached to camp meeting performers, some preachers and exhorters secured special fame and folkloric status for their praying talents. During his remarkable travels in the wilds of early 1830s Texas, camp meeting regular Reverend Sumner Bacon eluded death at the hands of vicious outlaws through his phenomenally moving ability to pray creatively. Permitted a moment of prayer before his promised murder, Bacon unfurled a passionate prayer on behalf of his captors, not himself, only to discover the bandits gone when he opened his eyes afterward. According to Texas legend, when later ridiculed for this uncharacteristic show of mercy, the outlaw gang's leader responded indignantly: "I would not hurt a hair of that man's head for this cabin filled with gold."[59]

Musically, camp meetings forged a rich amalgam of traditions, styles and innovations, in the latter case spawning a genre of hymns and ballads that came to be known as "camp meeting songs," a performative genus that has wielded substantial

[58] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 195-196.
[59] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 376-377.

influence on American evangelical worship.[60] Indeed, historian of liturgy James White argues that "frontier worship," epitomized by camp meetings and Finney's frequently derivative "New Measures," came to define evangelical services' style and format in America from the antebellum period down to the present, not least with respect to musical worship.[61] On the function of collective song in Protestant worship, Mark Noll asserts, "For the early generations of evangelicals, hymn singing became almost sacramental. It was the one physical activity that all evangelicals shared, and it was the one experience that bound them most closely together with each other."[62] Furthermore, Stephen Marini situates evangelical hymnody as American culture's most fundamental and influential aggregate of religious "texts" from the colonial period through today, continually circulating in "an unending round of living oral tradition."[63]

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[60] Paul Westermeyer, *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 292; Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1993).

[61] James F. White, *Christian Worship in North America* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 159-161. One of the deans of American popular music history, Russell Sanjek credited camp meeting hymnody and other democratic, revival-oriented musical expressions of nineteenth century Methodists and Baptists with generating a "major viable popular-religious-music publishing industry" of enormous impact on American musical culture. See Russell Sanjek, *American Popular Music and Its Business: The First Four Hundred Years, Volume II: From 1790 to 1909* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 180. In his preface to the *Plymouth Collection of Hymns*, Henry Ward Beecher, among the most prominent nineteenth century arbiters of American worship standards, wrote that, "not the least excellent are the popular revival melodies, which, though often excluded from classic collections of music, have never been driven out from among the people." See Henry Ward Beecher, "Introduction," *Plymouth Collection of Hymns: for the Use of Christian Congregations* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1869), vi.

[62] Mark Noll, "The Defining Role of Hymns in Early Evangelicalism" in *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology*, ed. Richard Mouw and Mark Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 4.

[63] Stephen Marini, "Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American Popular Religion," *Church History* 71, no. 2 (June 2002): 273.

Among the many camp meeting attendees with limited literacy, hymns—through their frequent repetition and because worshipers themselves actually vocalized the words—functioned as indispensable, highly effective means of transmitting, explaining or inculcating theological and denominational concepts.[64] This plainly followed John Wesley's philosophy of hymnody as expressed in his 1780 hymn collection's preface: "So that this book is, in effect, a little body of experimental and practical divinity."[65] Given camp meeting hymns' placement at critical, emotional junctures in the services and the texts' partnership with enjoyable, memorable music, they often and not at all surprisingly became forever etched in evangelicals' minds and spirits. Gifted as they were with a powerfully intuitive folk psychology and a penchant for grandly theatrical methods, frontier preachers keenly understood hymns' significance not only in this educational regard, but also in terms of their powerful role in preparing auditors and singers emotionally for the evangelical process of salvation while sustaining conviction and piety among the already converted.[66]

Procedurally, ministers or exhorters as a rule "lined out" the lyrics of a song; that is, they spoke or more typically sang a section that congregants then repeated, allowing people who lacked literacy or a hymnal--of very limited utility in the frequent nighttime

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[64] *Ibid.*

[65] Reverend John Wesley, "Preface," *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1889, 1780), n. p., Christian Classics Ethereal Library website, http://www.ccel.org/w/wesley/hymn/jw.html (accessed June 8, 2014).

[66] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 266-267; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307-308, 315; Brown, *Four Years Residence,* 43; Mead, *Manna*, 61, 142, 160, 199-200; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 190.

services anyway--to join in and learn the verses.[67] Of course, this liturgical strategy and necessity unsurprisingly promoted hymns with simpler, more readily memorable lyrics. As a practice, "lining out" dates back to seventeenth century New England and Britain as a solution for worship situations with illiterate congregants and shortages of hymnbooks.[68] In camp meetings, the practice became valorized as decidedly preferable to "regular singing," the term by which congregational song from hymnbooks was known. Because of the time lag created by lining out and repeating, this choral style

[67] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 221-222

[68] Linda R. Ruggles, "The Regular Singing Controversy: The Case Against Lining-Out," *The Early America Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 1997): n. p., Archiving Early America Website, http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/fall97/sing.html (accessed June 5, 2014).

The custom of lining out obtained official standing in the (Parliament endorsed) Westminster Assembly's *Directory for Public Worship* of 1645, which replaced Britain's supposedly Catholicism-tainted *Book of Common Prayer*. Drawing heavily on John Knox's Presbyterian *Book of Common Order*, which received official adoption in Scotland during 1564, the *Directory* proclaimed, "That the whole congregation may join herein, every one that can read is to have a psalm-book, and all others, not disabled by age or otherwise, are to be exhorted to learn to read. But for the present, where many in the congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the minister or some other fit person appointed by him and the other ruling officers, do read the psalm line by line, before the singing thereof." See "Of Singing of Psalms," quoted in David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell, eds., *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 224.

Researchers have identified that "lining out," also known in some locales as "the old way of singing," persisted through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in rural areas of Britain such as the Gaelic Highlands and throughout the 1900s among some white churches of the Southern Appalachians and African American congregations in the Deep South, where it is sometimes called "Dr. Watts Singing" in reference to the influential and beloved British hymnodist Isaac Watts. See Nicholas Temperley, "The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 1981): 511-544, esp. 512.

This type of songcraft also goes by such names as "Deaconing" (more common in England), "Long Meter" and simply "Dr. Watts" (especially among African Americans), as well as "surge-singing" and "surging" (George Pullen Jackson's phrases denoting the rhythmic and dynamic elasticity of the style among African Americans). For these terms, see William H. Tallmadge, "Dr. Watts and Mahalia Jackson - The Development, Decline, and Survival of a Folk Style in America," *Ethnomusicology* 5, no. 2 (May 1961): 95. Cf. also Nicholas Temperley's monumental *The Music of the English Parish Church*, *2 vols.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 91-96; Robert M. Stevenson, *Protestant Church Music in America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 27; William H. Tallmadge, "Baptist Monophonic and Heterophonic Hymnody in Southern Appalachia," *Yearbook for Inter-American Musical Research* 11 (1975), 103-136.

tended to slow the musical tempo, which increased improvisational opportunities. The enhanced improvisational avenues in turn democratized camp meeting music by encouraging talented or adventurous singers to add new elements. It also created more openings for African American influence, especially since that musical tradition strongly emphasized improvisation.[69]

Historically acknowledged for their devotion to sung worship and exuberance in performing it, early American Methodists employed numerous hymns from the British Protestant repertoire, particularly those of Isaac Watts and the Wesleys, along with some German contributions. [70] British hymnodists joined with the works—lyrical and

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[69] In his work on the rise of African American Gospel music, Horace Clarence Boyer writes, "Improvisation is the rule rather than the exception, a tradition rooted in the slow, languorous eighteenth and nineteenth-century hymns of Isaac Watts and others." Horace Clarence Boyer, "Gospel Music," *Music Educators Journal* 64, no. 9 (May 1978): 35. See also Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 77; Liam Riordan, "Passing as Black/Passing as Christian: African-American Religious Autonomy in Early Republican Delaware," *Pennsylvania History* 64, *EMPIRE, SOCIETY, AND LABOR: Essays in Honor of Richard S. Dunn* (Summer 1997): 219-220.

Echoing George Pullen Jackson's observation that camp meeting choruses provide "the most American of all the American folk hymns," Ellen Jane Lorenz contends that "Negro spirituals have their African flavor, the 'white spirituals' their British origins. But the campmeeting choruses flowered spontaneously in the unplowed soil of the American frontier of 1800-1840." See Ellen Jane Lorenz, *Glory, Hallelujah! The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual* (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1980), 13; George Pullen Jackson, *Another Sheaf of White Spirituals* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), 285.

While Lorenz here no doubt engages in hyperbole that neglects the undeniable influence of both traditions mentioned on the camp meeting songs, her statement rightly underscores the populist creativity and propitious departure from the musical past achieved by camp meetings hymnody. Reflecting the genre's democratic nature, Bernard Weisberger argued that camp meeting hymns' simplicity and accessibility offered yet another highly democratic avenue of participation in the forest services. Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), 148.

[70] Early American evangelicals especially relied upon compositions by such estimable figures as Isaac Watts, Charles and John Wesley, Joseph Hart, Samuel Stennett, William Cowper, John Newton, Philip Doddridge and other English stalwarts who laid the mighty foundation of Second Great Awakening and camp meeting hymnody.

For a broad perspective on hymnody in English—including American components of the story--consult J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 1997). Erik Routley and Paul Richardson's aptly named *Panorama of Christian Hymnody* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2005) elucidates hymn texts from literary and theological perspectives, tracing

melodic—of eighteenth century Americans like Samuel Davies, James Lyon, Frances Hopkinson and William Billings, the redoubtable "father of American choral music."[71] Alongside these touchstones of early American worship appeared newer songs--some of truly folk origin and many of ultimately unknown composition by now long-forgotten rural clergy and singers' collaborative efforts.[72] Typically, these vital 'new' songs

developments from the Medieval Era forward with highly rewarding analyses of Isaac Watts, the Wesleys and American hymnody. Paul Westermeyer, *Let the People Sing: Hymn Tunes in Perspective* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2005) complements *Panorama* quite well, addressing the musical component of hymnody through the ages.

In a quantitative testament to Isaac Watts' American magnitude and popularity, Stephen Marini established that among the seventy-one most published hymns (falling into the top twenty positions, with multiple ties for many positions) in the thirteen English colonies and United States during the period 1737-1860, Watts' entries accounted for fully twenty-six of them. For the top ten slots (involving ties and thus sixteen hymns), Watts penned a remarkable seven. See Stephen Marini, "Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of American Popular Religion," *Church History* 71, no. 2 (June 2002): 280-281.

[71] Regarding the American hymnodists, see George William Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971). Of course, the Presbyterian Davies stands as a highly significant figure in American colonial religious history through his ministry, theology and educational career as well as his contributions to sacred song. For his *Urania, or A Choice Collection of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems and Hymns* (1761), James Lyon is credited with the first American publication of sacred music compiled and contributed to by an American (the songbook includes a half dozen of Lyon's own compositions). William Billings receives tribute for publishing the first collection of sacred music entirely by an American. See Samuel Davies Alexander, *Princeton College During the 18th Century* (New York: A. D. F. Randolph and Company, 1872) regarding Davies and Lyon; George Thornton Edwards, *Music and Musicians of Maine (*Portland, Maine: The Southworth Press, 1928) concerning Lyon; and O. G. Sonneck, *Francis Hopkinson and James Lyon (*Washington, D. C.: H. L. McQueen, 1905). George Everett Hastings, *The Life and Works of Francis Hopkinson* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926) includes coverage of this remarkable Founding Father and Declaration of Independence signatory's literary and musical contributions. David Phares McKay and Richard Crawford, *William Billings of Boston: Eighteenth Century Composer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) provides a much fuller but older account, while K. L. Houk, *William Billings: Patriot* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu Publishing, 2011) offers a brief introduction to the subject as part of a series on American composers. Finally, Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: Norton, 1964) covers a good deal of territory, valuably links American music to national culture, and reminds us that composers of modest talent sometimes produced very culturally influential works.

[72] Among those offering staunch contributions to this new hymnody, the names of John Leland, John Adam Granade, Caleb Jarvis Taylor, George Askins and John Poage Campbell stand out prominently. See Richard H. Hulan, "Sketches of Selected Poets and Hymn Writers," in David Warren Steel with Richard H. Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 70-77.

combined sacred texts--sometimes paraphrased--with simple, repetitive and easily remembered lyrics, choruses and refrains. Melodies often derived from popular and folk music, including fiddle tunes, sea shanties, work or drinking songs as well as religious tradition.[73] For example, vocalists typically sang the text of perennial favorite "What Wondrous Love Is This?" to the popular tune previously associated with "The Ballad of Captain Kidd." [74] Hence, camp meetings employed disparate materials—musically, lyrically and culturally—in fashioning a democratic genre of hymnody that taught Wesleyan theology, reinforced sermonic or exhortative themes and invited audience participation as well as spiritual conversion. In Don Yoder's succinct formulation, camp meeting hymns served as the "spiritual arrows of God's grace."[75]

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[73] George Pullen Jackson, "Native and Imported Elements in American Religious Folksongs," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 3 (1951): pp. 70-74; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History, 3rd Edition* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1997), 82-88; Kay Norton, "Who Lost the South?" *American Music* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 391-411, esp. 393 & 399.

[74] George Pullen Jackson, "The 400-Year Journey of the 'Captain Kidd' Song Family--Notably Its Religious Branch," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 15 (1951): 239–248; William Hallam Bonner, "The Ballad of Captain Kidd," *American Literature* 15, no. 4 (January 1944): 378; Buell E. Cobb, Jr., *The Sacred Harp: A Tradition and Its Music* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 30. Marrying religious verses to folk music was not new, having appeared in some Protestant churches as well as makeshift theatrical productions around Europe since the 1500s. See Nina Ayres, *Creating Outdoor Theater: A Practical Guide* (Ramsbury, Wiltshire, UK: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2008), 18.

On Protestant Reformers' adaptation of secular folk tunes to metered religious verses, see Nicholas Temperley, "The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 1981), 511-544. Temperley locates the origins of *all* congregational singing during worship services in the Protestant Reformation's sweeping changes: "…it seems clear that in the late medieval Church the people did not sing in worship at all. The music was entirely in the hands of priests and professional musicians…Popular singing as part of worship was an invention of the reformers: first the Bohemian Brethren, then the Lutherans, Zwinglians, and Calvinists, then Anabaptists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, then Congregationalists and Separatists; much later, Baptists (513)." See also Friedrich Blume, *Protestant Church Music: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974).

[75] Don Yoder, *Pennsylvania Spirituals* (Lancaster: Pennsylvania Folklife Society, 1961), 449.

Exceeded in importance only by sermonic duties, 'exhortation' occupied an essential worship role, echoing and supplementing sermons, encouraging and prodding sinners, all while providing highly animated direction to those assembled.[76] Essentially, exhorters fulfilled a quasi-clerical responsibility from among the attending masses. They "preached" without necessarily occupying the pulpit or being clergy, offered prayers and testimony, recited Scripture and led hymns, plus furnished virtually sacerdotal guidance to those experiencing conviction and seeking salvation. They could operate from within the assembled worshipers during preaching or calls for conversion, or position themselves near the altar where they served as audible, visible ancillaries to pulpit activity and received people approaching the altar under conviction. Exhorters routinely depended upon spontaneity, an energetic wit and resort to anecdotes much more than preachers offering carefully planned and doctrinally based sermons.[77] Reverend A. P. Mead likened effective preaching to an army's establishment of position around a desired conquest, the laying of siege and wearing down of an opponent, but decreed that exhortation should constitute the final "triumph within the walls. This last feature of warfare answers to successful exhortation, when the speaker makes his irresistible appeals to the heart, carries it captive, and lays it as a trophy at the Savior's feet."[78] In spite of its martial and masculine excess, this analogy superlatively indicates the integral,

[76] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 220-221; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 159, 198.
[77] Allen, *Life of "Camp-meeting John,"* 28-30.
[78] Mead, *Manna*, 140.

instrumental and soteriological part enacted by exhorters in the camp meeting drama of conversion.

Moreover, this pivotally sacerdotal role embraced its practitioners in a decidedly democratic and mystical manner. Wesleyans believed exhortation derived from divine inspiration and the Holy Spirit's instigation, which in their view meant that common folk--regardless of education, race, gender, social class or even age--might be swept up in the activity. The Methodist Church endeavored to affirm these divine selections, but recognizing the democratic routes evangelism often took, cast a broad net of affirmation. During the 1820s, for example, the Alabama Cherokee possessed two approved exhorters named "Gunter and Brown. Brown was a young man of good English education, and a fluent interpreter. He possessed unction, and was full of missionary fire."[79] Despite his apparent lack of Brown's touted qualities, Gunter clearly demonstrated traits considered worthy of his being an exhorter. Pequot tribesman, eventual Methodist preacher and influential political figure William Apess launched his public career with a spontaneous camp meeting exhortation that perhaps surprised no one more than him:

> After Brother Hyde had concluded his sermon, I felt moved to rise and speak. I trembled at the thought; but believing it a duty required of me by my heavenly father, I could not disobey, and in rising to discharge this sacred obligation, I found all impediment of speech removed…my soul glowed with holy fervor, and the blessing of the Almighty sanctified this…I was now in my proper element, just harnessed for the work….[80]

[79] West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 386-388.
[80] William Apess, *A Son of the Forest & Other Writings* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 41-42.

Fredrika Bremer described a cadre of distinguished-looking African American exhorters poised on a bench near the altar of a South Carolina meeting, "men of a lofty, noticeable, and energetic exterior," ready for proselytic action. As the evening progressed, Bremer observed the markedly dynamic function these men served in catalyzing worship and eliciting conversions, their voices mingling urgently with those of clergy and singers.[81] Although an Alabama slave, Henry Seay served for many years as a highly respected exhorter, and then emerged as a leading minister in the postbellum Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America until his passing in 1884.[82] A witness during the extraordinary Cane Ridge meeting claimed that, amidst the thousands present for worship, at least 300 exhorters operated actively, including young females and children.[83]

In accordance with the Wesleyan and Pietistic emphases on religion of the heart and in recognition of most auditors' limited education, preachers avoided abstruse, inaccessible, learned but potentially dull sermons and themes that might have appeared pedantic, condescending or exclusive, preferring (and often themselves limited by background to) relatively common parlance, directness, broad Christian motifs and inclusive rhetoric. As one long-time pulpit occupant remembered, "The glory of God and the salvation of souls was the prevailing object."[84] The 1854 *Camp Meeting Manual* drew

[81] Bremer, *Homes of the New World,* 308.
[82] West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 489-490.
[83] Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xiv.
[84] West, *Methodism in Alabama,* 232.

on over a half century of experience in declaring that true preaching was "not dry, dogmatic theorizing; not metaphysical hair splitting; not pulpit bombast; but plain, clear, evangelical, Bible truth, uttered with faithful, solemn, earnestness, and with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." [85] At an Illinois camp meeting of Cumberland Presbyterians (who shared much in common with their Methodist neighbors on the frontier), a neophyte parson of elite Eastern education exploited his seminarian training to rebuke the homespun rhetorical style and uncomplicated Arminian doctrine of his fellow preachers hailing from more humble backgrounds. Reverend John McCutchen Berry--a legendarily tough camp meeting veteran who fought in the Battle of New Orleans alongside Andrew Jackson--subsequently strode to the pulpit, plainly countered each of the pompous young preacher's complaints and then finished with a pronouncement, "I admit…that Christ was bold, but he was not impudent; he was humble, but not mean." Pointing forcefully to the young scold, Berry decreed, "Sir, you are both impudent and mean."[86]

Again, God's infinite, mysterious love for humanity and the grace He offered to ALL people stood as the fundamental pillars of camp meeting sermonizing, along with the absolute necessity of spiritual transformation and God's imminent judgment of those who refused. [87] Unapologetically affirming the theologically straightforward, evangelically expedient and soteriologically utilitarian goals of camp meeting sermons,

[85] Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual*, 167.
[86] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 214.
[87] Mead, *Manna*, 72-73; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 235-239.

one old campaigner acknowledged, "The style of preaching is direct and hortatory. Present results are aimed at; present success is looked for."[88] Reverend Anson West decreed of campground homilies, "No attempts were made at fine or embellished discourses."[89] Whatever its lack of theological subtlety or doctrinal complexity, this genre of preaching achieved success, extraordinary success. Measured by observable human reactions, transformed lives and communities, the legions who attended camp meetings, or the soaring numbers of new Methodist adherents during this period, it succeeded wildly. As Mark Noll declares, "[O]nly a very compelling Methodist message could have won over such a large portion of early national America."[90]

An attentive visitor to the early nineteenth century trans-Appalachian West characterized Wesleyan itinerants he encountered as "men of great zeal and sanctity" whose success depended "upon the cultivation of popular talents," the recognition of which "goad[s] them on to study all the means and arts of winning the people…Hence the preaching is of a highly popular cast, and its first aim is to excite the feelings…." Flint further described the interaction between preacher and auditors as typically featuring a man of "rude, boisterous, but native eloquence," himself drawn from "these children of the forest and simple nature" who "echo" the "vehement" sermons, "alternately dissolved in tears, awed to profound feeling, or falling in spasms…This country opens a

[88] Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, xviii.
[89] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 231.
[90] Noll, *America's God*, 345.

boundless theatre for strong, earnest and unlettered eloquence…." [91] This frank delineation adroitly captures much about camp meeting clergy and their milieu without the hagiography to which many camp meeting exponents succumbed in depicting their ministry, or the obtusely supercilious denunciations penned by their detractors. As Flint understood, religiously populist champions combined sincere ministerial conviction with shrewdly performative strategies of popular, emotional appeal in highly theatrical settings, wherein they interacted plainly yet eloquently, resonantly and persuasively with the rural folks whence they came and whom they deeply understood.

In their service to evangelism, itinerant preachers received limited payment, withstood constant travel and endured a physically arduous existence that damaged health and interfered with normal family life.[92] Many embraced virtually continuous camp meeting service—with its sleep limitations--from June to November, plagued by ravenous insects and non-Biblical serpents, "roads" that would have better been termed rivers of mud, actual and unbridged rivers to cross, searing heat and potentially lethal cold, fevers and bandits, pain and anti-religionists, to say nothing of loneliness and misgivings. No one can doubt the conviction, selflessness, devotion and courage of such ministers, whose leader (among the preponderant Methodist preachers) Francis Asbury

[91] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 218-219.

[92] Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 243; William Apess, *Son of the Forest,* 39-40; Reverend Alfred Brunson, "Upper Mississippi Missions," *Western Christian Advocate* (Cincinnati), November 9, 1838; W. S. Woodard, *Annals of Methodism in Missouri* (Columbia, MO: E. W. Stephens, 1893), 215-216; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers,* 245-247, 250-251, 376-377; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 205; Mead, *Manna*, 61-62, 128-129; Allen, *Life of "Camp-meeting John*," 27-28; John Wesley Hardin, *The Life of John Wesley Hardin* (Seguin, TX: Smith & Moore, 1896), 5.

led by example and chose itinerants according to these attributes rather than formal education or social standing. Many were rough and raw, as untutored and backwoods as imaginable. Some lost their faith and regained it, while many sacrificed their health, economic opportunities, and family connections.[93] Not a few experienced their own conversion while endeavoring to disrupt a camp meeting with rowdy, drunken or mocking behavior.[94] The life made still vigorous men appear physically moribund long before the end, as in the case of Reverend John Snyder, about whom a contemporary decreed, "There is a tenacity in the subject…that puts calculation at defiance. He may live and labor after his apparently healthy brethren are dead."[95] At a Maryland camp meeting in 1816, early Methodist legend Reverend Jesse Lee caught a chill and fever from which he soon perished after thirty-six years of constant ministerial travel.[96] "Camp Meeting John" Allen died--no doubt happy--at a Maine camp meeting in his 90s. At least one—

[93] See Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 243; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 209-210, 245-247; Rev. W. M. Robey, "The Pioneer Preachers of North Carolina—Their Struggles and Triumphs," 16-38; W. C. Doub, "The Pioneer Preachers of North Carolina—Their Struggles and Triumphs," 39-75; Rev. M. L. Wood, "Eulogy on the Life and Labors of Rev. Peter Doub D. D.," 244-268; Bishop E. M. Marvin, "Methodism—Its Revival History," 269-324, all in *Centennial of Methodism in North-Carolina,* ed. Lingurn Skidmore Burkhead (Raleigh, NC: J. Nichols, 1876); Matthew H. Moore, *Sketches of the Pioneers of Methodism in North Carolina and Virginia* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884); William Lee Grissom, *History of Methodism in North Carolina: From 1772 to the Present Time, Volume I* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. church, South, 1905); Albert Micajah Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1883); John Berry McFerrin, *History of Methodism in Tennessee* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, 1888); Albert Henry Redford, *The History of Methodism in Kentucky* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1870); William Wallace Bennett, *Memorials of Methodism in Virginia: From Its Introduction Into the State, in the Year 1772, to the Year 1829* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1871); Woodard, *Methodism in Missouri*, 124, 215-216. These volumes abound with accounts of the difficulties, emotional and physical, personal and social, faced by itinerant ministers of the early republic and antebellum eras.

[94] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 101-110.

[95] Mead, *Manna*, 61-62.

[96] William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Methodist Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1861), 85.

the "Wild Man of Goose Creek," John Adam Granadd--clearly lost his mind, regained it, exhausted himself in four years of unceasingly ferocious itineracy, and then unceremoniously died in a humble Tennessee cabin.[97] Virtually everyone in the country deemed another—the celebrated Lorenzo Dow--as "crazy," though many simultaneously loved the peripatetic skeleton in filthy clothing who preached with such wit, beauty and force that not a few regarded him as somehow supernatural, while thousands named their sons for him.[98]

Camp meeting preachers nonetheless singularly and collectively accomplished an extraordinary mission to "reform the nation and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands," while in the process catapulting Methodism into position as America's largest and arguably most influential Protestant denomination for nearly a century and a half.[99] Through an appealing rural folksiness that drew backbone from staunch Christian certitude, from pious self-sacrifice wedded to calculated entertainment strategies, by enduring faith fused with often brilliant understanding of the young and changing country, campground clergy fashioned a style of public persuasion that has reverberated through American life ever since, not only religiously, but politically, socially and economically. As a visitor to the early West pronounced: "They speak the dialect,

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[97] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 131-134.

[98] *Ibid*, 235-239; Price, "Lorenzo and Peggy Dow," 39–73. See also Helen West Ridgely, *Historic Graves of Maryland and the District of Columbia, With the Inscriptions Appearing on the Tombstones in Most of the Counties of the State and in Washington and Georgetown* (New York: Grafton Press, 1908).

[99] Wade Crawford Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1769-1844, Vol. II: To Reform the Nation* (New York: Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church, 1950), 287-301. Though geographically limited in scope mostly to sections of Tennessee and Kentucky with outposts in neighboring states, Cumberland Presbyterians created a substantial, influential denomination through similar practices.

understand the interests, and enter into the feelings of their audience. They exert a prodigious and incalculable bearing upon the rough backwoods men; and do good, where more polished, and trained ministers would preach without effect."[100]

Despite being overwhelmingly drawn from the rural masses whom they served, camp meeting preachers undeniably held in many cases a sort of celebrity status—part shamanic bringers of light and dark power, part circuit performers from mysterious outer regions, part avuncular figures proffering keys to the Kingdom--that attracted participants to the gatherings and riveted attention upon their entertaining and mighty performances. Of the gifted camp meeting orator Samuel Coate's Mid-Atlantic States itineracy prior to the War of 1812, Atkinson effused: "He swept like a meteor over the land and spellbound the astonished gaze of the wondering new settlers."[101] A European witness described the Methodist clerics whom she encountered as unusually "handsome tall figures," while a New Englander visiting the Trans-Appalachian West of the 1810s reported that, "…people assemble, as to an imposing spectacle. They pour from their woods, to hear the new preacher, whose fame has travelled before him. The preaching has a scenic effect. It is a theme of earnest discussion, reviewing, comparison, and intense interest."[102] Appearing in a region he had toured several years earlier, the usually modest Jacob Young acknowledged, "Here I had many spiritual children. They heard I was

[100] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 222-223.
[101] Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 504.
[102] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 308; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 219-220.

coming to their camp meeting, and they flocked from every part of the large circuit."[103] Reverend Laurence McCombs cultivated renown for his alternatingly gentle or powerful, yet always "musical" gift of pulpit oratory. "At a camp or quarterly meeting he exerted himself with the strength of a Samson. Great occasions called him out; then the lion roused himself and shook his mane, and his roar was terrible." McCombs' fame spread so far that a grizzled veteran of Napoleon's ***Grande Armée*** journeyed to camp meeting expressly so he could hear the legendary preacher, after whose sermon the Frenchman converted. As McCombs thundered and pleaded from the humble stand, this Gallic warrior who had witnessed heroism and fanatical hero worship, glory, despair and carnage unspeakable, simply wept.[104] A British observer compared itinerants' fervent nocturnal preaching to romantic scenes "of the old Scotch Covenanters" in the "works of Sir Walter Scott."[105] Though some meetings depended upon only a few compelling preachers, others presented a stellar lineup of dozens with diverse and often complementary talents, like some type of sacred vaudeville show.[106]

Thus, after the pilgrimage, visiting and eating, after the prayers, Biblical passages and singing, ministers and their sermonic talents finally took center stage, inviting and reassuring, admonishing and threatening, promising and coaxing. Some preachers led

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[103] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 198.
[104] Joseph Wakeley, *Lost Chapters Recovered from the Early History of American Methodism* (Carlisle, MA: Applewood Books, 2009, 1858), 402-403.
[105] Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 44.
[106] See, for example, "Two Camp Meetings" *Barnstable Journal*, via *Boston Courier*, August 16, 1830; Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 43; Duncan, *Travels*, 370-371; Young, Autobiography *of a Pioneer,* 294-296; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 45.

gently while others challenged sternly or goaded their listeners forward. Western New York's "Father" Caleb Kendall so castigated lighthearted young dandies to their face that onlookers presumed certain violence would ensue, but often saw conversion results.[107] Lorenzo Dow habitually roused crowds to anger, but could as easily charm or amuse.[108] Camp meeting clerics understood their audiences well and unleashed torrents of language that swept up sinners and seekers in guilt, conviction, emotion, joy and recognition of spiritual need. As one participant remembered of a small meeting: "…David Young was there, in his best days, ready to mount the pulpit at a moment's warning, and, with his clear, smooth, silvery voice, charm and perfectly astonish the congregation…M'Kendree preached the closing sermon, which produced the most intense interest and excitement."[109] Another remembered the effects of a sprawling 1837 Tennessee meeting's vehement preaching in purely incendiary terms: "Like some mighty conflagration, the fire of God's Spirit seemed to kindle up in the hearts of the vast multitude, and burned on, uncontrollable, to the utter consumption of every thing [sic] sensual, devilish, and wicked."[110] Demonstrating that camp meeting eloquence could extend well beyond parochial appeal, an Englishmen acclaimed the power of nighttime sermons: "…the place is lighted up with fires and pine flambeaus and the men are preaching with all the fire and energy they are masters of, and a flow of language

[107] Rev. F. W. Conable, *History of the Genesee Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Conference* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1885), 145-146.
[108] See, for example, Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 235-239.
[109] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 198.
[110] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 310-312.

perfectly astounding."[111] Another contemporary student of the American frontier ascribed the ministerial articulacy he witnessed to itinerants' lonely "peregrinations" through the forests, during which they "acquire a pensive and romantic turn of thought and expression, as we think, favorable to eloquence."[112]

Worthy of emphasis, these oratorical feats required immense vocal power and physical stamina to reach the enormous and, of course, outdoor audiences—not infrequently thousands rather than hundreds—who flocked to camp meeting preaching. Despite fatigue and illness, itinerants delivered astonishing presentations with enthusiasm and cogency. Debilitated by years of travel over tens of thousands of arduous miles, Francis Asbury—like so many period itinerants—many times arrived at camp meetings sick or weak, yet rallied to deliver heroically moving sermons of unforgettable spiritual vigor. More than a quarter of a century into his unceasing journey on behalf of American Methodism, the ailing and aging Bishop reached an 1810 camp meeting exhausted and famished. Even so, the next day he issued an electrical sermon to throngs of auditors. As James Quinn recalled, "And O, with what holy fervor did he preach the unsearchable riches of Christ, while listening thousands felt that the Lord of hosts was with him. O, day of days, not to be forgotten."[113] One could multiply reports of this sort about Asbury from all quarters of the country, and then exponentially increase the number through accounts of his circuit riders emulating and perpetuating such

[111] Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 44.
[112] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 218-220.
[113] Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 292.

dedication, endurance and missional zeal. Many deserved the words applied to Lawrence McCombs: "He was great among the prophets, a man of heroic courage and indomitable perseverance."[114]

At an early 1800s camp meeting in Southwest Mississippi, Methodists found themselves confronted by a number of critical Calvinist ministers, to say nothing of numerous Catholics in the area and rowdy troublemakers in the surrounding woods. The redoubtable Lorenzo Dow arrived quite sick and weak, but took charge nonetheless, prowling through the gathering crowds "like a lion among the beasts of the forest." After outsmarting and intimidating the potential disruptors in several incidents, he took the pulpit one morning, looking like death itself. Ragged and emaciated, the cadaverous Dow delivered a formidable sermon in which he intriguingly discussed a thief at work in the region, a thief who eventually turned out to be none other than Satan greedily stealing human souls with a chain forged from principles of Calvinism, Universalism and Atheism. Eviscerating all these, Dow seemed only to grow stronger as he proceeded, even challenging five Calvinist ministers in the crowd to come forward and debate, an offer none dared accept. A fellow preacher recollected, "Here he [Dow] put forth all his masculine powers. By this time his shrill voice might have been heard nearly half a mile. The congregation were [sic] on their feet, and pressing toward the stand as if to press each other down."[115]

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[114] Wakeley, *Lost Chapters,* 402-403.
[115] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 235-239.

Faithful to their Pietistic roots and Wesleyan heritage, camp meeting sermonizers liberally employed impassioned means to reach participants, in whom they sought to evoke powerfully emotional responses en route to salvation. According to a typical account, "The preachers were vehement and energetic, and appealed more to the passions than to the reason of the audience…the devotees were rolling on the ground in agonizing fervour fearful to behold…."[116] At an Illinois camp meeting of the early 1840s, an elderly circuit rider found the crowd too distracted and light-hearted for what he deemed serviceable response. Rather than accept this scenario, the ancient orator transformed into a backwoods Dante, escorting his hitherto merry listeners into hell and its rapacious torments, summoning and imitating the wretched cries of the damned, until "all eyes seemed as if turned toward the yawning pit," at which propitious juncture the old but canny preacher pointed to Jesus as "the sinner's only refuge." Virtual pandemonium ensued as sinners fell to the ground writhing in spiritual agony, crying and pleading for mercy, or rushing to the altar for spiritual guidance.[117] One Methodist leader of the era argued that without sermons propelled by "gushing emotions of the heart," preachers would never achieve the desired "electric effect" upon the "auditory" faculties of their listeners, could never be truly "eloquent," and would "never reach and overcome the citadel of the heart."[118] Another minister of prodigious camp meeting

[116] Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 43.
[117] Reverend S. R. Beggs, *Pages from the Early History of the West and Northwest* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1868), 270-272.
[118] McLean, *Life of Reverend Collins*, 49-50.

esteem insisted that the emotional must be joined with the personal in sermons to achieve spiritual union with congregations. "A vital, vivid experience in the hearts of preacher and people, is the great bond of union in the Church, and the great element of power…That minister is to be pitied and blamed who cannot, in preaching the Gospel, bear testimony to its saving power upon his own heart."[119] In homage to Reverend John Collins' sermonic effectiveness, his biographer decreed simply that "the hearts" of his listeners "were broken."[120]

As might be expected, this level of emotional expression and personal revelation rendered some sermonic performances virtual high-wire acts subject to eccentricity, excess and self-indulgence, but also capable of overwhelming effects upon those gathered. A detractor of the post-War of 1812 period derided, "Their discourses and prayers are of course stimulating and alarming in the highest possible degree …the hearers become violently excited…."[121] In the midst of services, Alabama's wonderfully named Reverend Job Foster would sit unceremoniously in the altar's straw foreground, conducting exuberant spiritual conversations with himself, laughing and yelling in "rapturous delight," as the Southern hills echoed "with his shouts."[122] During the very first camp meetings held by James McGready and the McGhee brothers in Southern Kentucky's dark forests, some of the ecclesiastics experienced such overpowering

[119] Mead, *Manna*, 138.
[120] McLean, *Life of Reverend Collins*, 115-116.
[121] Duncan, *Travels*, 370-371.
[122] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 169-170.

emotions that they could not preach, but merely sat and wept uncontrollably. Regaining their facility and channeling religious passion into sermons, these preachers ignited a revivalist storm wherein participants fell "under the power of the word, 'like corn before a storm of wind'…."[123] At the end of a deeply moving Ohio gathering of 1807, a circuit rider too sick to sit on a horse reclined in his tent nevertheless still "shouting" joyously upon behalf of the Lord, while a substantial portion of enraptured attendees pursued the future Bishop and extraordinary pulpit performer William McKendree across the yet untamed Midwestern countryside. Upon catching him, this impassioned mob dragged their beloved preacher from his horse, whereupon he spoke and wept while the mob "shouted around him for about an hour, before they could part with him."[124] British visitors reported sermonic effects so emotionally powerful that participants could scarcely look upon each other without resort to weeping. One of these international travelers compared the countenances he witnessed among these rugged frontier people to those of the "primitive saints," and decreed a camp meeting he attended to be, "the most remarkable service I have ever witnessed…I never saw anything equal to this; so deep, so overpowering, so universal.[125]

In addition to the prevailing emotional synergy and mutual understanding that united preachers with their crowds, a camp meeting ethic of interactive, personal ministering and collective responsibility abounded during ceremonies as well. While one

[123] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 216-217.
[124] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 198-199.
[125] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 197.

preacher continued to pour forth a sermon, issue prayer or lead worshipful song, other clergy and exhorters met convicted supplicants at the altar, or journeyed into the crowd to find them, whereupon a collaborative pursuit of salvation ensued. A European correspondent noted preachers leaving the stand repeatedly, making their way to those under the Holy Spirit's influence, and then offering personal counsel, prayer and even hymns.[126] Other sources consistently affirm that large numbers from the crowds made their way to the altar or anxious pen as the various components of worship urged them forward. Met by solicitous ministers or exhorters, some threw themselves across the altar or upon the ground, weeping and despairing, but finding support in their transformational moment.[127] Assembled worshipers also helped those under conviction, whether personally through direct prayers and encouragement, or corporately through song and testimony. As one who attended many gatherings recorded, "…mourners or seekers gathered around the preacher's stand, the elder members of the church mingling with them."[128] Of course, camp meeting believers ascribed much of this—conviction and conversion, petitions and responses, suffering and release, voices and emotions—to

[126] Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 43. Forever disdainful of American customs, Frances Trollope's account imputed salacious intent to the ministers she saw undertaking this in Indiana, claiming the mobile and attentive preachers purposely sought out young women, "at once exciting and soothing their agonies" in an intimate manner the cultural tourist found alarming. See Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 144. Her account is not unique in its assertion that women were more visibly affected than men were by the sermons and calls to conversion. For examples, see Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times*, 104-105; Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 43.
[127] Conable, *History of the Genesee Annual Conference,* 145-146; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 308-309.
[128] Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times*, 104-105.

divine presence in their midst, "the 'power of the Holy Ghost,' accompanying hard, patient, steady, constant labor, with many tears and much crying…."[129]

In his astonishingly colorful and informative tribute to influential clergy of the early 1800s, Reverend Richard Beard concludes a description of one magnificently successful camp meeting with a rather narrow credit: "God, however, came down into his broad temple, and lighted it up with his presence…."[130] However piously poetic, the summation misses much. Indeed, the preceding quote succeeds far more thoroughly as a historical report. Church elders and camp meeting supporters, circuit preachers and bishops all contributed through planning and logistical arrangements, through physical preparation of God's "broad temple" and hopeful advertisements about what would transpire within it. The plans and their implementation—based on custom derived from experimentation, some of it church decreed, much of it democratically undertaken—required an exceptional measure of human effort and endowed the camp meeting with physical, temporal as well as social structure. This structure not only facilitated the event, but transformed it into a sacred and unique world of religious seeking, transfigurative spiritual experience and a deeply entwined community of humans united by divine purpose. Time flowed differently there, as did words, emotions and the course of lives. Voiced by people intent upon God's service but also service to others, the Scriptures

[129] Mead, *Manna,* 149.
[130] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 245.

recited and hymns sung, the prayers offered and exhortations issued, all configured a world apart and constructed God's "broad temple" in what otherwise passed for a woodland meadow, perhaps even a farm's pasture. The moving sermons--voiced from preachers' stands as humble as a Middle Eastern manger and across altars as makeshift as the poorest child's cradle—nonetheless resonated profoundly with the eager participants, with spectators previously unaware of their vulnerability to the sacred words, and with the wider society, contributing mightily to the emergence of a distinctly American public oratory. Through this perhaps divinely inspired yet—inevitably--humanly structured, denominationally guided, yet collaboratively and democratically realized effort, tens of thousands of early American lives changed momentously and a restless nation's culture received enduring definition.

Chapter Four:
'Holy Ground': The Sacralized Realm of Early American Camp Meetings

At a camp meeting in eastern Virginia during the year 1805, a white man looked carefully for a face from his vivid dream of a few nights earlier. The face he sought belonged to an African American woman he had never met in life, but only in the unforgettable dream wherein she helped him find spiritual peace. Searching the camp meeting throngs, the man discovered what he deemed to be exactly the face of the woman from his dream and, with considerable hesitation and fear of embarrassment, meekly asked her to pray for him. The African American woman--it is unknown whether she was free or enslaved, but of course the latter is more likely--responded that she would if he knelt with her, a condition rendering their interaction public if it was to proceed. According to inveterate camp meeting preacher Lorenzo Dow, who spoke with the man afterward, the dreamer and spiritual seeker thought to himself, "I shall mock the woman if I do not." Falling to his knees with the African American woman, yet conscious of gazing eyes and the tableau's potentially negative social reverberations, the man decided "…people are now observing me, and if I do not persevere, I shall look a hypocrite, the cross I must bear, let me do as I will, therefore, seeing I have gone so far, I will make a hand of it." While on his knees with this newly met woman, revealed in a dream, this

woman of such different social standing and experience than his own, the man found salvation and peace in his heart.[1]

This riveting conversion account illuminates several highly significant themes interwoven with the camp meeting phenomenon. The role of mystery, miracles, dreams and visions in early American evangelicalism strongly emerges, of course, manifesting most fully in the dream coming to fruition at the camp meeting.[2] Jon Butler has underscored the "extraordinary range of religious interests already evident in the twilight of the Federalist period," which included a popular "fascination with divine interventionism in dreams, visions, and ghosts that increased in the next decades" and produced "a dramatic American religious syncretism that wedded popular supernaturalism with Christianity and found expression in antebellum Methodism, Mormonism, Afro-American Christianity, and spiritualism."[3] Socially fluid and religiously liminal, held in natural settings that facilitated transcendence, camp meetings encouraged experimental worship, intense displays of enthusiasm, and dramatic personal encounters with divine forces. They also embraced a rural and largely un-

[1] Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite*; *or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814), 263.

[2] See Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: the Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1997), esp. 28-76 for discussion of supernaturalism in evangelical contexts of the Early Republic era. Although Heyrman emphasizes nineteenth century evangelical leaders' retreat from the more extreme aspects of folk superstition--such as visions of a corporeal Satan or belief in witches--the author stipulates that evangelical circles continued to credit supernatural events and abilities in their midst, with many ministers and worshipers still believing in "a world shot through with marvel and mystery" (Heyrman, 76). See also Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*: *Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 67-98, 164-194, and esp. 225-257.

[3] Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 226.

churched population who brought to the gatherings a rich variety of folk traditions, religious backgrounds and spiritual yearnings, thus producing a setting of unusual potency for the occurrence of what many participants interpreted as supernatural events. Barton Stone--a deeply devout minister who exercised conspicuous caution in pronouncements regarding the supernatural--declared of the gatherings: "Many things transpired there, which were so much like miracles, that if they were not, they had the same effects as miracles on infidels and unbelievers…."[4]

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[4] Barton Warren Stone, *The Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself: With Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers* (Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1847), 38. Historian Ann Taves has usefully discussed scholarly description and analysis of religious experience in her books *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). *Fits, Trances and Visions* insightfully explores the relationship between religious experience (principally that of "enthusiastic" Anglo-American Protestants) and religious analysis (especially theories associated with anti-enthusiasm, the Enlightenment, animal magnetism, popular and proto-psychology as well as professional psychologists like William James) from the seventeenth century forward. In *Religious Experience Reconsidered,* Taves boldly proposes myriad integrations of natural scientific, neurological, psychological, anthropological and sociological approaches to religion with humanistic efforts.

Taves' approach draws heavily on philosopher Wayne Proudfoot's now fundamental work *Religious Experience* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985). Revisiting significant interpreters of religious experience such as Jonathan Edwards, Friedrich Schleiermacher, William James, Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade, Proudfoot repudiates their claims for potentially universal access to a direct experience of divinity or sacredness that occurs without mediation by linguistic, conceptual and cultural categories. Utilizing Hegel, Kant and Wittgenstein, Proudfoot insists that religious experience, regardless of how seemingly transcendent or unique, can only and must always be rooted in preconceptions and categories derived from language or culture. (To this writer, Proudfoot's thesis provides a sensible and appropriate tack for the historian's craft.) For a spirited critique of Proudfoot from a William James scholar (and staunch defender), cf. G. William Barnard, "Explaining the Unexplainable: Wayne Proudfoot's 'Religious Experience,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 60, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 231-256. See also Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2), ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), and *The Great Awakening* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards Series, Volume 4), ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), both of which contain Edwards' meticulous distinctions between "true," unmediated in-dwelling of the divine as opposed to possibly counterfeit religious enthusiasm; Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers,* ed. Richard Crouter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), in which the author enunciated his Romantic, essentialist and "religion as feeling" response to Enlightenment critics of religious experience, and his *The Christian Faith* (London and New York: T & T Clark Ltd., 1999); William

James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007, originally published 1905); and Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1923), wherein the theologian explores his concept of unmediated, non-rational experience of divinity, which he terms "the numinous" and "mysterium tremendum."

Moreover, Proudfoot charges analysts of religion who posit pre-conceptual religious experience—especially Schleiermacher—with creating a philosophically indefensible "protective strategy" to render religious experience invulnerable to scientific—physical or social—analysis and criticism. While many scholars of religion have adopted Proudfoot's 'constructivist' approach, noted but controversial historian of religion Mircea Eliade articulated what many read as a universalist and 'essentialist' position that stands in contrast and retains academic followers despite criticisms of Eliade's theories as marred by over-generalization, neglect of historical context and cultural differences, as well as a lack of empirical grounding. Recently, Brian Rennie and Randall Studstill have endeavored to clarify and defend Eliade's work as a phenomenological philosophy of religion (whereby Eliade studied structures of reality in the minds of religious practitioners) rather than theology (in the sense of affirming the ontological reality of the "sacredness" of which he writes). See Bryan Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) and "The Religious Creativity of Modern Humanity: Some Observations on Eliade's Unfinished Thought," *Religious Studies* 31, no. 2 (June 1995): 221-235; Randall Studstill, "Eliade, Phenomenology and the Sacred," *Religious Studies* 36, no. 2 (June 2000): 177-194; Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt, Inc., 1957); *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1996); *A History of Religious Ideas, Vol. I, From the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries,* trans. W. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *A History of Religious Ideas, Vol. II, From Gautama Buddha to the Triumph of Christianity,* trans. W. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); *A History of Religious Ideas, Vol. III, From Muhammad to the Age of the Reforms,* trans. A. Hiltebeitel and D. Apostolos-Cappadona (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Proudfoot and Taves insist upon the value of a binary approach to writing about religion, wherein scholarly *description* of religious experience ideally utilizes terminology that would be intelligible to the subjects being described and should thus minimize alteration of the experience in the descriptive process. Proudfoot and Taves refer to scholars' use of terms that the subjects described would either not recognize or understand as "descriptive reductionism." (Again, this point seems to be one worthy of respect by historians attempting to recreate historical actors' mentalities and worldviews.) However, Proudfoot and Taves underscore the distinction between academics' *description* of religious experience and their *analysis* of such phenomena. During the latter process, they argue, scholars should feel at liberty—indeed obliged--to employ terms and concepts unfamiliar to the historical actors under study if such lexical and conceptual devices enhance scholarly understanding and comparison of religious experience. Of additional relevance here is Proudfoot's use and Taves' further delineation of Attribution Theory, whereby historical scholars assess religious experiences principally in terms of the qualities attributed to the experiences by the historical actors who had them. Of course, historical actors' attribution of meaning received powerful influence from the actors' linguistic and cultural background as well as their socio-religious context. Of considerable value in historical study, this methodology fruitfully encourages scholarly attention to culture and context in explicating religious phenomena. Regarding Attribution Theory, see Susan Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition: From Brains to Culture* (Los Angeles & London: Sage Publications, 2013), esp. 149-176. Concerning social scientific methodologies and qualitative research, see also Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sydney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Finally, Taves and Proudfoot reject essentialist conceptions wherein religious phenomena are regarded as methodologically discrete from other social phenomena by virtue of a presumed divine or

Additionally, race along with gender and perhaps class reverberate powerfully through this story, explaining the white man's initial hesitancy to seek the help of an African American woman in such a highly public setting ("the cross I must bear") and underscoring the camp meeting as a domain wherein nineteenth century social conventions could be upended for the sake of a higher spiritual cause. Of course, the two features entwined, since participants recognized the camp meeting as a sacralized space within the early American landscape, one in which the normal rules and typical social conventions warped and altered through intersection with the divine and a host of supernatural possibilities. The story highlights a third feature of camp meetings as well: the role of attending believers as spiritual guides and "exhorters," a role in which ordinary human beings--regardless of race, class, gender, even age and other social markers--could assume a virtually sacerdotal function in helping spiritual seekers negotiate the supernatural terrain, make connection with the divine, and experience "conversion."[5]

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supernatural content. While neither endorsing nor denying the historical actors' experiences as supernaturally influenced, my study credits the actors' *beliefs* that "special" (to employ Taves' term) behavior—trances and unconscious states, involuntary movements or sounds, dreams and visions, alterations of consciousness, heightened emotions, inability to resist religious expression or conversion, etc.--indeed constituted religious and supernaturally driven experiences (phenomenologically speaking) as sincere and experientially "real." However, in keeping with Taves and Proudfoot's undoubtedly wise counsel for historical inquiry, my study approaches camp meeting religious behavior in terms of the historical participants' linguistic, cultural and social matrix, only recognizing their religious experience as *sui generis* in a phenomenological sense (i. e. in the actors' minds).

[5] Patricia Bonomi notes the prevalence of sophisticated Protestant theology among common folk in America as early as the 1740s. See Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society and Politics in Colonial America* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 125. On exhortation's effectiveness and its roots in prevalently understood theology, see John Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 113-121. Although Jon Butler underscores the "marked tendency toward a reductionism and antitheologicalism" in the post-Revolutionary period, I would contend that this only facilitated the ability of laypersons to function in quasi-sacerdotal roles. See Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith,* 221-222. Traveling through America's interior during the mid-1810s, British

Significantly, camp meetings often took place in late summer and early autumn, after the "laying by" of crops or following the conclusion of harvest, a season associated with many folk and religious festivals, including the Presbyterian Communion services (termed "holy fairs" by Robert Burns) back in Scotland and Northern Ireland, whence came many residents of the Southern frontier.[6] Frequently coinciding with the full moon, camp meetings thus interlinked with lunar as well as autumnal folklore and traditions, invoking a quasi-magical character and deep significance for the gatherings.[7] Moreover, the woodland gatherings departed so dramatically from the rural routine followed during much of the year as to confer a mood of timelessness, a cognitive step outside the usual temporal flow, and to impart a feeling of remarkable transformative possibility. With evening services held under the moon's glow, torchlight, strings of lanterns and by bonfires, sometimes lasting deep into or through the night, camp meetings further banished the normal sense of time and farm schedule (wherein most people retired early) and conjured an atmosphere of otherworldliness.[8]

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cultural observer Morris Birkbeck noted, "men of all ranks are seen to engage in discussions on politics, history or religion" with "spirit and good sense." He further observed these to be "subjects which have attracted, more or less, the attention of every one." See Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America: From the Coast of Virginia to the Territory of Illinois* (London: Severn & Company, 1818), 135.

[6] See Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communions and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[7] Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan and Co., 1852), 304. Also see Scott L. Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), and Bernd Brunner, *Moon: A Brief History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[8] See the compelling description of a nighttime meeting in Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans, Vol. 1* (New York: Whittaker, Treacher & Company, 1832), 139-145. Elaw, *Memoirs of The Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour* (London: Self-Published, 1846), 19-20.

Inhabiting this mood of intersection with the supernatural, campground inhabitants frequently identified allegedly numinous occurrences and divine interventions as visiting camp meetings, a tendency extending to the weather. Obviously, weather conditions generated substantial concern for the outdoor gatherings, a fact registered in diverse accounts of preternatural influences.[9] On many occasions, thunderclouds and rainstorms threatened proceedings. Although these often resulted in lightning and downpours that drove worshipers to their tents and wagons, sometimes such weather relented and passed by, an occurrence routinely attributed to heavenly dispensation. As one revivalist narrated, "…the weather was chilly and the prospects before us very gloomy; however we poured out our complaint to God, who graciously heard our cry; sent off the clouds and gave us a beautiful sun."[10] On another occasion, a violent storm approached and sent some in the crowd scurrying for cover. Unfazed, the minister in charge beseeched congregants to remain calm and appeal to God, a spiritual tactic that availed the meeting of what registered as divinely sanctioned fine weather.[11] The violent electrical disturbances characteristic of Eastern North America during

[9] For a thorough history of interactions between weather and human activity in America since the Colonial Era, see William B. Meyer, *Americans and Their Weather* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000). Bernard Mergen, *Weather Matters: An American Cultural History Since 1900* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2008) deftly explores human attribution of meaning to American weather, arguing that its centrality in discourse, folklore and culture derives in part from its quasi-supernatural qualities. Sarah Strauss and Benjamin S. Orlove, *Weather, Climate, Culture* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004) provides an international cultural history of weather, including its relationship with social discourse and folklore. See also Lucian Boia, *The Weather in the Imagination* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005) for an historical account enriched by anthropological and psychological perspectives.

[10] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 201.

[11] Dow, *Cosmopolite,* 216.

warmer months could also provide a dramatic backdrop for services, especially nocturnal ones. One European visitor witnessed an evening service in Low Country South Carolina where impassioned preaching and powerful music fused with the elements to great effect. She described "…four preachers, who, during the intervals between the hymns, addressed the people with loud voices, calling sinners to conversion and amendment of life. During all this, the thunder pealed, and fierce lightning flashed through the wood like angry glances of some mighty invisible eye."[12]

Camp meeting leaders rarely ever conceded a lack of divine sanction in the many inevitable cases of inclement weather, though, interpreting them as God-given opportunities for intimate devotionals, prayers and Bible study in the tents or wagons. One soggy morning earned the tribute: "Thus we read, and thus we sang that rainy morning away. Our tent in the woods became a Bethel to our souls. We smile to think of those who pity us for our inconveniences and sufferings in the woods. Slavery and suffering are identified with artificial life. How free and happy were our souls that morning!"[13] Besides, gentle showers produced a meditative atmosphere conducive to spiritual enterprise: "Thank God for the rain. It made sweet music on leaf and tent…" wrote one preacher.[14] Supporters of a Mount Gilead, Kentucky camp meeting readily credited a day of fasting and prayer held at their gathering--and around the state through

[12] Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 308.
[13] Rev. A. P. Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness* (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 197.
[14] Ibid, 187.

gubernatorial request—with the cessation of a horrific drought. Repairing to a commodious tent, the cheerful crowd enjoyed a sermon rebuking anyone "foolish" enough to deem this mere coincidence.[15]

Given the significance of weather for camp meetings and early America's agrarian populace, ministers and others not surprisingly invoked meteorological metaphors to describe the Holy Spirit's work among celebrants, as in Reverend Finis Ewing's characterization of conversions during a markedly productive all-night service: "Within a few minutes the south wind came; and four or five were liberated, perhaps within one minute. There were little intervals between the heavenly breezes, until near daylight. It was literally a gospel sweeping shower."[16] Violent weather, on the other hand, provided an instructive eschatological analog, summoning the spectacle of Judgment Day for onlookers:

> Whilst one was speaking on the subject of the dead, small and great, standing before God, an awful black cloud appeared in the west, with flashes of forked lightning, and peals of rumbling thunder ensued; a trumpet sounded from a sloop, whilst hundreds of a solemn auditory were fleeing for shelter. This scene was the most awful representation of the Day of Judgment of any thing I ever beheld.[17]

[15] Richard Beard, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some of the Early Ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874), 294-295.
[16] Rev. Finis Ewing, Rev. Robert Donnell, "To Reverend Robert Donnell," Published Letter, 27 June 1818, in Franceway Ranna Cossitt, *The Life and Times of Rev. Finis Ewing: One of the Founders and Fathers of The Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Louisville, KY: Board of Publication of The Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1853), 245-247.
[17] Dow, *Cosmopolite,* 249.

Jeremiah Jeter remembered a tremendous lightning bolt striking a large oak that presided over a camp's area for primary religious observances. This natural event could have killed dozens, except the bolt fell during the dinner hour, merciful timing that Jeter and others unhesitatingly attributed to Providence.[18] Repairing to the tents for prayer during a storm also readied would-be Christian soldiers for renewed spiritual campaigns. As the ever-sanguine Reverend A. P. Mead acclaimed, "…this cessation of hostilities on the general field will only allow them to brighten their armor and prepare for another engagement. When the sky brightens, look out. The enemy shall suffer."[19]

Additionally, people of faith took avoidance of illness despite exposure to the elements as signaling yet another measure of divine presence in the camp meeting context. During a "pitiless storm" that unleashed torrential rains, Reverend Jeremiah Jeter recounted, participants found themselves unable to remain dry, awake or asleep. Concerned campers deemed some of the older and less healthy congregants as irretrievably endangered: "Their death was judged to be inevitable, but not one of them…suffered any damage from the exposure, and some of them were decidedly benefited by it."[20] Another writer underscored the remarkable durability of itinerant preachers who survived weeks of outdoor exposure, nighttime air, sleeping on wet

[18] Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *The Recollections of a Long Life* (Richmond, VA.: The Religious Herald Co., 1891), 155.
[19] Mead, *Manna*, 159.
[20] Jeter, *Long Life*, 154.

ground and intense service in camp meetings' heated throngs and tents, asserting that God rendered them "immortal till their work is done."[21]

Granting attendees a powerful sense of connection with the divine, camp meetings' endowed their physical sites with sacredness, usually temporarily, but for longer in the case of repeated meetings at a special site. Remembering one such campground, an evangelist avowed it to be, "the nearest heaven of any place I had ever been in…I should like to live and die on that sacred spot. It was, indeed, 'the house of God and the gate of heaven' to me, and hundreds of others."[22] A Methodist itinerant from Maine known as "Camp Meeting John" from his love for the gatherings deemed them "the next place to heaven," found salvation at one in 1825, and passed from the Earth at another in 1887.[23] Zilpha Elaw wrote that a camp meeting, "is like heaven descended upon an earthly soil…."[24] One Virginia Methodist compared an 1807 camp meeting to the future "happy time when saints and angels shall all meet in the presence of the Ancient of Days to praise God eternally…."[25]

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[21] John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 108-109. Conevery Bolton Valencius, *The Health of The Country: How American Settlers Understood Themselves and Their Land* (New York: Basic Books, 2002) provides an excellent study of frontier attitudes about the interrelationships of health, the land, weather, climate and spirituality.

[22] Reverend Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden; New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1872), 65.

[23] Stephen Allen, *The Life of Rev. John Allen, Better Known as "Camp-meeting John"* (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1888), 11, 21-26, quote on 23.

[24] Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life,* 19.

[25] John Early, "Diary of John Early, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 34, no. 3 (July 1926): 249.

Pertinently, religious scholar Mircea Eliade argued that such uniquely holy sites--which appear cross-culturally in various forms--constitute for believers in each case an *axis mundi*, an "irruption of the sacred into the world."[26] Affirming this conception, Cumberland Presbyterian minister William Harris, who was well known for spending three months a year at the outdoor revivals, proclaimed from the pulpit: "a camp meeting was the best place on this side of heaven."[27] A veteran of frontier circuits in Tennessee and West Texas declared that, "When, like Israel in olden days, the Church leaves Egypt and camps in the wilderness, God spreads out His cloud of glory about it, and sinners coming there realize that it is holy ground…."[28] Remembering an especially successful camp meeting scene, Alfred Brunson wrote: "I never wept more freely than when I left the ground, which to me, and to many others, was holy ground."[29] Thus, storied camp meeting sites sacralized the landscape for early Americans in a way that had nothing to do with buildings or battles, long ago saints or martyrs. Further, by comparing more settled regions and institutional edifices to Old Testament Egypt, the foregoing passage valorizes the natural setting as actually superior. Indeed, the author contended that by drawing people who "never entered city steepled churches," rustic camp meetings

[26] Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane*, especially 24-50, quote on 45. *Axis mundi* refers to any cultural conception of a sacred tree, pole, column, etc.—literal or metaphorical, sometimes with phallic or umbilical qualities--connecting the temporal world and its denizens with the heavens and divinity, thus providing an exceptionally fecund channel for accessing God or the gods.
[27] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 126.
[28] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 106.
[29] Brunson, *Western Pioneer*, 65.

produced "many of the ablest veterans in the church."[30] Although certainly no camp meeting ever achieved the insularity he desired, Reverend A. E. Ballard admonished participants to disavow secular topics altogether while in the sacralized camp meeting domain, deeming it a consecrated "mountain" above the secular "valley" where all should hope and pray "to be possessed of the Holy Ghost."[31]

Enhancing the sanctified atmosphere of camp meeting sites, sponsors purposely chose idyllic settings, such as the following in North Alabama:

> …on a point of the mountain is a bold spring, the never-failing waters of which are ever clear and cool. Just below this spring, at the base of the mountain, is a plateau. The combination of mountain and valley, of fountain and forest make it a lovely place…Its surroundings were well calculated to broaden, elevate and refine. It was the very place, with its uplifted peaks and outlying plains, its living fountains and verdant groves, to induce holy meditation and to prompt genuine eloquence.[32]

John Sears has noted that nineteenth century Americans substituted the natural sublimity of America's most beautiful landscapes for the venerable but humanly constructed shrines of the Old World, a cultural practice clearly illustrated in the selection of camp meeting locations.[33] In addition, these natural settings held the virtue—especially for up and coming sects like the Methodists or Cumberland Presbyterians—of no previous

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[30] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 106.
[31] Reverend A. E. Ballard, *Penuel; or, Face to Face with God*, ed. A. McLean and J. W. Eaton (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., Publisher, 1869), 16-17.
[32] Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 230.
[33] John Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999). Sears also emphasizes how nineteenth century Americans' response to natural wonders often paralleled the Protestant conversion experience (see Sears, *Sacred Places*, 13-16).

association with any ecclesial or denominational competitors.[34] As if to complete the grandeur of such scenes--granting, as with proximity to a mountain spring, the choice also served a quite practical purpose-- planners frequently timed their gatherings to unfold around the full moon. An English visitor to an Indiana camp meeting remembered that the "moon was in meridian splendor above our heads."[35] Howe described the effect in his recollection of frontier religion: "when the moon…begins to show its disc above the dark summits of the mountains and a few stars are seen glimmering in the West…The whole constitutes a temple worthy of the grandeur of God."[36] The collection of sinners attracted to the perimeter of camp meetings typically supplied a sharp contrast with the holiness at the events' heart, yet sometimes the savagery of the natural setting could serve the comparative purpose as well. Anson West evoked both serene and threateningly primeval images in his account of an early 1800s meeting, "held in a forest, and the Indians were fishing in the river, while we were preaching and praying; the bears were ravaging the corn fields, and the wolves and tigers were howling and screaming in the very woods…of our meeting."[37]

In more domesticated yet still compelling portraits of night services, sources report the haunting play of bonfires, torches, lanterns and lamps (sometimes strung from tent

[34] *Ibid*. Sears notes the preferably non-sectarian or ecumenical nature of many emergent "shrines" in the religiously plural United States.
[35] Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* 140.
[36] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 304. Again, for lunar lore in Western culture, see Montgomery, *The Moon and the Western Imagination* and Brunner, *Moon: A Brief History*. Brunner underscores the significance of "moon gazing" in nineteenth century Europe and North America.
[37] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 210.

to tent) on the majestic forest surrounding camp meetings. One witness declared, "The scenery of the most brilliant theater in the world, is only a painting for children compared to this," and that it "elevates the soul to fit converse with its creator, God."[38] A visiting English clergyman recollected preaching after dark in a woodland glen where the towering but pruned trees reminded him of Europe's columned churches.[39] Notably, celebrity minister Henry Ward Beecher's "picturesque" account of camp meetings to Fredrika Bremer so strongly emphasized nighttime features that the Swedish traveler and writer initially employed the term "the nocturnal camp meeting of the West" in her letters home.[40] One well-educated observer characterized the impression of "three-pronged lamps" suspended above twelve presiding ministers as "pouring down…radiance on their heads, and surrounding them with such lights and shadows as Rembrandt would love to copy. Behind the stand were clustered about 300 negroes, who, with their black faces and white dresses thrown into partial lights, were a striking object."[41] In his chronicles of Hoosier state religion, David Turpie described the effective use of lanterns around camps as well as wooden tripod-based fires blazing away at a chosen height, whereas a keen observer declared of his 1823 Canadian meeting, "…the whole place was illuminated with fire-stands, which had a very imposing appearance amongst the trees

[38] Howe, *Historical Collections* 308.
[39] Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Volume 1* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 188.
[40] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 243.
[41] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 190.

and leaves."[42] Much impressed with these when attending services, Bremer submitted that they were called "fire-altars, or fire-hills" and resembled "a sort of lofty table raised on posts" with "a flickering brilliance of flame" emitted from "large billets of firewood" that contained considerable resin (quite probably the coastal plain's abundant yellow pine at her South Carolina meeting).[43] Another source also describes these sources of illumination as being "constructed in the form of altars" and as situated in each corner of the more or less square area reserved for worship services. According to this witness, each platform "supported layers of earth and sod, on which burned immense fires of blazing pine-wood."[44] A detailed Kentucky painting from the era reveals these blazing tripods scattered around a forest gathering of worshipers and spectators. Though providing considerable light, they also issued a good deal of smoke (no doubt especially when employing resinous wood such as pine), thus contributing to the mysterious atmosphere prevailing at assemblies after dark.[45]

Moreover, any camp meeting's central radiance received support from constellations of campfire throughout the grounds:

> …on every side in the wood, far away in its most remote recesses, burned larger or smaller fires, before tents or in other places, and lit up the lofty fir-tree stems, which seemed like columns of an immense natural temple consecrated to fire. The vast dome above was dark,

[42] David Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1903), 104; Reverend Peter Jones, *Life and Journals of Kah-ke-wa-quo-nā-by: (Rev. Peter Jones), Wesleyan Missionary* (Toronto: Anson Green, 1860), 9-10.
[43] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307.
[44] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 140.
[45] Untitled and Unpublished Watercolor of Nighttime Camp Meeting, Special Collections, Kentucky Historical Society Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky.

> and the air was so still that the flames rose straight upward, and cast a wild light, as of a strange dawn upon the fir-tree tops and the black clouds.[46]

One attentive visitor characterized the camp meeting as surrounded by a "triple circle of defence [sic]," which included the tents, then wagons, and then horses encircling the area dedicated to religious devotions. She commented further upon the charming visual effect of "numerous fires burning brightly within" this holy zone, even as there appeared "still more numerous lights flickering from the trees that were left in the enclosure."[47] A veteran Midwestern minister captured the allure of nocturnal services and their preternatural mood:

> At night the whole scene was awfully sublime. The ranges of tents, the fires reflecting amidst the branches of the forest-trees; the candles and lamps illuminating the ground; hundreds moving to and fro with torches like Gideon's army; the sound of exhortation, singing, praying, and rejoicing rushing from various parts of the encampment, was enough to enlist the feelings of the heart and absorb all the powers of thought.[48]

Trollope echoed this with her dreamy observation about the internally lit tents, reporting that "faint light…gleamed through the white drapery," and that "backed as it was by the dark forest" produced "a beautiful and mysterious effect, that set the imagination at work…."[49]

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[46] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307.
[47] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 139-40.
[48] Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 108.
[49] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 140.

As demonstrated above, camp meeting accounts preponderantly valorize nighttime and services held therein, thus eliciting two interesting points relative to recent cultural histories of pre-industrial night. In his book *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past*, historian Roger Ekirch explains the social leveling endowed by the shadow of darkness and its attendant hours, a theme that extends to the relatively egalitarian camp meeting context. He writes, "Night revolutionized the social landscape. If darkness rendered members of the mighty more plebeian, it made legions of the weak more powerful."[50] Of course, camp meetings principally derived their comparative egalitarianism from evangelical concepts about all souls' spiritual equivalence in religious settings, along with the rough parity of frontier society in many cases. However, following Ekirch, the fall of night over meetings—meetings then lit only by the various picturesque but decidedly imperfect sources of illumination just detailed--would have obscured social markers of wealth and standing such as attire, bearing, accessories, possessions, mannerisms, health and previous medical care to a considerable degree, thus augmenting camp meetings' equalitarian spirit.[51] Two Englishmen unaccustomed to rural America's nighttime world powerfully evoked the concealing shroud of darkness, emphasizing, "Never was darkness made more visible, more present." Averring that "enkindled" lights only rendered the darkness beyond them more opaque, the gentlemen contended, "everywhere more was hidden than seen," as tents looming in the dark could only dimly

[50] A. Roger Ekirch, *At Day's Close: Night in Times Past* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 227.
[51] *Ibid*, esp. 227-260.

be perceived, and the "verdant…vaulted roof" of the trees lay partially hidden in "the mysterious and thickening shadows which dwelt there."[52]

Going further, Ekirch conjures nighttime's accompanying emotional veil of fear, paranoia, mistrust, superstition and depression.[53] He quotes a late eighteenth century English newspaper article's characterization of premodern night: "Our ancestors spent one half of their life in guarding against death…they dreaded fire, thieves, famine, hoarded up their gains for their wives and children, and were some of them under terrible apprehensions about their fate in the next world."[54] Offering his own evaluation, Ekirch contends that denizens of the brightly lit modern world are hard-pressed to imagine the paranoia and anxiety imposed by pre-industrial night's gloom: "Just as heaven glowed with celestial light, darkness foreshadowed the agonies awaiting transgressors after death. Often likened to hell ("eternal night"), nighttime anticipated a netherworld of chaos and despair, black as pitch, swarming with imps and demons…Indeed, it was the conviction of some divines that God created night as proof of hell's existence."[55]

Craig Koslofsky also underscores strong traditional European associations of the night with fear, mystery and the supernatural, particularly in terms of ghosts, witchcraft and the diabolical. Nonetheless, whereas he affirms the dominance of these views in

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[52] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 206.
[53] Ekirch, *At Day's Close,* 7-58.
[54] *Ibid*, 7.
[55] *Ibid*, 8. See also Ernest Freeberg, *The Age of Edison: Electric Light and the Invention of Modern America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014) for a wealth of highly illuminating discussions regarding the profound differences wrought in human existence and nighttime experience by modern lighting's advent.

classical and medieval sources, the author argues that by the late sixteenth century a more complex understanding of darkness emerged. Of particular relevance here, Koslofsky identifies European reappraisal of nighttime's spiritual worth as originating with the clandestine needs of radical and/or proscribed sects during the Reformation Era. Anabaptists, Moravians, English Catholics, Puritans and various British dissenters, Huguenots plus many others found a degree of religious autonomy and security under cover of darkness, transforming night hours into a context for worship, reflection and spiritual community rather than the devil's playground or a foreboding evocation of human separation from the divine.[56] Camp meetings maintained a heightened attentiveness to supernaturalism, life's brevity and the fate of the soul, but their nocturnal incarnations' typically joyous atmosphere banished gloom and despair in an ebullient celebration of faith and hope, of God's irrevocable promises and saving grace. Moreover, the often celebratory character of night meetings embraced attendees in a communal festival of trust (in the Lord but also fellow Christians), reassurance (supernatural indeed, but decidedly optimistic) and joy, to say nothing of a profound Christian camaraderie that expelled paranoia and suspicion of (at least some of) one's fellow human beings.

[56] Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire: A History of the Night in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-90 and 236-257. Koslofsky extensively delineates what he classifies as "nocturnalization…the ongoing expansion of the legitimate social and symbolic uses of the night" (2). Discerning nothing less than an early modern "revolution" in the use and conception of nighttime, Koslofsky builds his case with attention to emergent nocturnal activities (such as courtly fireworks and frivolity, elite and middle class socializing, urban theater, religious meetings and the era's wildly popular coffeehouses) as well as myriad cultural references in literature, art and religious thought. While able to demonstrate extensive "colonization" of the urban night—especially facilitated by the implementation of street lighting--Koslofsky concedes that rural rhythms of life changed far less.

Consequently, nocturnal services presented a particularly commanding stage for enacting evangelical Christianity's triumph over multifarious perils of darkness—literal or metaphorical—from wariness of a neighbor or the misery of rural loneliness to fear of the devil or anguish concerning the afterlife.

Consistent with many congregants' understanding of camp meetings as a sacralized zone of remarkable possibilities on the threshold of the divine, mysterious events routinely occurred in seeming defiance of prosaic explanation. Not least among these events appeared the various physical manifestations of spiritual agony or exultation and holy possession. The atmosphere of one meeting felt as if it was "impregnated with electric fluid," while participants exhibited "spots of purple and scarlet thick on their hands and in their faces, visible, through the Holy Power passing through them, which caused an extraordinary quick circulation to pass through the blood and fluids."[57] At another gathering, "devotees were rolling on the ground in agonizing fervor fearful to behold…."[58]

Purely emotional extremes also abounded and customarily preceded physical displays. In camp meetings' hallowed and haunting atmosphere, passions and enthusiasm routinely overwhelmed celebrants. The aforementioned English visitor

[57] Quoted in Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 127.
[58] William Brown, *America: a Four Years' Residence in the United States and Canada* (Leeds, UK: Kemplay & Holland, 1849), 43.

returned to Britain with accounts of religious "ecstasy" and "hysterical" emotions--particularly among Methodists.[59] In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville ascribed "a fanatical and almost wild enthusiasm, which hardly exists in Europe" to camp meeting revivalists.[60] Legendary Reverend John S. Inskip averred that the "intensification of feeling incident to so large an assembly of fervent spirits can scarcely be conceived, except by those who have had the opportunity of witnessing it. To know what a point of interest and excitement the mind and heart may be drawn in such circumstances, can be understood only from experience."[61] Another minister recognized the cogent impact of camp meetings' unrelenting religious stimulation, noting that "hortatory" preaching, testimony, prayer, music, exhortation, or intense interpersonal persuasion constantly assailed sinners' defenses.[62] A witness at Cane Ridge echoed this, observing that the "meeting continued from Saturday till Tuesday--above seventy hours--without one minute's intermission."[63] Recounting an 1803 Maryland camp meeting, Reverend Samuel Coate claimed, "there were not three minutes one whole night but were in the exercises of singing or prayer. So it continued nearly through the whole meeting, except in time of preaching."[64]

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[59] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit,* 191.
[60] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: *Volume II* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 620.
[61] Reverend John S. Inskip, *Penuel*, ed. McLean and Eaton, 12-13.
[62] Bishop Matthew Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel*, ed. McLean and Eaton, xviii.
[63] N. A., unidentified Presbyterian's personal letter, *Penuel,* ed. McLean and Eaton, xiv.
[64] John Atkinson, *Centennial History of American Methodism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston & Snowe, 1884), 497.

Such intense spiritual activity unleashed torrents of passion that most believers attributed to camp meetings' propinquity with the divine and conjunction with the supernatural. Lorenzo Dow habitually spoke of the devil as if he was actually present for gatherings, angry when meetings advanced contrary to his malign purposes, and even "growling" in remonstrance.[65] Of an 1841 gathering, an Illinois itinerant wrote:

> …we could almost feel the darkness of despair brooding over the sinner…. All eyes seemed as if turned toward the brooding pit, and the deep sighs heaved from a thousand breasts--Lord, save; Lord, save the sinner! And then he [the preacher] pointed to the Savior as the sinner's only refuge…I have never witnessed another such a scene. It was as if they realized that the judgment was near at hand. Some fell, and lay all night and cried for mercy; others screamed as if hell was moving from beneath to meet them at their coming.[66]

These circumstances proved so transfixing that casual observers, doubters, scoffers and would-be antagonists of camp meetings succumbed to emotional conversion with celebrated frequency. Occurring with sufficient regularity to become a virtual trope of the primary literature, one termed by some as the "running exercise," this scenario often features sinners trying to flee the meeting as their only means of resistance yet being struck down emotionally and perhaps physically as well, nonetheless.[67] During the Kentucky Revival just after 1800, a doctor hailing from one of that state's foremost families attended a camp meeting for entertainment and amusement but found himself overcome with "something very uncommon," whereupon he bolted for the nearby forest.

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[65] See, for example, Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 217, 232.
[66] Reverend S. R. Beggs, *Pages from the Early History of the West and Northwest* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1868), 271.
[67] William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859), 159.

Bystanders observed the young man "running as for life, but [he] did not proceed far till he fell down, and there lay till he submitted to the Lord, and afterwards became a zealous member of the church. Such cases were common."[68]

Cane Ridge and other early meetings in Kentucky during the first years of the Second Great Awakening established this pattern indelibly upon the camp meeting tradition. At one of the first gatherings, John McGee observed "…some exhorting, some shouting, some praying, and some crying for mercy, while others lay as dead men on the ground. Some of the spiritually wounded fled to the woods, and their groans could be heard all through the surrounding groves, as the groans of dying men."[69] At the bluegrass state's Cabin Creek in 1801 and at subsequent meetings, many more attempted to flee proceedings on foot as the entwined spirits of conviction and conversion took hold, only to be physically struck to the ground or drawn inexorably back to the services by a force they did not regard as originating within themselves. Summoning rural Americans' agricultural background, one minister offered the bucolic simile that attendees fell "like corn before a storm of wind."[70] Barton Stone more grimly compared them to "men slain in battle" while James Finley also adopted a martial simile (and reported his own efforts to escape): "At one time I saw at least five hundred swept down in a moment, as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed

[68] Stone, *Biography of Barton Stone*, 41.
[69] John McGee, Rev. Thomas L. Douglass, "Commencement of the Great Revival of Religion in Kentucky and Tennessee, in 1799," Published Letter, 23 June 1820, in *The Methodist Magazine, for the Year of Our Lord 1821,* ed. Rev. Ezekiel Cooper, Volume IV (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1821), 190.
[70] McGee, "Commencement of the Great Revival," *Methodist Magazine*, 191.

shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens. My hair rose up on my head, my whole frame trembled, the blood ran cold in my veins, and I fled for the woods…."[71]

Of those "struck down," many remained prostrate in an unconscious state or trance-like inattention to their physical surroundings. Indeed, the numbers of people in this mysterious condition sometimes necessitated an orderly arrangement of prone bodies to preserve space and avoid trampling while friends of the fallen watched over what one witness called "the strange phenomena of their conversion."[72] Spectators at Cane Ridge observed as many as five hundred people at once in the strange cataleptic state, which lasted anywhere from a brief span of minutes to several hours. Upon rising, many proceeded to exhort with fervor and determination, demonstrating no ill effects from the mystical experience.[73]

Long-time camp meeting minister Alfred Brunson described the condition:

> I saw some who fell…who lay for hours as if dead, having no appearance of life, except a regular pulse and occasional breathing; some lay as limpsy [sic] as a rag, their joints as loose as a skeleton hung together by wires, while others were so stiff and rigid in their joints that apparently a bone would break as soon as a joint would bend. In all these cases when the person came to, it was with a shout of glory to God for pardoning mercy. I saw also several who had previously obtained religion, thus lie, and in general they came out of such spells with a shout, but some came to as if out of a sleep; but all were happy….[74]

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[71] Stone, *Biography of Barton Stone*, 34-35; James Finley, *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley* (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2009, 1853), 167. Jeffrey Williams, *Religion and Violence in Early American Methodism: Taking the Kingdom by Force* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) provides a comprehensive survey and analysis of martial language in Wesleyan documents during the 1700s and earlier 1800s. Indeed, Williams contends that diminishing references to violence and embattlement in late antebellum Methodist parlance signaled an increasingly genteel and/or at least bourgeois ethos.
[72] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 217.
[73] N. A., personal letter, *Penuel,* ed. McLean and Eaton, xiv.
[74] Brunson, *Western Pioneer*, 65-66.

Barton Stone supplemented this picture with his observation that some of the fallen interrupted their lifeless spells momentarily by uttering "a deep groan, or piercing shriek, or by a prayer for mercy most fervently uttered. After lying thus for hours, they obtained deliverance."[75] Reporting these strange occurrences, an eyewitness wrote, "Numbers of thoughtless sinners have fallen as suddenly as if struck with lightning. Many professed infidels, and other vicious characters, have been arrested in this way, and sometimes at the very moment when they were uttering blasphemies against the work."[76] As Brunson pointed out, the already converted held no immunity to the experience, either. Nor, reportedly, did preachers. Lorenzo Dow, a man renowned for his own oratorical gifts, acclaimed that Pastor Nicholas Snethen transformed from a merely "pleasant speaker" to a powerful preacher after God "knocked him down twice at a camp-meeting, and gave him such a baptism as he never felt before."[77]

Although a full explanation for this behavior would foray perilously into the realms of psychology and theology, historical and sociological analysis offers some insight. First, the seemingly magical camp meeting context delineated above established a potent social mood of susceptibility to such physical reactions. Immersed in a powerfully collective and ritualized event, participants clearly experienced a diminishing sense of individuality and self-control, one in which communal action became highly

[75] Stone, *Biography of Barton Stone*, 34.
[76] George Baxter, A. Alexander, "America," Published Letter, 1 January 1802, in *The Missionary Magazine For 1802, Volume 7* (Edinburgh, U. K.: J. Ritchie, 1802), 426-429.
[77] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 215.

contagious in a process well known from modern political rallies, musical events or other instances of mass behavior.[78] The entire range of stimuli available—visual, aural, and tactile, the unusually large and noisy accumulations of highly agitated people, widespread conviction that the Holy Ghost literally, actively inhabited this sacralized zone on behalf of God Almighty--all served to render many people vulnerable. Believers utterly credited physical manifestations of divinity as possible, while those who *wanted* to believe perhaps sought the experience even more vigorously. Many who doubted were *merely* doubters, a quite different mentality than one of complete disbelief.

Further, most frontier and rural Americans of this period who attended camp meetings grew up in a cultural matrix deeply imbued with supernaturalism, divine signs and wonders, magic and mystery, ghosts and spirits.[79] Even for the skeptics, this shadowy world endured in their consciousness and culture. Meanwhile, the socio-political world that purported adulation of reason, progress and rationality frequently created disorder, strife and confusion. By the early 1800s, schismatic political battles, vicious business competition, class and cultural cleavages all divided and disappointed Americans. The Napoleonic Wars raged in Europe, threatening American independence and burying Enlightenment hopes on battlefields or in reactionary regimes. Surrounded

[78] Classic studies in the field include Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (New York: Aristeus Books, 2014, 1895); Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981); Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York: Viking Press, 1960); Jaap van Ginneken, *Crowds, Psychology and Politics 1871–1899* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[79] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 28-76; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 67-98, 164-194, and esp. 225-257.

by the world's human chaos yet temporarily ensconced in an evidently miraculous setting, attendees' overstimulated minds summoned their own supernaturalist proclivities and absorbed those around them. No wonder so many succumbed to the apparent power of the Holy Spirit, the authority of a suddenly undebatable and enduring God, the majesty of an ordered universe wherein divine sureties ruled, human life made sense, and the potentially frightening preternatural realm lay under God's dominion as well. Preachers and believers stricken by divine physical symptoms obtained affirmation, while seekers and doubters received assurance. Importantly, many who could not decide consciously which side to choose—evangelical supernaturalism or rational skepticism—made the decision subconsciously, easily embracing the seemingly more orderly and reassuring cosmology, the one planted in most of their minds long, long before.

While ensconced in their trances, not a few camp meeting participants experienced spiritual visions--usually of their savior--and mystic visits to heaven. Brunson maintained the acquaintance of a young woman who claimed repeated, planned celestial visitations that terminated abruptly with the sensation of falling "like a dead body from heaven" if anyone touched her while in the trance.[80] Pequot American and Methodist minister William Apess asserted visionary sojourns in heavenly spheres, wherein he would lose track of terrestrial time and return enraptured.[81] Of course, belief in spiritual

[80] Brunson, *Western Pioneer*, 67-68.
[81] William Apess, *A Son of the Forest & Other Writings* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 82.

possession could also take a dark turn, as in an allegedly occult incident recounted from Methodist minister John Collins' career. Itinerating during the early 1800s, Collins detoured from his camp meeting circuit to attend a Maryland woman exhibiting "frequent paroxysms of raving, in which she would utter heart-rending shrieks, and the most pitiable lamentations, and even profane and blasphemous expressions, accompanied with strong contortions of the body; during which she had often to be forcibly prevented from doing personal injury to herself, or those near her." [82] Determining with caution that this situation constituted possession by the devil or one of his demonic minions, Reverend Collins convened and led a Protestant exorcism that proved--after a particularly dramatic display of the aforementioned behavior--successful and enduring.[83] Thus, camp meeting culture intersected with the supernatural world on multiple fronts, with diabolical threats underscoring the imperative of accepting God's grace and salvation.[84]

One feature of the primary documents particularly serves to highlight believers' conviction that camp meetings comprised a sacred world apart, where normal physical laws receded in influence and supernatural ones reigned. Accounts of trances frequently

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[82] John McLean, *A Sketch of the Life of Reverend John Collins* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Power, 1849), 83.
[83] *Ibid*, 82-87.
[84] Though living contemporaneously with the Enlightenment, Methodist leader John Wesley maintained his distance from the Age of Reason in many ways and unapologetically revealed his convictions about the supernatural sphere's diabolical aspects in his journal, writing in 1768 that, "It is true likewise, that the English, in general, and indeed most of the men of learning in Europe, have given up all accounts of witches and apparitions, as mere old wives' fable. I am sorry for it…in direct opposition not only to the Bible, but to the suffrage of the wisest and best of men in all ages and nations…the giving up witchcraft, is, in effect, giving up the Bible." John Wesley, *Works of the Reverend John Wesley, in Ten Volumes*, vol. 3 (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1827), 245.

include skeptics, rationalists and even doctors who accused the afflicted of pretense, reproached ministers and exhorters for emotionalist sham, or proffered empirical explanations--only to be themselves confounded and have their worldview challenged or refuted. Mead relayed an incident wherein a physician asserted that a young woman in a trance was surely dying, only to have the medical opinion contradicted by her joyful and healthy return from the spiritual realm.[85] At Cane Ridge, an "intelligent deist" verbally accosted Barton Stone for ministerial fraud, to which the preacher responded "mildly." "Immediately" afterwards, this proponent of rationalism "fell as a dead man, and rose no more till he confessed the Savior."[86] In a telling passage that affirms the triumph of camp meeting mysticism over worldly empiricism and doubt, Lorenzo Dow wrote:

> …soon nine were sprawling on the ground, and some were apparently lifeless. The Doctors supposed they had fainted, and desired water and fans to be used: I replied, "Hush!" then they to shew the falacy [sic] of my ideas, attempted to determine it with their skill, but to their surprise their pulse was regular; some said, "it is fictitious, they make it." I answered, "the weather is warm and we are in a perspiration, whilst they are cold as corpses, which cannot be done by human art.[87]

In some cases, the gatherings' unrestrained expressions of religion and seeming imperviousness to natural explanations compelled learned exponents of rationalism and science to conflate camp meeting phenomena with the primordial darkness and extant primitivism that heirs of the Enlightenment conceived themselves as countering.

[85] Mead, *Manna*, 44-46.
[86] Stone, *Biography of Barton Stone*, 37.
[87] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 222.

Unfortunately, this conflation all too easily acquired racial themes as well. Addressing medical students in New York City during 1820, Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill--the exceptionally distinguished physician, scientist, professor and Jefferson protégé--designated the empirical purview "*Materia Medica*," but cautioned his auditors about the opposing "*Materia Magica*," a sphere inhabited by "the magic of the negroes, the tricks of the indians [sic], and certain other things" that "take place at Camp Meetings [sic]."[88] Although the esteemed physician and polymath failed to clarify whether he deemed such occurrences as truly supernatural, mere chicanery and delusion, or some of each, he clearly situated camp meetings outside the putatively rational trajectory of white civilization and as entwined with the supposedly primitive, unenlightened customs of non-whites. This heavy-handed racializing and othering of the camp-meeting faithful demonstrates racial conceptions' malleability in nineteenth-century American discourse, how deeply informed nineteenth century physical anthropology was by religio-cultural prescriptions,

[88] 'No Friend to Superstition' (Signed), "Letter to the Editor and Dr. Samuel L. Mitchell [sic]," *National Advocate, for the Country (New York)*, November 14, 1820. Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill (1764-1831; graduated University of Edinburgh, 1786) enjoyed tremendous renown for his virtually encyclopedic knowledge of diverse fields of scientific inquiry and as a populizer of scientific findings through his voluminous writings and frequent speaking engagements. After serving as "professor of chemistry, botany, and natural history" at New York's Columbia College during the 1790s, Mitchill entered Congress, representing New York as a Democratic-Republican in the House and subsequently the Senate. During his distinguished career, Mitchill became "founder and president of the Lyceum of Natural History of New York City 1817-1823; professor of chemistry and natural history in the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons 1808-1820 and of botany and materia medica 1820-1826." He also helped found Rutgers Medical School and served as its vice-president from 1826 until 1830. From the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-2005* (Washington D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2005), 1599.

and how transgressive of conventional norms most camp meetings' racial diversity, folk mysticism and emotionally charged, physically demonstrative worship could be. [89]

Dramatic and controversial, the "holy jerks," and "holy dance" provided further uncanny demonstrations of camp meeting sacralization for believers and firm proof of "primitive" or deluded otherness for non-believers. Lorenzo Dow—an unstinting promoter of enthusiasm and spectacle himself--characterized these as "a strange exercise indeed." In an intriguing parallel to his Methodist theology, Dow held the movements' impulse to be "involuntary" and divinely derived ***but*** as necessitating a person's

[89] Of course, Irish Catholic immigrants would soon be designated a separate race by many because of their non-Protestant and non-Anglo-Saxon behavior, as would Italian immigrants some decades later. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) provides a rewarding account of mainstream American Protestant efforts to racialize Mormons as non-white by virtue of the Latter Day Saints' divergent religious and marital practices. Toni Morrison has called racial othering in America a "projection of the not-me…a playground for the imagination...a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American." See Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 38. Cf. also Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Douglas L. Howard, *The Gothic Other: Racial and Social Constructions in the Literary Imagination* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, 2004), which examines the literary practice of instantiating Gothic horror and malign darkness in the racial, socio-cultural or religious Other. Wendy Fall has noted Methodist worship's position *outside* of prescriptively correct behavior for "the proper English person" because of Wesleyans' "deviation from rationality." See Wendy Fall, "Religion," *Glossary of the Gothic*, http://epublications.marquette.edu/gothic_religion/ (accessed May 20, 2015). Robert F. Geary discusses Methodism's relationship with Gothic literature and rationality in *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction: Horror, Belief, and Literary Change* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992). See also R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Russell W. Stevenson, *For the Cause of Righteousness: A Global History of Blacks and Mormonism, 1830-2013* (Sandy, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2014). Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) insightfully utilizes Weberian theories of the Protestant Work Ethic and Rationality to explain the evolution of racial thought and the process of racial othering in nineteenth century America. Thomas Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) provided a groundbreaking study when published and usefully delineates conceptions of race in relation to American colonial experience, the Enlightenment, as well as nineteenth century scientific, social, religious and literary thought. Also see Thomas C. Patterson, *A Social History of Anthropology in the United States* (London: Bloomsbury Academic Publishing, 2003) and his *Inventing Western Civilization* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997), the latter of which deftly analyzes historical constructs of "civilization" and "primitivism" in terms of their interaction with race (plus class and gender).

acquiescence. Resistance to the compulsion produced stupor and inertia, while submission typically invited "a heavenly smile and solemnity on the countenance, which carries a great conviction to the minds of beholders." [90] Other sources present the phenomenon as irresistible (perhaps revealing their Calvinist roots), or as a basis for religious anxiety because of evangelical proscriptions against dancing. [91] From his Kentucky experiences, Presbyterian minister John Lyle amusingly related the case of an elderly African American man who embraced the jerks at camp meetings in order to avoid the immoral act of dancing.[92]

Barton Stone reported fits of the jerks upon "wicked persons" who cursed the 'possession' even as it occurred, while Peter Cartwright even related the camp meeting death of an inebriated disruptor who rashly contested the phenomenon with more whiskey, flight, anger and profanity. Cartwright held that the jerks often involved God's admonition, wherein acquiescence helped them to subside. [93] Conversely, Reverend Joseph Brown welcomed the jerking exercise as "a visitation from God…intended to convince gainsayers that the religious movement which was then just commencing in the country was from God." Once he entered this state, which recurred intermittently throughout his life, Brown claimed to "enjoy more of the light and comfort of religion

[90] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 229.
[91] Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*: *Or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 136-137.
[92] Reverend John Lyle, "*Narratio Factorum*, 1801," Microfilm of Handwritten Manuscript, n. p., Special Collections, Kentucky Historical Society Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky.
[93] Stone, *Biography of Barton Stone,* 40; Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*: *The Backwoods Preacher* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 48-51.

than he had ever enjoyed before…and always rejoiced in it as a lesson calculated to keep before the mind an illustration of man's utter helplessness, and…his 'nothingness' in the hands of God."[94] While delivering a blistering jeremiad, Reverend Jacob Young reminded his Methodist listeners that Presbyterians taunted them as "hypocrites" who "could refrain from shouting if they would." Upping the ante, the preacher yelled, "Do you leave off jerking, if you can." In response, "more than five hundred commenced jumping, shouting, and jerking. There was no more preaching that day," recollected Young. "One good old mother in Israel, admonished me and said, 'I had just done it in order to set them jerking.'"[95]

In some accounts, divine energy arrived in a manner analogous to a jolt of electrical current: "Then, like a flash, the power of God struck me. It seemed like something struck me in the top of my head and then went on out through the toes of my feet. I jumped, or rather, fell back against the back of my seat."[96] Young contended that the jerks visited camp meeting participants from all classes, diverse backgrounds and both genders, on occasion appearing with such ferocity that women's long hair snapped like whips while onlookers feared that those stricken would suffer broken necks and dislocated elbows or knees.[97] A well-regarded South Carolina Methodist named David Gray left a written account of this phenomenon at a Rutherford County camp meeting of

[94] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 231.
[95] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 138-139.
[96] Quoted in Juster, *Doomsayers*, 127.
[97] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 136-137.

1802: "Sometimes their heads would be jerked backward and forward with such violence that it would cause them to utter involuntarily a sharp, quick sound similar to the yelp of a dog." Gray affirmed that women's long hair would "crack like a whip" during the exercises, while their arms convulsed so vigorously in opposition to the body that it seemed the limbs would fly "from the body…it was as impossible to hold them still almost as to hold a wild horse." Whereas unaffected women surrounded and protected other females so consumed, men jerked "at large through the congregation, over benches, over logs, and even over fences." Gray reported that celebrants' feet would become agitated "with a quick, dancing motion" of "such rapidity" that they rattled "like drumsticks."[98] Sometimes accompanied by strange laughter and shouts, screaming and running, as well as a surreally expectant gaze toward the heavens during the dancing exercise, this behavior inarguably amplified the intense supernatural mood that rendered camp meetings so spiritually fecund and movingly mystical for those present.[99] Of further significance—and decidedly reflecting the early republic's rapidly democratizing culture--this complex of devotional "exercises" readily situated congregants from sundry walks of American life as active, consequential contributors to the mass outdoor gatherings.

[98] Albert Micajah Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1883), 273-274.
[99] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 136-137; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 229; Cartwright, *Autobiography,* 48-52.

Thus, American camp meetings of the era between the turn of the nineteenth century and the Civil War comprised for many attendees a sacred terrain on the threshold of the supernatural world, a temporal and spatial context that intersected with the divine and empowered ordinary people to transform their lives in profound ways. Season of year and time of day (or night), weather, the moon, lighting and the vast American forest all contributed to and heightened the mood of extraordinary possibility and sense of transfigurative potential that reigned at camp meetings. Yet the greatest source of transformative opportunity resided in attendees' faith and conviction that their lives, those of others, and the world beyond the consecrated camp meeting domain could be changed. Moreover, the camp meeting endowed rural Americans with a unique, exhilarating and sacralized realm—a "holy ground"--in which to define themselves according to the various events, activities and values present, a definition that propelled them back into their ordinary and often difficult lives with a sense of meaning, belonging and purpose.

Chapter Five:
"Like the Sound of Many Waters": Camp Meetings' Democratic Noise

In his often stunningly immediate description of camp meetings in their heyday, John F. Wright recounts—along with the hopeful arrival of family wagons, the diligent construction of camp and meeting grounds, even the careful placement of cooking fires—also the considerable amount of sound, the sheer acoustical volume produced by the gatherings' faithful. In addition to joyous sociability, trumpeted calls to meals or worship, plus the urgent hours of ministerial or musical appeal to the saved and sinners, camp meetings generated a great deal of decidedly democratic and ecstatic ***noise*** that must be understood in terms of assertions of selfhood and autonomy by the poor, African Americans, Native Americans, women and children.[1] Sound issued from not only appointed preachers or august personages in attendance, but from the rural masses who offered testimonials, prayed, admonished, sang, "shouted," exhorted and exulted to express spiritual yearnings and certitudes in myriad noisy ways. Ordinary farm families--some dirt poor and engaged in the most important, exciting trip of their year or perhaps lives--women of all stations (prostitutes and destitute widows among them), deeply impressionable children of various ages, African Americans—many of whom lived in slavery, enduring physical suffering and constant indignities—as well as curious Native Americans, tentatively venturing out from imperiled societies, came to camp meetings

[1] John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 105-109.

and sounded their voices. These voices—gentle or raucous, hesitant or bold, highly conscious of or apparently oblivious to their social context—proclaimed spiritual affliction, remorse, personal crisis or abject fear, but also hope, joy, life-affirming conviction and pious epiphany, transcendent ecstasies and thrilling flights of mystical Christian deliverance. Some simply wept in gratitude for the salvation of a loved one. Others laughed maniacally or yelled to heaven, even convulsed violently or uttered words that would have passed as nonsense but for their ostensibly divine provenance. In what might seem an irony--but becomes quite understandable given camp meetings' spiritual egalitarianism and social fluidity--early American society's most oppressed and lowest-ranking members, African American slaves, often figured as the most vocally and physically expressive participants of all. Truly, America's characteristically democratic and "barbaric yawp" never announced itself religiously with more fervor, populist piety or inclusivity. Tocqueville wrote of the American camp meeting: "Although the desire of acquiring the good things of this world is the prevailing passion of the American people, certain momentary outbreaks occur, when their souls seem suddenly to burst the bonds of matter by which they are restrained, and to soar impetuously toward heaven."[2]

Both David Hempton and Leigh Eric Schmidt have thoughtfully emphasized the significance of an historical effort addressing the experience of sound in early

[2] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Vol. 2*, trans. Henry Reeve (Cambridge, MA: Sever and Francis, 1863), 161.

Methodism, which Hempton refers to as "largely an oral movement," whose recreation by scholars principally—and unavoidably, of course--involves "written sources." [3] Schmidt's invaluable *Hearing Things* underscores how variously the supposedly physical and empirical phenomenon of sound has been socially constructed and understood by people of the past—including eighteenth and earlier nineteenth century evangelicals who readily credited supernatural sources for what they 'heard' and just as readily 'heard' sounds with no natural origin. [4] Concurring, Hempton adds, "Moreover, religious insiders and outsiders heard noise differently…but what can be stated with confidence is that the Methodist message was inexorably bound up with the medium of oral culture. Itinerants preached, exhorters exhorted, class members confessed, hymns were sung, prayers were spoken, testimonies were delivered, and revival meetings throbbed with exclamatory noise."[5] Further, as historian Mark Smith argues in *Listening to Nineteenth Century America*, the subject of humanly created sound—whether public or private—comprises a major intersection for issues of authority and status with race, class and gender, an insight that applies quite decidedly to the sphere of religion and its implications for social order and hierarchy. Here again, everyone did not interpret

[3] David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 56. See also his *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25-71; and *The Church in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Taurus and Co., 2011), 141-168.
[4] Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).
[5] Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 56.

human sound the same, as some heard liberation, democracy and divine empowerment where others heard insurrection, disrespect and challenges to divine order.

Essentially, early American elites preferred the "lower orders" to worship with quiet, decorum and solemnity while cultivating a religiously derived ethos of industriousness and sobriety.[6] Presbyterianism provides a useful example of this

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[6] Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1-118, esp. 57-66. Salient works addressing this sort of religious paternalism and following the "social control thesis" of American religion, as it is often termed, include Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), which offers a classic "social control" interpretation of events in the 'Burned Over District.' Paul S. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978) benefits from a more nuanced approach yet clearly belongs within the social control school of interpretation as well. Glenn M. Harden, *Men and Women of Their Own Kind: Historians and Antebellum Reform* (USA: Dissertation.com, 2003) provides an extended historiographical review of the "social control" thesis's development and its major proponents.

Predictably, the term "social control" originated in sociological circles. It became popular through the work of American scholar Edward A. Ross and seems to have first been used in reference to American religion by Clifford S. Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44, no. 3 (December 1957): 423-44; Griffin continued the theme in his *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1960). In this vein, see also John R. Bodo, *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); Charles C. Cole, Jr., *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists, 1820-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954); Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); M. J. Heale, "Humanitarianism in the Early Republic: The Moral Reformers of New York, 1776-1825," *Journal of American Studies* 2, no. 2 (Oct. 1968): 161-75; W. David Lewis, "The Reformer as Conservative: Protestant Counter-Subversion in the Early Republic," in *The Development of an American Culture,* ed. Stanley Coben and Lorman Ratner (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1970); Raymond A. Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), and Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Rockdale: The Growth of an American Village in the Early Industrial Revolution* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1972).

Later social control thesis entries include Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John S. Gilkeson, Jr., *Middle-Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America (*Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986); Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Sean Wilentz and Paul E. Johnson, *The Kingdom of Matthias: A Story of Sex and Salvation in 19th-Century America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Relatedly, consult also Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Brion Davis, ed., *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Robert Remini, *The Jacksonian Era* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1997); Ronald G. Walters,

prescription. In 1789, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church publicly expressed its paternalistic ecclesiological vision for propagating salutary socio-economic and political values, assuring newly elected President Washington of its ministerial duty to help "render men sober, honest, and industrious citizens, and the obedient subjects of a lawful government." Expressing its hope for an ecumenical affirmation of "these pious labours," among at least "the most worthy brethren of other Christian denominations," the Assembly--which included no less eminent figure than Declaration of Independence signatory John Witherspoon—"assured that if we can, by mutual and generous emulation, promote truth and virtue, we shall render a great and important service to the republic; shall receive encouragement from every wise and good citizen; and, above all, meet the approbation of our Divine Master."[7] Although Presbyterians contributed much

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American Reformers, 1815–1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997); Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York : W. W. Norton , 2005); and T. Gregory Garvey, *Creating the Culture of Reform in Antebellum America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

In 1973, Lois Banner issued a ringing and now famous critique of many fundamental assumptions in the social control thesis with her "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60, no.1 (June 1973): 23-41. For significant interpretations of American religion opposing or counterbalancing the social control thesis, see Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); Mark Y. Hanley, *Beyond a Christian Commonwealth: The Protestant Quarrel with the American Republic, 1830-1860* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington, D. C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995); Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours' Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992); Lazerow, "Rethinking Religion and the American Working Class in Antebellum America," *Mid-America: An Historical Review* 75, no. 1 (January 1993): 85-104; Lazerow, "Spokesmen for the Working Class: Protestant Clergy and the Labor Movement in Antebellum New England," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 323-54.

[7] General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, President (George Washington) of the United States, "Address to Washington on his election to the Presidency," Published Letter, 26 May 1789, in Rev. Samuel J. Baird, ed., *A Collection of the Acts, Deliverances, and Testimonies of the Supreme Judicatory of the Presbyterian*

to camp meetings' foundation and figured prominently in some of the earliest efforts, the preponderance of Presbyterian leadership repudiated the gatherings after the first half decade or so, joining with elites of Anglican, Lutheran, German Reformed, Congregational and various liturgically conservative backgrounds in denouncing the meetings' disorderly, loud, physically demonstrative devotions as well as their characteristic manifestations of religious agency among uneducated, underprivileged, female and non-white participants as all being contrary to appropriate devotional and social propriety.

Vocally as well as physically assertive appropriations of status and authority by women, the poor, African Americans, Native Americans and even children in camp meeting worship combined with noisy, voluble leadership by ministers lacking formal education to provide opponents of the outdoor revivals with myriad objections. In Kentucky, one of the principal hotbeds for camp meetings, the state's Presbyterian Synod "censured and endeavored to silence those of their ministers that engaged in them," thus compelling secession by Presbyterian camp meeting supporters among the generally more common folk, many of whom subsequently formed the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, joined the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, or converted to Methodism.[8]

Church: from its Origin in America to the Present Time (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 827-828.

[8] Quote from Rev. A. P. Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness* (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 23. Founded during the Second Great Awakening among the frontier settlements in Tennessee and Kentucky's Cumberland River Valley, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church maintained support of camp meetings and spirited revivals, permitted ministers with limited or no formal education, and not infrequently supplanted Calvinist theology (particularly soteriology) with Arminian. Davy Crockett and William

From his lofty position at Princeton, Presbyterian theologian and professor Dr. Samuel Miller condescendingly pronounced that camp meetings "have always appeared…to make religion more an affair of display, of impulse, of noise, and of animal sympathy, than of understanding, the conscience, and the heart. In short, they…produce effects on our intellectual and moral nature analogous to strong drink."[9] Late in life, itinerant preacher Jacob Young remembered, "A long controversy had been going on between the Presbyterians and Methodists. The Presbyterians used to say some bitter things about their Methodist neighbors…They were the aristocracy, and we the poor people."[10] Speaking of a preeminent Presbyterian minister in North Carolina, an antebellum chronicler stated that Rev. Samuel McCorkle came to see the early nineteenth century revivals as Godly and beneficial, but "ever looked upon these 'exercises,' and some accompanying extravagances, as profane mixtures, against which he bore open testimony. He rather tolerated than approved camp-meetings; and sometimes was opposed to them…."[11]

The influential Episcopal Bishop John Henry Hopkins opposed revivalism--especially the democratic, innovative, sometimes rowdy brand occurring at camp

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Jennings Bryan stand among the small denomination's most famous adherents. See Matthew H. Gore, *The History of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Kentucky to 1988* (Memphis: Joint Heritage Committee of Covenant and Cumberland Presbyteries, 2000).

[9] Quoted in Charles Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985, 1955), 234.

[10] Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: Or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 137-138.

[11] William Henry Foote, *Sketches of North Carolina: Historical and Biographical, Illustrative of the Principles of a Portion of Her Early Settlers* (New York: R. Carter, 1846), 362.

meetings—declared Methodists "defective," and unsurprisingly championed sedate worship guided by tradition and the *Book of Common Prayer*.[12] Boston's Brahmin Unitarians emphasized the importance of reason in approaching the Divine and found the "extravagances committed of late, in various parts of our country, under the abused name of Revivals of Religion…ebullitions of overheated zeal…disturbances...revolting scenes…violent measures…fires of religious frenzy…high passionate excitement…inflammatory, or we should say, ferocious style of preaching" to be appalling means of stirring up the "coarse passions, and those especially which are expressed in strong and boisterous tones and gestures."[13] Unitarian leader William Ellery Channing declaimed, "In these feverish seasons, religion, or what bears the name, is spread, as by contagion, and to escape it is almost as difficult as to avoid a raging epidemic...The prevalent emotion...masters every mind which is not fortified...."[14] Pursuing a similar approach in connecting heightened emotions and noisy worship with mental destabilization, socially and religiously conservative newspapers endeavored to douse camp meetings' molten hot fervor, as in the *Gazette of the United States*' withering rebuke claiming the "noise and uproar made by the preachers have alarmed the weak

[12] John Henry Hopkins, *The Novelties which Disturb Our Peace: Letters Addressed to the Bishops, Clergy, and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: James M. Campbell & Co., 1844), 32; John Henry Hopkins, Jr., *The Life of the Late Right Reverend John Henry Hopkins: First Bishop of Vermont, and Seventh Presiding Bishop* (New York: F. J. Huntington & Co., 1873).

[13] "The Oneida and Troy Revivals," in the *Christian Examiner and Theological Review* 4 (Boston: Bowles and Dearborn, 1827), 242-249. See also Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

[14] William Ellery Channing, "On Associations," in *The Complete Works Of William Ellery Channing: Including The Perfect Life And Containing A Copious General Index And A Table Of Scripture References* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2010), 146-147.

and illiterate, and caused in some an entire derangement of intellect; their enthusiasm has been so great, as to make them complete madmen, and rendered a great many unfit for any occupation whatever."[15]

While staunch Calvinists repudiated the Arminian theology that animated camp meeting salvation--not least for its soteriological democratization and spiritual egalitarianism--social conservatives abhorred the meetings' encouragement of public prayer and exhortation by minorities, women, and children.[16] Some of the bitterest invective streamed from the pen of German Reformed professor John Williamson Nevin, who detected in Methodist-style revivalism the spirit of the radical Reformation as well as a potential for religious—and given the imputation, likely socio-political--anarchy.[17] Writing from Pennsylvania's Mercersburg Seminary, Nevin decried what he viewed as specious conversions wrought by ministerial manipulation, rampant individualism at the expense of true religious community, and substitution of public emotional displays for authentic faith.[18] Advocating a calmer, more gradual and organic acquaintance with

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[15] N. A., "Petersburg, (Virginia) Camp Meetings, August 7," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), September 4, 1804.

[16] The charismatic Methodist preacher and camp meeting regular Lorenzo Dow famously ridiculed Calvinist theology in response as, "You can and you can't—You shall and you shan't—You will and you won't—And you will be damned if you do—And you will be damned if you don't." Quoted in John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 18.

[17] Interestingly, Nevin—of Scottish ancestry--was raised, educated (Princeton Theological Seminary) and ordained as a Presbyterian, only becoming German Reformed after joining the faculty at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania's German Reformed Seminary. See D. G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High-Church Calvinist* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005).

[18] Keith J. Hardman and Michael J. McClymond, "History and Arguments of Anti-Revivalism," in the *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America*, ed. Michael J. McClymond (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press,

Christian faith, Congregationalist Horace Bushnell emphasized the religious nurture of children and feared that the subtler manifestations of God were "swallowed up and lost in the extraordinary" type of devotions that characterized camp meetings.[19] Although a successful revivalist, even New England's Asahel Nettleton criticized the emotionalism, uproar, democratization, female insurgency and physical excess of frontier religion, insisting instead upon decorous services, Calvinist theology, and leadership by men.[20] Thus erupted an entire range of critiques that would be frequently leveled at camp meetings: their *lack* of decorum, tranquility and passive worship, the dubious authority and humble origins of their leadership, the prominent and vocal parts played by women and minorities, as well as their potential for challenging "proper" spiritual—and perhaps social—order and hierarchy.

Thus, camp meetings and other forms of Second Great Awakening revivalism encouraged populist noise, democratic worship and relatively unrestricted informal leadership in a dramatic repudiation of most early American religious groups' traditional preference that people of lower social status remain primarily silent and consistently

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2006), 24; Robert Bruce Mullin, *The Puritan As Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 100-114; See also John Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench (*Chambersburg, PA: Office of the *Weekly Messenger*, 1844); Richard E. Wentz, *John Williamson Nevin: American Theologian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Hart, *High Church Calvinist*.

[19] Horace Bushnell, "The Spiritual Economy of Revivals of Religion," *Quarterly Christian Spectator* 10 (1838), quoted in Hardman and McClymond, "Anti-Revivalism," in *Religious Revivals*, ed. McClymond, 24; See also Mullin, *Puritan as Yankee*; Daniel Walker Howe, "The Social Science of Horace Bushnell," *The Journal of American History* 70, no. 2 (September 1983): 305-322.

[20] Richard Owen Roberts, "Asahel Nettleton," in *Religious Revivals*, ed. McClymond, 298-300; J. F. Thornbury, *God Sent Revival: The Story of Asahel Nettleton and the Second Great Awakening* (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 1977), 147-157.

submissive in worship contexts. Camp meetings—especially during their first two decades--unashamedly, brazenly, even defiantly transgressed multiple strictures registered by detractors. Though not without vehement challenges and furious criticism, evangelicalism's strident voice and boisterous egalitarianism escalated mightily during the tentatively more democratic early 1800s, even enjoying a measure of begrudging toleration by *some* elites for the (hopefully) concomitant increases in beneficial religious uplift, Protestant ethic and morality. Nonetheless, camp meeting clamor and commotion also flirted dangerously with unrestrained self-expression, unalloyed democracy and mob rule, while the prominence assumed by subaltern celebrants signaled perilous unorthodoxy and social leveling on multiple fronts.[21] Moreover, especially as cautious Presbyterians receded from camp meeting influence after the first half decade, these innovations enjoyed virtual institutionalization within the incredibly popular outdoor gatherings and—at least for a time—considerable support in other venues of the rapidly growing Methodist denominations (as well as among Cumberland Presbyterians) that sponsored most of them. Significantly, these customs attained rapid normalization and became badges of self-identity for many in what would emerge by 1820 as the largest denomination in the United States (The Methodist Episcopal Church) and especially within the camp meeting subculture.[22] This clearly represented a major challenge to

[21] Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century*, 57-66.

[22] Edwin Scott Gaustad, *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 4; Hatch, *Democratization*, 49, 257. The year 1811 likely witnessed the largest *proportion* ever of Americans attending camp meetings. Francis Asbury conjectured in a letter to Thomas Coke that between three and four million Americans attended camp meetings in that year, which would have embraced around half the population

mainstream Protestant practice and furnished one of the most rapidly democratizing elements of an American culture whose overall trajectory lay—however hesitantly and contestedly--in that direction.

Hence, just as the First Great Awakening's socio-cultural innovations anticipated and facilitated Revolutionary era changes in politics and societal interaction, the Second Awakening—particularly in its most vivid expression, the camp meeting—inherited the Revolution's principles of social democracy and freedom of expression while prefiguring and catalyzing social changes of the Jacksonian Era and well beyond.[23]Although early

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of about 7.5 million U. S. citizens. Hatch believes this number to be a considerable exaggeration, but estimates a number in attendance of around 1.2 million, which I calculate to be 16% of the 1811 population. Francis Asbury, *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church: From August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815, In Three Volumes* (New York: N. Bangs & T. Mason, 1821), 3: 455. For population figures, see http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/decennial/1810.html

[23] See Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America, from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965); Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind, from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); William G. McLoughlin, "'Enthusiasm for Liberty': the Great Awakening as the Key to the Revolution," in Jack P. Greene and William G. McLoughlin, *Preachers and Politicians: Two Essays on the Origins of the American Revolution* (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1977); William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction," *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 305-325.

Perry Miller (see especially 3-95) credited evangelical revivalism with significant cultural impact, while Alan Heimert posited (with likely overestimation) enormous and long-lasting consequences from the First Great Awakening in the political sphere and American Revolutionary cause. William McLoughlin offered significant social theory and keen argument in support of such claims, presenting Awakenings as periods of momentous cultural, social and political change. For McLoughlin, "Awakenings" consisted of prolonged (roughly thirty years in duration) movements of "cultural revitalization" that occur because of a major crisis in beliefs and values. Arguing that such awakenings have prevailed as the fundamental means of cultural transformation and social change in American history, McLoughlin further conceptualized them as "folk movements" wherein a culture redefines its identity and readjusts its ethos to the demands of a new situation. Resulting from prevalent loss of faith in the legitimacy of institutions, the authority of leaders, as well as the relevance of cultural norms and values, they are followed by periods of dramatic transformation in social, political, and economic institutions.

nineteenth century Methodism's hopeful experimentation with vocal leadership by racial minorities and women would achieve far more limited gains in antebellum society than those involving white men of humble background, the ultimate consequences for altering cultural views on the roles and abilities of African Americans, women, children and Native Americans cannot be denied.[24] Highly regarded Black camp meeting ministers of the Second Great Awakening like Richard Allen, Zilpha Elaw, George White and Harry Hoosier—along with so many other known or unnamed African American preachers and exhorters—earned considerable respect among white and African American auditors. Women exhorters, leaders and preachers such as Jerena Lee, Fanny Newell, Julia Foote and Phoebe Palmer (two of whom were also African American and thus doubly

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In reaction to other historians' widespread celebration of the First Great Awakening as a major causal event in American history and for the Revolution, Jon Butler famously contended in 1982 that no coherent, unified phenomenon deserving identification as "The Great Awakening" even took place, and that a period of disparate revivals ought not to be subsumed under one title. (The term "Great Awakening" originated in the 1800s.) This challenge fortuitously inspired a good deal of historiographical soul-searching and finely grained research on mid-eighteenth century revivalism. Utilizing these efforts and picking up Butler's gauntlet, Thomas Kidd issued a grand vision and sweeping, evidential case for a large-scale and unified Great Awakening by demonstrating how many leading figures interacted, communicated and preached in different regions—and how much awareness revivalists maintained of other revivals in other locales. He argues compellingly for recognition of a "Long Great Awakening" that lasted from the 1730s to the 1780s, at least in different places. Conceptualizing the Great Awakening as the beginning of American evangelicalism, Kidd analyzes its relationship to the American Revolution in a more nuanced fashion than Heimert, but still emphasizes an important interactive relationship between the two phenomena. Frank Lambert sees the Great Awakening as an "invention" of sorts, but one brilliantly conceived and adroitly marketed by its ministerial impresarios. He argues that major revivalists—such as George Whitefield, along with many others—ingeniously utilized the emerging print media, communication networks and better travel opportunities of the mid-eighteenth century Atlantic World to create a perception of the revivals as a powerful, unified, intercolonial and trans-Atlantic movement.

[24] Chapters Six focuses on the African American camp meeting experience, while Chapter Seven addresses women's and children's roles in the gatherings.

influential) redefined perceptions of their gender and contributed significantly to long-term gains in women's rights.

Along with the visually captivating nature of the services, camp meetings' acoustical impact and richly diverse sounds riveted many observers, enthralling some while repulsing others. In either case, many sources dwell upon this feature, reminding us that the jangle of noise and auditory stimulation associated with large crowds presented a far more unique experience to rural people of the early nineteenth century than denizens of the early twenty-first century can easily conceive.[25] Depicting this, one

[25] Cultural histories, anthropologies and historical phenomenologies of sound, hearing and acoustics—variously termed historical acoustemology, aural history, sociology/anthropology of sound or auditory cultural studies—provide a valuable means of reconstructing and better understanding religious experience in the past. Of particular significance in this historiography and literature stand questions regarding the Enlightenment and modernity's valorization of the visual over the aural, the marked differences in the phenomenologies of pre-modern and modern hearing (the latter being predicated on empirically verifiable "sounds" and scientific understandings of the ear's physicality whereas the former often endorsed a broader collection of potential sources for sound, including the supernatural), as well as the comparative significance of sight and hearing in the creation of primary historical documents. Mark M. Smith, ed., *Hearing History: A Reader* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004) provides a diverse collection of approaches to these issues while his *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) argues compellingly for attention to the social construction and phenomenological nature of sensory perception in the past. Smith's *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) analyzes sectional differences as well as issues of race, class and gender in aural perception.
In Leigh Eric Schmidt's highly significant work, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion and the American Enlightenment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), the author emphasizes modern sensory perception as valuing the visual over the acoustic and contends that the Enlightenment--with assistance from scientific, technical and entertaining demonstrations (such as ventriloquism)--redefined many hallowed aural religious experiences as dubious, illusory or even psychotic. Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) explores the religious, supernatural, magical and mystical dimensions of early American listening, while Alain Corbin, *Village Bells* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) offers a now classic study regarding the construction of time, space and sacredness through the sound of church and village bells, along with challenges to and evolutions of their use relative to French politics, culture and technology from the Revolutionary Era to the early Twentieth Century.

1809 attendee of a Methodist camp meeting occurring about forty miles up the Hudson River from Manhattan recorded his sensory, and especially aural, encounter. Debarking from their boat, this visitor and his fellow travelers could easily hear the echoes of worship from well over a half mile distant even though early morning still presided. Something of a freelance reporter, the New Yorker intended to log carefully the details of this curious scene, but found himself completely overwhelmed by the sights, sounds and "multiplicity of extraordinary circumstances." Later, he conceded that creating a careful account "appeared nearly as impossible as to attempt to number the stars." The bewildering and raucous activities included "the most extreme exertions of the human passions, bounded only by religious enthusiasm. Under its directions, and influenced by this stimulus, some were praying, some preaching, some singing, some shouting, and clapping their hands in exultation, some dancing and jumping, some crying, and others lying without motion, apparently deprived of life…." Turning to the pulpit, the New Yorker claimed that each minister typically refused to end his session of "preaching, praying, and singing, till he communicated so much of his enthusiastic fire, as to inflame the congregation: then a scene ensued of noise, and ***regular disorder*** (sic), beyond my

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David Howes, *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2005); *Sensual Relations: Engaging the Senses in Culture and Social Theory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); as well as David Howes and Constance Classen, *Ways of Sensing: Understanding the Senses in Society* (London: Routledge, 2014) situate human sensory perceptions as highly variable elements of cultural systems.

See also Don Ihde, *Listening and Voice: Phenomenologies of Sound* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007); Robert Jütte, *A History of the Senses: From Antiquity to Cyberspace,* trans. James Lynn (Cambridge, Oxford and Boston: Polity, 2004); and for two lively cultural histories of sound, Hillel Schwarz, *Making Noise: From Babel to the Big Bang and Beyond* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2011) and David Hendy, *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening* (London: Profile Books LTD, 2013).

power of description. This they call an outpouring of the spirit, and a modern day of Pentecost." [26] A long-time itinerant maintained that some camp meetings actually required very little preaching, since the congregants' abundant vocalizations left "but little time to preach. The people were either singing, shouting, or praying, nearly all the time."[27]

A visitor in the 1850s South particularly remembered the rich amalgam of sounds, as the "singing of hymns mingles with the invitations of the preachers, and the exhortations of the class-leaders with the groans and cries of the assembly." [28] After touring America in 1818 and 1819, a Scotsman noted the feverish mix of camp meeting hubbub, emphasizing that several ministers often preached simultaneously while worshipful choruses marched about singing hymns and fervently exhorting the unconverted. Underscoring the intense, unrelenting stream of sermonizing, the traveler shared, "when one speaker is worn out another begins, and thus it is kept up, without intermission, for a week or more." In reply to the preachers' "stimulating and alarming" outpour, he added, "the hearers become violently excited; groan, cry aloud, and throw themselves on the ground in paroxysms of mental agony." [29] A veteran of Illinois Methodism recollected a particularly volatile 1841 outdoor assembly, wherein a light

[26] NA, "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251.
[27] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 267.
[28] Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 308.
[29] John M. Duncan, *Travels through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819, Vol. 2* (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1823), 370-371.

mood of merriment prevailed until the lead minister issued a fire and brimstone jeremiad summoning, "the wailings of the damned, till it seemed as if the sound of those wailings reached our ears." Responding, some auditors "fell, and lay all night and cried for mercy; others screamed as if hell was moving from beneath to meet them at their coming…."[30] *The Life and Labors of James Quinn* also submits a powerful scene of "…penitents writhing in anguish, crying aloud to God for mercy; souls just born into the kingdom shouting in ecstasies and telling their raptures all abroad, and their relatives and friends… rejoicing over them as those recovered from the dead."[31] Similarly, an 1809 meeting in the Maryland woods produced "uncontrollable feelings" in a "vast congregation," which rejoined with "shouts of joy, mingled with cries for help, penitent sinners crying aloud for the pardon of their sins and the people of God rejoicing…."[32] These passages accentuate the interaction of sound between ministers or exhorters and congregational voices, as does John Early's diary entry from 1807 Virginia: "I began to preach and the people began to holloa [sic] and shout. I made out after a long time to finish my discourse while sinners trembled and cried aloud for mercy. All had a glorious time."[33]

Clearly, camp meetings engendered a sense that worshipers could freely and noisily express their feelings and convictions, their deepest fears and most sublime joy,

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[30] Reverend S. R. Beggs, *Pages from the Early History of the West and Northwest* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1868), 270-272.
[31] Wright, *Life and Labors of James Quinn*, 108.
[32] Reverend John Atkinson, *Centennial History of American Methodism* (New York: Phillips and Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1884), 502-504.
[33] John Early, "Diary of John Early, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 34, no. 3 (July 1926): 238.

at least within the framework of Arminian theology and evangelical impetus. Moreover, this afforded a highly unusual measure of opportunity for therapeutic emotional release in a deeply affirming situation. Emotional expression that would have been proscribed, deemed madness or anti-social behavior in other contexts could be channeled into the performative and socially acceptable yet highly personal religious behavior of the camp meeting, no doubt allowing many participants a sense of exhilaration, catharsis and eventual calm unavailable elsewhere. British visitors Reed and Matheson observed that some people—particularly female Methodists, according to their report—embraced ecstatic, noisy self-expression "as many do a dram…for the sake of enjoying it."[34] This in no way necessarily limits or denigrates adherents' sincere religious motivations or the spiritual results, but does recognize the appeal of emotional release, especially among many rural early Americans who perhaps otherwise led gritty yet stoic existences.

David Hendy reminds us of collective sound's centrality to feast days and many other church celebrations of late medieval and early modern Europe. Parading out of the churchyard and into the streets, parishioners sang, danced, played instruments, banged on pots and generally created a magnificent measure of communal noise that both enticed celebrants out of themselves into the populist mass and catalyzed ecstatic, highly physical worship. As he stipulates, Christianity long possessed "plenty who believed that losing themselves in ecstasy through dancing and singing was the best means of experiencing

[34] Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Volume 1* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 191.

the divine."[35] Similarly, the scale and collectivity of camp meetings' acoustical tumult bade worshipers to unite with others--in many cases with far more fellow human beings than any other context of their lives would ever permit—in a mass religious experience that transcended personal existence and the sometimes confining individualist tenets so prominent in both Protestant Christianity and American culture. This transcendence of self through ecstatic aural communion embraced not only fellow Christians, but in the perception of believers, God and His immutable, unquestionable verities, thus erecting an ancient sense of community and a forceful renewal of Christian covenant. For denizens of the rapidly changing American society of the early 1800s--a world of geographic mobility, economic competition and not infrequently isolating individualist values--this must have offered a beckoning sense of belonging, certitude and continuity.

Unquestionably, this exceptional social and spiritual encounter, with its potent sensorial and emotional properties, elicited profound feelings of transfigurative affirmation and purposeful self-definition. Given the sensory feast and concomitant rites of passage that camp meetings provided for so many attendees, the events seared themselves into the memories of a multitude of early American evangelicals as essential spiritual turning points, enduring personal touchstones, and major life events.[36] Finally, as rites of passage delivering converts into the eternal Christian community while

[35] See Hendy, *Noise: A Human History,* 134-143, quote on 135.
[36] For a fascinating exploration of the relationships among sound, human memory and construction of the self, see Seán Street, *The Memory of Sound: Preserving the Sonic Past* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

imparting a personal communion with God, camp meeting rituals benefited from any contextual accoutrement heightening their atmosphere of radical, transformational departure from normalcy and routine. In its uniqueness and rarity, the formidable aural component of the outdoor gatherings critically augmented just such an impression and mood. Indeed, camp meeting sound and fury contributed mightily to the sense of *axis mundi*, seemingly convoked a physical manifestation of God in the holy clamor, and furnished a sort of meditative basis and sensory overload to draw worshipers out of their individual selves. In a rural and frontier world of so much quiet, the meetings' din must have absorbed attendees' consciousness as effectively as silence does residents of our noisy modern world.

Echoing John Wright's observation that camp meeting "noise [was] like the sound of many waters, and heard afar off," Reverend James Finley recollected of Cane Ridge's meeting: "The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm."[37] A. J. Potter likewise summoned camp meeting sound and its effect upon him in meteorological terms: "Peal after peal, as the roaring surf telling of distant storms, startled my guilty soul, while bitter remembrances and tormenting fears came over me."[38] Intriguingly, the primary literature's frequent analogies to large volumes of moving water and weather remind us that many attendees held limited

[37] James B. Finley, *Autobiography of the Rev. James B. Finley: Or Pioneer Life in the West,* ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curts, 1853), 166.
[38] Hiram Atwill Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter: The Noted Parson of the Texas Frontier* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1888), 100.

familiarity with loud sounds. Of course, the reverberations of nature often joined the outdoor gatherings' human symphony, with particular drama during the afternoon thunder so common in Eastern America's late summer, when many camp meetings occurred. One auditor excitedly recorded how, "During all this tumult the singing continues loud and beautiful, and the thunder joins in with its pealing kettle-drum."[39] In other cases, proponents credited the camp meeting grove as the optimal context for various sanctified rites due to its particular combination of acoustical and spiritual characteristics: "The forest and the open heavens are friendly to the spirit of devotion, while the sound of prayer, of praise and instruction from the pulpit, spreads in open space, without the obstruction of walls, like the circular wave on smooth water."[40] In a signal departure from her general scorn for camp meeting aesthetics, even the customarily dyspeptic Frances Trollope conceded that the mixed chorus of worshipful voices singing "at dead of night, from the depths of their eternal forests" combined with the visual context of moonlight and campfire to create "a fine and solemn effect, that I shall not easily forget…."[41]

Along with noisy expressions of religious inclination, camp meetings' consecrated domain and uncanny spiritual possibilities controversially afforded participants a venue

[39] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 309.
[40] Andrew Manship, *Thirteen Years' Experience in the Itinerancy* (Philadelphia: Higgins & Perkinpine, 1856), 28-29.
[41] Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans, Vol. 1* (New York: Whittaker, Treacher & Company, 1832), 143.

for *hearing* the divine in remarkable ways. Certainly most worshipers perceived God at work in the voices of sermons and exhortations, prayer and song. Yet within the camp meeting setting, aural and mystical experiences also predictably intermingled, a fact clearly illustrating Leigh Eric Schmidt's contention that Methodist worship took place in an acoustically "liminal space where the spirit and the flesh were under constant negotiation" and in which "noises were silent yet heard, external yet internal, transient yet deathless, in the body yet beyond the body."[42] This "liminal space" meshed with the enduring supernaturalism and rich folk beliefs of rural early Americans, while holding at bay the empirically founded, scientific paradigm of aural phenomena that would come to dominate, and in some ways impoverish, modern existence.[43] Hence, this sacralized auditory space permitted believers to hear as they believed worshipers *should* rather than merely what they 'knew' people factually could. As a result, God and His aural messengers clearly "spoke" to some amenable worshipers, as in Zilpha Elaw's extraordinary ministerial commencement. A long-term camp meeting evangelist, Zilpha Elaw seems never to have doubted the authentic, physically audible, *real* nature of the celestial voice commanding her into the midst of a substantial, lively camp meeting to preach for the first time before a gathering throng of hundreds.[44] Stressing the value of

[42] Schmidt, *Hearing Things,* 56-57.
[43] Schmidt discusses and analyzes these different social constructions of reality brilliantly and at length in *Hearing Things*, of course.
[44] Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw, in Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William M. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 76-82.

words heard in dreams upon meetings' hallowed ground, McLean deemed them "of a supernatural agency," while an experienced minister of the Midwest typically paused for fifteen minutes between his messages in order to "let the Lord preach."[45] One young lady of Alfred Brunson's acquaintance achieved camp meeting notoriety through an apparent ability to "hear" what family and friends said at considerable distances from her while she occupied the catatonic state associated with "falling out" during camp meetings.[46] Another female worshiper descended into such a state at a Maine camp meeting, then experienced ascension into a vision of Heaven replete with the highly acoustical component of luminous angels singing brilliant anthems.[47] Lorenzo Dow routinely referred to Satan as if he hovered malevolently nearby, watching camp meetings and audibly "growling" in disapproval.[48] In this sacred sphere of ostensible miracles, quasi-possessions, physical manifestations of divine power and numinously derived transformations, divine sound constituted but one more element of a credible religious experience on the threshold of the supernatural world. As one minister phrased a reference to camp meetings' exceptional acoustical aspect, "The people heard as for eternity."[49]

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[45] John McLean, *A Sketch of the Life of Reverend John Collins* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Power, 1849), 81; Beggs, *Early History of the West*, 53-54.
[46] Reverend Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden; New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1872), 67-68.
[47] Fanny Newell, *Memoirs of Fanny Newell* (Springfield, MA: O. Scott and E. F. Newell, 1833), 55-57. See also Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 155.
[48] See, for example, Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814), 217, 232.
[49] Early, "Diary of John Early," 248.

Of course, those who believed themselves to have literally heard the voice of God or His agents remained relatively few in number, limited to camp meetings' more mystically receptive participants. In far more cases, attendees 'heard' an inner directive to sound *their* voices in the service of Christian deliverance, to "speak the language of Canaan," as many termed this spiritual vernacular.[50] Not infrequently, these emboldened voices issued from the lower orders of early American society. A member of New England's Pequot tribe who also possessed European and African ancestry, William Apess became a formidable and effective camp meeting minister for the Methodist denomination in New England and authored a fascinating autobiography as well as two other books.[51] Detailing his spontaneous emergence as an exhorter at an 1818 meeting, Apess recollected the combined trepidation, yearning and ultimate assurance of his first vocal contribution during worship:

> After Brother Hyde had concluded his sermon, I felt moved to rise and speak. I trembled at the thought; but believing it a duty required of me by my heavenly father, I could not disobey, and in rising to discharge this sacred obligation, I found all impediment of speech removed; my heart was enlarged, my soul glowed with holy fervor, and the blessing of the Almighty sanctified this, my first public attempt to warn sinners of their danger and invite them to the marriage supper of the Lamb. I was now in my proper element, just harnessed for the work, with the fire of divine love burning on my heart.[52]

Thus, Apess believed he truly appropriated his "voice" within the camp meeting context. Nor did he speak in mere mimicry. Quite far from being the stereotyped Indian

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[50] *Ibid*, 238.
[51] His *Son of the Forest* was the first ever autobiography by a Native American.
[52] William Apess, *A Son of the Forest & Other Writings* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 41-42.

convert whose "authentic" native voice was lost as Protestantism "colonized" his consciousness, Apess—as a minister, speaker and author—adroitly fused Methodist egalitarianism, Christian compassion and evangelical democratization with a staunch advocacy of Native Americans' rights and an unflinching critique of their racist mistreatment by whites. In fact, Professor Patricia Bizell has characterized Apess as "perhaps the most successful activist on behalf of Native American rights in the antebellum United States."[53] In British Canada, Ojibwa Peter Jones, also known as Kahkewaquonaby, converted to Methodist Christianity following a powerful camp meeting where he syncretically perceived the Christian God as one with the Ojibwa conception of the Great Spirit. Fascinatingly, Kahkewaquonaby described his conversion in terms of being able to *utter* the words, "Abba, Father," while elements of his people's traditional animistic beliefs informed nature's 'vocal' witness to his Christian awakening: "…all the works of God seemed to unite with me in uttering the praises of the Lord. The people, the trees of the woods, the gentle winds, the warbling notes of the birds, and the approaching sun, all declared the power and goodness of the Great Spirit."[54]

A common presence at camp meetings, the trumpet contributed to the rural meetings' sonic drama. Often employed to wake congregants from their slumbers and signal time for services, prayer or meals, trumpets imparted aural fellowship with armies

[53] Patricia Bizell, "(Native) American Jeremiad: The 'Mixed Blood' Rhetoric of William Apess," *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic,* ed. Ernest Stromberg (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 34-49.
[54] Donald B. Smith, *Sacred Feathers: The Reverend Peter Jones (Kahkewaquonaby) & the Mississauga Indians* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 60.

on the march--a fact not lost on participants envisaging themselves as soldiers for Christ—but more importantly with the Bible and heavenly occurrences.[55] After all, trumpets figure prominently throughout the Bible, sounding in association with God meeting Moses to deliver the Ten Commandments, Jericho's divinely ordained fall, Gideon and the Israelites' holy victory over the Midianites, to say nothing of heralding an entire series of apocalyptic occurrences in Revelations as well as presaging Christ's Second Coming in the Pauline eschatological narratives of Thessalonians and Corinthians.[56] Given his dramaturgical proclivities, Lorenzo Dow of course embraced the trumpet as a means of heightening his preaching performance, famously positioning a young trumpeter in a tree whence the brass instrument blew just as Dow's outdoor sermon swelled to an account of Judgment Day.[57] Likening a camp meeting preacher's voice to the trumpet involved a considerable accolade, as such a voice could "fill every

[55] For examples of the trumpet's use in signaling the time for specific camp meeting activities, see Elaw, *Memoirs*, in *Sisters of the Spirit,* 65-66, 81.

[56] Trumpets appear first in Exodus, as a means by which God signals Moses and the Israelites: "And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice." (Exodus 19:19 KJV). In Joshua 6:1-27, the account of Jericho's fall features God commanding (Joshua 6:4): "And seven priests shall bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns: and the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets." Judges 7:1-25 presents an Israelite military victory wherein 300 trumpets combine martial and divine significance. 1 Thessalonians 4:16 KJV references "the trump of God." A divine "last trump" holds enormous eschatological meaning in 1 Corinthians 15:52: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Finally, Revelations includes seven different angelic trumpet blasts, each portending an apocalyptic occurrence.

[57] Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 60. See also Donald Byrne, *No Foot of Land: Folklore of American Methodist Itinerants* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1975), 286, which affirms the nineteenth century notoriety of this theatrical gesture.

ear in the grove."[58] Further, British and American culture popularly associated the angel Gabriel with a trumpet via John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* an image perpetuated in African American Spirituals such as "Blow Yo' Trumpet, Gabriel."[59] As the historian of this trope affirms, "Our Negro spirituals are perhaps the best evidence of this view. They never tire of singing about Gabriel blowing his horn…."[60]

Clearly, trumpets heightened the sense of divine presence and holiness in the camp meeting setting, while also providing a piercingly serviceable instrument for summoning worshipers' attention. Inevitably, the quality of trumpeting varied, as one description of being awakened by "something which resembled the humming of an enormous wasp caught in a spider's web" reveals.[61] (Whatever this lacked in aesthetic finesse, the campers clearly awoke.) "At an early hour the trumpet sounded louder and louder. The people assembled around the tabernacle of the congregation, for morning prayer," remembered an itinerant.[62] According to Wright's *Sketches* chronicling the half-century ministry of James Quinn:

> The sound of the trumpet around the encampment, a short time after daylight, was the signal for all to arise and prepare for family devotion. After a sufficient time allowed, another signal of the trumpet was given for prayer in each tent, preceded by singing two or three verses of a hymn. A short time after sunrise the trumpet was again sounded for

[58] Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 502-503; Richard Beard, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some of the Early Ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874), 167.
[59] S. Vernon McCasland, "Gabriel's Trumpet," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 9, no. 3 (August 1941): 159–161.
[60] *Ibid*, 159.
[61] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 312.
[62] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 159.

> prayer meeting at the stand, at which many attended, while breakfast was being prepared.[63]

In this way, a storied instrument with ancient Biblical and deific connections announced the camp meeting day's sequential stations, intensifying the rural gatherings' compelling mood of blessedness and urgency.

Predictably, critics routinely indicted camp meeting clamor as signaling unorthodox worship, wicked activities, threats to social order and hierarchy, while mentally disturbing the impressionable masses. In a stern rebuke to the meetings, one conservative Virginia opponent claimed, "the noise and uproar…caused in some an entire derangement of intellect."[64] Mocking a supposedly rowdy camp meeting in the Natchez, Mississippi vicinity, skeptics quipped, "Is God deaf, that they cannot worship Him without such a noise?"[65] A European eyewitness characterized mid-century services in less than flattering terms, observing that "Men roar and bawl out; women screech like pigs about to be killed," while drolly referring to the night woods' concert of amphibious croaks and groans as a "parody of the scenes we had just witnessed."[66] Yet another antagonist felt strongly enough about the din and disorder to pen a letter to the editor in ordinarily taciturn Vermont, decrying camp meeting tumult on behalf of the apostle

[63] Wright, *Life and Labors of James Quinn*, 107-108. Again, regarding the trumpet as a signaling device for maintaining camp meetings' daily schedule, also see Elaw, *Memoirs,* in Andrews, *Sisters of the Spirit,* 65-66, 81; and Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 142 & 145.
[64] N. A., "Camp Meetings," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), September 04, 1804.
[65] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 232.
[66] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 309-310.

Paul's strictures against worshipful cacophony. This epistolary censor avowed that simultaneous sermons, prayers, exhortation and music combined with "perpetual coming and going of so many persons, with horses and rattling carriages…" as well as "spectators who are hanging about upon the outskirts, whispering, and jeering…" must surely violate Paul's admonition that "God is not the author of confusion."[67]

During the late 1820s, having secured fellow English folk who would guide her to an American camp meeting, the redoubtable Frances Trollope anticipated the experience visually *and* aurally, writing, "…I screwed my courage to the proper pitch, and set forth determined to see with my own eyes, and hear with my own ears, what a camp meeting really was." Upon arrival, the British cultural tourists discovered the general assembly to be in late evening recess, while many of the tents pulsed light and throbbed with the "clamour" of "praying, preaching, singing, and lamentation," plus "woeful and convulsive cries," all of which assembled for a "discordant, harsh and unnatural" effect "that could neither be mistaken nor forgotten" and "gave to each the air of a cell in Bedlam."[68] Peering into one of the tented worship circles, Trollope observed a "tall grim figure in black" resembling "an ill-constructed machine" and "jerkingly, painfully, yet rapidly" issuing a strange combination of sermon and prayer delivered with "incredible vehemence" while his mesmerized audience unceasingly invoked the name of Jesus and discharged "sobs, groans, and a sort of low howling inexpressibly painful to listen to."

[67] A Friend to Gospel Order (Signed), "Religious," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827.
[68] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 140-141.

Meanwhile, a particularly excited young man of feral appearance repeatedly bellowed the term "'Glory!' with a violence that seemed to swell every vein to bursting. It was too dreadful to look upon long, and we turned away shuddering," wrote Trollope.[69]

Summoned by a horn to gather for a united nighttime service, the English observers soon found themselves in the midst of a chorus pouring forth sublime music. However, as exhortation and preaching replaced the music, Trollope's delight turned to "horror and disgust" at the ensuing display of untoward physicality and wildly raucous human racket. A frantic clutch of women and girls exceeding one hundred in number surged toward the preaching en masse, seemingly dragging one another while emitting "howlings and groans so terrible" that the British visitor claimed she would "never cease to shudder" upon recollecting the discord. After wildly kneeling together in prayer, the worshiping females fell into a tangle of bodies, an "indescribable confusion of heads and legs" in spastic motion.[70] Though aghast at the physical display, Trollope reserved her most vicious reproof for the ***noise*** of this proceeding, comparing it to a dreadful spectacle in Dante's *Inferno*[71] and writing:

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[69] *Ibid,* 141.
[70] *Ibid*, 142-143.
[71] "Quivi sospiri, pianti, ed alti guai
Risonavon per l'aere _____
_____ Orribili favelle
Parole de dolore, nascenti d'ira
Voci alti e floche, *e suon di man con elle*."
(From Canto III)
"There sighs, complaints, and ululations loud
Resounded through the air without a star,
Whence I, at the beginning, wept thereat.
Languages diverse, horrible dialects,

> But how am I to describe the sounds that proceeded from this strange mass of human beings? I know no words which can convey an idea of it. Hysterical sobbings, convulsive groans, shrieks and screams the most appalling, burst forth on all sides. I felt sick with horror. As if their hoarse and overstrained voices failed to make noise enough, they soon began to clap their hands violently.[72]

Failing to understand what she witnessed in terms of its mystical spirituality, its provenance in arduous, tedious lives that sought transcendent release, or its collectivist appeal in lonely frontier society, the condescending Trollope soon fled this torrent of worship for the security of her carriage. She subsequently penned a sensationalist but obtuse reading of this dramatic, deeply American cultural phenomenon and affirmed her abiding British superiority.

Of course, Methodists had consistently endured scorn as a noisy rabble throughout much of their movement's existence. To be sure, a standard trope in contemptuous portrayals of Methodism—whether British or American--involved highlighting the belligerent noise and unbridled commotion of the attending masses.[73] As Hempton notes, critics routinely deployed the phrase "all nonsense and noise" to

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Accents of anger, words of agony,
And voices high and hoarse, with sound of hands." Translation from *Atlantic Monthly: A Magazine of Literature, Art and Politics* 20 (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867): 191.

[72] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 143-144.

[73] See especially Albert M. Lyles, *Methodism Mocked: The Satiric Reaction to Methodism in the Eighteenth Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1960), which thoroughly explores parody and derision of the early Methodist movement. See also Eric Baldwin, "'The Devil Begins to Roar': Opposition to Early Methodists in New England" *Church History* 75, no. 1 (March 2006): 94-119; Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, esp. 56 and 206; Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 22; "Petersburg, (Virginia) Camp Meetings, August 7," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), September 4, 1804; Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 158-159; Robert Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous: John Wesley's Idea of the Supernatural and the Identification of Methodists in the Eighteenth-Century* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2013), 200-201.

disparage Methodist services.[74] Indeed, many claimed the din from Methodist revivals registered among listeners a full mile distant.[75] Not a few detractors reviled camp meeting preachers themselves as inviting the commotion, being little more than "noisy, uncouth babblers who reported miracles, prophecies, revelatory dreams, and visions," thus inciting the gathered multitude into general pandemonium.[76] Further, pictorial derision of Methodists as a boisterous, uneducated throng easily manipulated by ministerial enthusiasm entered the popular mind on both sides of the Atlantic through satirical works by William Hogarth and others.[77] Hence, concern about this matter surfaced among some camp meeting proponents, especially by the 1820s, and especially among conservative ministers who cautioned attendees to maintain decorum and order for the sake of righteous work and public reputation. As early as 1804, the legendary Stith Mead happily reported "good order" as prevailing among a Virginia camp exceeding four thousand in number: "…it is rare to observe better order in so large and promiscuous a crowd."[78] As this concern increased, a Maryland camp meeting advertisement from 1825 insisted upon fidelity to "solemn and sacred purpose," while Anson West bragged about an 1828 gathering in north Alabama typified by "serious, attentive…orderly

[74] Hempton, *Long Eighteenth Century*, 156.
[75] Donald L. Parman and William Graham, "Riding Circuit in Arkansas, 1844-1845: An Excerpt from the Autobiography of Reverend William Graham," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 309-339.
[76] E. Brooks Holifield, "Clergy," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism,* ed. Jason E. Vickers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 177.
[77] See David Bindman, *Hogarth and His Times: Serious Comedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 123-125.
[78] Stith Mead, "Camp Meeting," in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (July 1924): 210.

behavior of the congregation," which required no "reproof" to be issued, "either in the pulpit, or in any other way during the meeting."[79] During the yet more cautious 1830s, a British attendee stipulated that, "Spiritual intemperance…was kept down by the good sense and right feeling of the leading ministers."[80] This matter received frequent documentary attention all through the antebellum period—with some ministers continuing to seek and justify noisy fervor while others extolled orderly restraint--revealing a persistent dialectic in camp meeting circles between the stridently ecstatic worship that defined early Methodism and a move (especially by the second quarter of the nineteenth century) toward more sedately mainstream devotions.

However, with camp meeting accounts--particularly earlier ones, those prior to the 1820s--readers must not necessarily interpret the claim of "order" as meaning *quiet* services, as attested by an 1803 report from North Carolina's Reverend Jonathan Jackson. In it, Jackson unhesitatingly juxtaposes assertions of camp meeting order with accounts of noisy services: "Great pains have been used to prevent irregularities and disorder…It is impossible to tell the good that has been done at them; for while some have been crying for mercy, others shouting the praises of the Most High, there would not be a sinner found who would open his mouth against the work."[81] Accordingly, camp meeting

[79] N. A., "Methodist Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette and State Register* (Annapolis), September 1, 1825; Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 234.
[80] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit,* 203. The date here is significant, as many contemporary observers and modern scholars believe(d) camp meeting leaders became increasingly concerned with spiritual decorum as the century progressed.
[81] Atkinson, *Centennial History,* 494

supporters did not necessarily believe loud and ecstatic devotions signaled 'disorder,' a term often reserved for referencing the services' disruptive opponents. For many, consideration of order did not preclude noisy devotions at all, as demonstrated by numerous Wesleyans embracing the epithet of "Shouting Methodists," and as represented in a prescription penned at the (supposedly quieter and more decorous) ***end*** of the antebellum period: "It shall be in order, when public services are not being held, to *pray*, and *sing*, and *shout* as much as you please, and as loud as you please (*Hallelujah*)... [emphases in original]."[82] A popular Methodist song even proudly conceded the initial impression of many newcomers, echoing their reaction:

> The Methodists were preaching like thunder all about.
> At length I went amongst them, to hear them groan and shout.
> I thought they were distracted, such fools I'd never seen.
> They'd stamp and clap and tremble, and wail and cry and scream.[83]

In a noteworthy turn of events, the shocked neophyte converts into a noisy Wesleyan himself later in the song.

In the main, supporters found camp meetings' typical din and tumult to be gripping evidence of divinity at work upon human hearts. Ann Taves and Russell Richie have both identified Methodists' conception of worshipful sound and movement as emanating from God's presence, while David Hempton has argued that historians should

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[82] Mead, *Manna,* 85.
[83] Quoted in Winthrop S. Hudson, "Shouting Methodists," *Encounter* 29, no. 1 (Winter 1968), from Stith Mead, *A General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs Now in Use*, no. 131 (Richmond, VA: Seaton Grantland, 1807).

understand that much early Methodist culture only fully existed in a vibrant oral matrix.[84] Corollary to Taves and Richie's observation, the fact that worshipers ultimately *produced* the sound *emanating* "from God's presence" provided an auditory parallel to Methodists' Arminian theology, whereby God engendered conversion while humans participatorily accepted and expressed their spiritual rebirth. Exultations of joy, cries of guilt and despair, weeping, laughter, physical movement, clapping, singing, "shouting," as well as fervent prayer, impassioned preaching and committed exhortation all enveloped worshipers in a thrilling aural experience regarded by most as confirmation that God and holiness pervaded the camp meeting spectacle. In this vein, Beggs recorded:

> The cries for mercy, the bursting forth of praise, and the preacher's voice sounding out over all with its melting tones of pardon produced a scene, I imagine, like that of God's ancient people when laying the foundation of the second temple, "when the old men wept with a loud shout, so that they could not discern the noise of the shouts of joy from the voice of the weeping people." This camp meeting ended with glorious results, which may be seen to this day.[85]

Camp meeting's hallowed aural space allowed worshipers to express misgivings and fears, hopes and ecstasies they might well not have dared communicate anywhere else. The gatherings' liminality, openness, egalitarianism and transfiguring departure from normalcy elicited vocal responses from multiple categories of customarily subordinate Americans who mostly otherwise acceded to social expectations of their

[84] Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 76-108; Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, 56.
[85] Beggs, *Early History,* 272.

passivity and silence. Here though, in camp meetings' magical embrace, African Americans, the poor, as well as women and children even *heard* divine messages and more commonly *voiced* their spiritual convictions. Religious populism never sounded with more ardor or authority. Unencumbered by scientific expectations to come as well as many constraining social norms of the period, celebrants spoke as emissaries for God, holy guides to their erstwhile social superiors, and as celestially sanctioned leaders or seekers within a sacred domain. In the process, these vocal participants vented frustrations and resolved apprehensions, finding spiritual, emotional solace while acclaiming their individual worth and facilitating collective communion with the divine in a harrowing, often lonely world. Moreover, their cadences and supplications contributed enormously to the American religious accent, particularly in its evangelical dialect. As a place where everyone might declare their thoughts and feelings, their anxieties and longings, Second Great Awakening camp meetings anticipated to some extent *all* American democratic spaces to come, all the rollicking zones of unfettered speech, grassroots opinion and raucous *vox populi* that have given America its unique, diverse and essential sound.

Chapter Six:
"A Great Tumult": African Americans' Camp Meeting Experience

During early May of 1850, indefatigably curious Swedish traveler, writer and social activist Fredrika Bremer journeyed about twenty miles from the lavish port city of Charleston with its ornate churches erected by wealthy citizens to a vast, bustling camp meeting in the warm, humid forests of South Carolina's coastal plain. As evening descended, Bremer found herself in the midst of three to four thousand souls animating a boisterous religious service wherein African American participants substantially outnumbered whites, perhaps three to one. Undoubtedly, most of these African Americans toiled as slaves, many in the Low Country's extraordinarily profitable rice or cotton fields. Installed atop a commanding platform, four white preachers and multiple black exhorters forcefully urged members of the enormous crowd to repent their sins, reform their lives and embrace salvation. Bright fires and colorful tents stood sentinel around this lively forest gathering as far as the European visitor could see into the densely set oaks and pines, while volatile spring weather unfurled intermittent rain, spectacular flashes of lightning and ominous thunder. Confronted with this visually and tactilely arresting scene, Bremer's attention nonetheless riveted on the joyous worship and superb singing that issued from African American congregants. As she recorded:

> They sang hymns--a magnificent choir! Most likely the sound proceeded from the black portion of the assembly, as their number was three times that of the whites, and their voices are naturally beautiful and pure…. The later it grew in the night, the more earnest grew the appeals; the hymns, short but fervent, as the flames of the light-wood ascended,

like them, with a passionate ardor. Again and again they arose on high, like melodious burning sighs from thousands of harmonious voices.[1]

Surrounded by landscape, people, weather and behavior that must have struck Bremer as intensely exotic, this wealthy and cultured, well-traveled and educated woman whose musical experiences included hearing the carefully rehearsed choirs of Europe's ancient churches, responded with reverence and wonder to the impromptu, *a capella* songcraft of African Americans in those damp woods. As the service proceeded, Bremer continued in profound admiration for the black celebrants' authentic "joy and rapture," their transcendently holy experience, as well as their active facilitation of worship, even as some approached convulsive states of religious ecstasy. She recorded afterward that, "Some of these countenances are impressed upon my memory as some of the most expressive and the most full of feeling that I ever saw." Overwhelmed, this cosmopolitan woman who had toured the great European art museums declared her ardent wish that "painters of the New World avail themselves of such scenes and such countenances."[2]

Many Southern slave masters of the 1800s continued to fear the "revolutionary implications" of evangelical Christianity along with its potential for "subversive uses" and the conferral of "an undue agency and subjectivity" to the enslaved.[3] Hence, the slave

[1] Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, *Vol. 1*, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 307-308.
[2] *Ibid*, 314.
[3] See Mark M. Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 62; Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 96-210, especially 163-164; Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: the Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1997), 46-52; Edward E. Baptist,

master of Francis Henderson, a Methodist church member in the District of Columbia, decreed to him, "You shan't go to that church—they'll put the devil in you." After a successful escape from slavery in 1841, Henderson clarified: "He meant that they would put me up to running off."[4] In his groundbreaking work on African American culture, Lawrence Levine observed that even white evangelicalism fostered "egalitarianism and fundamental change" along with its lessons of passivity and obedience while African American evangelicalism leaned more toward promotion of "discontent and …a different order of things."[5] Relatively few slaves responded receptively to the South's non-evangelical churches, while the evangelical allegiances of many white Southerners deeply complicated their reactions to slave worship. On the one hand, many feared that their slaves would be empowered by the evangelical message, but they also feared for their own souls, or at least the opinions of pious neighbors, if they prevented or hindered the

The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 198-213; Milton C. Sernett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 63-138; C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 1-91; Donald G. Matthews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 159-284.

[4] Benjamin Drew, *A North-side View of Slavery: The Refugee: Or, The Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (Boston: J. P. Jewett, 1856), 159. The relatively late antebellum date here becomes intriguing if Henderson belonged to a preponderantly white Methodist Episcopal church, as it would indicate this particular congregation's lack of accommodation to slavery in slavery-permitting D. C. Of course, the nation's capital held diverse people and views, so an anti-slavery church there would not be surprising. Unfortunately, Henderson does not stipulate in the document whether his congregation affiliated with the Methodist-Episcopal Church or one of the predominantly black African Methodist Episcopal or AME Zion denominations, but simply refers to it as "Methodist."

[5] Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977, 2007), 49.

Christian conversion of slaves.[6] This created a difficult dilemma for many slave owners, and helps explain why so many allowed slaves a measure of religious activity--such as the camp meeting participation so many African Americans sought--despite their apprehensions about its possible impact on the social order. Of course, black bondsmen and bondswomen tenaciously maintained many of their Old World traditions while routinely fashioning decidedly more Christian lives than all but perhaps the most devout or latitudinarian of masters deemed requisite.

As is well known, restrictions on slave worship increased dramatically in the wake of Nat Turner's insurrection in 1832 Virginia, whence the governor somehow omnisciently announced that "every black preacher…east of the Blue Ridge" possessed knowledge of Turner's plans before they unfolded, while a newspaper in Alabama proclaimed the danger of slave rebellion in the Old Southwest likewise lay with African American ministers: "Some crispy-haired prophet, some pretender to inspiration, will be the ring-leader as well as the inspiration of that plot…he will rouse the fanaticism of his brethren…."[7] Along with the potentially insurgent leadership of black preachers and the emancipatory implications of an inclusively populist Christianity (particularly if left free from censorship and restraint imposed by slavery interests), the devotional style

[6] See Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: One World Books, 2004), 45-47. For a discussion of the parallel quandary over whether slave literacy and consequent access to the Bible should be encouraged in keeping with the Protestant, evangelical tradition or discouraged as a basis for slaves' exposure to dangerous ideas that might spark rebellion, see Eugene Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 1-34.
[7] Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*, 210.

practiced by African Americans who embraced evangelicalism caused slave-owners tremendous consternation. Historian Mark Smith insists the "unfettered vocal and aural expression that evangelical Christianity encouraged confirmed masters' fears by making their own admonitions for disciplined quietude seemingly subordinate to a deity who enjoyed immense authority among the enslaved. Their God seemed to encourage rather than condemn loud emotionalism." [8] Undoubtedly, something in these moments suggested even to the most obtuse slave masters that they enjoyed far less dominion over the enslaved than the institution's conceptual models decreed.

In consequence of all this, wary masters sought to monitor if not outright control worship on their plantations or in local churches, silencing blacks who preached dangerous messages, steering slaves away from boisterous devotions that might feed insurrectionary impulses and toward passive religious observations buttressed by lessons of obedient docility.[9] Raboteau records the words of a freedman who experienced this: "Church was what they called it but all that preacher talked about was for us slaves to obey our masters and not to lie and steal. Nothing about Jesus was ever said and the

[8] Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century*, 62.

[9] See Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 162, 168-190. Of course, another means of control revolved around efforts to limit slave literacy and access to the entire Bible. Regarding the important topic of slave literacy and consequent Bible reading, see Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *When I Can Read My Title Clear: Literacy, Slavery, and Religion in the Antebellum South* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), which follows Carter G. Woodson in asserting that likely one in ten antebellum slaves commanded some measure of literacy; Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* addresses this topic as well as broader educational efforts among nineteenth-century blacks; Harvey J. Graff, *The Literacy Myth: Cultural Integration and Social Structure in the Nineteenth Century* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1991) helpfully combines social theory, empirical data and political insights in a ground-breaking work on the topic of literacy during the period.

overseer stood there to see the preacher talked as he wanted him to talk."[10] Obviously endeavoring to ingratiate their denomination with the planter elite and its wealth, the 1820s Mississippi Baptist Convention instructed slaves regarding their oppression: "However dark, mysterious, and unpleasant these dispensations may appear to you we have no doubt they are founded in wisdom and goodness."[11] Christopher Hamilton insisted that the only preaching his owners permitted under captivity centered on two themes: "Servants, be obedient to your masters…" and, "He that knoweth his master's will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes."[12] Another former slave submitted that his Baptist minister and master taught him nothing of Christianity save the previous verse commending corporal punishment, "and after he had quoted the text, he would take me to the barn-yard and give me a practical explanation with raw hides."[13] A plantation master in Kentucky shamelessly preached to his slaves during their Sabbath service that, "The great God above has made you for the benefit of the Whiteman [sic], who is your law maker and law giver."[14]

Hoping to obviate African American worship proclivities, a South Carolina master accompanied his slave to church, promising the bondsman new boots if he would worship sedately and eschew noisy, expressive outbursts. Unable to fulfill his bargain,

[10] *Raboteau, Slave Religion,* 213-214.
[11] Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told*, 204.
[12] Drew, *A Northside View of Slavery*, 175-176.
[13] *Ibid*, 105.
[14] Baptist, *The Half has Never Been Told,* 204. One wonders if anyone—including the speaker—believed his words in the least.

the devout African American erupted mid-service with a declaration of self-governance and devotional preference: "Boots or no boots, I gwine to shout today."[15] Elizabeth Ross Hite belonged to Louisiana masters who expected their slaves to embrace Catholicism, but as she reported, "…lots didn't like that 'ligion." Her explanation of this attitude centered on African Americans' fondness for vocally expressive and emotionally demonstrative worship, which the imported French priests predictably suppressed. According to Hite, the slaves would "hide behind some bricks and hold church ourselves. You see, the Catholic preachers from France wouldn't let us shout, and the Lawd done

[15] Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 238. Though virtually all Methodists of this period speak of "shouting" and "shouts" in reference to loud and jubilant worship, African American use of the term indicates additional and particular devotional behaviors. As has been extensively discussed among scholars of African American religion, "Shouting" entailed significantly more than merely high volume vocalization. Rhythmic stomping of the ground or church floor, clapping of hands together or upon the body and a characteristic swaying, counterclockwise movement all featured in the "shout" or "ring shout" as well, along with frequent collective performances (thus "*ring* shout"). In an excellent study of latter day versions in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, sociologist of religion Timothy J. Nelson argues that "Shouting" constitutes a highly stylized and routinized aspect of performative worship clearly promoted and delimited by group norms in worship contexts. Nonetheless, practitioners believe(d) the behavior to be transcendent of social context, generated by the Holy Spirit's presence within the shouter, and to be an altered state of consciousness (all of which strongly echo West African religious traditions). See Timothy J. Nelson, "Sacrifice of Praise: Emotion and Collective Participation in an African-American Worship Service," *Sociology of Religion* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 379-396. Music historian Robert Palmer writes: "The ring shout, a black 'holy dance' in which worshipers shuffled rhythmically in a circle, clapping and stamping, seems to have developed with the widespread conversion of slaves to Christianity during the revival fervors of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries…more vivid descriptions from the twentieth century leave little doubt that the dancing and stomping constituted a kind of drumming….A recording of a ring shout, made by John Work and Alan Lomax for the Library of Congress in 1934, sounds like a percussion ensemble, with hand clapping furnishing a crisp counter-rhythm to the thudding beat of feet on the floor. This tradition is surely older than the earliest white accounts of it." Robert Palmer, *Deep Blues: A Musical and Cultural History of The Mississippi Delta* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 38. See also Katrina Dyonne Thompson, *Ring Shout, Wheel About* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Art Rosenbaum, *Shout Because You're Free: The African American Ring Shout Tradition in Coastal Georgia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013); Jonathan David, *Together Let Us Sweetly Live: The Singing and Praying Bands* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Albert J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 48-66, and *Slave Religion*, 66-67,68-73, 245, 339-340.

said you gotta shout if you want to be saved. That's in the Bible." Further complicating this relationship, her Catholic master insisted that religious expression should be confined to Sunday mass, with other days steadfastly devoted to plantation labor. Hite reproached this accordingly: "See, our master didn't like us to have too much 'ligion, said it made us lag in our work. He jest wanted us to be Catholicses on Sunday and go to mass and not study 'bout nothin' like that on week days. He didn't want us shoutin' and moanin' all day 'long, but you gotta shout and you gotta moan if you wants to be saved."[16]

Camp meetings, however--through their social diversity, sizeable nature, relatively neutral location, and receptiveness to African Americans as well as enthusiastic religion--afforded slaves far more autonomous, expressive worship than master-controlled services, thus permitting the animated, noisy and sometimes frenetic devotions that so many African Americans preferred. One observer noted:

> In the camp of the blacks is heard a great tumult and a loud cry…many, having fallen into convulsions, leap and strike about them, so that they are obliged to be held down. It looks here and there like a regular fight; some of the calmer participants laugh. Many a cry of anguish may be heard, but you distinguish no words excepting, "Oh, I am a sinner!" and "Jesus! Jesus!"[17]

For African Americans, unabashedly full-throated exaltations combined with extensive, unusual bodily movement—a good measure of it seeming to involve animation of the

[16] Lyle Saxon, Edward Dreyer and Robert Tallant, eds., *Gumbo Ya-Ya: A Collection of Louisiana Folk Tales* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1945), 242.
[17] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 309.

celebrant from somewhere beyond yet simultaneously within, or to erupt from a deep but normally hidden reservoir of pain or hope—plus feverishly emotional ecstasy approaching and including loss of self-control to comprise a transcendent state of spiritual agony under conviction or rapturous joy in comprehending God's grace. Significantly, William Henry Williams' intensive work on the Delmarva Peninsula cautions us that "it would be a mistake to see black Methodism as just a highly emotional variant of white Methodism," adding that despite a considerable loss of tradition in the New World, black celebrants in Methodist contexts maintained an "African style of worship."[18] Heyrman, too, notes that even white preachers accustomed to notoriously clamorous Methodist acclamations of faith often found African Americans to be exceptionally noisy and boisterous during services.[19]

Disapprovingly, a camp meeting visitor from Great Britain remembered the descent of an already late and exhausting nighttime service into "a lower but more noisy character" instigated by "those of weaker mind and stronger nerve" and accompanied by "endless singing." Of this, the censorious witness acclaimed, "…the effect was various, but it was not good," as some participants became "unduly and unprofitably excited." During the ensuing hours, the African American contingent embraced this change in tone enthusiastically, then "separated themselves from the general service, and sought their

[18] William Henry Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism: The Delmarva Peninsula, 1769-1820* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1984), 114.
[19] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 49.

own preacher and anxious seat…A preacher was seen appearing and disappearing…as his violent gesticulation caused him to lean backwards or forward." Thus, in a vigorous display of religious autonomy, black attendees adopted a preferable style and volume of worship while also asserting the right to worship with an African American leader of their choosing.[20] As the preaching, exhortation and exultation swelled in volume and intensity, the English visitor predictably found ever more to disapprove in what he perceived as an exercise in disorder, confusion and excess. Conversely, the African Americans apparently viewed this turn of events as a resounding and enjoyable success. Even the observer seems to have recognized the depth of spirituality evidenced, conceding that the "blacks had now things to their mind, and they pressed round the speaker, on their feet or their knees, with extended hands, open lips, and glistening eyes…."[21]

Recollecting North Carolina camp meetings of 1802, the Reverend Samuel McCorkle spoke in his published letters of African Americans falling "as if by an electric shock" and lying stricken on the ground, elderly enslaved women kneeling in impassioned prayer, other blacks weeping and beseeching Christ for mercy or praising God, and one particularly arresting older African American who spent all of one day's services pouring derision upon the faithful only to be eventually struck herself with

[20] As early as the celebrated Cane Ridge camp meeting, African Americans held devotions led by their own exhorters. See Bishop Matthew Simpson, "Introduction" to *Penuel; or, Face to Face with God*, ed. A. McLean and J. W. Eaton (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1869), xiii.

[21] Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Volume 1* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 192-193.

conviction. After three hours "in a state of horror and despair," the woman "roared out, 'O hell! hell! hell! Thy pangs have seized me! O torment! torment!...'" Afterwards, the penitent reported a vision wherein she dangled perilously over the scorching fires of hell, suspended by a mere thread while a "sharp, bright sword" hovered ready to sever her last strand of hope. Finding spiritual release from her agony of conviction, the newly converted African American woman finally ended by shouting, "Glory, glory…." [22] During a late evening tour through a camp meeting almost five decades later, an observer drew particular inspiration from "the black side" of the camp, where she found each tent to contain a somewhat different demonstration of spiritual devotion, though all seem to have been bold in volume, physicality and theatricality:

> We saw in one a zealous convert, male or female, as it might be, who with violent gesticulations gave vent to his or her newly-awakened feelings, surrounded by devout auditors; in another we saw a whole crowd of black people on their knees, all dressed in white, striking themselves on the breast, and crying out and talking with the greatest pathos; in a third women were dancing "the holy dance" for one of the newly converted….In one tent we saw a fat negro member walking about by himself and breathing hard; he was hoarse, and, sighing, he exclaimed to himself, "Oh! I wish I could hollo!"[23]

[22] Dena J. Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War* (Urbana-Champaign and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 198.

[23] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, Vol. 1, 311. The fact that these reports originate *48 years apart* constitutes a significant corrective to some historians' contention that only the early years of camp meetings witnessed such enthusiastic and physical devotions. No doubt this behavior diminished among (typically white) Methodists whose socio-economic gains elevated them into the middle class and a more bourgeois habitus as the nineteenth century proceeded, but these activities had by no means ceased by mid-century, as Bremer's observations affirm. Occurring here in the 1850s, "enthusiastic" and highly physical worship continued in the postbellum era among many African American, rural and Holiness groups within the Wesleyan tradition, surviving to inform Pentecostalism as that religious movement emerged in the early 1900s.

All these passages reveal the characteristic vocally expressive, aurally vibrant and physically demonstrative devotions favored by many African Americans of the period, undoubtedly encompassing potent assertions of selfhood, independence and cultural autonomy, while also reflecting the strong tendency toward what W. E. B. Dubois termed "the Frenzy." "Those who have not witnessed the frenzy of a Negro revival in the untouched backwoods of the South can but dimly realize the religious feeling of the slave; as described, such scenes appear grotesque and funny, but as seen they are awful." In Dubois' conceptualization of slave religion, three key elements stood out dramatically: preachers, music, and "the Frenzy…the Frenzy of 'Shouting,' when the spirit of the Lord passed by, and, seizing the devotee, made him mad with supernatural joy." Indeed, Dubois argued that antebellum African Americans accorded the Frenzy even greater devotion than they did clerics or music. "It varied in expression from the silent rapt countenance or the low murmur and moan to the mad abandon of physical fervor, ---the stamping, shrieking, and shouting, the rushing to and fro and wild waving of arms, the weeping and laughing, the vision and the trance." For Dubois, the Frenzy stood as an essential ingredient of worshipful fulfilment and divine connection. He contended that "so firm a hold did it have on the Negro, that many generations firmly believed that without this visible manifestation of the God there could be no communion with the Invisible."[24]

[24] W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Boston & New York: Bedford Books, 1997), 148-149.

Inarguably, this entire behavioral complex presented an unruly exposition of African American traditions, culture and liberty within the adopted folds of Protestant Christianity, as well as a valuable forum for personal expression and autonomy despite the yoke of slavery.[25] As Zora Neale Hurston wrote of African American voices and sound, "It was the time to hear things and talk. These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. Mules and other brutes had occupied their skins. But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so the skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. They passed nations through their mouths."[26]

In addition to crucial assertions of personal or ethnic autonomy, another intriguing rationale for "frenzied," transcendent, seemingly "out of control" camp meeting behavior among African Americans emerges, one celebrating "ecstatic trances" or quasi-possession by the Holy Spirit and thereby negating the Western ontology of individualism wherein the lone person stood subject to self-mastery *or* an exterior, worldly master such as the slave owner.[27] Anthropologist Paul Christopher Johnson has

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[25] See Noel Leo Erskine, *Plantation Church: How African American Religion Was Born in Caribbean Slavery* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 182-186 regarding the deeply African and libertarian nature of such worship strategies and throughout the book for a useful discussion of African American "sacred space."

[26] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000), 1-2.

[27] Paul Christopher Johnson, *Spirited Things: The Work of "Possession" in Afro-Atlantic Religions* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2014), 1-46. Albert Raboteau's seminal *Slave Religion* includes numerous references to the topic of possession, trance and ecstasy throughout, esp. 10-11, 17, 19, 20, 27, 28, 35-37, 63-73. Also see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), particularly 20-46, 166-206, 308-361; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 168-183, 209-232; Ronald Arbuthnott Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950) offers a classic

insightfully described spirit possession among African, Amerindian and African American practitioners as a state of otherness completely antithetical to the most fundamental Western principles of 'individuality within society.' Possessed celebrants embrace or receive embrace from an arcane force--originating far outside of society--that is contrary to personal autonomy and rationality while also "possibly dangerous," a force that repudiates the "accountable, contract-worthy, transparent, and properly civil" modes of individual behavior upon which the entire European construction of individualist personhood in social, political relations rests.[28]

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account of Christian mysticism and possession; Elmer O'Brien, *Varieties of Mystic Experience: An Anthology and Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) benefits from less Christian chauvinism than Knox; Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010) provides a very solid, broad historical survey drawing largely on other secondary works; Clinton A. Hutton, *The Logic and Historical Significance of the Haitian Revolution and the Cosmological Roots of Haitian Freedom* (Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak Publications, 2005) makes fascinating and suggestive reading. A political philosopher with deep interests in historical and anthropological conceptions of the African Diaspora, Hutton concentrates on the ontology and epistemology of African freedom in the Americas, including Caribbean spirit possession rituals and religious performances.

[28] *Johnson, Spirited Things,* 1. Genovese contends that the absence of Original Sin as a belief in traditional West African religious systems shifted the societal balance between individualism and collectivism decidedly toward the latter. Citing socio-economic reasons, Durkheim's work concurs that African Americans' ancestral societies leaned heavily toward collectivism rather than an individualist ethos.

For the history of individualism's conceptualization and evolution, the following are useful: Steven Lukes' valuable and now classic *Individualism (*Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973) delineates various formulations of "individualism"--since the term was coined in the wake of the French Revolution--through what he calls "semantic histories" and a "taxonomy" for the concepts comprising these formulations. Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1997, 1893) issued one of the earliest and most influential explanatory models for the differences between traditional societies' conceptions of the self and those in modern, industrialized societies characterized by occupational specialization, economic complexity and tolerance of diversity. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford, UK & Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) challenges mid-20th century sociology's dominant Structuralist-Functionalist interpretation of—among other topics—the development of the modern self. Elias emphasizes individuals' agency, their interactive relationships with social forces, and their internalization of norms involving personal restraint and self-control. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna and David E. Wellbury, eds., *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986) unites a broad, interdisciplinary range of inquiry on the topic, including historical, sociological, literary and philosophical scholarship. Roy

Attempting to situate spirit possession epistemologically in Western social science, Candomblé scholar Mattijs van de Port helplessly declares, "…the otherness of the phenomenon (its uncanny inexplicability, its screaming incompatibility with Western notions of personhood, its seeming disdain for self-control, its radical otherness) demands explanation, and this explanation highlights the inadequacy of our conceptual categories rather than the phenomenon itself."[29] Following this line of argument, divine possession momentarily supersedes the always somewhat fictive and socially constructed "individual in society" who maintains "self-control" or submits to the control of another human being because of social, historical arrangements of human artifice.[30]

F. Baumeister, *Identity: Cultural Change and the Struggle for Self* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), though written by a social psychologist, provides an excellent historical perspective on the development of individual self-identity from the Medieval Era forward. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1992), involves a philosophical exploration of Western thought since the Greeks and argues that conceptions of self inevitably entwine with and depend upon systems of morality. Richard Sorabji, *Self, Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006) analyzes an extraordinary range of Western and non-Western historical thought regarding the individual self, deflating Lockean psychology's significance for modern conceptions while advancing the idea of self-ownership as critical and widespread in human understandings of the self. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, Steven Lukes, eds., *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985) brings together a rich array of perspectives that are particularly indebted to the seminal work of French sociologist and anthropologist Marcel Mauss.

[29] Mattijs van de Port, "Circling around the Really Real: Spirit Possession Ceremonies and the Search for Authenticity in Bahian Candomblé," *Ethos* 33, no. 2 (June 2005): 151.

[30] R. J. Young, *Antebellum Black Activists: Race, Gender, and Self* (London: Routledge, 1996) contains an excellent discussion concerning construction of the self among free Northern blacks in racist antebellum society. Of course, much has been written about the particularly fictive selves African American slaves constructed to navigate racially oppressive social conditions and consciously presented in interaction with masters and other whites. Consult especially Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), which addresses this topic adroitly; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) includes a very useful cross-cultural discussion of slave and peasant stereotypes—many in existence since antiquity--availed by subalterns as fictive personae to inhabit for various purposes (see especially 27-47 and 175-204); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Simon Gikandi,

Slavery and the Culture of Taste (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011) deal extensively with the influence of racial slavery on the social construction of modern selves (see esp. 50-144 in the latter work). Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South*, 1890-1940 (New York: Vintage, 1999) spends considerable time looking back to antebellum constructions of selves in order to explain developments in the twentieth century; John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) provides thoughtful discussions of slave stereotypes, roles and "personalities" (see esp. 223-248 and 284-322).

Clinton Hutton depicts the self-preserving slave (both in the sense of preserving a *safe* self *in* slave society as well as an alternative, autonomous self *within* their own consciousness) as a "social being who consciously constructs a (feigned) personality out of the cultural and intellectual fabric of White supremacy to protect and to mask the real personality and intentions of the enslaved through performance rituals of flattery, mimicry, and deception and other forms of creative improvisational socio-political acts of becoming. At the core of this process is the cognitive construction of a sovereign diasporic African folk feeling and vision of free personage, consciously masked or hidden as agency beneath an officially certified public and externally scripted construction of subaltern identity, role and place in (White) hegemonic order." See Clinton A. Hutton, *The Logic and Historical Significance of the Haitian Revolution and the Cosmological Roots of Haitian Freedom* (Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak Publications, 2005), 44.

Also consult Ian Burkitt, *Social Selves: Theories of Self and Society* (London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008). In contrast to any present-day assumptions about individuality and slavery's ideological incompatibility, Burkitt identifies important precedents for the Western concept of "individuality" in slave-holding Greek and Roman societies. Particularly, he emphasizes Greco-Roman construction of the "individual" self around conceptions of citizenship (which was, of course, limited and socially conferred), public ritual (making it external and performative rather than intrinsic), legal and non-slave statuses (constructed by and dependent upon society), and Stoic representations of the "self" to others through educational efforts, epistolary relationships and personal narratives. Of these historical and ideological origins of "individuality," Burkitt affirms: "Self-mastery is about watching one's habits and routines for signs of immoderation—because the right of being a free citizen goes hand-in-hand with showing you can govern yourself (6)." Thus, slave-owners of the modern era held ample ideological armament from this tradition for defining and delimiting "free" and "slave" status alongside—indeed, entwined with--strong conceptions of individuality.

A far more extensive yet inward and unalienable formulation of the self and individuality derived from Christian beliefs about the universality of souls. As Burkitt points out, though, even St. Augustine's penetrating, landmark journey of inward self-discovery ultimately arrived not at an innermost "self," but rather, an encounter of God within. Following these two—according to Burkitt, most significant—foundational sources of modern individuality, slaves understandably discerned more potential for recognition of their individuality and self—along with rights or privileges thereby held--in Western religious traditions than political ones.

Also valuable is Amitai Etzioni, "Individualism--Within History," *The Hedgehog Review: Critical Reflections on Contemporary Society* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 49-56. "Another reason individualism has more than nine lives is ideological. Since its inception it has served the new classes well," Etzioni states, [by "the new classes," he means the bourgeoisie] "and through them the public at large…. [It] seems hard to recall that it is not a universally valid position for all times and for all societies. It is not above or out of history (50)." Thus, originating as they did in West African societies with strong communitarian conceptions of human existence as well as very different cultural ideas about "the self," African Americans may have recognized far more clearly than European Americans the socially constructed as well as often fictive and illusory nature of Western individualist ideology based on socio-political thought. Further, slaves' frequent resort to highly *conscious*, strategic presentations of self that were designed to placate whites would have also served to highlight the fictive aspects of the public self.

The possessed belongs to the Holy Spirit, to God, the Divine—perhaps only transiently in a temporal and spatial sense, but forever and definitively in the hierarchically ascendant spiritual sense bulwarked by Christian, many West African and other belief systems--and thus escapes being defined as a slave by mere arbitrary social decree.[31] Dumont explains: "This tremendous affirmation takes place on a level that transcends the world of man and of social institutions...The infinite worth of the individual is at the same time the disparagement, the negation in terms of value, of the world as it is…for human life to be bearable, especially in a universalist view, values must be maintained well beyond the reach of events."[32]

Methodist itinerant John Brooks related a powerfully illustrative account concerning a slave's 1816 camp meeting conversion in Giles County, Tennessee. In reaction to the young male African American's "screaming and wallowing on the ground" as the spirit took hold, his owner approached while brandishing a whip and swore he would end the ecstatic behavior. Upon Pastor Brooks' intervention, the handsome and well-attired slave master angrily declared the stricken man to be *his* property and replied that he "would do what he pleased with him." As the defending

[31] This section owes considerably to Louis Dumont's explorations of individualism and hierarchies of reality--temporal and religious--in his *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), especially 23-59. The religious process abnegating the "individual in society" as he or she has existed under oppressed circumstances entirely eliminates neither "individuality" nor even the "individual in society." Actually, both individualities—universal and particular to social relations--gain redefinition from the transcendent experience. As Dumont contends: "The individual soul receives eternal value from its filial relationship to God, in which relationship is also grounded human fellowship: Christians meet in Christ, whose members they are" (Dumont, 1992, 30).
[32] *Ibid*, 30-31.

Methodist preacher and irate young planter continued their encounter, Brooks "heard the poor fellow behind proclaim the shout of triumph. As I turned my head to see him, he seemed to be ten feet up in the air. Though black as jet, heavenly glory was beaming from his eyes and features. My antagonist seemed unmaned [sic], became very pale and turned away and walked off without saying anything more to me."[33] Confronted so unmistakably with the untenable fiction of his "ownership," the deflated slave owner fled the situation haplessly.

Drawing on a postmodern perspective, van de Port issues a related explanation of spirit possession's power to negate the putative--but ultimately fictional—'reality' of the world as it is assumed to be. Through its ultimate "ineffability" in both the social world *and* the supposedly knowable physical world that humans socially construct through symbolic communication, ecstatic possession gives the impression of occurring "beyond received ways of knowing and understanding…it seems to escape all attempts at signification." Apparently existing outside the arbitrary, mutable system of meaning and "knowing" that depends upon human symbolism, religious ecstasy--through its independence--accordingly reveals the existence of a higher reality. "Whether you say a million words about it or nothing at all," adds van de Port, "you are not going to grasp its essence. Possession thus suggests that there are realities 'beyond' conventional

[33] Reverend John Brooks, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Brooks: In which are Contained a History of the Great Revival in Tennessee; with Many Incidents of Thrilling Interest* (Nashville: Nashville Christian Advocate Office, 1848), 19-20.

knowledge…[and] thus creates a locus for the really real." [34] Resisting verbal symbolization and epistemological categorization so effectively, religious ecstasy seems only comprehensible as the manifestation of a supernatural reality whose consequent existence humbles and degrades the world around humans, the one so easily captive in words, science, received wisdom and social taxonomy. In this sense, Glock's theory of deprivation illuminates the appeal of ecstatic possession rituals among the downtrodden, who embrace(d) such religious behavior partly to forge alliance with a sacred hyper-reality reigning above and beyond while simulataneously diminishing the unjust, inequitable social reality in which they reside(d).[35]

According to historian of the African diasporic experience Patrick Manning, "the visitation of individuals by the Holy Spirit within the practice of Christianity, was parallel to or perhaps inspired by Niger-Congo traditions of spirit possession."[36] As Raboteau poetically reminds us:

> The gods of Africa were carried in the memories of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic. To be sure, they underwent a sea change…Still, much remained…And it should be

[34] Van de Port, "Circling Around the Really Real," 153.
[35] See Charles Y. Glock, "The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," in *Religion and Social Conflict*, ed. Robert Lee and Martin E. Marty (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964): 24-36; Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965); Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Lang, 1987); Dale W. Wimberley, "Religion and Role-Identity: A Structural Symbolic Interactionist Conceptualization of Religiosity," *The Sociological Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 125-142. The Wimberly article adds to the Glock-Stark-Bainbridge theory a valuable symbolic interactionist perspective and useful emphasis on religious "salience"—or overall importance of religion--among practitioners.
[36] Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 232.

emphasized that it is the continuity of perspective that is significant…the new, like the old, have been perceived in traditionally African ways.[37]

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[37] Raboteau, *Slave Religion,* 16. While in this vein, Raboteau assesses the famous and persisting Herskovits-Frazier debate regarding the degree of African culture that survived in North America. As is well known, Herskovits argued that a great many traits and beliefs endured while Frazier believed the horrors of enslavement and the Middle Passage combined with the rigors of slavery, European-American culture's pervasive influence, and black Americans' diverse backgrounds in extirpating African roots and heritage. Though Herskovits engaged in overstatement and sometimes presented more speculation than evidence, Frazier's contentions appear contrary to masses of evidence (as in his erroneous pronouncements concerning Ring Shout geography, which Raboteau underscores, [68]) and often seem to demand evidence for cultural survival of such purity and clear genealogy as to render definitive proof with any group difficult. This dissertation's intellectual genealogy on the matter thus asserts kinship with Herskovits and his intellectual heirs, such as Sterling Stuckey, Michael A. Gomez and Jason R. Young.
Raboteau lands somewhere between the two extremes, but asserts a wealth of example that supports Herskovits and his thesis's defenders. Indeed, at times, Raboteau seems to claim a more Frazierian position than does his evidence. For example, he states: "…there are major differences between spirit possession as it occurs in African and Latin American cults, on the one hand, and the ecstatic shouting experience of United States revivalism, on the other. There is a discontinuity, then, between the African heritage of spirit possession and the black shouting tradition in the United States (64)." First, as myriad scholars note (See, for example, Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations,* trans. Helen Sebba [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007]; Hutton, *Haitian Revolution;* and Nathaniel Samuel Murrell, *Afro-Caribbean Religions: An Introduction to Their Historical, Cultural, and Sacred Traditions* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010]), there are major differences between spirit possession as it occurs in Africa, on the one hand, and Latin America, on the other, not least because of New World practitioners' exposure and sometimes (however syncretic) conversion to Christianity (plus exposure to indigenous religions), as well as their context of European-dominated slave regimes. However, neither in this comparison nor in Raboteau's above, does sufficient cause for use of the word "discontinity" emerge. *Differences*—even major theological ones--do not satisfactorily prove cultural discontinuity, while *absence of similarities* would. Further, Raboteau surrounds this assertion with numerous, rich accounts of North American, black Christianity that serve to demonstrate African influences, underscore variance from European worship and thus affirm Herskovits' position (see 60-75). Raboteau differentiates black worship in North America from its diasporan kin, averring that, "Instead, it is the Holy Spirit who fills the converted sinner with a happiness and power that drives him to shout, sing, and sometimes dance (64)." Although certainly correct in terms of North American blacks' theology and phenomenology of the possessing force, Raboteau's observation underreports or neglects ecstatic elements from primary accounts he quotes only pages before, elements that go well beyond "happiness" or autonomous "power" and do not fit neatly into the categories of shouting, singing, or dancing. These accounts adduce a celebrant who "trembled," while "his teeth chattered, and his face, at intervals, was convulsed…shouts, and groans, terrific shrieks, and indescribable expressions of ecstasy—of pleasure or agony—and even stamping, jumping, and clapping of hands were added….(61-62)," and another older black female who--after a crescendo of shouting, clapping and dancing--"fell back into the arms of her companions, then threw herself forward and embraced those before her, then tossed herself from side to side, gasping, and finally sunk to the floor, where she remained…kicking, as if acting a death struggle (62)." [Both accounts originated with the notably reliable Frederick Law Olmsted.] At other times, Raboteau's assessments swing toward Herskovits' position, especially in noting clearly African influences regarding blacks' physical and acoustical behavior at camp meetings (61), the significance of rhythmic inducements to spiritual ecstasy (63), blacks' continuation of "danced religion" in Protestant worship (65), "black

Christine Heyrman likewise affirms that as "black worshipers wept and screamed, collapsed and sank into trancelike states," their behavior "meant something other to them than what it did to white evangelicals," something with significant roots in West African belief and ritual.[38] Gomez and Young separately contend that West African religious practices survived so amply and specifically in the New World that particular ethnic variants remained identifiable in given regions of the American South well into the nineteenth century at least.[39] Further, Berry and Blassingame unequivocally pronounce African American Protestants' "frenzied shouting" to be "a variant of African spirit possession."[40]

A revealing window into the transition from African possession by traditional gods to a more acceptably Protestant quasi-possession by the Holy Spirit appears in the account of a black female convert to Christianity who, at a Methodist service in North Carolina, declared that she was possessed by "young King Jesus" (she actually announced that she *was* Jesus, following the custom that African gods spoke and acted through the celebrants they possessed). Inevitably, this invited grave consternation as well as a sharp and no doubt initially confusing rebuke from the parson in charge,

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patterns of behavior" influencing "white revivalists at camp meetings (67)," as well as the prolonged, trance-inducing, and theologically *necessary* (to black celebrants) ring shout (69).

[38] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 49-50.

[39] See Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), and Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

[40] Mary Frances Berry and John W. Blassingame, *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 29.

although in time the possessed woman became an upstanding member of the Methodist denomination.[41] Of course, white evangelicals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries themselves engaged in ecstatic devotional behavior understood as instigated by an indwelling of the Holy Spirit, thus extending a remarkably inviting opportunity for synthesis of African tradition and Christian worship. How many converting Africans spanned this problematic distance by syncretically substituting an ecstatic quasi-possession by the Holy Spirit for their heritage of possession by various West African gods and spirits? No doubt, many found this a satisfactory solution, one that typifies Raboteau's dictum that African traditions adapted to the newly adopted medium of Christian worship and Heyrman's observation that African Americans seemingly "so fluent in the language of Canaan colonize[d] its cadences to express spiritual truths" deriving from their own spiritual heritage and experiences.[42] "In the ring shout and allied patterns of ecstatic behavior, the African heritage of dance found expression in the evangelical religion of the American slaves," writes Raboteau, adding that "…the camp meeting revival, where enthusiastic and ecstatic religious behavior was encouraged, presented a congenial setting for slaves to merge African patterns of response with Christian interpretations of the experience of spirit possession, an experience shared by both blacks and whites."[43]

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[41] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 51-52, 198.
[42] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 51-52, 58-75, 126-128, 136-143, 147-150, 212-288, esp. 72; Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 50.
[43] *Ibid*, 72.

Further, in *Working the Spirit*, a comparative study of religious orientations within the African diasporic tradition—Haitian Vodou, Brazilian Candomblé, Santería, Jamaica's Revival Zion Church, *and* the Black Church in the United States—Joseph Murphy identifies powerful commonalities that serve to differentiate each from European traditions but unite all in a shared African heritage manifested in various forms of spirit possession and shaped by confrontation with slavery as well as continued racial oppression. [44] Transcendent yet ritualistic worship of a highly corporeal nature characterizes all of these, particularly finding expression through "ceremonies of rhythm, music, and movement" whereby "the spirit" is "'worked' through the human body."[45] Illustrating this, some months after her fascination with the vibrancy and physicality of

[44] Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994). Raboteau notes the history of Protestant cults celebrating spirit possession in the Caribbean; cf. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 27-28.

[45] *Ibid*, xi. In asserting the distinctiveness and unity of this African *American* diasporic tradition, Murphy educes the "experience of exile" and "hopes for deliverance" as conferring a spirituality that is "different, distinctive, and profound (xi)." He adds, "Each tradition became the focus for an extraordinary struggle for survival against and triumph over brutal systems of exploitation. They share an elevated sense of solidarity against injustice and a commitment to the protection and advancement of their communities (2)." This certainly joined conceptions of justice with understandings of divinity. Discerning a consistent orientation among these groups, Murphy ascribes to the ecstasy-engendering, possessing "spirit" of God, the Holy Spirit, saints, gods, or ancestors "a real and irreducible force uplifting communities throughout the African diaspora (3)." Defending his inclusion of the North American "Black Church" among faith traditions more famous (or, unfairly, infamous) for possession trances, the author contends: "Once we know something about Vodou and Revival Zion, the spirituality of the Black Church…is revealed in a new context. From a 'hemispheric perspective,' black religion in the United States can be seen as a special articulation of a spirituality which has kindred expressions throughout the Americas… In the diasporan religions portrayed, the spirit is recognized as present by means of the actions of the community in ritual time and space. It is this 'ceremonial spirituality' that concerns us…[W]hat is distinctive about the spirituality of the religions of the African diaspora can be found in the way that the relationship between human beings and spirit is worked out in community ceremony (3-6)." According to Murphy, despite obvious doctrinal differences between North America's Black Protestantism and its diasporan brethren who retained African gods, the fundamental and definitive link remained in its ecstatically oriented "construction of ceremonial space and time" and its continuing "orientation to the African past (170)."

African American camp meeting worship in South Carolina, Swedish author Fredrika Bremer visited Cuba, where she observed black Catholic worshipers engaged in "a kind of dance, like galvanized frogs, but with slower action, bowing and twisting their bodies and all their joints…as if they were seeking for something in the dark."[46] Years later in South Carolina, Reverend Daniel Alexander Payne, sixth Bishop of the A. M. E. Church ((1852–1893) and steadfast advocate of decorous worship, was informed pointedly by the leader of ring shout enthusiasts at a Southern camp meeting: "Sinners won't get converted unless there is a ring…At camp-meeting there must be a ring here, a ring there, a ring over yonder, or sinners will not get converted."[47] These passionate defenses of 'Shouting' reaffirm the previously mentioned Louisiana slave Elizabeth Ross Hite, who insisted, "…the Lawd done said you gotta shout if you want to be saved…you gotta shout and you gotta moan if you wants to be saved."[48] Bishop Payne vehemently opposed the ecstatic practice along with its quasi-possessive states and presumed theological necessity, but conceded that among "the ignorant masses…it was regarded as the essence of religion."[49] In Maryland, a pair of African American women actually accosted Bishop

[46] Fredrika Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, Vol. 2, 382. Although Raboteau perhaps underestimates these entwinements of spirituality and bodily movement in terms of their theological significance—as did Bremer--his research underscores the apparently soteriological necessity of this ecstatic exercise for African American camp meeting participants. See Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 60-75.

[47] Daniel Alexander Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (New York: Arno Press, 1969, [1886]), 253-255; quoted in Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 69. The date—1878—of Payne's camp meeting exchange assumes considerable significance here. The ring shout leader's theological defense of ecstatic ritual clearly hewed to African traditions that remained fervent among postbellum blacks who likely represented second and third generation African American Protestants, a point clearly supporting Herskovitsian survival—in new contexts—of African culture.

[48] Saxon, Dreyer and Tallant, eds., *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, 242.

[49] Payne, *Recollections*, 253-255; quoted in Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 69.

Payne with cudgels in response to his condemnation of the highly physical and deeply African ring shout they so revered.[50] Raboteau acknowledges that "the 'holy dance' of the shout may very well have been a two-way bridge connecting the core of West African religions—possession by the gods—to the core of evangelical Protestantism—experience of conversion."[51]

Indeed, the well-documented centrality of spirit possession to many West African religious systems marks these common devotional rituals at camp meetings as not only performative insurgencies ***against*** Euro-American sociologies and cosmologies but correspondingly as demonstrations of loyalty ***to*** African ones.[52] Moreover, this seems to

[50] Renee K. Harrison, *Enslaved Women and the Art of Resistance in Antebellum America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 211-212.

[51] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 73. In *Embodying Colonial Memories*, Paul Stoller analyzes the bodily aspects of religious ecstasy in great depth, underscoring the theological significance of religious physicality.

[52] The anthropological literature on spirit possession/ecstatic worship in African culture and the African Diaspora is vast (and further complicated by French, British and American differences within the discipline), but tends to fall into five (by no means mutually exclusive) categories of interpretation according to anthropologist Paul Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories: Spirit Possession, Power, and the Hauka in West Africa* (London & New York: Routledge, 1995). These are "functionalist, psychoanalytic, physiological, symbolic (interpretive) and theatrical (17)." Adherents of Functionalism, particularly I. M. Lewis and scholars he has influenced, interpret spirit possession as illuminating and sometimes negotiating social structural conflicts, a theoretical approach that certainly applies to African American behavior in the camp meeting context. The psychoanalytic and physiological approaches, though not without intriguing results, suffer from reductive analysis--and in the case of the psychoanalytic--a tendency to convert most phenomena into Western categories of meaning. The symbolic approach presumes ecstatic behavior to be richly communicative of cultural meanings, whether sociological or cosmological. Thus, spirit possessions and encounters emerge as "texts" to be interpreted. I. M. Lewis and others have criticized this approach for its neglect of social structure and its Westernizing emphasis on textuality. Finally, the theatrical approach analogizes possession to stage and theater, wherein possessions enact cultural performances. This, too, has received criticism for imposing a Western format upon disparate cultural events and meanings (all of the foregoing is deeply indebted to Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories,* 17-20). Nonetheless, symbolic and theatrical approaches provide the student of camp meetings' ecstatic "texts" and cultural "theater" with provocative means of understanding diverse elements of religious behavior while usefully highlighting the cultural matrices of contested meaning and expectant, interpreting audiences among which camp meeting ecstasy ensued.

affirm Erskine's contention that "an awakening to African consciousness [was] made possible by reliance on spirit power," while fostering "the creation of Black sacred spaces through which they were able to restore their stolen dignity and humanity...In these sacred spaces, they created their own meaning, their own sacred cosmos."[53] Murphy underscores the shared and fundamental importance among diasporic African religions of the "extraordinary struggle for survival against and triumph over brutal systems of exploitation."[54] Without doubt, this markedly heightened African American religionists' association of justice with divinity.

A classic work inaugurating one of the salient motifs in anthropological analysis of spirit possession, I. M. Lewis's *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* strongly links supernatural possession to situations of socio-political subjugation wherein ecstatic religion provides a counterhegemonic discourse.[55] This explanatory theme has been pursued and ratified by many subsequent studies of possession among slaves, their descendants, subalterns of various kinds and subjugated groups.[56] As Clarke Garrett reminds us in his work on the Shaker movement, spirit

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[53] Erskine, *Plantation Church*, 183-186.
[54] Murphy, *Working the Spirit*, 2.
[55] I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971).
[56] In 1966, Irving I. Zaretsky published *Bibliography on Spirit Possession and Mediumship* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), regarding sub-Saharan Africa and African diasporic activities in the Caribbean and Brazil. Revised and updated, this effort became Irving I. Zaretsky and Cynthia Shambaugh, *Spirit Possession and Spirit Mediumship in Africa and Afro-America* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1978). Some of the most important classic and recent works--especially those relating spirit possession to social subordination and counterhegemonic expression--include: Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations,* trans. Helen Sebba (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, originally published as *Les Religions Afro-Brésiliennes: Contribution à une Sociologie*

possession and religious frenzy include "a kind of spectacular body language for expressing convictions or emotions too profound, too painful, or too dangerous to be expressed verbally."[57] Paul Stoller suggests that religious ecstasy, "like surrealism, is an attack on reality, an aesthetic reaction to the inadequacies of the world."[58] Of significance regarding enslaved practitioners, anthropologist Janice Boddy affirms that messages and

des Interpénétrations de Civilisations [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960]) is considered a masterpiece that blends social, psychological, cultural, historical, global economic and syncretic religious issues into a powerful study of Brazilian Candomble and its ecstatic worship; G. P. Makris, *Changing Masters: Spirit Possession and Identity Construction among the Descendants of Slaves in the Sudan* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2000) issues a compelling explanation of spirit possession as an instrument for contesting historically, socially constructed hierarchies of group and personal status (especially those deriving from slavery), as well as a means of creating alternative personal identities; Paul Christopher Johnson, "On Leaving and Joining Africanness Through Religion: The 'Black Caribs' across Multiple Diasporic Horizons," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37, no. 2 (Out of Africa? 1, 2007): 174-211, as well as his aforementioned book *Spirited Things;* Paul Stoller, *Fusion of the Worlds: An Ethnography of Possession among the Songhay of Niger* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1997); Janice Boddy, *Wombs and Alien Spirits: Women, Men, and the Zar Cult in Northern Sudan* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) views "counterhegemonic" spirit possession as a means to decenter, challenge and critique male domination, while augmenting women's otherwise limited social roles and contesting their societal objectification as mere child bearers. Boddy also advocates analyzing spirit possession and concomitant behavior as allegorical texts and "cultural performance" (49) that transcend society even while commenting upon it; Steven Engler, "Ritual Theory and Attitudes to Agency in Brazilian Spirit Possession," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 21, no. 4 (2009): 460-492; Heike Behrend and Ute Luig, eds., *Spirit Possession, Modernity, and Power in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); Felicitas D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988); *Western Folklore* 66, no. 1/2, *Afro-Caribbean Religions, Culture, and Folklore* (Winter - Spring 2007) includes multiple discussions of spirit possession and religious ritual in the Afro-Caribbean context (including New Orleans); Lindsay Lauren Hale, "preto velho: Resistance, Redemption, and Engendered Representations of Slavery in a Brazilian Possession-Trance Religion," *American Ethnologist* 24, no. 2 (May 1997): 392-414, delineates the practice of African diasporic spirit possession within a larger Catholic fold as a means of engaging issues of race, racism, slavery, accommodation of and resistance to enslavement, as well as the African and Brazilian collective memory; and Cristina Sánchez-Carretero, "Santos y Misterios as Channels of Communication in the Diaspora: Afro-Dominican Religious Practices Abroad," *The Journal of American Folklore* 118, no. 469 (Summer 2005): 308-326, wherein the author analyzes spirit possession in terms of its capabilities for social problem-solving, community maintenance and collective memory.

[57] Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Old World to the New World: Origins of the Shakers* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 4.

[58] Stoller, *Embodying Colonial Memories*, 20.

imputations "reworked in the alternate discourse of possession are hardly less eloquent for being muted; they are merely inexplicit."[59]

Standing second only to the private, all-black "bush arbor" meetings as a hospitable venue for this milieu of behaviors, camp meetings thus provided fecund opportunities for the construction and presentation of uniquely African American worship rites that defied slavery as well as its oppressive definitions of people and society.[60] Moreover, given the absence of white observers at the clandestine bush arbor meetings, the partially integrated camp meetings presented a more effective and psychologically satisfying—albeit simultaneously more dangerous--public arena for insurgent and self-emancipatory (however veiled and symbolic) rituals.[61] Underscoring this, suspicious white observers sometimes reacted apprehensively or even violently to black camp meeting worship, as in Lorenzo Dow's account of an ugly incident clearly charged by the issue of racial hierarchy.[62] Prior to the start of an 1804 Virginia camp meeting, African Americans were "rejoicing in God" when "some ungenerous persons

[59] Boddy, *Alien Spirits,* 5.
[60] Comparatively, see Young, *Rituals of Resistance.* Young identifies substantial survival of Congolese religious belief and practice in the South Carolina and Georgia Low Country, where such traditions served as powerful countermeasures to slavery and the Western conceptions maintaining it.
[61] Of course, secret "hush arbor" meetings entailed considerable risk of punishment for celebrants if discovered, whereas most slaves attending camp meetings did so with permission. In many cases, this made the public camp meetings a more available and viable option.
[62] Again, regarding the conflict between white Southerners' fear of increased slave agency through Christianization and their simultaneous fear for their own souls if guilty of preventing slave conversions, see Larson, *Harriet Tubman*, 45-47.

struck the negroes...to the shedding of blood."[63] Dow was himself threatened repeatedly with floggings, a cocked pistol and other forms of assault for his unrelenting camp meeting critiques of slavery and the treatment of African Americans.[64] In an intriguing demonstration of white fears regarding black empowerment at the gatherings, rumors and even newspaper reports circulated in 1817 that a crowd of African American worshipers left their camp meeting a few miles from Baltimore—notably, on a Sunday—then surrounded and assaulted two officers of the law escorting a pair of convicted African Americans to the state penitentiary. "A tumultuous attack was made upon the officers, which occasioned the escape of the convicts," who had not been recaptured at the time of the report.[65] Like so many insurrectionary scares, the entire episode later proved to be quite at odds with early reports; no evidence ever emerged that any of the camp meeting faithful assisted the escape. In fact, the officers likely contributed, either purposefully or through sheer incompetence.[66] Antebellum Southern whites' assumption that camp meetings emboldened African Americans plainly emerges, nonetheless, rendering the story widely creditable at the time.

However, white misgivings did not occur without reason, as evidenced by the planning and successful execution of escapes from slavery during large, chaotic camp meetings, especially under cover of darkness, and the ideological influence of black

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[63] Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814), 216.
[64] *Ibid*, 217.
[65] N. A., N. T., *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), September 4, 1817.
[66] *Ibid*, September 10, 1817.

preaching at the Methodist gatherings on Harriet Tubman and others who combated slavery directly.[67] Frederick Douglas revealed in his autobiography that an extra night's stay at a Maryland camp meeting precipitated something of a crisis with his master Hugh, who thought the intractable Douglas might have made a break for freedom.[68] Mrs. Isaac Riley of Missouri decided that she and the rest of her enslaved family should abscond for Canada when a favorable prospect arrived. As she later remembered from that free land, "At last, when there was a camp-meeting, I told my husband we had better leave…We left, and made a long camp-meeting of it."[69] Although the passage demonstrates Mrs. Riley's clever sense of humor, it also revealingly characterizes the remainder of her life--a life spent in Canada as a free person with her emancipated family—as 'a long camp meeting,' thus affirming the sacred events' association with joy, self-determination, celebration and personal liberty. Drawing on theoretical insights from Henri Lefebvre, historical sociologist Thomas P. Barker has noted that, "insurrection could…be controlled through the rational management of time and space."[70] In his work on time in the antebellum South, Mark Smith maintains that slaves resisted impositions of rationalized, quasi-industrial, profit-oriented time management in order to contest plantation

[67] Dr. J. R. S. Pitts, *Life and Confession of the Noted Outlaw James Copeland* (New Augusta, MS: Self-Published, 1909), 69-87; Larson, *Harriet Tubman*, 43-54.
[68] Frederick Douglas, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Boston: Published at the Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 103.
[69] Drew, *A North-side View of Slavery,* 300.
[70] Thomas P. Barker, "Spatial Dialectics: Intimations of Freedom in Antebellum Slave Song," *Journal of Black Studies* 46, no. 4 (May 2015): 366.

hegemony.[71] Camp meetings, though, altered slaves' and masters' routine relationship to time and space conspicuously—creating a sacralized as well as empirically different time and space—thus furnishing a remarkable opening for engagement in otherwise carefully proscribed behaviors as well as repudiation of slave life's customary temporal, spatial constraints. Hence, the above reference to enduring personal freedom as "a long camp meeting" signals camp meetings' association with joyously sacred time *and* time belonging to a slave rather than the master.

One scholar of the Underground Railroad emphasizes that camp meetings not only offered a hectic setting wherein one might blend in and then disappear, but a unique opportunity for slaves of different plantations to meet and plan collective or mutually aided flights to freedom. Moreover, he submits, predominantly black camp meetings sometimes openly encouraged self-propelled exoduses from bondage.[72] In other instances--once again illustrating the alteration of normal time and space occasioned by camp meetings--the journeys required to attend them at some distance from home could offer a plausible explanation for fugitive slaves traveling the countryside. Fleeing Loudon County, Virginia during 1841, runaway Charles Bentley and his two companions found food and temporary haven among a kindly Dutch family in nonetheless slavery-permitting Maryland. This family advised Bentley's trio to inform anyone who inquired

[71] Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
[72] Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013), 44-45.

that they were en route to "Horse Shoe Bottom camp meeting on the Susquehanna. We did accordingly, and soon struck the track of the underground railroad, which we followed into the northern free States [capitalization sic]."[73] As is illustrated here, the gatherings' social significance combined with evangelical obligation in persuading many normally restrictive slave-owners to allow attendance of camp meetings despite their consequent threat to slave control, thus generating a credible excuse for slaves roving the countryside.[74]

Francis Henderson, who successfully fled slavery in 1841, observed that Methodist preaching convinced him "that God had made all men free and equal, and that I ought not to be a slave…."[75] From her research on Harriet Tubman's formative context, Kate Larson concludes that the celebrated courier of slaves to freedom drew considerable inspiration and moral certitude from attending camp meetings on Maryland's Eastern Shore, quite likely through exposure to the impassioned preaching of black female itinerants such as Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw.[76] David Brion Davis has noted the ideological tutelage disseminated at camp meetings, highlighting the interconnections

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[73] Drew, *A North-side View of Slavery*, 107-109.

[74] Relevantly, Barker writes, "Slavery derived much of its immense hegemonic power precisely through its socially integrative qualities—a fact that also gave credence to the bizarre myth of racial harmony in the South." Hence, however counterintuitive it may seem for vigilant slave owners to have so frequently permitted attendance of camp meetings by their slaves, the action reflects the necessity of social integration in maintaining slavery. As discussed below, slaves typically wished ardently to attend, thus making any master's refusal a major source of tension and unhappiness.

[75] Drew, *A North-side View of Slavery*, 158.

[76] Larson, *Harriet Tubman*, 44-50. Cf. Chapter 7 for discussion of both these figures. See also William M. Andrews, ed., *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

between earthly and spiritual liberation: "Ham's children, however, also dreamed of a New Jerusalem as they flocked to camp meetings or heard their own preachers tell of Moses and Christ, the twin deliverers."[77] Further, Stephen Prothero and Eugene Genovese both remind us of African American theology's frequent fusion of Moses and Jesus, of earthly and spiritual liberation, while Albert Raboteau has underscored the centrality of the Book of Exodus for black Christians.[78] Prothero writes:

> To slave Christians, Jesus was both savior (from sins) and deliverer (from slavery). Like the spirituals themselves, he gave voice to the need to endure suffering as well as the hope of escaping. At least in the word the slave Christians made, Jesus was both a this-worldly and an otherworldly liberator. This Mosaic Jesus helped to transform black Christianity into an effective vehicle for political resistance and social reform. As Eugene Genovese argued in *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, the slaves' creative conflation of Moses and Jesus brought together the saving grace of the New Testament and the transforming justice of the Old.[79]

Of course, many scholars have identified this double messaging in the African American spirituals sung at camp meetings—otherworldly, sacred meanings entwined with socio-political ones concerning temporal freedom.[80] The employment of coded

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[77] David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 556.

[78] See Stephen Prothero, *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 200-228; Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 159-284; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 211-322.

[79] Prothero, *American Jesus*, 212.

[80] Among the vast literature on African American Spirituals and their diverse meanings, see especially William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware and Lucy McKim Garrison, *Slave Songs of the United States: The Classic 1867 Anthology* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1995); James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, *The Books of the American Negro Spirituals* (New York: Viking Press, 1925); George Pullen Jackson, *White and Negro Spirituals, Their Life Span and Kinship* (New York: J. J. Augustin Publisher, 1943); Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 3-54, 174-189; Howard Thurman, *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1975); John Lovell, *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame: The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual Was Hammered Out* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1986); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting*

words or phrases, clever metaphors, synecdoche and, as Barker in particular argues, metonymy permitted African Americans to encapsulate and interweave both types of meanings in Spirituals.[81] For example, Graham Russell Hodges has demonstrated pointedly emancipatory messages in several of the 29 hymns composed by camp meeting regular and African American preacher, John Jea.[82]

Drawing on this vein of religious empowerment, Harriet Beecher Stowe has the bold and fearless Maroon hero in her novel *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* underscore his uncompromisingly militant stance by singing "the commencement of a wild camp meeting hymn" in a pivotal scene with a "clear, loud voice, one of those peculiar melodies in which vigor and spirit are blended with a wild, inexpressible mournfulness…There was a wild, exultant fullness of liberty that rolled in the note…."[83] Having received criticism for her hero's meekness in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Beecher Stowe sought to create an indelibly belligerent character in Dred, making his resort to camp meeting hymnody as a register of defiance quite noteworthy. Although the evangelical author no doubt chose a hymn for its recognition and resonance with her readership, a camp meeting "Shout" would have likely provided a more authentic militancy and pride.

Its History from Africa to the United States (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997); Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals.*

[81] Barker, "Intimations of Freedom in Antebellum Slave Song," 363-383.

[82] Graham Russel Hodges, "Introduction" and "Appendix 1: Hymns from *A Collection of Hymns Compiled and Selected by John Jea, African Preacher of the Gospel*," in *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 1-50 & 165-178.

[83] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: a Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009, or. pub. 1856), 200.

Whether 'Shout' or Spiritual or 'Frenzy,' with their independent voice (verbal or otherwise) and authentic sound, their sonic vitality and physical animation, all offered transcendent communion with a deific power recognized as far surpassing that of the slave master and as the source of a sacred justice so uncommon on Earth. With this momentary elopement from slavery, unremitting toil, personal and racial degradation, black camp meeting celebrants rebuked the onerous social order that demanded quietude and passivity from the enslaved, and concurrently resituated themselves in the divinely superior cosmic order.

Given the miserable position occupied by African Americans in this social order and its network of Euro-American civil law, contracts, property, economic exploitation, and unjust social relations, such a negation would have been ontologically revolutionary and psycho-socially satisfying indeed. Of course, the Western ideology of individualism contained philosophical foundations for slavery's moral and juridical dismantling, a promise fulfilled in some cases. However, with most Americans effectively ignoring that refrain, few slaves could—even if they held awareness of this philosophical point—be expected to embrace it as their signal hope. Some, like Frederick Douglas, did, but many others understandably looked outside the European intellectual landscape to African traditions, and beyond it to divine justice. Consequently, ecstatic worship and various forms of camp meeting enthusiasm redefined individuals whose worth society had diminished and recalibrated their value according to superordinate divine standards, a

process accomplished through *de*valuation of flawed, inequitable social structures.[84] The appeal of this process--however vaguely and half-consciously recognized—must have been extraordinary for African Americans, especially slaves, but also for many others suffering social subordination, mistreatment or any form of oppression.

In response to all this, a critical historical imagination might justly inquire why slave owners allowed their sentient "property" to assemble and participate at camp meetings, where slaves audited preaching that could easily translate into conceptions of personal identity and divine justice inconsistent with bondage, where they could forge a powerful sense of unity with other African Americans and quite conceivably formulate plans for escape or insurrection. Why would masters permit their slaves' engagement in the gatherings' performative assertions of African American culture and tradition, self and faith, religious autonomy and transcendent freedom that cognitively vanquished—for many slaves at least--the institution of slavery?

First, as mentioned previously, quite a few masters felt an obligation to Christianize their slaves and feared for their own souls—or at least reputations—if they refused evangelical exertions. Moreover, many slave owners fell prey to their own racial arrogance, their own necessary delusions of superiority, and their own comforting

[84] Dumont, *Essays on Individualism,* 23-59, esp. 30-31. We also profit by remembering the etymology of the word "enthusiasm," which derives from the Greek "enthousiasmos," combining "en" (in) with "theos" (god) to suggest the indwelling of—*or possession by*--a god.

convictions about African Americans' inability to construct sophisticated sociologies and cosmologies that rebutted slavery so thoroughly. As Levine, Stuckey and Floyd emphasize, most European Americans demarcated supernatural and natural experience, the sacred and profane realms, to a far greater degree than African Americans; consequently, most owners failed to recognize how camp meeting religion continued to inform slave life and consciousness the remainder of the year.[85] So slavery's proponents underestimated or failed to "see" much of what transpired cognitively, spiritually and culturally at camp meetings. In some cases, perhaps they bemusedly glimpsed it for a disturbing but dismissed instant, or clearly saw and yet then somehow convinced themselves reassuringly otherwise. After all, the most convinced advocates of any unjust ideology tend customarily to be its most blinkered victims. Of course, sometimes masters simply did not themselves attend, but permitted their slaves to go without surveillance.

Further, many masters likely understood the camp meetings as something of a safety valve, an ephemeral but effective catharsis for their otherwise presumably hard-working and thoroughly disciplined slaves. In this sense, the festive, carnival aspects of camp meetings--however simultaneously sacred these gatherings remained for many--permitted African Americans a temporary but welcome reprieve from the drudgery, squalor and unrelenting service to whites that otherwise shaped their existence. Whether all slave owners could have fully articulated the sociological and psychological functions

[85] Levine, *Black Culture*, 3-80 and 136-189; Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 1-109; Floyd, *The Power of Black Music*, 3-34.

of this for their purposes, most probably gleaned it on some level, noted in many cases the apparently increased 'happiness' of their laborers afterwards, and even valued the holiday-like camp meetings for their ironic contribution to stability. This was surely a self-serving, superficial and limited evaluation, missing much, but one befitting their viewpoint and concerns.

Finally, we must remember C. Vann Woodward's tutelage concerning the relatively integrated nature of the Old South. Although profoundly unequal, the two races attended many of the same social occasions in a way that would decline markedly after Reconstruction.[86] Significantly, African Americans appear to have especially and passionately desired attendance of camp meetings in a way that could incite considerable tension and trouble for masters who refused permission. Such a course would have delivered in many cases a reaction among slaves akin to enforced work on Sunday or the cancellation of Christmas. As one of Stowe's white characters in the aforementioned novel *Dred* ruefully declaims about an upcoming camp meeting: "Then, of course, all the hands will want to be off; and Mr. Gordon has brought them up so that they feel dreadfully abused if they are not in with everything that's going on."[87] In comparison, Nissenbaum has deftly demonstrated how the antebellum Christmas season's permissiveness and revelry for African Americans no doubt briefly threatened the social

[86] C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 11-17.
[87] Stowe, *Dred*, 221.

order of slave society, yet in a more enduring sense protected its normally harsh fabric through a Yuletide week of sustaining release and provisional liberty.[88] This was an ancient alchemy, long recognized and deviously utilized in support of markedly unequal societal structures. However, many slave-owners' racist underestimations of African American's intellectual reach and spiritual depth allowed them to support camp meetings' utility in these relatively superficial terms. Likewise, they failed to note the profound psychological liberation, emancipatory spirituality and sustaining conceptions of ultimate justice that the lively outdoor gatherings supplied to slaves.

One might also fairly inquire how fulfilling or insurgent an ephemeral, spiritual escape from slavery could be, and indeed, whether it might have functioned in the longer view as a source of profound dissatisfaction. First, religious sources of enduring dissatisfaction with the socio-political world not infrequently induce resistance or change, themes uniting the otherworldly spirituality and decidedly this-worldly social activism eventually exhibited by African American Christianity, to say nothing of helping to explain historical actors such as Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Gabriel 'Prosser,' Denmark Vesey, Vesey's associate Gullah Jack Pritchard, and other highly religious rebels against slavery and racial oppression.[89] Relevantly, in a formulation that

[88] Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 258-300.

[89] Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006) provides a valuable history of slave rebellion and African American resistance to slavery, including considerable attention to religious components; Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998, 1973) comprises a classic, highly influential account of the relationship between African American spirituality and resistance to racial oppression; See also Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through*

effectively refutes social control theories of slave religion as well, Herbert Marcuse sharply criticized Marxist dismissals of art as preponderantly escapist, counterrevolutionary and supportive of the social order. Contending that social theorists should not necessarily construe imaginative flights from oppressive realities as mere false consciousness or escapism buttressing the status quo, Marcuse wrote:

> The transcendence of immediate reality shatters the reified objectivity of established social relations and opens a new dimension of experience: rebirth of the rebellious subjectivity. Thus, on the basis of aesthetic sublimation, a *desublimation* takes place in the perception of individuals—in their feelings, judgments, thoughts; an invalidation of dominant norms, needs, and values.[90]

Hence, the highly subjective religious departures of African Americans into morally and ethically superior divine realms ultimately redounded as re-imaginings of the social order, as vital reconceptualizations of a more just world. Further, there stands the matter of what French social anthropologist and historian of ideas Louis Dumont has termed "hierarchical relativization." Dumont argues that religious transcendence of this world and union with divinity existing outside of this world—during human beings'

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the Night: A History of African American Christianity (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011); Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church*; Nat Turner and Kenneth S. Greenberg, *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents* (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996); Kenneth Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); David F. Allmendinger Jr., *Nat Turner and the Rising in Southampton County* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2014, 1975); Douglas Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, 1999); Lois A. Walker and Susan R. Silverman, *A Documented History of Gullah Jack Pritchard and the Denmark Vesey Slave Insurrection of 1822* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001).

[90] See Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics,* trans. Herbert Marcuse & Erica Sherover (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), quote from 7-8.

temporal lives—offer neither permanent escape from the travail of terrestrial existence nor necessarily a radical revision of it, but *do* (re)position the profoundly unjust social world of human beings as morally beneath, metahistorically inferior to, epistemically less important than—***and ultimately answerable to***--Christians' "destiny of union with God and outworldly bliss."[91] As he writes, "The worldly order is relativized, as subordinated to absolute values."[92]

Was this sufficient balm for the suffering of all American slaves? Certainly not. Could this process in some ways operate on behalf of status quo maintenance? Absolutely. Yet for many African American Christians, the "Frenzy" or "Shout," with their ecstatic trances and quasi-possession, clearly provided a sustaining, hopeful and joyous rebuke to the social conditions in which they unfortunately resided. These potent rituals also joined with impassioned preaching, exhortation and spirituals to issue a celestially ordained deconstruction of the ideologies undergirding those social conditions and a conclusive reordering of the moral universe.[93] Inherent in all of this lay the possibility of a different future and better world.

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[91] Dumont, *Essays on Individualism*, 35.
[92] *Ibid*, 31.
[93] William D. Wright's *Black Intellectuals, Black Cognition, and a Black Aesthetic* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997) argues that African Americans have been "deconstructing" white American society's cultural and linguistic formulations of black Americans since the Colonial period. He contends, "Many postmodernists laud deconstruction, but Black people have been employers of the deconstructive method since the seventeenth century, from the first moment they heard that white people and America stood for freedom. Over their history, they have deconstructed documents, writings, phrases, words, images, and symbols….There is one other thing to say about the way Blacks have employed deconstruction in their history in America. They have used it to expose the White over Black hierarchical relationship (124-125)."

Upon the consecrated grounds of the camp meeting, in this sacred space where rudimentary physical laws and empirical explanations yielded to divinely sanctioned possibilities for strange and transformative events, antebellum society's normative prescriptions regarding race encountered meaningful challenges and, sometimes, conspicuous repudiation. African American participants discovered a fluid and unusually accepting space for physically demonstrative, often aurally raucous, and unfailingly ardent expressions of anguish and rapture, tradition and innovation, culture and selfhood. They celebrated African rites, syncretically acquired and refashioned new material for religious devotion, dramatically changing American evangelicalism and Southern culture in the process. And they made better lives for themselves despite the onerous yokes of slavery and racism.

African American devotions contributed momentously to the events' unique, unprecedented and influential contours. Black and white attendees shared theology, song, fears and joys, food and fellowship in a manner less crippled by racist norms than anywhere else in early America was save small interactions among remarkably enlightened people. Although enormous distinctions between free and slave, European American and African American surely obtained, many of the white people at early camp meetings endured difficult lives of endless toil, heartbreaking loss of children with a

frequency we cannot imagine, and seemingly insurmountable hardship both physically and emotionally, just like their black brothers and sisters in the Christian faith. Surely the hope, solace, release, joy and transcendent repudiation of this world's sorrows and injustice that transfigured African Americans in the camp meeting context translated by some measure into white experience, offering spiritual comfort and regenerative faith, as well as an at least temporary sense of common humanity bereft of racial division and definition. In those transitory interconnections, those moments of shared human experience, the struggles for a richer, more profound Christianity and a more just American society undoubtedly gained incremental territory.

These struggles would of course be long ones. Inarguably, camp meeting's spontaneity and improvisation, broad tolerance and sincere evangelical welcome, all of which combined to enable the range of African American expression detailed herein, never fully gained entrance to many white-dominated physical churches. Within those edifices, racial privilege received more vivid emphasis through seating arrangements, order of communion, planning of vocal contributions, and a growing insistence upon bourgeois decorum during the mid-nineteenth century.[94] In reaction, blacks who could—principally in the North—withdrew from these increasingly racist situations and formed their own churches within the Wesleyan movement, especially under the umbrella of the

[94] As an example, the issue of African American testimony in Methodist church trials became a matter of enormous contention during the first years of the 1840s. This dispute obviously pitted Methodist tradition regarding the worth and voice of black Methodists against the social mores and legal customs of the American South.

African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches. As many preponderantly white Methodist churches gained affluence and embraced increasingly bourgeois or even elitist attitudes by the 1830s and afterwards, camp meetings' remarkable innovations regarding race, quasi-possession, physically demonstrative and "enthusiastic" worship, performative insurgencies against slavery, and vocal criticisms of racial injustice all diminished therein while remaining more viable and vibrant in rural, African American, Free Methodist and eventually Holiness orbits. Sadly, even by the 1840s and 50s, many lamented the loss of Methodist egalitarianism, common folk insurgency and grassroots missiology that typified the first third or more of the century.

Further, and even more regrettably, Methodism in the antebellum South after 1800--excepting principled stalwarts like Lorenzo Dow--increasingly abandoned the anti-slavery position common among many of their British and Northern brethren. As Christine Heyrman and others have demonstrated, long-term acceptance and mainstream growth of evangelicalism in the South likely required as much, but the eventual influence of slave-holding families within the Church muted earlier Methodism's promise of racial cooperation and brotherhood.[95] The racially accepting stream never disappeared entirely, however, persevering in certain channels of nineteenth century Methodism. This egalitarian outlook supplied a notable contribution to American culture's slowly evolving attitudes about the abilities and rights of African

[95] Heyrman, *Southern Cross*.

Americans and other non-whites, (re)appeared dramatically in the various Holiness and Pentecostal sects that branched out from the Wesleyan tradition during the late 1800s and early 1900s, and ultimately provided a historic bulwark for twentieth century Methodist progressivism in areas of race, poverty and social justice.

Significantly, what mainstream Southern Methodism lost during the course of the long nineteenth century African American denominations and churches gained, concentrated and strengthened. This eventually contributed mightily to the development of a black nation within a nation, the crucial postbellum missionary and educational efforts accomplished by the two AME denominations among Southern freedman, the twentieth-century battle for Civil Rights so often rooted in the Black Church, as well as to diverse African American cultural expressions in political consciousness, theology, literature, musical genres, oratory, and community organization.[96]

[96] See Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003); James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998). On the connection between African American camp meetings and politics in the postbellum South, see Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. 232-233.

Chapter Seven:
"The Divine Flame": Women and Children as Camp Meeting Leaders

During the 1800s' first decade, a freeborn African American female from Pennsylvania named Zilpha Elaw experienced a gradual but deeply emotional conversion to the Methodist faith, one that crested into certainty of salvation during a remarkable visual epiphany. While milking a cow and happily singing the enduring John Leland hymn, "O When Shall I See Jesus?" Elaw observed a tall, white-robed man with long hair approaching her. The young woman recognized this kindly figure as Jesus, who held out His arms and radiantly affirmed her salvation with a beatific countenance. Afterwards, Elaw admitted she might have ultimately interpreted the vision as occurring solely in her mind, except the milk cow swiveled its bovine head to stare at the heavenly figure and then, like some long ago animal in a Levant manger, "bowed her knees and cowered upon the ground. I was overwhelmed with astonishment at the sight, but the thing was certain and beyond all doubt." In her memoirs, the future itinerant evangelist wrote, "from that happy hour, my soul was set at glorious liberty…."[1]

Like many other women who claimed a new religious authority at camp meetings, Elaw's spiritual vision furnished a rite of passage propelling her toward subsequent assumption of an unabashedly vocal role in services. This transpired a few years later as

[1] Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw*, in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century,* ed. William M. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 53–57.

Elaw attended a gathering of "saints in the wilderness," wherein she precipitously fell to the ground in spiritual ecstasy. During this extended period of physical incapacitation, Elaw felt herself to be floating high above the camp meeting with God "so powerfully near to me" and as surrounded by "bodies of resplendent light." In this state, Elaw claimed, she heard a supernatural voice unmistakably declare, "Now thou art sanctified; and I will show thee what thou must do." Upon regaining consciousness, Elaw discovered a crowd of several hundred people watching her and piously shedding tears. Immediately, the young woman perceived herself as joyously embraced by Wesleyan sanctification, a state of purity beyond salvation. As the camp meeting resumed, this African American female who had always remained silent in public services assented instead to lead prayers in earnest. Receiving considerable acclaim as well as requests for her Godly entreaties during the meeting's remaining days, she finally returned home with an urgent sense of evangelical mission.[2]

[2] *Ibid*, 66-67. For discussions of the Wesleyan concept of sanctification, see John Wesley, *John Wesley's 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,' The Annotated Edition*, ed. Mark K. Olson (Belding, MI: Alethea In Heart Publishing, 2005); Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007); Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Nappance, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1998); Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 1994), 311-344; Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996). The Methodist Episcopal Church (USA) included Wesley's *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* in its entirety within the denomination's *Discipline* manual. Olson's explanations in the *Annotated Edition* above prove quite helpful. According to Randall Stephens, the doctrine of sanctification enjoyed considerable emphasis among early Methodists such as Francis Asbury and Jesse Lee, as well as a fair number of converts during camp meetings' early decades. However, by the 1840s, he argues, most Southern and frontier Methodists neglected the doctrine in favor of stressing salvation, especially at camp meetings, which presented a relatively uncomplicated and ecumenical theology. See Randall Stephens, *The Fire Spreads: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 15-55.

However, Zilpha Elaw fully embraced the ministerial role only after safe transit through a harrowing experience she also ultimately deemed as divine in origin: a lengthy and severe illness—lasting for months and considered by most as terminal--during which a heavenly messenger appeared, informing the bed-ridden and presumably dying woman that she would not only survive but receive a revelation from God at a camp meeting to come, a gathering she would unquestionably survive to attend. During that event's rapturous worship fifteen months later, Elaw maintained, an unseen spirit hand reached out and palpably touched her just as a supernatural, holy voice commanded she step out before a gathering throng of hundreds in the midst of this lively camp meeting and preach…which she did with astonishing eloquence and power.[3] Reflecting camp meetings' characteristic democratization of leadership, the assemblage of notable preachers headlining the gathering not only permitted Elaw's extemporaneous contribution, but actually wept in humble approbation. After this ministerial inception, the nascent preacher perceived a light brighter than the sun glowing about her. From the radiance came the voice she heard before while bedridden, acclaiming, "Now thou knowest the will of God concerning thee, thou must preach the gospel; and thou must travel far and wide."[4]

[3] Elaw, *Memoirs,* 76-82; Yolanda Williams Page, *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers, Vol. 1* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 183.
[4] Elaw, *Memoirs*, 82.

This mystical empowerment, the radical enfranchisement of an unassuming individual generally disregarded and degraded in the wider early nineteenth century American world by virtue of her gender, race and poverty, occurred in the camp meeting's sacralized zone of magically insurgent possibilities, drawing authority from the divine sphere on whose threshold the meeting camped. This event initiated a highly successful—though not infrequently controversial and dangerous—ministerial and camp meeting career that lasted into the 1840s and carried Elaw not only through many American states of the North and South--where she risked much, not least her life and liberty--but across the ocean to England as well.[5] Thus, a black woman of poor origins, orphaned at fourteen, served for decades as a markedly effective and frequently heralded leader in broad-ranging evangelical circles. She recurrently interacted with putatively preternatural, deific forces while leading untold numbers into a rich spiritual existence and for decades shouldered the supreme camp meeting responsibility of ministry and sermonizing. In the early American camp meeting realm, where the normal antebellum social hierarchy receded and a spiritually ordained democratization flourished at least for a time, Zilpha Elaw achieved enduring popularity with racially mixed congregations

[5] William Andrews, "Introduction," *Sisters of the Spirit,* ed. Andrews, 1-23; Williams, *African American Women Writers*, 182-185; Leslie M. Alexander and Walter C. Rucker, Jr., eds., *Encyclopedia of African American History,* vol. 1 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 396-397. *Sisters of the Spirit* includes the autobiographies of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw and Julia Foote, along with excellent introductory information and useful footnotes. See also Paul Chilcote, *She Offered Them Christ: The Legacy of Women Preachers in Early Methodism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001) and Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism 1760-1968* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

and earned an esteem unthinkable for someone like her in virtually any other sector of early American national life.

Like African Americans, early American women suffered the admonition to worship in unobtrusive, tranquil and submissive terms while eschewing leadership roles.[6] Many religious authorities pointed to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (**KJV**), wherein the Apostle Paul decreed: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing [sic], let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church," or to 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and its warning to "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."[7] New England's Congregationalist faith, the colonial South's Anglican establishment, traditionalist Presbyterians, Lutherans and most of early America's mainstream to conservative churches insisted upon female silence during services.[8]

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[6] See eighteenth century evangelist Sarah Osborn's extremely hesitant and apologetic acceptance of leadership in Sarah Osborn, Reverend Joseph Fish, "To Reverend Joseph Fish," Published Letter, 28 February 1767, in *Readings in Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*, ed. Barbara J. MacHaffie (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992), 102-104.

[7] Of course, churches intent upon limiting women's speech and authority in devotional contexts usually neglected other passages wherein Paul arguably endorsed female contributions, leadership and ministry, such as Romans 16: 1-2 and Philippians 4: 2-3. For an in-depth and scholarly discussion that views Pauline restrictions on female church activity as actually quite limited in nature, contextually specific and carefully qualified by Paul himself, see Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992); Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul, in Other Words: A Cultural Reading of His Letters* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) culturally contextualizes and thoughtfully historicizes Pauline scripture.

[8] The Society of Friends, also known as Quakers of course, constituted a notable exception.

Though common among the Society of Friends from their mid-seventeenth century beginnings forward, female preaching and many other forms of public religious speech by women principally drew infamy from their connection with the generally despised Quakers. Carol Karlsen reveals that, prior to the Friends' rise, Antinomian and other dissenting females in Puritan New England who spoke out publicly or led religious meetings received community opprobrium and perhaps suspicion of heresy or even witchcraft.[9] Indeed, the Bay Colony's flurry of witch trials during the later 1640s effectively silenced much of this public vocalization by assertive women.[10] While Catherine Brekus has connected eighteenth century religious innovations such as women's public discourse with the Enlightenment in interesting ways, likely the most powerful catalyst for sacred public speech by women—and minorities—resided in the central evangelical edict that Christians should deliver conversion testimonies in front of potential proselytes, an endeavor necessarily enlisting women as surely as men.[11] Susan Lindley accords:

> The Great Awakening also gave a fresh impulse to and further justification for expanded religious roles for women. The central experience of God's grace in conversion…propelled him or her to witness of that experience to others….Significantly, it was the experience of

[9] Common folk tended to conceive witchcraft more in terms of *maleficium* than dissent or heresy.
[10] Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 120-125. See also David Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), and Michael P. Winship, *The Times and Trials of Anne Hutchinson: Puritans Divided* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2005).
[11] Catherine Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Beverly Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists: Woman's Rights and Religious Conviction in the Lives of Three Nineteenth Century American Clergywomen* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 76.

> grace that gave authority, not formal theological training, thus opening a door for women as well as black men.[12]

Although exceedingly rare as preachers during the eighteenth century, women sometimes became noteworthy speakers and inspiring leaders among New Light, Baptist or other radical elements of the First Great Awakening by providing testimony and prayer. However, this proved not only highly controversial among traditionalist groups but also decidedly short-lived as the American Revolutionary era dawned.[13] Susan Juster has demonstrated how the masculine rhetoric of the Revolution devalued feminine or putatively feminized speech in evangelical circles. Meanwhile, imputations of "sexual disorder" combined with the war's centripetal, unifying effects upon colonists to compel more mainstream religious behavior among Baptists and others who had experimented with feminine empowerment during the First Great Awakening.[14] Moreover, Stephen Marini has outlined the trajectory of radical sects that formed during the Revolutionary period—including assemblies permitting female leadership--noting particularly the

[12] Susan Hill Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 43.

[13] Catherine Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 8-12. Cf. also William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 1-58; and Stephen A. Marini, *Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[14] See Susan Juster, *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

ephemeral, tenuous nature of groups who maintained their "ecstatic deviance" from community norms such as female passivity and conventional gender roles.[15]

By the nineteenth century's Second Great Awakening, several factors combined to permit American women a still highly contested but enhanced opportunity to speak publicly in evangelical services. Not least among these stood the aforementioned obligation to offer testimonials of God's salvific grace, which combined with notions about the spiritual duties of 'Mothers in Israel' and the didactic responsibilities of 'Republican Motherhood' to propel more women into speaking roles and religious leadership.[16] Demographically, the evangelical percentage of the overall growing American populace was increasing—thus augmenting the number of venues for the requisite act of testimony—while more women than men experienced evangelical "conversion" and united with the movement's proliferating churches.[17] Further, historians have extended the sociological argument that the period's feminized religious activity granted many young adult women the self-definition, meaning and purpose that

[15] Marini, *Radical Sects,* 40-62, esp. 53.

[16] Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place*, 48-69, 90-134; Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims,* 13-15, 117-231; Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists,* 78-80. Also see Linda K. Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment--An American Perspective," in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda K. Kerber* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 41-62, and *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Amanda Porterfield, *Mary Lyon and the Mount Holyoke Missionaries* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Sarah Robbins, "'The Future Good and Great of our Land': Republican Mothers, Female Authors, and Domesticated Literacy in Antebellum New England," *New England Quarterly* 75, no. 4 (December 2002): 562-591.

[17] Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 186-195.

became less available in other endeavors because of the market revolution's impact on socio-economic relations. For example, females' household contributions (such as those involved in the transition from home manufacture of cloth to use of industrial textiles) diminished in prestige as market goods became available, motivating many women to look beyond the domestic sphere for affirmations of self-worth and prospects for making laudable contributions.[18] Other scholars have detected early expressions of the long nineteenth century effort by women to secure public voice and power, while many discern a response to the market economy's alienating impact on social relations. As economic interactions became increasingly competitive, impersonal and distant, churches offered a network of warm, rewarding social connections not defined by the market and profit. Further, as some historians suggest, these relationships and the evangelical ethos animating them served as buttresses against, as well as satisfying alternatives to, the emotionally unsatisfying ones characterizing the emergent capitalist and far-flung economy.[19] As a sacred sphere defined by loving spiritual associations and evangelical concern for others' well-being rather than selfishness and one's own personal

[18] Lindley, *You Have Stept Out of Your Place*, 59-61; See also Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 19-62, 126-159. See also Jon Kukla, "Elizabeth Henry Campbell Russell: Champion of Faith in the Early Republic," in *Virginia Women: Their Lives and Times,* eds. Cynthia A. Kierner and Sandra Gioia Treadway (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), which provides an instructive example in its biographical treatment of patriot Patrick Henry's sister, who made a lifetime of significant evangelical contributions to the Methodist movement.

[19] Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999) attributes much of Kentuckians' and others' gravitation toward early camp meetings to the atomization, anomie and emotional isolation promoted by the Early Republic's fiercely competitive, individualist socio-economic system, which manifested in the Bluegrass with particular intensity.

gain, as passionately collective efforts to worship and proselytize sincerely instead of cynically calculated strivings to achieve personal success and money, camp meetings appealed to women and others who doubted, disliked and feared the new economy, or stood on its margins. As an evangelical context wherein women's experience of God's gracious salvation and their vocal testimonies about this rapturous transformation mattered as much as those of men, camp meetings granted a rare gender parity and a unique opportunity for selflessly earned social prestige.

Numerous witnesses and chroniclers attest to women's emergence in the camp meeting context as fervently active participants, vocal worship leaders, highly effective exhorters and even occasionally ministers. According to the Reverend James McGready, whose highly anticipated services at Kentucky's Gaspar River in 1800 occasioned the first full-fledged camp meeting, women in a sense propelled the entire phenomenon forward, contributing momentously to the Revival of 1800-1801 and the ensuing Second Great Awakening. As he remembered events in Logan County during the last week of July 1800:

> On Friday, nothing more appeared during the day, than a decent solemnity. On Saturday, matters continued in the same way, until in the evening. Two pious women were sitting together, conversing about their exercises; which conversation seemed to affect some of the by-standers; instantly the divine flame spread through the whole multitude. Presently you might have seen sinners lying powerless in every part of the house, praying and crying for mercy.[20]

[20] James McGready, *The Posthumous Works Of The Reverend and Pious James McGready, Late Minister of the Gospel in Henderson, Ky,* ed. Reverend James Smith (Nashville: J. Smith, 1837), ix.

The devotion and zeal of these two nameless frontier women ignited not only an evening's religious exercises, but also those of an entire camp meeting, one that congregants by the hundreds of thousands emulated across the frontier and nation through ensuing decades.[21] At Cane Ridge's legendary camp meeting the following summer, Reverend Barton Stone noted the abundance of women alongside men "declaring the wonderful works of God, and the glorious mysteries of the Gospel. Their appeals were solemn, heart-penetrating, bold and free."[22] This pattern continued over the years, as verified by a Yorkshire observer over four decades later who reported *all* of the serious and involved worshipers at a camp meeting he attended to have been women, while the men stood by watching or engaging in other, decidedly less religious activities.[23] Moreover, women performed some of the most extreme and dangerous physical worship in all of camp meeting primary literature, such as leaping and falling repeatedly against the meetings' hard wooden pews in a manner that would normally have entailed "broken limbs and ribs." Attributing these celebrants' complete and seemingly miraculous lack of injury to protection by the Holy Spirit, a ministerial

[21] See also John B. Boles, *Religion in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1976), 16-30.
[22] Barton Warren Stone, *The Biography of Elder Barton Warren Stone, Written by Himself: With Additions and Reflections by Elder John Rogers* (Cincinnati: J. A. & U. P. James, 1847), 34-35.
[23] William Brown, *America: a Four Years' Residence in the United States and Canada* (Leeds, UK: Kemplay & Holland, 1849), 43.

eyewitness thus situated women as superior vessels to men—who attempted none of this--for the Spirit's manifestation.[24]

Interestingly, missionary and Western traveler Timothy Flint spoke of supercilious, derisive camp meeting visitors who yielded to spiritual conversion as becoming "women and children in their turn," as if that indicated a more sanctified state.[25] Of course, this derives in some measure from a perceived similarity between the supposedly gentler, more emotionally vulnerable temperament of women and the broken, susceptible spirit of the sinner in conviction, yet further indicates why camp meetings so readily embraced women as spiritual leaders. Namely, the prevalent nineteenth century conceptualization of women aligned more readily than that of men with the evangelical and especially Methodist idealization of spiritual readiness. This evolving perception placed women in a somewhat worshipfully advantaged position that liberated their voices and commended them as leaders--albeit usually under the ultimate authority of male ministers--in camp meeting efforts.[26] British visitors Reed and Matheson commented pointedly on the salient roles of women in exhorting, singing and emotional display in the woodland services, while Lorenzo Dow--in admirable fidelity to

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[24] Reverend Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden; New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1872), 62-64.

[25] Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States: Or the Mississippi Valley,* Vol. 1 (Cincinnati: E. H. Flint, 1828), 222.

[26] Of relevance here, see especially Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977). Also useful are Leon J. Podles, *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity* (McLean, VA: Spence Publishing Company, 1999); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood;* and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).

"the last will be first" concept--underscored the activity of young women and girls in leading their families to conversion.[27] In a less than feminist vein, one veteran Cumberland Presbyterian minister acknowledged women exhorters' signal contributions and noted the social order's reversal within sacred forest gatherings: "It is not uncommon for the great Head of the Church to select apparently weak means for the accomplishment of his work." Beard further noted the major influence of a youthful woman he termed "an angel of peace and mercy" in converting a young man who afterwards became a renowned minister among the Cumberland Presbyterians.[28] Emphasizing the inversion of both gender and class, Dow told the story of a languishing Virginia camp meeting to which a poor woman walked thirty miles to worship and then personally catalyzed the moribund event with her piety and enthusiasm.[29] Another mere girl enjoyed celebrity status at a Pennsylvania camp meeting through a remarkable spiritual exercise wherein she entered a seemingly catatonic state for five days, and then awakened to report precisely what acquaintances had stated well outside her presence during the interim. The young lady furthered her acclaim by providing a detailed account of the "spirit world" she purported to have visited.[30]

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[27] Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Volume 1* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 191; Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814), 206.

[28] Richard Beard, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some of the Early Ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874), 71-72.

[29] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 216.

[30] Brunson, *Western Pioneer*, 67-68.

Lorenzo Dow and others repeatedly underscore women's receptiveness to these catatonic states and consequent visions, which also preceded some of camp meeting lore's most vocal women taking the mantle of exhorting or even preaching.[31] New England Methodist Fanny Newell provided an exceptionally vivid rendering of such a spiritual flight in her popular memoirs.[32] While worshiping at a Maine camp meeting, Newell "felt a spark of divine power which took away all my bodily strength." Entering a seemingly comatose condition for the next three to four hours, she experienced a vision wherein shining angels flew her to a heaven populated by sacred beings of light producing beautiful music. Significantly for the issue of female vocalization in religious circles, Newell soon joined ***her voice*** to those of the celestial chorus by invitation. As she recollected, "I longed to join them in singing one of those heavenly anthems; and one of them said to me ***you shall***, and immediately I struck in and sang so as I never did before or since." Observing God and other celestial beings as forms of sun-like light, Newell then received transport by illumined angels to view the crucifixion of Jesus back on Earth. Upon awakening to the camp meeting, the young woman actually usurped the august Bishop Francis Asbury's turn to preach and issued a sterling exhortation without

[31] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 222; Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 191; N. A., N. T., *Aurora & Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), September 2, 1829; Rev. Finis Ewing, Rev. Robert Donnell, "To Reverend Robert Donnell," Published Letter, 27 June 1818, in Franceway Ranna Cossitt, *The Life and Times of Rev. Finis Ewing: One of the Founders and Fathers of The Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Louisville, KY: Board of Publication of The Cumberland Presbyterian Church, 1853), 245-247.

[32] Sales of her memoirs exceeded ten thousand during the first decade after Fanny Newell passed away in 1824. See John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 156.

"confusion, or disorder, or any irregularity, or the least interruption…," *nor* any disapprobation from the highest leader of American Methodism or anyone else present.[33] Thereafter a highly regarded and regular exhorter in Methodist gatherings, Newell offers magnificent insight into camp meetings' enfranchisement of women as holy vessels, mystical visionaries and vocal leaders.

Women of all stations and ages--including poor old widows who earned hard-won respect through their holiness, wisdom and commitment, little girls who gained sudden notoriety with ecstatic revelations and lucid religious expositions, as well as mothers who worshipped, prayed or sang admirably *and* organized so much of camp meetings' support through temporary domesticity and rewarding fellowship—assumed positions of influence and leadership at the holy gatherings. The product of an austere Presbyterian background and quite traditional theological education, camp meeting founder Reverend James McGready always remained relatively cautious about the nature and medium of spiritual exercises, as well as emotional outbursts and leadership roles. Nonetheless, he unhesitatingly acknowledged the role of young girls in heralding and inspiring some of the earliest outbreaks of rapturous piety in camp meeting circles. As McGready remembered:

> Of many instances to which I have been an eye-witness, I shall only mention one, viz. a little girl. I stood by her whilst she lay across her mother's lap almost in despair. I was conversing with her when the first gleam of light broke in upon her mind—She started to her feet, and in an ecstacy of joy, she cried out, "O he is willing, he is willing—he is come, he is come — O what a sweet Christ he is—O what a precious Christ he is — O what a

[33] Fanny Newell, *Memoirs of Fanny Newell* (Springfield, MA: O. Scott and E. F. Newell, 1833), 55-57. See also Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 155.

> fulness I see in him—O what a beauty I see in him- — O why was it that I never could believe! that I never could come to Christ before, when Christ was so willing to save me?" Then turning round, she addressed sinners, and told them of the glory, willingness and preciousness of Christ, and plead with them to repent; and all this in language so heavenly, and at the same time, so rational and scriptural, that I was filled with astonishment. But were I to write you every particular of this kind that I have been an eye and ear witness to, during the two past years, it would fill many sheets of paper [sic throughout].[34]

Mature women routinely distinguished themselves as what some camp meeting habitués termed "pretty shouters," referring to the religious fervor, unapologetic volume and stirring enthusiasm of their prayers, singing, declarations in support of preaching, and exhortations on behalf of conversion.[35] One minister spoke of this esteemed cohort as "sisters of deep piety, intelligent and zealous for the salvation of souls...."[36] Although not common, females also occasionally preached in Methodist services, thus putting women in the actual pulpit with its sacerdotal power.[37] Moreover, John Wigger has rightly argued that the role of exhorter frequently entailed sermons in a mode that would, but for gender and licensing, have been termed "preaching."[38]

Several women, such as Jarena Lee, notably preached at camp meetings of the antebellum era, however. A fixture at many interracial gatherings of the Middle Atlantic States during the 1820s, the freeborn Lee was a proud African American, an outspoken

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[34] McGready, *Posthumous Works*, x.
[35] David Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1903), 105.
[36] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 88.
[37] N. A., "PLAIN AND PERTINENT: Female Preaching at a Methodist Camp Meeting," *Republican Banner*, July 22, 1869. This seems to have become more acceptable in the postbellum era, certainly indicating the strides made in American culture over the course of the nineteenth century on behalf of women's rights, but also suggesting camp meetings' trajectory in this direction and influence on the culture generally.
[38] Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 152-157.

defender of female preaching, and a harsh critic of racial prejudice.[39] Though generally well received at camp meetings, Lee met local opposition, such as an effort in Maryland by non-Methodist white men to intimidate her into silence or departure, as well as occasional criticism from congregants and fellow black ministers.[40] Of a male African American minister who expressed his doubts that a woman should be preaching and inquired why she did not join the Quaker movement, Lee pithily recorded, "We may say, with propriety, he had not tarried at Jerusalem long enough."[41] After initially walking out on Lee at a church in Chillicothe, Ohio, a white man who vehemently opposed female ministry returned, heard her preach, and then apologized the next day, adding that "now he believed that God was no respecter of persons, and that a woman as well as a man, when called of God, had a right to preach."[42]

The daughter of formerly enslaved African Americans who bought their own freedom in New York State, Julia Foote (1823-1901) emerged from camp meetings and other Wesleyan venues of the 1840s as a prominent female African American minister who created a highly respected, influential—though similarly embattled--career in

[39] See Jarena Lee, *Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Printed and Published for the Author, 1849).
[40] *Ibid*, 36-38. Interestingly, the local white magistrate in Maryland defended Lee's right to preach, affirmed her credentials to the complainants, informed them that she came "highly recommended," *and* subsequently advised Lee that he did not mind if she continued in the ministry for the rest of her life (37-38).
[41] *Ibid*, 38.
[42] *Ibid*, 55.

nineteenth century Methodist and Holiness circles.[43] Foote became the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church's first female deacon and, defying her husband and parents, preached widely in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic region, California, the Midwest, and eventually Canada during a ministry that spanned five active decades.[44] A militant proponent of gender equality in the church as well as women's rights to the pulpit and formal ordination, Pastor Foote joined Mary J. Small as the "first women to achieve the rights of full ordination to the ministry by any Methodist denomination, black or white."[45] Besides challenging nineteenth century norms through her insistence upon women's entitlement to preach, Foote trenchantly criticized racial hierarchies, capital punishment of criminals and corporal punishment of children, while unequivocally advocating African American education and alcohol's prohibition. She also consistently defended the controversial doctrine of Wesleyan Holiness and affirmed mystical visions such as her visitations by angels.[46] The conclusion of this social activist and religious mystic's fascinating, passionate autobiography includes a hymn for which she wrote the

[43] See Julia A. Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch* (New York: George Hughes & Co., 1879); Andrews, ed., *Sisters of the Spirit.* Though ultimately associated with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Foote preached before mixed and all-white congregations.

[44] Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Notable Black American Women, Book II* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1996), 227–228. Tonya Bolden, "Julia Foote," *Digital Schomburg African American Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: The Digital Schomburg, New York Public Library), File number 1997wwm972.sgm.1997http://digilib.nypl.org/dynaweb/digs/wwm972/ (accessed June 17, 2015).

[45] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 285; Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Julia A. J. Foote," in *Notable Black American Women*, Book 2, ed. Jessie Carney Smith (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson-Gale, 227-228).

[46] Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*. In her autobiography, Foote recorded the traumatic childhood experience of seeing one of her teachers hanged, and pleaded, "Christian men, vote as you pray, that the legalized traffic in ardent spirits may be abolished, and God grant that capital punishment may be banished from our land (17)."

lyrics, one verse of which reads: "Sometimes I am in doubting, and think I have no grace; Sometimes I am a-shouting, and camp-meeting is the place."[47]

Camp meetings also provided significant forums for female assertions of agency, liberty or power in more worldly connections. Certainly they supplied otherwise rare opportunities for young women's defiance of male authority, evidenced in various reports of attendance or conversions undertaken despite paternal disapproval, as well as courtship and flirtation with young men attending meetings.[48] As detailed in Chapter Two, mothers and daughters of attending families claimed crucial roles by establishing domesticity, providing meals and maintaining comfort for their family and acquaintances, old or new. After visiting various family tents at a mid-century South Carolina camp meeting, Sweden's Fredrika Bremer penned an account emphasizing the hospitality and refreshments generously bestowed upon her by women she termed "hostesses."[49] Since Bremer became famous for her ardent literary and political devotion to women's rights, we should likely read her positive appraisal not as an observation on female subservience, but rather as a statement emphasizing women's status and power within the gatherings' milieu.[50]

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[47] Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, 116.
[48] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 248-249; Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan and Co., 1852), 305. See also Chapter Eight for a discussion of camp meeting courtship.
[49] Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America, Vol. 1*, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 307-311.
[50] See Fredrika Bremer, *The Home, or Life in Sweden*, trans. Mary Howitt (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853) and *Hertha*, trans. Mary Howitt (New York: G. P. Putnam and Co., 1856). The latter novel particularly exerted a powerful influence on behalf of women's rights and education in Sweden. See also Carina Burman, *Bremer: En Biografi* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Forlag, 2001); Brita K. Stendahl, *The Education of a Self-Made Woman, Fredrika Bremer, 1801–1865* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994); Greta Wieselgren, *Fredrika*

Further, women of means displayed leadership through material wealth and familial power, especially as benefactresses to visiting ministers and other camp meetings dignitaries, as generous hostesses within the meetings' context, or as benevolent sponsors of the less fortunate. Caroline Lucy Turrentine, the wife of wealthy and powerful General Daniel Turrentine of Gadsden, Alabama, served as the *de facto* matriarch and unstinting patroness of all things Methodist, particularly camp meetings, in that area of Northeast Alabama during the 1840s and 1850s, as well as after the Civil War.[51] It was not at all exceptional for visiting ministers to spend weeks at the Turrentine's fine home before or after meetings. Renowned for their largesse, the Turrentines provided tenting, food, refreshment and fellowship at camp meetings, where Caroline Turrentine presided as "a woman of much worth" and "hospitality," as well as a sincerely devoted congregant and spiritual guide to others.[52]

A Mrs. Hollis of Pennsylvania, whose first name is unfortunately unknown, sponsored attendance during the 1850s for many children from families employed in her wealthy husband's substantial iron foundry. Calling her "one of nature's noblewomen" and an "angel of mercy," Reverend A. P. Mead details her supply of creature comforts to poor workers and their families, as well as her camp meeting endeavors on behalf of wild,

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Bremer: Och Verkligheten: Romanen Herthas Tillblivelse (Stockholm: Norstedts Forlag, 1978); Signe Alice Rooth, *Seeress of the Northland: Fredrika Bremer's American Journey* (Philadelphia: American Swedish Historical Foundation, 1955).

[51] Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 688; Mike Goodson, *Gadsden: City of Champions* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2002).

[52] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 688.

miscreant children whom her husband described as "the most degraded specimens of humanity I ever saw…They will lie like Satan, steal like pirates, fight like wild-cats, and their oaths, curses, and obscene language are enough to make the hair of a decent man stand on end."[53] Undeterred, Mrs. Hollis secured permission from her husband and his workers, persuaded many of the children to journey forth in a traditional Conestoga Wagon with her and an appointed driver to a camp meeting, plus provided their food and shelter during the week of services. Elated with this vibrant camp meeting's diversions and novelties, the young people enjoyed themselves considerably, behaved well and soon became favorites of many present. According to Mead, all save two of the hitherto reprobate children sincerely converted at the meeting while the other two "seriously inclined in the right direction," and continued faithfully thereafter through Mrs. Hollis's establishment of a Sunday school and weekly services led by a Methodist itinerant. Even "some of the old backslidden Methodists and Presbyterians among the workmen" swore off the "sweep of depravity" and reunited with their lost faith.[54]

Of course, women's agency and leadership within camp meetings predictably drew sharp reproach, particularly from opponents who saw this as yet another indictment of the innovative worship gatherings. Some moralists censured the meetings for allowing women's presence at night and for the sexual possibilities inherent in the

[53] Rev. A. P. Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness* (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 154.
[54] *Ibid*, 152-158.

large, multi-day and night campouts.[55] However, criticism of women's voices and authority in camp meeting circles often appeared in league with denunciation of other democratizing, egalitarian and liberating components of the open-air revivals.[56] Signing himself 'Vindex' (Latin for 'Avenger'), an 1820 Baltimore resident railed vehemently against camp meeting fervor and disorder, but aimed his most vicious indignation at the empowered women he termed "female inquisitors." First repudiating the "crude effusions of a set of illiterate and enthusiastic preachers" who emerged from the laboring classes and "laying aside their mechanical occupations, imagine themselves inspired by the Holy Ghost, to preach what they call the gospel at camp meetings and prayer meetings…," Vindex then condemned the "extremes" to which "the heated imagination of females" under such influence could lead. As evidence, he asserted that such women "neglect their domestic duties, make long and loud prayers…spy into the conduct of their neighbors, and censure, and calumniate, and condemn, all those who are not as enthusiastic and ostentatious as themselves."[57]

Writing in an era of rapid democratization on multiple fronts, the outraged detractor managed to inveigh against camp meetings' populist religious agenda in terms of class, educational status, gender, female *voices* and the violation of domestic routine while simultaneously depicting women's assumption of public roles as something akin

[55] John Early, "Diary of John Early, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 34, no. 3 (July 1926): 248; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans, Vol. 1* (New York: Whittaker, Treacher & Company, 1832), 139-145.
[56] A Friend to Gospel Order (Signed), "Religious," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827.
[57] Vindex (signed), "Communication," *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D. C.), August 19, 1820.

to the overbearing influence of medieval village scolds or shrewish puritanical busybodies. Rooted deeply in gendered church traditions along with the desire to maintain female subordination and silence, this attitude received clear endorsement in (non-Cumberland) Presbyterian efforts to distinguish their protracted or "Four Day" frontier meetings from Methodist camp meetings.[58] Although the demographic constraints of a widely scattered population compelled Presbyterians to hold multi-day gatherings culminating in a communion service, leaders of the faith hastened to separate these in the popular mind from camp meetings and their "disastrous results." Unambiguous leadership by male ministers and exhorters, the silence of women and common folk during services (other than lending their voices to decorous song), and the avoidance of overnight camping or worship all provided signal distinctions.[59]

Within camp meetings' consecrated domain of insurgent possibilities, another leveling of established hierarchy occurred through the extraordinary spiritual leadership of children. Exhorting with a conviction and wisdom seemingly beyond their years, children and young adults commonly received the deferential attention of congregants.[60]

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[58] Again, Cumberland Presbyterians proudly embraced camp meetings with virtually all the characteristics of the Methodist gatherings.

[59] N. A., "Presbyterian Camp-Meetings in Kentucky," *Vermont Chronicle*, December 7, 1827; N. A., "Presbyterian Camp-Meetings," *Vermont Chronicle*, February 22, 1828; N. A., "Four Days' Meetings," *Western Intelligencer: Religious, Literary and Political* (Hudson, OH), March 19, 1828.

[60] Of course, age categories and concomitant expectations involve considerable social construction and have changed substantially over time, as attested abundantly in historical literature. See especially Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?: Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), which reveals that prior to the significant changes occurring after 1850 (particularly as a result of educational, medical, psychological and legal efforts), many "children" of around seven and older frequently worked, worshiped and celebrated alongside older Americans (7). Chudacoff also reminds us of the enormous percentage of young people in early American society--at the time of the American

One minister remembered arriving at a camp meeting where he "observed a small boy exceedingly active among the penitents. His fine, shrill voice was distinctly heard, cheering them on by his exhortations and prayers."[61] Barton Stone spoke reverently of "little girls" whose "addresses made deep impressions on the congregation."[62] He related that, among others, young children "would rise shouting deliverance, and then would address the surrounding multitude in language truly eloquent and impressive. With astonishment did I hear men, women and children declaring the wonderful works of God, and the glorious mysteries of the gospel."[63]

Reverend A. P. Mead averred the quasi-ministerial guidance of children during the "great revival that introduced camp meetings," reporting that "children were often made instruments of…leading men to the savior." He recollected a boy of ten who preached passionately and compellingly from atop a log at one camp meeting, attracting most of the attendees. His youthful face covered in tears, the fledgling preacher quoted

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Revolution, fewer than fifty percent of Americans had attained the age of twenty or more, while fully a third had not yet seen their tenth birthday (14)--although many did not acquire fully "adult" status until well into their twenties (13). Of course, the latter situation owed much to dependence upon parents for land, a factor mitigated by the opening of frontier tracts.

Nonetheless, hierarchies of authority certainly obtained, as Chudacoff notes: "To be sure, before 1850 Americans had certain concepts about stages of life—youth, adulthood, old age—and about behaviors appropriate to such stages...(9)." Further, one must be careful not to assign children equal status with adults in early America merely by virtue of their sartorial appearance and shouldering of labor. As historian of childhood, Joseph Illick, observes of the era: "But if children were dressed as miniature adults, they were not regarded as such; elders were discussed differently than children in diaries and journals, the law distinguished between young and old, and children were accorded only limited religious participation… (27)." Joseph E. Illick, *American Childhoods* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

[61] William Buell Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1859), 157-158.

[62] Stone, *Biography*, 36.

[63] *Ibid*, 34-35.

the Bible, alerting all to the perils of life and death without redemption while extolling the sweetness of salvation. The enthralled congregation so tightly enveloped the little fellow that two stout men proceeded to hold him aloft, whereby he sermonized articulately for the better part of an hour. Finally spent, the boy theatrically raised his handkerchief in the air, dropped it and exclaimed, "Thus, O sinner, will you drop into hell unless you forsake your sins and turn to God." In response to this prodigious display of evangelical talent—which the crowd no doubt interpreted as evidence of God's immediate presence and unqualified willingness to utilize anyone as an instrument of redemption—"sinners fell like men slain in mighty battle, and the cries for mercy seemed as though they would rend the very heavens…."[64]

Clearly, this pattern involved a transgression of traditional and mainstream social mores regarding children's obligation to remain silently passive in public situations—particularly sacred ones.[65] In her autobiography, nineteenth century Wesleyan minister

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[64] Mead, *Manna*, 21-22.

[65] Margo Todd, *The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) furnishes a detailed look at early Protestant efforts to prevent youthful disturbances of worship, including imposition of fines and incarceration. Indeed, the Reformation's unprecedented emphasis on audibility of the Word and sermons rendered the quietude of young attendees more important than ever before. For a detailed examination of children's roles in medieval English Catholic services, see Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 199-236. Vocally, children could say collective prayers along with adults while some boys served as choristers. Young people's presence would have otherwise been preferentially silent.

See also Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), which argues that seventeenth and eighteenth century evangelicals pursued "will-breaking" discipline of their children designed to make them passively obedient toward parents and submissively receptive to salvation. Greven conjectures, however, that such upbringings also engendered a potentially assertive and combative "soldier for Christ" mentality (cf. especially 109-123). One can certainly argue that this mentality manifested interestingly at camp meetings, which permitted a channel for expressing feelings otherwise repressed. Illick identifies this child-rearing pattern as "typical of isolated rural areas and the ever-expanding frontier where poorer people lived in

nuclear families dominated by the only two adults present. Recent immigrants from Germany and Northern Ireland can be placed in this category, though not in every instance (Illick, *American Childhoods*, 30)." However, David Hackett Fischer discerns and produces considerable evidence for a quite different child-rearing ethic among the "North British Borderers" (by which he means 'Scots-Irish' or Ulster Scots, Scots, Welsh and Northern English settlers) of the Southern back country, one characterized by significant gender differentiation wherein girls learned to be long-suffering, industrious and submissive, while males received encouragement to be proud, courageous and aggressive. This would certainly contribute to an explanation of youthful male assertion in the frontier camp meeting context as well—whether supportive or antagonistic (cf. Chapter Eight for the latter. See David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press: 1989), 605-782, esp. 687-690.

For further reading on early American childhood, see Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class;* Jay David, ed., *Growing Up Black: From Slave Days to the Present* (New York: Avon, 1992).

More general works about American childhood include the invaluable Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); again, Illick, *American Childhoods*; Harvey J. Graff, *Conflicting Paths: Growing Up in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); and the older but still helpful Joseph Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977).

Obviously, the questions of how "adults" perceived "children" and what roles older people permitted to younger ones bear great relevance for this discussion. The broader historiography of childhood and children in Western Culture since the Middle Ages has experienced a revolution since the 1980s, when Linda Pollock's *Forgotten Children: Parent-child Relations from 1500-1900* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983) effectively repudiated the prevailing interpretations of Philippe Ariès, who argued in *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1965) that no conception of "childhood" existed in the Middle Ages; Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), which contended that medieval and early modern parents largely regarded their children with indifference ("Good mothering is an invention of modernization [168]."); and Lloyd deMause, an American psycho-historian who painted an exceptionally bleak picture of pre-modern childhood and parental behavior in his once influential but now largely discredited *The History of Childhood* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974). Though Ariès and Shorter valuably underscored the socially constructed character of childhood and family relations, Pollock and subsequent authors have revealed critical flaws in their methodology, sources and conclusions. While as contentious as many others, the field now revolves around a working consensus that—although quite different social constructions of family and childhood have certainly obtained over the centuries—most parents in European history over the last millennium generally appear to have regarded their offspring with affection and concern, mourned their loss, endeavored to promote their well-being, and regarded younger, physically immature members of the species as *something other than* adults, with a distinctive mentality and age subculture.

For this newer school of thought in various guises, see Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, and her *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children Over Three Centuries* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1987); Barbara Hanawalt, *The Ties That Bound: Peasant Families in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), and *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Beatrice Gottlieb, *The Family in the Western World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 1995) and *The Invention of Childhood* (London: BBC Books, 2006); Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval*

Julia Foote recollects the local minister's sharp admonition of her as a girl for being too vocal about her convictions—particularly the theological matter of sanctification, which many held to be an unlikely status for younger people and the province of mostly older believers—and for asserting herself as a leader within the church. The preacher rebuked young Foote by stipulating: "…you must remember that you are too young to read and dictate to persons older than yourself, and many in the church are dissatisfied with the way you are talking and acting."[66]

In contrast, children's vocal leadership within camp meeting services provides a striking, though revised example of what sociologist Sally K. Gallagher has called the "religious capital of children."[67] Drawing on Emile Durkheim's definition of (religious) resources as "collective representations which express collective realities," Gallagher argues that children in religious contexts comprise such a resource insofar as they represent and perpetuate fundamental values connected with "adult identity." In this

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to Modern Times (Oxford, UK: Polity, 2001); Orme, *Medieval Children*; and Steven Ozment, *Ancestors: The Loving Family in Old Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
Further, and of considerable significance regarding children's autonomous behavior in camp meetings, Colin Heywood writes, "A key weakness of the earlier neo-behaviourist emphasis on socialization was, arguably, its reduction of children to passive receptacles of adult teaching (4)." Thus, it would be misleading to explain children's actions at camp meetings *only* in terms of their culture, socialization, parents or context; historians should view child actors as autonomous agents choosing to believe, participate and vocalize as means of self-identity and self-expression, while also reflecting the trajectories of emancipatory religious ideas and an increasingly egalitarian American culture. Finally, the historiography absolutely justifies conceptualizing child actors at camp meetings as members of a contemporaneously recognized, separate age category about which adults held particular expectations and conceptions, ones often challenged by youthful performances of spirituality and religious leadership at the outdoor revivals.

[66] Foote, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, 39-40.

[67] Sally K. Gallagher, "Children as Religious Resources: The Role of Children in the Social Re-Formation of Class, Culture, and Religious Identity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 46, no. 2 (June 2007): 169-183.

way, children's sanctioned religious roles also reflect "culture, class, and religion in the lives of adults."[68] These assertions link the salient, vocal performances of camp meeting children seamlessly with historian John Wigger's contention that early Methodists devoutly believed "God could speak to anyone, even those traditionally excluded from authority." Highlighting the socio-politically combustible byproduct of this theological conviction, Wigger maintains: "Methodism's new cultural precedents had the unanticipated effect of dramatically empowering those previously held at arm's length by organized religion, particularly women and African Americans."[69]

Without doubt, the camp meeting experience reveals that a radical activation of children as speaking, exulting, exhorting and effectual participants in the evangelical process also occurred, thus adding a further dimension to Wigger's insightful observation. Everyone—*truly everyone*—within camp meetings' sacralized space, everyone orbiting the *axis mundi* summoned by the outdoor revivals, enjoyed access to divine inspiration, numinous revelation and consequent opportunities to lead others spiritually. Moreover, the utility of children as agents of religion reflected Methodists' and other similar groups' democratic and egalitarian values, upholding the principle that anyone might contribute to American life in a beneficial way and that the rural working class of yeoman farmers could produce leadership as surely as any other segment of society. Of course, for African Americans and for not a few whites, at least temporarily,

[68] *Ibid*, 169; Also see Susan Stedman Jones, *Durkheim Reconsidered* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001), 1-19.
[69] Wigger, *Taking Heaven,* 104-124, quotes on 112 & 118.

the logic moved further afield, since even a child of slavery could provide spiritual leadership and religious impetus.

Prior to an important camp meeting, Alfred Brunson dreamed about "a child, a mere infant, whose hands and fingers were tinged with gold, very bright, and it was very happy, lifting its hands and saying glory, though apparently too young to talk. This encouraged me…."[70] Obviously echoing imagery of the innocent baby Jesus's triumphal, emancipatory entry into a flawed world, the dream also highlighted God's empowerment of those seemingly without power, to say nothing of His mystical ability to redefine the experiential parameters of human and terrestrial existence among those willing to accept divine grace. As Joycelyn Moody has underscored, black camp meeting evangelist Julia Foote spends a good deal of time in her autobiography emphasizing her own deep, natural childhood spirituality as well as young children's simultaneity of innocent grace and redemptive stewardship.[71] Moody observes that Foote deployed a "repeated and ironic invocation of the nineteenth-century child as uncorrupted, innocent, and pure—in other words, as inherently salvific…for most of the autobiography children are regarded as sacred creatures [with]…the capacity to convert numerous unregenerate souls to Christianity…the holy child mediates between this world and the next."[72]

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[70] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 82-83.
[71] Joycelyn Moody, *Sentimental Confessions: Spiritual Narratives of Nineteenth-Century African American Women* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 133-139.
[72] *Ibid*, 133.

However, rather than depicting her young self—an impoverished, female, African American child of former slaves—as a weak, doomed sacrificial victim, Foote presents her childhood in terms of multiple triumphs over hurdles of race, gender and class, thus entwining Christianity's paired goals of divine redemption and ultimate justice, or at least endurance, for the oppressed.[73] At Cane Ridge, a small girl of nine delivered a "body of divinity" while perched atop her father's shoulders. As the child finally succumbed to exhaustion, an onlooker said, "Poor thing. Set her down…" to which the young, likely indigent, female exhorter replied in a fashion that leveled all social markers: "Don't call me poor; I have Christ for my brother, God for my father, and am heir to a kingdom."[74] Thus, the revolutionary spiritual empowerment provided by frontier camp meetings gainsaid through a mere child all the earthly constraints of poverty, humble origins, gender and age. Significantly, the child clearly understood the message of that religious leveling as well, given that her formidable retort came in response to the trigger word "poor."

Hence, young people functioned not only as temporary, mystical conduits of divine messages, but also as sentient recipients of personal liberty and empowerment.[75]

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[73] *Ibid*, 134.

[74] N. A., unidentified Presbyterian's published letter, in *Penuel; or, Face to Face with God,* ed. A. McLean and J. W. Eaton (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1869), xiv.

[75] The shift from a Calvinist theology of predestination to Arminian belief in free will both undergirded this development and heightened parental obligations to guide their children toward acceptance of God's grace and salvation. As William McLoughlin wrote: "The waning of the old doctrines of Calvinism…posed new problems in childrearing. While new Arminian doctrines softened the notions of Predestination and Original Sin…they also fostered an increasing insistence upon the freedom of the will. Both of these new outlooks placed an additional burden upon parents. As God's sovereignty lessened, parental responsibility increased. It was not divine determination nor Adam's fall which placed children who died unconverted

Camp meetings' primary literature speaks often of youthful zealots who attended in defiance of parental wishes, and of spiritually neglected youngsters who found direction and meaning through the religious gatherings. Lorenzo Dow, a seasoned outsider who never tarried long in any place, cited the frequent appearance in camp meetings of young men and women—especially young women—who came without parents' approval or even against their strictest instructions. One such youthful female journeyed thirty miles from her home—in spite of a father's dire warning not to go—and then spent eight hours "shrieking for mercy…sometimes on the borders of despair, until near sunrise…" when the girl brightened, became evidently joyful, and then "testified" vocally and articulately of "the peace she had found."[76] One can only speculate about this young lady's domestic situation and psychological state, but surely not a few of these fugitive camp meeting participants fled from situations of misery, abuse and desperation.

In another instance, a girl experienced conversion as her angry father physically dragged her from the camp meeting. Revealingly, Dow wrote, "her soul was set *at liberty* whilst she was in his arms [emphasis mine]."[77] As an orphaned boy in his early teens, Andrew Manship received appointment as class leader for the African American Methodists of Denton, Maryland. Soon serving as an exhorter among white Methodists, the young man found himself leading an entire Sunday service in the absence of a

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in Hell; at a very early age the child began to assert its free will and at that very early age the parent acquired the obligation to bring that child into harmony with God's laws." See William McLoughlin, "Evangelical Child-Rearing in the Age of Jackson," *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 22-23.

[76] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 222.

[77] *Ibid*, 248-249.

minister. Accustomed to his class leader oratory, Manship repeatedly addressed the white congregants as his "coloured friends," an error for which he received "the mantle of charity" owing to his youth.[78] Whatever his trepidation and missteps, Manship thus assumed in his early teenage years the highest ecclesiastic role in the keystone Methodist service.

Modern observers benefiting from the insights of psychology will likely interpret these situations as involving young people with innate abilities and keen intelligence who absorbed Biblical readings along with evangelical rhetoric, and then made studied, highly vocal use of it in contexts where they received encouragement and affirmation for doing so. But just as surely, nineteenth century camp meeting worshipers understood these actions as God's majestic power in their midst, evidenced most impressively and democratically in His infusion of salvific sound and performative grace into people without regard to race, gender, wealth or age. Wesleyan theology thereby dovetailed felicitously with many camp meeting congregants' populist sociology as well--*and/or* promoted such a sociology--particularly in the conviction that all people held worth and could potentially exercise power, benefit others and serve as leaders of some kind. Historian William McLoughlin has revealingly compared early nineteenth century children's assertions of personal agency in defying traditional authority with similar efforts by African Americans, women, Native Americans and other oppressed minorities.

[78] Andrew Manship, *Thirteen Years' Experience in the Itinerancy* (Philadelphia: Higgins & Perkinpine, 1856), 20.

McLoughlin argues that this complex of behaviors typically motivated adult, white males to reassert their dominion and suppress these insurgencies.[79] Undoubtedly, many outsider views of camp meetings during this period register just such a reaction. However, Wesleyan and other similar churches' belief that God could speak through anyone--in a quest to save everyone--created an unusually permissive avenue for insurrectionary behaviors by subordinate groups, an avenue of greater breadth and facility within the fluid, highly extemporaneous camp meeting context than anywhere else. Thus, Arminian free will theology, Methodist egalitarianism of spiritual leadership, and rural Americans' persistently mystical supernaturalism combined in camp meetings with oppressed Americans' efforts to claim freedom of expressive voice and religious self-determination in exceptionally fruitful, provocative ways.

As Methodist churches multiplied in the wake of camp meeting success and population growth in rural and frontier areas, female and youthful empowerment appeared in antebellum Methodist worship indoors as well, just as early versions of it had manifested in small chapels and private homes since just before the Revolution.[80] Yet many nineteenth century Wesleyans first witnessed these innovations in the worshipfully fluid, egalitarian camp meeting setting, wherein the events' free and improvisational nature invited experimental expansion of themes laid down in earlier Wesleyan circles.

[79] McLoughlin, "Evangelical Child-Rearing," 21.
[80] See Wigger, *Taking Heaven, 3-20.*

Significantly, whereas late eighteenth century Methodism's contributions took place in very small venues with limited numbers of people, camp meetings provided a far grander stage with vastly more participant observation, thus channeling the late eighteenth century ideas about women and children's empowerment into mainstream American life.

Nevertheless, camp meetings always remained an exceptional format among the variety of Methodist service types, despite sharing some features with quarterly meetings, love feasts, Sunday worship, communion services and night watches.[81] Noted scholar of Methodist services Karen B. Westerfield Tucker classifies camp meetings among the "Great Festivals" of the Methodists.[82] As a result, some elements that made camp meetings unique, revolutionary and inspiring—such as women and children's remarkably vocal contributions and unprecedented assumptions of leadership--never completely followed Methodism indoors as physical churches became available for worship. Further, by the 1840s, Wesleyan attitudes resembled those of mainstream churches in many more places. As Methodist brethren increasingly identified with middle class decorum and gender roles, as their services grew calmer, more restrained and choreographed, the insurgent voices of women and children diminished while their

[81] For a detailed typology of Methodist services, cf. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[82] Of course, no universally applicable style of worship can be ascribed to all Wesleyan followers of the 1800s, given services' ecclesiological, functional, situational, regional, racial, class, organizational and rural/urban diversity. Karen B. Westerfield Tucker undertook extensive study of various historical Methodist modes of worship; her conclusions emphasize Wesleyan freedom to innovate within certain expectations and consequent diversity. Moreover, her work concurs that antebellum camp meetings provided worship opportunities *particularly* suited to experimentation in structure, leadership and religious expression. See Westerfield, *Methodist Worship*, esp. 74-78.

roles became more passive in worship and otherwise 'behind the scenes' in nature. Further, the secular first wave feminism asserted in the middle and later nineteenth century often redounded to the detriment of evangelical women's public religious speech and authority. As Catherine Brekus has demonstrated, secular feminism assumed a quite different form and ethos than evangelical feminism. With the former eventually perceived by so many Methodists and Baptists as violating Biblical doctrine, the latter had to go, and institutional support evaporated, particularly in white and middle class churches.[83] Zink-Sawyer observes that by the mid-1800s many evangelicals deemed "any female behavior that fell outside" evangelical norms drawn from "biblical injunctions and theological rationales" as "inappropriate and even dangerous to the religious and social order." She adds:

> It is not surprising, therefore, that as the woman's rights movement gained momentum through the nineteenth century, it generated increasing resistance from church leaders and religious organizations as feminist ideology clashed with cultural norms that were undergirded by theological and biblical assumptions of the prevailing mid-nineteenth-century American Protestantism.[84]

Even so, many African American and Holiness churches within the Wesleyan orbit persisted in granting every sincere worshiper--including females and youthful participants--the right to speak, pray, exhort, testify and even preach in church, as witnessed by the extraordinary postbellum ministerial careers of Phoebe Palmer, Julia Foote, the Salvation Army's Catherine Booth, the Churches of God's Maria B.

[83] Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 1-22.
[84] Zink-Sawyer, *From Preachers to Suffragists*, 1-26, quotes on 8.

Woodworth-Etter, as well as many other women and young preachers. These heirs of camp meeting equality, opportunity and experiment carried forward the emancipatory tenets forged in the forest gatherings, refusing to concede that God's power to anoint spiritual leaders and speakers was somehow limited to people of a certain gender or age, social position or training. Though frequently disparaged for it by mainstream religious groups, these Wesleyan evangelists with camp meeting roots continually and unapologetically reminded American society of every human beings' potential for spiritual epiphany and beneficial pronouncement. Moreover, they maintained a powerfully unfettering tradition that ultimately reappeared in middle class Methodism's late twentieth century progressivism regarding gender and leadership.

Chapter Eight:
"Grand and Absorbing Occasions": Socializing and Sin

As camp meetings became a relatively common feature of life in sparsely settled regions, they promised a vibrant range of social opportunities. Dickson D. Bruce was no doubt correct in reminding us that, "For all its social importance, the camp meeting was first and foremost a religious activity."[1] Nonetheless, as the largest, most diverse events available each year for many Americans, camp meetings offered great communal significance and occasioned an appealing variety of pursuits. Some of these reflected the dominant religious motif of the occasion, while others expressed concerns incidental to or even ironically at odds with it. Considering the scarcity of large gatherings and substantial social happenings in many regions of the country during this period, however, the latter point becomes understandable and a good deal less ironic. Further, given the evangelical purpose of these assemblies, preachers and devout Christians welcomed the unconverted and less committed regardless of their rationale for coming, and hoped that conversion or reaffirmation would result from their exposure to the religious services. Indeed, primary sources abound with compelling narratives of attendees who came to socialize, to pursue business or romance, or even to scoff at the services, but experienced spiritual conversion instead.[2] As evangelist and Methodist

[1] Dickson D. Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 4.

[2] See especially James B. Finley, *Autobiography of the Rev. James B. Finley: Or Pioneer Life in the West*, ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curts, 1853); Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. 2* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane , 1839); Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*

historian Nathan Bangs affirmed, "In such cases, those who before had been blasphemers, and mockers, persecutors, and bigoted dogmatizers…became the living witnesses for its divine and genuine character, and stood forth as its bold and fearless defenders."[3] Defining and expressing themselves not only in the religious rituals of the meetings, but also through social activities—whether ones with evangelical imprimatur or those clearly without--participants embraced identities that conferred meaning and purpose on individual, collective and cosmological levels.

For early America's rural and small town people, camp meetings beckoned with prospects for socializing that modern urbanites, participants in large institutions, and beneficiaries of mass communication cannot begin to understand emotionally. The thrill of visiting with old friends or relatives, new acquaintances and temporary 'neighbors,' fellow Christians and Americans simply cannot be sufficiently underscored as part of camp meetings' potent appeal.[4] An Easterner who spent several years traveling upon the frontier and visiting the revivals tried to convey this, saying, "…when they congregate on these exciting occasions, society itself is to them a novelty, and an excitement."[5] In her novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp,* Harriet Beecher Stowe evokes an

(New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857); John Atkinson, *Centennial History of American Methodism* (New York: Phillips & Hunt; Cincinnati: Cranston & Snowe, 1884), 492-493.

[3] Bangs, *Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. 2,* 59.

[4] Richard Beard, *Brief Biographical Sketches of Some of the Early Ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1874), 810; Anson West, *A History of Methodism in Alabama* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 675.

[5] Timothy Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States, or the Mississippi Valley* (Cincinnati: E. H Flint, 1828), 219.

approaching camp meeting's promise of enjoyable sociability: "'Oh, Uncle John! there's [sic] the greatest fun getting up! You must all go, certainly…Tiff says there's to be a camp-meeting in the neighborhood…Let's make up a party and all go!' 'That's the time of day!' said Uncle John. 'I enroll myself under your banner at once. I am open to improvement! Anybody wants to convert me, here I am!'"[6]

A British tourist of 1840s America fascinatingly depicted camp meetings' curious juxtaposition of spiritual ecstasy among some and secular amusements among others, noting that while participants under conviction endured "agonizing fervor" and thrashed about the worship ground, three quarters of those present seemed only to be interested in fun and diversion, "of which there was no lack."[7] Over twenty years earlier, a New Englander catalogued non-religious motives for attendance among various groups, conjecturing that the wealthy or powerful came to be seen, and would suffer reduced influence if their absence was detected, while many others attended from "curiosity" and to "enjoy a spectacle."[8] Whether through a sense of community obligation, a desire for personal prestige, or unapologetic love for convivial occasions, a proudly non-believing Texas rancher stepped forward multiple times as Reverend A. J. Potter's foremost camp meeting supporter, supplying labor, materials and no end of fine

[6] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, 1856), 221.
[7] William Brown, *America: a Four Years' Residence in the United States and Canada* (Leeds, UK: Kemplay & Holland, 1849), 43.
[8] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220-221.

beef for the proceedings.[9] Our observer from New England depicted a no less sociable mood among the more clearly pious folk who arrived at camp early and intended to sojourn for the duration. Core supporters of revival rather than spectators, these campers spent the initial hours after setting up their temporary habitations in visiting "from tent to tent," exchanging "apostolic greetings and embraces, and talk of the coming solemnities."[10]

Undoubtedly, for many participants, any sort of congenial assemblage supplied an extremely welcome diversion from lives otherwise characterized by grueling physical labor and the same faces week after week, rendering camp meetings a "pleasing change" and "gala-day."[11] Apropos of the meetings' attraction as entertainment, the otherwise serious-minded and devout Reverend A. P. Mead readily reminded itinerant preachers that an arsenal of amusing anecdotes constituted an appreciated currency.[12] One influential proponent of the events conjectured that people instinctively yearned for a festival during late summer, after harvest or laying by of crops, as a respite from hard work and prosaic concerns. Given that some celebration likely would develop, he reasoned, the most laudable ones would be Christian-themed yet appealingly festive camp meetings.[13] Two English ministers concurred, emphasizing the dangers of isolation

[9] Hiram Atwill Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter: The Noted Parson of the Texas Frontier* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1888), 211-214.
[10] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220-221.
[11] Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the Great West* (Cincinnati: E. Morgan and Co., 1852), 303.
[12] Rev. A. P. Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness* (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 199.
[13] Bishop Matthew Simpson, "Introduction," in *Penuel; or, Face to Face with God,* ed. A. McLean and J. W. Eaton (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1869), xi-xii.

and loneliness for individuals and society. Though not entirely condoning many of the occasions' "extravagances," whether spiritual or celebratory, they argued that camp meetings furnished a valuable opportunity for communalism within religion's beneficial auspices.[14] Further, wise denominational leaders recognized the institutional virtues of cultivating relationships among different communities through camp meetings' geographically expansive reach: "Christian effort is increased by the feeling that, though one may be alone in his vicinity, he is part of a large family, and has earnest and active associates scattered throughout the land."[15]

Of course, camp meeting activities interconnected with the prominence of tightly knit extended kinship networks as well as the importance of family roles and relations. Capturing the range of ages associated with such a familial enterprise, one visitor wrote, "Children are there, their young eyes glistening with the intense interest of eager curiosity. The middle aged fathers and mother are there…Men and women of hoary hairs are there, with such thoughts, it may be hoped, as their years invite."[16] The very first true camp meetings ignited among interconnected family groups of Southern Kentucky's Red and Gasper River communities, further benefiting from the ministerial leadership of brothers John and William McGhee.[17] In particular, camp meetings served as occasions

[14] Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches by the Deputation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales, Volume 1* (London: Jackson and Walford, 1836), 203-204.
[15] Simpson, "Introduction," in *Penuel,* xvi.
[16] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220-221.
[17] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 216. One brother represented Methodism, while the other remained in the familial Presbyterian fold.

for kinship groups to camp together without the usual arduous demands of agricultural labor and to catch up on news, visiting and changes in the extended family network. Given kinship relations' significance in antebellum rural America, many participants regarded this as a reason for attendance second in appeal only to the religious rationale. Without doubt, this provided a great deal of enjoyment and meaning for most people, helping to explain the gatherings' continued popularity throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.[18] Further, camp meeting custom decreed that preachers and bishops, elders and various dignitaries receive their meals all about the camp in various family tents.[19] This allowed kinship groups to display their generosity and graciousness, enhancing extended family reputation.[20]

Mornings at camp meetings typically began with family prayers while periods of the day without formal services occasioned familial prayer meetings and Bible studies,

[18] William Apess, *A Son of the Forest & Other Writings* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 40; Reverend Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden; New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1872), 82-83; Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, Vol. 1, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 307; Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 167, West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 655-657; Flint, *A Condensed Geography, 220-221.* See also Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Stephanie Coontz, *Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families, 1600-1900* (London & New York: Verso Books, 1988); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[19] Reed and Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 193-194.

[20] Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite*; *or the Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal* (New York: John C. Totten, 1814), 206-207; 237; Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: Or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 216; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 560-561, 656, 688; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307. See also Charles Reagan Wilson, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 4: Myth, Manners, and Memory* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 96-103, 234-236; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 80-104.

as well as socializing and collective cooking efforts.[21] Individual family units frequently camped near other families in their extended kinship network, thus affording a sort of family reunion wherein old acquaintances were renewed and new relationships forged.[22] Further, the assemblies granted family members an occasion to assume social roles they understood to be important and through which they could earn esteem and satisfaction. Fathers or grandfathers enacted the role of family patriarch leading his family to the site (sometimes through areas of wilderness or danger), preparing their encampment, participating in order's maintenance, and guiding younger members toward spiritual rebirth.[23] Mothers and grandmothers dutifully planned for the excursion, created a temporary domesticity on the grounds of the meeting, provided nourishing meals, maintained familial health, and led children toward faith and salvation.[24] An acclaimed camp meeting sermon of the later antebellum period urged parents to, "Look well to your tents! Keep lights burning. Look up for salvation…."[25] The admonition felicitously

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[21] Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America Beginning in 1776, and Continued till 1809* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 361-362; Fanny Newell, *Memoirs of Fanny Newell* (Springfield, MA: O. Scott and E.F. Newell, 1833), 53-54; John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 107-108; Mead, *Manna*, 187-188; Zilpha Elaw, *Memoirs of The Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels and Labours of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw, An American Female of Colour* (London: Self-Published, 1846), 20.

[22] John McLean, *A Sketch of the Life of Rev. John Collins, Late of the Ohio Conference* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Power, 1849), 113-114; Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220-221; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307.

[23] Andrew Manship, *Thirteen Years' Experience in the Itinerancy* (Philadelphia: Higgins & Perkinpine, 1856), 26-27; Jeremiah Bell Jeter, *The Recollections of a Long Life* (Richmond, Va.: The Religious Herald Co., 1891), 155-156, 159; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 244; Mead, *Manna,* 147; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 97-99, 563-564; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 269-270, 291-292, 300-301; Stith Mead, "Camp Meeting," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (July 1924): 210; Reed & Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 203.

[24] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 64-65, 82; Mead, *Manna*, 84-85, 152-158, 187-188; West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 561, 675, 688; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307.

[25] Mead, *Manna,* 78.

highlights camp meeting culture's powerful sense of familial, matriarchal and patriarchal duty. The lights reference a practical necessity, but also commend the preservation of spirituality and the 'light' of God—again, within the family abode—by fathers and mothers.

Older children and young adults fulfilled their family's hopes and prayers by embracing salvation, thus registering their spiritual maturity as part of a larger rite of passage into adulthood.[26] They also demonstrated responsibility to elders by tending to younger relations and accomplishing various chores.[27] Boys contributed and no doubt enjoyed a fine time in running away stray dogs and feral hogs that threatened chaos, while girls assisted their mothers with cooking duties.[28] In a crucial introduction to the sacred realm, all children were expected to display obedience and respect by behaving properly at services, while some actually began the chain of conversion that would ultimately embrace their entire family.[29]

Finally, camp meetings became well known for the courtship opportunities that beckoned. For rural people in thinly settled regions, such vast collections of people inevitably assumed this function. When conducted with proper attention to community norms and kin group expectations, courtship presented an acceptable and even welcome

[26] William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Methodist Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1861), 157-158; Manship, *Thirteen Years*, 13-14; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 244; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 88.
[27] Mead, *Manna*, 84-85.
[28] Charles Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 221; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 307.
[29] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 206.

byproduct of the religious event.[30] Capturing this attraction of the forest gatherings, as well as its potential religious benefits, a veteran itinerant approvingly recorded, "…a large number of young ladies joined the Church and experienced religion. This brought out the young gentlemen, a goodly number of whom became pious." [31] Another chronicler winked at the inevitable campground romances as well: "The young and beautiful are there, with mixed motives, which it were [sic] best not to scrutinize severely."[32] However, potentially sexual relationships that proceeded in an illicit manner proved a source of conflict or shame for attending families and supplied a basis for detractors to denounce camp meeting morality.[33]

With gatherings so large and festive, commercial endeavors predictably sought out the outdoor religious revivals as well. Artisans, vendors and entrepreneurs took advantage of the unusual and potentially lucrative concentrations of people to market their goods or services, including provisions for meals and camping, refreshments and necessities, books and pamphlets, medical services such as tooth extraction or patent medicines, along with many other products associated with earlier nineteenth-century

[30] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 168-169; Howe, *Historical Collections*, 305; Bruce, *They All Sang Hallelujah*, 54.
[31] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 168-169.
[32] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 305.
[33] John M. Duncan, *Travels through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 & 1819, Two Volumes, Vol. II* (New York: W. B. Gilley, 1823), 370-371; Christian Advocate (signed), "Religious," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827; Bruce, *They All Sang Hallelujah*, 54-55; Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 433. Illicit sexuality is addressed more fully later in the present chapter.

peddling.[34] Some vendors were no more than local families endeavoring to make a small profit by selling foodstuffs, but many professionals graced the scene as well.[35] Peddlers, those alternately beloved and reviled traveling purveyors of assorted goods, enjoyed a heyday in America that overlapped markedly with the camp meeting era studied herein. Many areas' scattered population and lack of urban centers help to account for both after all, though vendors and peddlers grew more common at camp meetings as the religious events became increasingly fixed in location, diversified in permissible activities, and wealthier in clientele. Certainly, the marketplace consumerism manifested in purchasing goods from traders advanced as a feature of American life with every passing decade, while the ratio of peddlers to territory increased all through the early Republic and antebellum eras. Aggressive, wily artisans expanded markets and elevated profits through the itinerant agency of rural peddlers who knew and understood their customers. Furthermore, the industrial revolution produced and delivered—through steamships, canals and railroads—more inexpensive manufactured goods to peddlers by the first half of the nineteenth century, but had not yet created a transportation system sufficient to bypass such middlemen.[36]

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[34] N. A., "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* (April 30, 1809): 250-251; Paul Gutjahr, *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1-88, 143-180.

[36] David Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860," *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (September 1991): 511-535; Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 82-84; Richardson Wright, *Hawkers and*

Some camp meetings relegated all vendors to an area of prescribed distance from the religious proceedings.[37] This seems to have prevailed earlier, with a greater degree of campground integration developing in antebellum decades, when vendors' colorful and attractive booths appeared regularly among the tents of the faithful.[38] Demonstrating the arc of commercial development, an 1868 collection of camp meeting images reveals a campground village of unapologetic consumerist opportunities, including a barbershop and shoeshine stand alongside fruit stands and a makeshift grocery store.[39] As early as 1827, camp meetings' economic role surfaced in a comment by 'entertainment' competitors in a traveling actors' troupe touring Kentucky: "[T]he Methodists had raised their banner before us, and had got possession of all the money and all the hearts of the young folk."[40] Although some preachers warned against commerce as a sideline of the

Walkers in Early America: Strolling Peddlers, Preachers, Lawyers, Doctors, Players (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1927); J. R. Dolan, *The Yankee Peddlers of Early America* (New York: Bramhall Publishers, 1964). Itinerants themselves, peddlers offer a fascinating parallel to Methodist circuit riders. Both responded to "markets" in rural areas of scattered population, while many in each vocation found an escape from stifling farm life through their traveling professions. Both groups also challenged traditional customs of production and consumption, while each vocation eventually succumbed to the changes wrought by population increases and transportation improvements. Peddlers ultimately lost out to local, stationary stores more easily reached than before (by goods and customers) that carried a wider assortment of products than peddlers could. Ministerial itineracy eventually bowed to an increase in local, stationary churches, improved access to them, and the wider array of services offered therein. Both groups transgressed Colonial era standards of local authority and control, while each represented a transition toward competition and heightened connections with the non-local world.

[37] "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; N. A., "Legislature," *The National Advocate* (London, England), February 24, 1824; N. A., "Notice," *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina State Gazette*, August 13, 1824.

[38] Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 306.

[39] N. A., "Methodist-Episcopal Church Camp-Meeting at Sing Sing," Engraving from *Harper's Weekly*, August 29, 1868.

[40] Solomon Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1868), 48.

meetings, it proceeded nonetheless.[41] Even some ministers took advantage of the main chance, such as Texas' highly respected Reverend Andrew Jackson Potter, who hawked—*at* camp meetings—a "patent medicine called 'Soother of Pain.'" Responding to another minister's remarks that appear more to be good-natured ribbing than serious criticism, Potter entwined religion and business by affirming his medication's salutary effects for those physically overtaxed during worship services.[42] Horse-trading appeared as another commercial but quite practically minded feature of the meetings. Indeed, as with human numbers, the gatherings brought far more horses and mules together in a single place at once than any other event. Itinerant ministers depended upon horses as much or more than other people, necessitating their involvement in the trade as well.[43] In what seems a far more egregious violation of the gatherings' spirit, to say nothing of earlier Methodism's admirable opposition to slavery, incidences of slave sales even took place at camp meetings by the 1830s.[44]

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[41] Mead, *Manna*, 59-60.

[42] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 219-220.

[43] Dr. J. R. S. Pitts, *Life and Confession of the Noted Outlaw James Copeland* (New Augusta, MS: Self-Published, 1909), 66-71; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 30; Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 224; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn*, 105-106; Bremer, *Homes of the New World*, 306; Elisha W. Bowman, Rev. William Burke, "Letter from a Methodist Itinerant Serving in Louisiana," Published Letter, 29 January 1806, in *History of the Louisiana Annual Conference Archives of the United Methodist Church*, http://www.la-umc.org/historyofunitedmethodism (accessed March 8, 2016); William Henry Milburn, *The Lance, Cross and Canoe: The Flatboat, Rifle and Plough in the Valley of the Mississippi* (New York and St. Louis: N. D. Thompson Publishing Company, 1892), 357-360. Graves discusses circuit-riding duties being curtailed by failing horses or insufficient natural fodder for preachers' mounts.

[44] Rev. Francis Hawley, "Narrative and Testimony of Rev. Francis Hawley," in *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses*, ed. Theodore D. Weld (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 97.

Beyond the direct sale of goods and services, camp meeting attendance furnished an avenue to social connections and status that benefited business people in the longer range. Additionally, many families of high stature and wealth who perhaps disdained the assemblies' egalitarian and populist fervor evidently appeared nevertheless, as their absence would have been potentially detrimental.[45] Alongside commercial endeavor, politics also invaded the late summer religious gatherings. Camp meetings afforded a venue in which local politicians could connect with voters, foster support for campaigns, and demonstrate religious faith.[46] One contemporary affirmed, "Aspirants for office are there, to electioneer, and gain popularity."[47] Besides office seekers' use of the events as an adjunct to their political barbecues and rallies, ordinary participants engaged in so much political discussion that religious periodicals enjoined--no doubt with limited success--the faithful to avoid the topic: "For Christ's sake let us avoid these themes, and not introduce them among people who seek our society, not to reform their politics, but to save their souls."[48]

In an intriguing amalgam of religion and commerce, camp meetings gave participants unusual access to another commodity: books and other reading materials. Itinerant ministers as well as peddlers and colporteurs served as human conduits purveying a good deal of printed religious material to ordinary people in rural parts of

[45] Bruce, *They All Sang Hallelujah*, 3; Flint, *A Condensed Geography,* 220-221.
[46] Howe, *Historical Collections*, 305; N. A., "A Calendar for 1827, From the *Macon Telegraph*," *Louisiana Advertiser* (New Orleans), June 19, 1827.
[47] Flint, *A Condensed Geography*, 220-221.
[48] Quoted in Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 222.

the country, areas where books and magazines could be rare and difficult to obtain. Of the early 1800s, Peter Cartwright recollected, "[T]here were scarcely any books of any kind in this now mighty West; but especially was there a great scarcity of Bibles and Testaments."[49] Methodist preachers responded to the shortage dutifully. In their dusty saddlebags, itinerants carried Bibles, Testaments, and copies of the Methodist *Book of Discipline;* sermons and theological works by Wesley, Asbury, and other influential Protestant leaders (especially Methodists); the very popular hymnals and hymn sheet music; religious histories, tracts, pamphlets, biographies and autobiographies (some by fellow itinerants); as well as diverse books on other edifying subjects.[50] At one time or another, all of these were available for purchase at camp meetings, an availability fostered by the publishing house known as the Methodist Book Concern (and after 1828, by the Methodist Western Book Concern in Cincinnati).[51] Besides the books sold, many volumes were given away by preachers grateful for lay assistance and hopeful of redemptive effect. Concerned and wealthy Christians along the Eastern seaboard funded various organizations such as the American Bible Society (1816) and American Tract Society (1825) to help propagate Christianity in rural and frontier regions through dissemination

[49] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 178.
[50] Halford E. Luccock and Paul Hutchinson, *The Story of Methodism* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1926), 367-370; Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 166-167; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 104, 178-179, 280, 522.
[51] *Ibid*; E. Michael Fleenor, "United Methodist Publishing House," in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), Online Edition, https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=1419 (accessed February 29, 2016).

of reading materials.[52] Peter Cartwright recorded that he "spread …sometimes a thousand dollars' worth a year," and proclaimed his conviction, "that it was a part and parcel of a Methodist preacher's most sacred duty to circulate good books wherever they go among the people."[53] Itinerants also assisted people who attended the outdoor revivals in subscribing to religious newspapers and magazines.[54]

Peddlers of the era journeyed to camp meetings armed not only with diverse religious materials of the sort listed above, but with secular books of non-fiction, poetry or fiction, alongside pamphlets, music, almanacs, magazines and other materials carefully calculated for appeal. In fact, historian David Jaffee has demonstrated the shrewd market insights of peddlers, many of whom communicated to printers or merchants the desired and likely popular reading material for a clientele they knew so well.[55] Hence, an enormous quantity of published material, religious and otherwise, reached a rural readership through camp meeting ministers and peddlers, exerting significant impact on religious thought and practice, denominational adherence, as well as the broader culture.

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[52] Whitfield, "Tracts at Large Religious Meetings…Letter to the Editor," *Statesman & Gazette* (Natchez, MS), August 22, 1829; Jonathan Cross, *Colportage in Virginia* (Annual report of Mr. J. Cross, Superintendent, 1852). See also David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Cathy N. Davidson, ed., *Reading in America: Literature and Social History* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Elizabeth Twaddell, "The American Tract Society, 1814-1860," *Church History* 15, no. 2 (June 1946): 116–132.
[53] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 280.
[54] Johnson, *Camp Meetings*, 167.
[55] See David Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress," 511-535.

During the late Illinois spring of 1858, in one of his last and most celebrated courtroom trials, Abraham Lincoln defended the son of old friends, a young man named William Duff Armstrong who stood accused of murdering another man in the seemingly improbable context of an otherwise fruitful Methodist camp meeting. On Saturday evening, August 29 of 1857, twenty-four year old Armstrong and James H. Norris each brawled—perhaps in concert, but probably at separate times--with a brawny farmer named James Preston Metzker. Although Metzker returned home Sunday morning, he passed away two days later from severe injuries to his head, triggering the arrests of Norris and Armstrong, who received charges of murder with the respective weapons of a large stick and a slingshot, or "slungshot." Armstrong proved fortunate in three ways. First, judicial agreement to a change of venue delayed his trial until May of 1858, by which time the state had already tried and convicted Norris of manslaughter, allowing Armstrong's defense team to insist that jurors only convict the young man if certain he acted in tandem with Norris. Since Norris and Armstrong likely battled Metzker in separate encounters that night, this would prove invaluable. However, providence intervened on Armstrong's behalf most significantly through his parents' enduring, warm relationship with Abraham Lincoln, who defended the accused both gratis and brilliantly. Lincoln utterly derailed the prosecution's most important testimony by proving with an almanac that the moon would have been nearly setting rather than high in the sky over the camp meeting and thus affording light by which a crucial witness supposedly observed events from a distance. The soon to be president further established

through medical testimony that Norris could have been solely responsible for Metzker's lethal injuries, and then concluded with a masterful, heart-rending account of Armstrong's saintly parents' benevolence and generosity toward a young, unmarried and unknown Abe Lincoln. The jury *literally* wept and subsequently found the young man not guilty.[56]

To later generations, this incident might seem to involve a very odd juxtaposition of sacred context and sinful behavior, of religious devotion and shameful misconduct in a public setting, of spiritual intent and primitive instincts. Above all, a religious revival seems an unlikely place for a murder, especially one—as it turns out—fueled by heavy consumption of liquor and occasioned by young, drunken men brawling. However, more careful attention places the scene of the alleged murder a short distance away from the Methodist services, at a "whiskey camp" established to take advantage of the temporary mass of population created by the religious—and inevitably sociable—assemblage of people.[57] Indeed, meticulous scrutiny of the entire panoply of camp meeting activities—

[56] Daniel W. Stowell, "Murder at a Methodist Camp Meeting: The Origins of Abraham Lincoln's Most Famous Trial," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 101, no. 3/4 (Fall - Winter 2008): 219-234. See also John Evangelist Walsh, *Moonlight: Abraham Lincoln and the Almanac Trial* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); George R. Dekle, Sr., *Abraham Lincoln's Most Famous Case: The Almanac Trial* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014).

[57] Stowell, "*Murder at a Methodist Camp Meeting*, 219-234. Historical studies on the role of alcohol and distillers in American culture prior to the Civil War and particularly before the effects of the Temperance Movement suggest the juxtaposition—even considering Methodist opposition to liquor and especially to drunkenness—of camp meetings and liquor dealers to have likely appeared less jarring and ironic to its contemporaries than to people peering back over subsequent periods' evangelical developments and Prohibition efforts. See, of course, W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), wherein the author demonstrates alcohol consumption's pervasiveness—especially liquor—in American life during the first third of the nineteenth century. Also cf. Bruce E. Stewart, "'This Country Improves in Cultivation, Wickedness, Mills, and Still': Distilling and

including those *without* support from the pious—highlights the frequent presence of whiskey vendors and eager customers, drunken and belligerent "rowdies" who sometimes disturbed services, as well as camp meeting detractors who came to mock what they considered pretensions to sacredness or threats to traditional norms. Card sharks and horseracing, gambling of various sorts, sexual activity or at least its pursuit, along with an entire range of non-religious diversions, secular merriment and earthly pleasures all made appearances, too.[58] It was there, in the iniquitous shadows of the sacred camp meeting--after imbibing the whiskey dealers' potent product for several hours--where three young men brawled their way into Abraham Lincoln's famous camp meeting murder case and into American religious history, where they offer rich, though tragic insight regarding the seamier underside of the outdoor revivals.

Drinking in Antebellum Western North Carolina," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 83, no. 4 (October 2006): 447-478, which affirms the virtual ubiquity of alcohol at most social gatherings, its status as socially acceptable and essential to good health, as well as the respect accorded distillers.

[58] For a comprehensive example, see Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 30. Regarding the history of alcohol in America, see Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*; Sharon V. Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1999); Mark Edward Lender, *Drinking In America: A History* (New York: The Free Press, 1987). On gambling, Herbert Asbury, *Sucker's Progress: An Informal History of Gambling in America from the Colonies to Canfield* (New York: Dodd and Mead, 1938) offers a highly entertaining, anecdotal tour of American gaming history; John M. Findlay, *People of Chance: Gambling in American Society from Jamestown to Las Vegas* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) furnishes a much more scholarly and recent examination that skillfully connects American gambling themes with those of the frontier experience: high hopes, risks, opportunities, substantial wins and tragic losses. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles Over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Knopf, 2003) presents a lively and diverse portrait of nineteenth century American sexuality, including considerable attention to evangelical attitudes and opposing ideas.

For many, religion was simply not the motivation to attend camp meetings, a fact that deterred their presence not at all. For these men--and some women--who emerge from the primary sources, nefarious attractions such as the 'sinful' ones listed above comprised the draw, leading one critic to label camp meetings as "that most terrific Saturnalia."[59] Again, devout promoters weighed efforts to prevent such behavior against consideration that many who came to indulge in worldly activities found conversion in the religious atmosphere.[60] The famous traveling minister James Finley recalled his own experience attending Cane Ridge as a young unbeliever expecting mischievous fun, then fleeing services for the woods, and finally downing liquor to repel his unexpected and ultimately irresistible spiritual awakening.[61] The future Reverend A. J. Potter entered the camp meeting of his conversion as a "ringleader in sin," filled with malice, intent upon frolic and disruption.[62] Thus, the religious assemblies' missionary impulse embraced sinners as well as the devout, and welcomed those who might foster chaos rather than spiritual order, in the fervent hope of saving souls.[63]

Balancing this embrace of the sinner with efforts to banish sin, camp meeting organizers often appointed a group of men known as "managers," "camp watch," or "camp guard" to police the grounds, particularly at night, and thus preclude or intercept

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[59] Frances Trollope, *Domesic Manners of the Americans (*London: Whittaker, Treacher, & Co., 1832), 101.
[60] *Ibid*, 54-56; Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 492-493; John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 92-97.
[61] Charles C. Cole, *Lion of the Forest: James B. Finley, Frontier Reformer* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 1-6; see also Cartwright, *Autobiography*.
[62] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 98-100.
[63] Atkinson, *Centennial History*, 492-493.

misbehavior.[64] Despite these efforts, gathering narratives reverberate with stories of wickedness and corruption taking place in the very shadows of the services, in what amounts to a fascinating cultural dialectic. Indeed, some accounts read as if the alleged depravity functioned to heighten the sense of righteous sublimity attached to camp meetings' religious aspects. In examining primary sources, the dramatic utility of such juxtapositions in religious and popular narratives leaps out as a literary device employed for both praising and condemning the meetings.

All this offers much insight into the rural culture of early America. Given the arduous, lonely, sometimes tragic lives of many Americans during the early 1800's, most facets of the camp meeting—sacred and profane—must be understood in terms of keen and even desperate need for self-definition, purpose, and belonging, as well as stimulation, catharsis, transcendence and ecstatic abandon of one kind or another.[65] Indeed, considerable overlap exists between Ellen Eslinger's explanation of camp meeting motivation as deriving significantly from frontier anomie, rural isolation, viciously competitive capitalism, social disorder as well as geographic rootlessness, and correspondingly, W. J. Rorabaugh's seminal attribution of the early Republic's high alcohol consumption rates and concomitant misconduct to similar personal and social anxieties.

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[64] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 169, 291-292; Reed & Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 203; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 201; Atkinson, *Centennial History,* 494.

[65] See Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: the Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999); Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*.

Camp meetings furnished a wide range of social functions and cultural opportunities. The religious and religiously approved social activities produced a unique, powerful forum for personal transformation, providing converts with psychic and social support in their new evangelical lives. Ironically yet similarly, the merriment, iniquity, and derision of the faithful pursued by the inhabitants of camp meetings' shadows provided lively, expressive avenues of self-definition and social community as well. The relationship of camp meeting pursuits—expressive, complementary, dialectical, or antagonistic--to the gatherings' religious motif divided early Americans into opposing but related factions yet united them in a vivid cultural performance about sanctity and sin, either of which would have been far less defined without the other. Baptist Minister Jeremiah Jeter vividly captured the woodland events' Janus-faced nature, affirming properly regulated ones as "eminently useful" for evangelical efforts, but forewarning that they could also easily degenerate into "occasions of social pleasure, festivity, and even of frivolity, dissipation, and vice." Jeter direly added, "Satan usually attends camp-meetings, and musters and trains his servants for mischief…."[66]

In 1805, young and impressionable Alfred Brunson's journey to a New York State camp meeting included a tour of the parallel yet unambiguously contrarian shadow camp "congregated at a rum-hole a mile or so west" of the Methodist mustering. In "the Devil's Camp," Brunson discovered an exhilarating if utterly unreligious carnival of

[66] Jeter, *Recollections*, 162.

sinful activities being embraced with abandon by its temporary residents. Revealing the passion for alcoholic overindulgence characteristic of camp meetings' penumbra and of devout worshipers' roguish opposite numbers, Brunson remembered: "Some were drunk as brutes, and others in all the stages of inebriation, from dead drunk to the first stages of merry feelings."[67] In 1805 Connecticut, Reverend Lorenzo Dow—an inveterate adversary of demon rum and all its diabolical, distilled kinfolk—found himself and his forest revival beset by "satan's (sic) emissaries," who "set up the grog tent" nearby and then threatened to flog Dow for diminishing sales through his admonitory preaching against their fiery product.[68] Peter Cartwright encountered hard-drinking Illinois frontiersmen who openly walked into an early 1800s camp meeting brandishing their whiskey bottles and cursing religion.[69] In 1807 Virginia, a cadre of drinkers erupted with such fury in the midst of a gathering that they ultimately threated to kill Reverends John Early and Lorenzo Dow.[70]

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[67] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 30. Diverging in rationale from earlier criticisms of alcohol abuse by religious stalwarts like Cotton Mather, John Wesley and George Whitefield, medical pioneer Benjamin Rush published in 1784 a perceptive, scientifically impressive and—for a time--widely unheeded critique of Americans' overdependence upon alcohol. See Benjamin Rush, *Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind* (Philadelphia: Bartam, 1805). Americans of the early Republic imbibed at a torrential rate, with per capita liquor consumption soaring between 1790 and the early 1830s, by which point it reached an estimated 5 to 7 gallons annually (triple the consumption today *and in addition to* widely enjoyed hard cider and less popular beer and wine). See N. A., "The Alcoholic Republic: Temperance in the United States," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 81, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 60; and Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, 7-10. While rum, gin and brandy figured prominently as trade items throughout the Atlantic world, distillation of American grain into "ardent spirits" and the transformation of apples into hard cider provided rural inhabitants with exceedingly marketable and relatively compact products that most acclaimed as highly effective means of comfort, nutrition, health and fellowship. See Brian S. Katcher, "Benjamin Rush's Educational Campaign against Hard Drinking," *American Journal of Public Health* 83, no. 2 (February 1993): 274; Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic*, 61-122.

[68] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 251. See also Reed and Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit*, 203.

[69] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 48-51.

[70] John Early, "Diary of John Early, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 34, no. 3 (July 1926): 244-245.

A mere half mile from Cane Ridge Revival's phenomenal religious outpouring, there appeared "about one hundred men engaged in drunken revelry, playing cards, trading horses, quarreling and fighting."[71]

Camp meetings' earnest proponents often had no choice—except when local or state laws intervened--but to couple begrudging toleration of whiskey vending and its attendant mischief with stern moral condemnation. After all, one property owner could permit a camp meeting while an adjacent one profited by allowing a liquor camp to be established along with whatever ensued. A *Belfast (Ireland) Monthly Magazine* correspondent reporting from America in 1809 registered both attitudes: "Some tents are permitted at a distance, where articles of refreshment for strangers are sold. These are called the tents of wickedness." [72] At times, attendees drank openly among the congregants as holy worship and spiritual pursuits proceeded. Visiting Yorkshireman William Brown observed at a Northern Ohio camp meeting of the 1840s that even as "the devotees were rolling on the ground in agonizing fervour fearful to behold, the others were enjoying themselves comfortably with smoking, drinking, or chewing tobacco, chatting with the women, or talking politics with the men."[73]

Naturally, such relatively peaceful coexistence not infrequently proved impossible, as witnessed by (the ironically named, in this connection) Reverend A. P.

[71] Finley, *Autobiography of James B. Finley*, 167-168.
[72] "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251.
[73] Brown, *Four Years' Residence*, 43.

Mead, who averred, "In spite of the restraining moral power of the meeting, many became furious with the effects of the maddening bowl, and outraged all decency by their conduct."[74] Certain counties endeavored to assist by passing assembly ordinances whereby disruptors could be prosecuted.[75] Camp meeting proponents tried—often in vain—to prevent open drinking by posting rules for the gathering on trees lining the most common routes and surrounding the revival grounds. They also appointed safety committees and campground guards comprised of strong, reliable men to police the gathering, discourage misbehavior and prevent turmoil.[76] Reverend John Lyle and others formulated detailed, decidedly martial plans of action for responding to larger scale disturbances.[77] Further, people of local eminence and authority provided helpful support in preserving order, such as the celebrated repudiation of a Texas revival's tormenters by no less imposing defender of the faithful than Colonel Jim Bowie himself, who faced down the "ruffians," personally inscribed "the sign of the cross upon the ground" before them, and declared the matter settled in favor of orderly worship. The would-be lords of misrule wisely concurred.[78] However, since grog camps usually sprung up at a distance from the worship grounds, policing them proved difficult in many cases. On occasion,

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[74] Mead, *Manna*, 15.
[75] N. A., "Methodist Camp Meeting," *Maryland Gazette and State Register* (Annapolis), September 1, 1825.
[76] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 169, 291-292; Reed & Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 203; Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 201; Atkinson, *Centennial History,* 494.
[77] Reverend John Lyle, "Narratio Factorum," (Photocopy of Handwritten Manuscript, 1801), n. p. Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort KY.
[78] Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 377. See also Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 201; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 300-301.

very direct action by intrepid ministers and supporters proved necessary. Fearless Lorenzo Dow reported an 1805 Connecticut gathering where "satan hoisted his standard near by, as a grogman brought his liquors for sale, but was constrained by threats (when reason would not do) to give it over, the law being against him [sic]."[79]

As referenced here, states passed laws stipulating a specific minimum distance at which grog tents had to stand from camp meetings.[80] While this moved the whiskey camps out of sight, it also permitted far greater degrees of inebriation than might have occurred within surer reach of camp guards. Further, inebriates from the liquor camps could easily visit the nearby religious meeting for disorderly or libidinous purposes after imbibing. Reverend Jacob Young notes establishment of a two dozen men guard for a camp meeting that sprawled over one hundred acres, demonstrating how thinly the protective coverage lay and suggesting the necessity of all pious campers' role in countering mayhem. This communal effort registers in Young's assertion: "Our rules were very mild, and few in number; but the people saw we were determined to enforce them."[81] Religious folk likewise exerted informal social control by shaming would be miscreants. After discovering a stock of whiskey with the vendor's name attached, Lorenzo Dow hoisted it into a highly visible tree and posted notice that the display served

[79] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 250.
[80] "Camp Meetings," *Maryland Gazette and State Register* (Annapolis), September 1, 1825; N. A., "Camp Meetings," *The Belfast Monthly Magazine* 2, no. 9 (April 30, 1809): 250-251; N. A., "Legislature," *The National Advocate* (London, England), February 24, 1824; "Notice," *Raleigh Register, and North-Carolina State Gazette*, August 13, 1824; N. A., "Vermont Legislature," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), November 2, 1827.
[81] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 169.

as a monument to old Lucipher himself.[82] At times, religious devotion combined with informal norms to check tippling proclivities utterly, as in an English minister's report that an entrepreneurial spirits dealer established himself a half mile from worshipers with multiple barrels at the ready, yet drew not even one customer.[83] Anson West, who likely attended as many camp meetings in the Deep South as anyone ever, contended that, "where the good sense and taste of an enlightened community, under a powerful influence of divine grace, become deeply interested in favor of religion, we need no guards…." [84] This idealistic formula clearly failed in many cases, however, as confrontations between the forces of order and chaos occurred with regularity.

Of course, alcohol and religiosity competed and entwined not only in the camp meeting milieu but within many participants, as illustrated in the account of a Tennessee Methodist preacher named Ogden who "backslid, quit preaching, kept a groggery, and became wicked, and raised his family to hate the Methodists." Demonstrating Methodism's Arminian theology--wherein one could embrace, abdicate and regain salvation--the relapsed parson once again found his faith as well as ministerial calling at an 1813 camp meeting, after which he "lived and died a good Methodist preacher."[85] The commonplace tug of war between the bottle and Bible provided ministerial humor in Reverend John Collins' anecdote about being assailed by an inebriated man claiming to

[82] Ibid, 235-236.
[83] Reed & Matheson, *Narrative of the Visit*, 203.
[84] West, *Methodism in Alabama*, 234.
[85] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 39-40.

have experienced conversion under Collins' preaching. Collins humbly replied, "I converted you! no doubt it was me; it looks like my work."[86]

Further, many renowned camp meeting ministers readily offered autobiographical conversion accounts of divine grace rescuing them from alcohol and its train of wickedness. One of the Midwest's most formidable Methodist itinerants, James B. Finley, drifted between relative dissolution and religion for some time before undertaking his illustrious clerical career.[87] As mentioned previously, Texas circuit rider A. J. Potter unstintingly asserted his past as a notorious imbiber, brawler and troublemaker prior to his utterly transformative camp meeting salvation. He wrote, "On the Sabbath-day, large crowds under my leading would assemble at the grocery, and drink, get drunk, blaspheme, fight, gamble, and horse-race."[88] His biographer, in an otherwise virtually hagiographic account, refers to the pre-conversion Potter as "an unlearned, wicked sinner, denizened with the slum and garbage of the world."[89] Unquestionably, these formative experiences served the famously tough and fearless Potter well throughout his itinerant career on Texas' wild frontier.[90] In this vein, many

[86] McLean, *Life of Reverend Collins*, 57.
[87] Finley, *Autobiography of James B. Finley*, 166-168.
[88] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter*, 98-100. Reverend Peter Cartwright echoes this, asserting that the frontier Sunday supplied for many "a day set apart for hunting, fishing, horse-racing, card-playing, balls, dances, and all kinds of jollity and mirth." See Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 25.
[89] Graves, *Andrew Jackson Potter,* 109.
[90] *Ibid*, 8, 107-109, 211-212, 220-224. Potter's biographer praises this rugged preparation for frontier travel and ministry among rough folk: "Born on her early frontier, having inherited all the taste and genius for frontier-life, he continued in that school till his lesson was fully learned; and, after his regeneration, religion supplied all needed virtues for a grace-refined manhood (8)." Intriguingly germane, notorious Texas outlaw John Wesley Hardin was--as his name suggests--the son of an itinerant Methodist minister. See John Wesley Hardin, *The Life of John Wesley Hardin* (Seguin, TX: Smith & Moore, 1896), 5; Lawrence Block,

camp meeting preachers functioned effectively—to say nothing of remained safe and alive--in part because of their earlier, intimate familiarity with the rural male subculture in which alcohol-driven behavior flourished.[91] While never much interested in drink, the redoubtable Peter Cartwright knew this milieu well and confessed to having been "a wild, wicked boy" who "delighted in horse-racing, card-playing, and dancing."[92] As a revivalist, he consequently excelled at handling the disorderly young men who frequently invaded services and campgrounds intending frolic and mayhem.

Under the dominion of what historian W. J. Rorabaugh termed the "Alcoholic Republic," most Americans--including women and children--drank. However, liquor consumption intermeshed particularly deeply with the prevailing male subculture and its attendant emphases on camaraderie, youthful hijinks, tavern-going, sexual exploits and festive derision of social superiors. In a misguided but nonetheless staunchly held conviction, men also associated drinking with physical prowess as displayed in fighting, hard work and sporting or gambling contests. Of course, celebration of holidays, special occasions such as the harvest, and various rites of passage also invited heavy consumption of alcohol for everyone, but especially younger men.[93] As Potter noted, his

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Gangsters, Swindlers, Killers, and Thieves: The Lives and Crimes of Fifty American Villains (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 106. Notorious Tennessee and Natchez Trace outlaw John Murrell was also the son of an honest Methodist itinerant. See N. A., "Interesting Facts about John A. Murrell," *Nashville Daily American*, January 1, 1876; Block, *Fifty American Villains*, 162-166.

[91] See Beard, *Early Cumberland Ministers*, 376-377; Cartwright, *Autobiography*; Mead, *Manna*, 132.

[92] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 27.

[93] Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic* furnishes the seminal and still excellent historical account and analysis of these cultural themes; See also Stephen Nissenbaum, *The Battle for Christmas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997) for a lively discussion concerning the crossroads of drink and young adult male subcultures in early America; Eric Burns, *Spirits of America: A Social History of Alcohol* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,

iniquitous efforts typically occurred in the company of other young men collectively engaged in furious drinking, indiscriminate brawling, plus reckless swearing, gambling and horseracing.

In camp meetings' primary documents, these gangs of young men who devoted themselves to sinful pleasures, masculine companionship and disorderly behavior appear often, customarily bearing the name "rowdies, "sutlers" or "camp meeting rowdies." An account from 1805 memorializes some of their merriment occurring near a Methodist encampment: "Some were running horses, some were fighting just for the fun of the thing, there being no provocation. Some were eating cakes and other good things…and passing their jokes in merry-making, while others were trading horses, watches, or other property."[94] In her novel *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, Harriet Beecher Stowe has a character declaim, "I think these camp-meetings do more harm than good. They collect all the scum and the riff-raff of the community, and I believe there's more drinking done at camp-meetings in one week than is done in six anywhere else."[95] Echoing this, an 1804 Petersburg, Virginia account condemned camp meetings' association with "acts of revelry and mirth" as well as their "flagrant violations of

2004); Iain Gately, *Drink: A Cultural History of Alcohol* (New York: Gotham Books, 2009). See also Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-58; "Guyland: Gendering the Transition to Adulthood," in *Exploring Masculinities: Identity, Inequality, Continuity and Change*, eds. C. J. Pascoe and Tristan Bridge (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Thomas A. Foster, ed., *New Men: Manliness in Early America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

[94] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 30.

[95] Stowe, *Dred*, 221.

decency and order."[96] John Patterson MacLean declared that although the camp meetings "grew out of a necessity" on the early 1800s frontier, the custom "was prolonged until its usefulness had not only departed, but became a stench, a byword, a demoralizing power and a blighting curse."[97]

Some ministers took the youthful gangs and their antics in relative stride, though not without imposing clear spiritual dichotomies on behavior. Alfred Brunson observed in one instance "the usual amount of rowdyism outside the camp," rationalizing that, "as in the days of Job, 'when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, Satan came also among them….'"[98] Issuing a common report, Jacob Young noted in quasi-military fashion: "We discovered a great many rude young men and boys, reconnoitering the ground, acting as though they intended to make a disturbance; so, placing our sentinels on guard, we retired to rest."[99] In his fascinating memoirs, Lorenzo Dow also portrayed camp meetings as embattled zones: "Being informed of some ill designs among the youth, to bring a stigma on the meeting, I observed three companies in the woods…."[100] Placing his martial conception in a cosmic frame like Brunson's, Dow routinely categorized the rowdies as enlisted under Satan's banner, endeavoring to thwart the good work of Christ. At an 1804 Mississippi camp meeting near Natchez, he

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[96] N. A., "Petersburg, (Virginia) Camp Meetings, August 7," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), September 4, 1804.
[97] John Patterson MacLean, *Shakers of Ohio: Fugitive Papers Concerning the Shakers of Ohio, with Unpublished Manuscripts* (Columbus, OH: F. J. Heer Printing Company, 1907), 23.
[98] Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 65.
[99] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer,* 159. See also Pitts, *James Copeland*, 67.
[100] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 222.

recorded, "the devil was angry…and through his emissaries contrived various projects to raise a dust," while in Virginia earlier the same year "some attempted disruption," but "the devil's kingdom suffered loss…."[101]

Inevitably, disputes between religious participants and unruly attendees occasionally devolved into serious acts of violence, even between preachers and disruptors.[102] As Reverend Jacob Young avowed, "When they would not obey orders, I would take hold of them and lead them out of the congregation. They soon saw that I had a great deal of muscular power."[103] A proud frontiersman with confidence in his fists, Reverend Peter Cartwright routinely challenged and shamed rowdies, triggering multiple skirmishes. In one celebrated instance, misunderstanding routed his would be assailant. Following a combative agitator into the woods for an agreed upon fight from which neither would retreat, the preacher tripped on a fence, injuring his leg. When the troublemaker looked back, he saw Cartwright reach for the injured leg and thought the intrepid minister to be retrieving a knife. In response, the miscreant fled ignominiously.[104] A bloodthirsty mob once accosted Francis Asbury's tent in pursuit of a hidden camp meeting guard who had struck an intractable rowdy's head so fiercely with a cane that the victim's allies believed him dead. The man revived, averting a showdown. Asbury,

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[101] *Ibid*, 232, 218.
[102] H. M. Rulison, *Brother Mason, the Circuit Rider: or, Ten Years a Methodist Preacher* (Cincinnati: Queen City Publishing House, 1858), 46; Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 65; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 130-133; Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 235-236, 269-270, 291-292, 300-301, 336-337; Simpson, *Penuel*, xv.
[103] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 336.
[104] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 130-133.

an exceptionally peaceful and calm man, nonetheless subsequently related the story to would be malefactors, warning in his dulcet voice: "You may be in danger from a quarter you little suspect. It is true that the Methodists are not a fighting people, but they are not all sanctified—they may be provoked to retaliate, and they are very numerous on this ground. If it should come to that, you will get the worst of the battle."[105]

In quintessential camp meeting and evangelical fashion, however, the humans involved in this cosmic battle easily switched sides through the power of Christian salvation or Satanic temptation, as in Dow's aside from 1805 Virginia relating that the collection of rowdies who sought to flog him at a previous camp meeting subsequently appeared in worship "solemn and tender."[106] Cartwright, too, received a threat of whipping from bellicose young men who later the same year converted under his ministry.[107] Mead supplies a remarkable account of transformation wherein a tribe of rowdies' formidable chieftain, "more bold and wicked than his comrades," charged into the midst of worship upon a mammoth horse, shouting curses and creating havoc, only to fall from his mount "as if smitten by lightening." After thirty-six hours of lying apparently comatose, the erstwhile menace erupted in convulsions and groans, followed by a reawakening both literally and spiritually, whereafter he jumped about shouting praises to the Lord as part of his Methodist conversion.[108]

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[105] Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer*, 294-296.
[106] *Ibid*, 244.
[107] Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 49-50.
[108] Mead, *Manna*, 19-20.

The conflict between 'rowdies' and order should likely be interpreted generationally as well. In his book, *American Manhood*, Anthony Rotundo contends that young male cohorts of the nineteenth century routinely challenged older men's hegemony through pranks, troublemaking or simply pursuing frowned-upon pleasures. In more thickly populated communities, youthful crews "fought countless skirmishes" with "neighbors, teachers and lawmen…." Parents and older family members, however, presented complicated targets for youthful rebellion by being at once the "most potent enemies" of illicit "youthful pleasure," but also authority figures whom the boys customarily loved and respected. As Rotundo underscores, "Remote adults could be irked at little emotional cost," while conflicts with family typically invited considerable heartache and stress. Hence, young males in populous areas easily vented their frustrations or challenged social order with non-familial opponents, against authority figures situated at an emotional distance.[109] Surrounded by a network of tightly knit relatives and neighbors, however, rural youth enjoyed far fewer such cathartic avenues. Camp meetings thus supplied a unique opportunity for self-expression. Featuring transitory but densely populated campgrounds filled with hundreds or even thousands of adults bearing no familial or affectional ties to aspiring rebels, the substantive outdoor revivals briefly presented a scenario similar to those enjoyed by youthful town renegades. In their devotion to order, morality and high-minded seriousness, camp guards and

[109] E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from The Revolution to The Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 31-74, quotes from 48.

traveling preachers provided rural locales' mutinous young men with ideal targets for illicitly pleasurable, assertively masculine, and inter-generationally meaningful hijinks or battles. Fortuitously, these came with limited emotional or social cost as long as one avoided relatives or neighbors' displeasure. Indeed, the ephemeral camp meeting community and its temporary or itinerant authority figures soon disappeared, except in the rowdies' self-affirming memories and bolstered identities.

Of course, the young—and not so young—male celebrants of worldly pursuits who congregated in and around camp meetings' flame of social activity inevitably turned their focus at times to female company. Nor did they constitute the only group keenly conscious of the opposite sex.[110] Although much acceptable courtship naturally occurred in this sociable situation, receiving encouragement if mindful of religious convictions, community standards and kin group approval, other romantic efforts and sexual liaisons—including prostitution--fell decidedly outside the prescribed parameters.[111] Indeed, a prominent Virginia Presbyterian declared camp meetings to be "a common place of rendezvous for all the licentious & lewd."[112] At Cane Ridge, Presbyterian John

[110] See Clare A. Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[111] As Chapter Two delineates, camp meetings typically decreed separate *seating* for male and female congregants during worship, but the ambulatory, gregarious and eclectic gatherings furnished ample opportunities for interaction between the genders, as accounts and period images clearly reveal. See David Turpie, *Sketches of My Own Times* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1903), 10; Wright, *Sketches of James Quinn,* 107. For an interesting account of unmarried young men and women openly sharing a tent under the careful supervision of an older chaperone, see Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 64-65.

[112] John Durbarrow Blair Papers, Archives and Manuscripts, Library of Virginia, quoted in Meredith Henne Baker, *The Richmond Theater Fire: Early America's First Great Disaster* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 185.

Lyle ashamedly reported the discovery of "six men and one strumpet" under the preachers' stand while another couple was caught committing adultery in an adjacent cornfield.[113] Proscribed sexual--or potentially so--relationships provoked enormous strife and embarrassment for families and drew harsh censure for the gatherings.[114] A national newspaper condemned meetings occurring all over 1804 Virginia and North Carolina as "injurious in society, and hurtful to morality."[115] Proud camp meeting defender Lorenzo Dow conceded that some even regarded the revivals as "scandalous for women to attend."[116] Naturally, a good deal of sexual activity at the assemblages resided only in critics' fervid imaginations, as in a New Englander's revealing reverie that surely "a multitude of persons of different sexes, and many of them strangers to each other, husbands without their wives and wives without their husbands..." could not "meet together in the woods and night after night take up their lodging together in tents…" without violations of "propriety."[117]

Adding to the chorus of criticism, popular travel writers and regional novelists described camp meetings in highly sensational, even lurid terms, accentuating the most

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[113] Lyle, "Narratio Factorum," n. p. (handwritten manuscript). Reflecting many camp meeting preachers' conception of the world as a battlefield between good and evil, Christ and Satan, Lyle characterized the adulterous coupling as an effort "to dishonor" the camp meeting. Lyle's interpretation remains dubious, since far more basic and personal motivations likely explained the activity.

[114] Bruce, *They All Sang Hallelujah*, 54-55; Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 433; Christian Advocate (signed), "Religious," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827.

[115] "Petersburg, (Virginia) Camp Meetings, August 7," *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), September 4, 1804.

[116] Dow, *Cosmopolite*, 262.

[117] Christian Advocate (signed), "Religious," *Vermont Chronicle* (Bellows Falls), June 29, 1827; See also Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, 27-28.

prurient, excessive and unusual aspects.[118] Thus, the physical paroxysms that revival attendees *sometimes* exhibited, the midnight trysts that *could* and at times did occur at the outdoor events, and the sideshow of rowdies' nocturnal adventures all entered the popular consciousness of American and European readers. A Scottish traveler in the late 1810s lamented, "the positive immoralities which it is said usually attend these immense assemblages, necessarily promiscuous in the utmost latitude of the term" and declared them as meriting "decided disapprobation."[119] Even the sociologically reliable and usually empathetic Harriet Martineau disdained "the insanity of camp-meetings and revivals…in the heart of the forest or prairie" in her examination of American mores.[120] Among the most notable contributors to this genre appeared the British cultural tourist Frances Trollope, who spent the night at an Indiana camp meeting in 1829 and vividly included her impressions in the widely read *Domestic Manners of the Americans.* For her account, Trollope presented a large group of female worshipers who issued frighteningly maniacal sounds while cavorting on the ground in an unspeakable knot of writhing bodies and entangled legs. Imputing lascivious design to the attending ministers, Trollope wrote, "the preachers moved about among them, at once exciting and soothing their agonies…I saw the insidious lips approach the cheeks of the unhappy girls…." Recording that she grew "sick with horror," the author eventually had to flee "the

[118] See especially Flint*, A Condensed Geography;* Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners.*
[119] Duncan, *Travels*, 370-371.
[120] Harriet Martineau, *Society in America*, *Vol. 2* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1837--reissued by Cambridge University Press, 2009), 333.

atrocious wickedness of this horrible scene."[121] Thus, Trollope powerfully conveyed the impression of camp meetings as cacophonous, physically as well as emotionally frenzied, to say nothing of eerily sexual, descriptors that fired the popular imagination and associated the gatherings with salacious behavior.

Besides the potentially unlawful activity incidental to alcohol consumption and sexual desire, camp meetings sometimes supplied the setting for calculated criminal operations such as stealing horses, con games and slave theft. Although solid evidence regarding John Murrell's criminal activities in Tennessee and along the lower Mississippi River remains unfortunately entwined with an elaborate, once socially consequential myth, the bandit purportedly assumed the persona of a camp meeting preacher to facilitate horse-theft and possibly slave-stealing.[122] These two pursuits comprised much of his professional activity, along with counterfeiting and petty theft. Auditor's horses could be stolen by Murrell's confederates while he preached or visited the faithful. Further, Murrell notoriously pretended to assist slaves' escape to freedom while actually

[121] Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* 139-145.

[122] Reports--many of which originated with unreliable writer Virgil Stewart--that Murrell planned a massive and elaborate slave rebellion to cover his criminal organization during an impending looting spree ignited a major slave insurrection scare in central Mississippi and parts of Tennessee during 1835. This led to widespread torture of slaves for information, the expulsion of professional gamblers (thought to be involved in the coming insurrection) from a number of river ports, and the hanging in several Southern towns of, in all, about three dozen African Americans and whites deemed conspirators. Lowell Kirk, "John A. Murrell: An Early Tennessee 'Terrorist,'" *Tellico Times* (Tellico Plains, TN), August, 2002; Larry D. Ball, "John Andrews Murrell," in *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, Online Edition, http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3566 (accessed March 13, 2016); Larry D. Ball, "Murrell in Arkansas: An Outlaw Gang in History and Tradition," *Mid-South Folklore* 6 (Winter 1978): 65–75. See also James Lal Penick, Jr., *The Great Western Land Pirate: John A. Murrell in Legend and History* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981).

intent upon selling, reselling and finally murdering them as the ruse became exposed.[123] The son of a respected Methodist itinerant, John Murrell likely assumed the roles of trustworthy Wesleyan preacher and credible Underground Railroad conductor quite convincingly. Indeed, after a debilitating stint in prison, the former thief and bushwhacker died an apparently sincere Methodist. Murrell related to his eventual chronicler the highly profitable ploy wherein a talented villain established his identity as a Methodist itinerant, possibly through camp meeting appearances, and created trusting relationships with potential victims. At some point, the ostensibly dependable preacher inquired about purchasing a horse badly needed to continue his pious duties, but then confessed having insufficient funds. The devout mark would then perhaps offer to allow immediate possession of the horse, with an understanding that payment would be made at an upcoming camp meeting. Of course, the "preacher" then headed to a different locale with his ill-gotten mount(s).[124] Other miscreants attended camp meetings, defused suspicion with sanctimony, and then stole horses, saddles, clothing and other valuables.[125] Sadly, a number of murders also occurred at camp meetings in addition to the Illinois incident discussed above.[126]

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[123] "Interesting Facts about John A. Murrell," *Nashville Daily American*, January 1, 1876; Block, *Fifty American Villains*, 162-166; Virgil A. Stewart, *The History of Virgil A. Stewart and His Adventure,* ed. H. R. Howard (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1836), esp. 26-34. The last must be read very carefully as it offers many clearly fallacious details. However, corroborating sources affirm that criminals in Murrell's business assumed the guise of camp meeting preachers to engender confidence in their marks.

[124] Stewart, *Stewart and His Adventures*, 26-34.

[125] James H. Kincaid and G. W. Ruth, "Stop the Thief and Swindler," *The Nashville Tennessean*, September 20, 1841.

[126] N. A., "Murder at a Camp Meeting," *Memphis Eagle*, September 10, 1846; Catherine Read Williams, *Fall River: An Authentic Narrative* (Boston: Lilly, Wait and Company, 1834).

No group exceeded the Deep South's Copeland Gang of the 1830s and 1840s in exploiting camp meetings for criminal gains. A member named Charles McGrath excelled at preaching, praying and quoting the Bible, thus enabling his highly convincing impersonation of a traveling Methodist minister. In a favorite subterfuge, McGrath would leave his mount and exterior clothing with henchmen, and then walk into a campground while purporting to have been robbed of his horse, saddle and garments. Good folks at the assembly would generously collect money to provide the "preacher" with new accoutrements, much of which would later be sold miles away. Meanwhile, McGrath's cohorts would steal horses from the camp's pasturage at night or rob local farms while their residents attended the religious gathering. Copeland gang members also acted in concert with "Reverend" McGrath by presenting themselves as Northerners and abolitionists intent upon liberating slaves with the kindly preacher's assistance. Since many slaves enjoyed a relative degree of freedom and lack of surveillance during the forest gatherings, the criminals would convince bondsmen to flee the camp at night and meet their supposed emancipators. Subsequently, the gang profited magnificently by renting the slaves out while traveling and eventually reselling them somewhere distant.[127] On at least one occasion, McGrath even personally organized a Louisiana camp meeting for African Americans, fostered local confidence by suppressing frolic and drunkenness, all the while fomenting plans for slaves to escape in a boat his accomplices

[127] Pitts, *James Copeland,* 66-87.

brought at an opportune moment. Executed flawlessly, this 1842 gambit enlisted two free blacks who believed themselves truly to be assisting abolitionists. In the end, the nefarious crew netted thousands of dollars through sale of seven escaped slaves from the camp meeting *and* the two free but tragically deceived African Americans endeavoring to help.[128]

In many regards, camp meetings should be grouped with fairs, carnivals, court days, political barbecues, militia musters and other types of early modern public gatherings because of their festive mood, communal importance, and myriad social functions.[129] Of course, many of these events incorporated consumption of alcoholic beverages along with opportunities for sport, gaming, ribaldry, bawdy fellowship and interaction among the sexes as major components of their jovial mood and social appeal. This atmosphere combined with the social elasticity and personal license—at least on camp meetings' margins--that often characterizes large gatherings of diverse people away from home, and understandably promoted a wide array of religious *and* non-religious experimentation. Like fairs and carnivals, these outdoor religious events comprised a fluid, liminal scenario in which participants could explore different social roles, challenge the structure of everyday life to an extent, and--in the case of camp

[128] *Ibid*, 69-78.
[129] See the comparison of camp meetings and Whig political gatherings in Joe L. Kincheloe, "Transcending Role Restrictions: Women at Camp Meetings and Political Rallies," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 158-169.

meetings--create religious *or* rebellious, roistering personae that augmented, altered, or even transcended their customary position in society.[130]

Thus, the journey to camp meeting became a sort of pilgrimage, one often fraught with difficulty and even danger, to a sacralized place. If doubters, critics and sinners contested the transitory shrine, perhaps that was all the better for clarifying and galvanizing pilgrims' devotion. Given the lack of shrines and holy places in rural America at this time, camp meetings fashioned a sacred locale, however ephemerally, where one could commune with the devout and tread upon the threshold of otherworldliness. Yet, not unlike the situation in hallowed places of the old world, the pilgrim could be tempted--in the very shadows of the consecrated event--by the sirens of liquor, gambling, frolic, sex, and derision of the meeting's putative sacredness. Ironically, or perhaps predictably, these temptations provided a contrast underscoring the holiness of the camp meetings' religious activities. The evils of the sinful world danced and taunted upon the perimeter of the sacralized zone, yet the faithful and newly converted ideally chose to embrace righteousness and the divine. This extraordinary scene comprised a powerfully charged context for the focal conversion experience and seared

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[130] 'Liminal' is used in the anthropological sense of a social or psychological threshold (Latin *limen*—threshold), as with Victor Turner's famous conception, most notably in his *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967). See especially the chapter "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," (though the idea appears in many of Turner's publications). The debate over Turner's delineation of liminality versus critics' revisions and repudiations of it figures prominently in the study of religious ritual and pilgrimage, and thus occupies a place of relevance to this study. See Timothy L. Carson, *Liminal Reality and Transformational Power* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997).

the rite of passage deeply into the recollection of new converts and witnesses. For many people, these occasions generated some of their most durable, stirring memories and provided a life-long "master story," personal "narrative," or "life story" of the kind sociologists recognize as sustaining people's essential self-conceptions and their steadfastness in difficult undertakings.[131]

As Christine Heyrman and others have emphasized, genuine commitment to early nineteenth century evangelical Christianity entailed significant, sometimes difficult changes in converts' lives, moral codes and social relations. These changes involved acceptance of church discipline, abandonment of traditional pleasures like drinking, gambling and dancing, as well as potential conflict with unconverted family and friends. Preparatory to the substantial effort and challenges required by such a transformation, dramatic campground conversions offered propitious beginnings sharply demarcating the old life from the new. Further, the woodland revivals furnished personal experiences and collective rituals that valuably reinforced converts' commitment to their changed lives in the demanding months ahead by serving as emblematic memories for the new Christian and all who attended the meeting with them.[132] However arduous, the new life

[131] Ronald Berger and Richard Quinney, "The Narrative Turn in Social Inquiry: Toward a Storytelling Sociology," (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, Aug 14, 2004), online http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p108465_index.html (accessed March 12, 2013); Ronald J. Berger and Richard Quinney, eds., *Storytelling Sociology: Narrative as Social Inquiry* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005); Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, *Analyzing Narrative Reality* (London: Sage Publications, 2008).

[132] Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); see especially 5-9, 16-22, 26, 32-40, 117-154, 180-184, 210-217.

embraced by converts conferred a sense of purpose, meaning and direction that banished anomie and isolation. In keeping with this view of conversions as socially and psychologically functional rites of passage, we should regard them as the centerpiece of a much larger religious ritual inscribed in the entire camp meeting experience.[133]

As we have seen, though, many attendees refused to be drawn emotionally into the religious proceedings and declined conversion, even opting to mock the camp meetings' religious themes through scoffing or participation in sinful social activities. Yet those decisions likewise constituted potent affirmations of selfhood, assertions of personal autonomy, and commitment to particular worldviews. These choices reflected both the celebration of new personal liberties stemming from the American Revolutionary ethos and adherence to old traditions of drink, revelry, camaraderie, youthful rebellion, and manly pursuits under assault by evangelicalism. [134] For participants already committed to the evangelical faith, the sacred events recapitulated their conversion experience, offered a vicarious reliving of their own salvation journey, and reaffirmed their rejection of temporal sins (sins that beckoned luridly from the shadows). The camp meeting therefore functioned as a celebratory "performance" once again clearly distinguishing the saved (however autonomously Arminian) and sacred

[133] Talcott Parsons wrote, "Ritual is one of the fundamental defense mechanisms of society against the tendency to anomie." Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 713.
[134] Christine Heyrman emphasizes the conflict within families and communities wrought by adoption of evangelical norms, behavior and morality, which typically repudiated long-standing pleasures such as drinking, gambling, horse-racing, cock-fighting, dancing and men's pursuit of sexual adventure. See Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, esp. 117-160. On alcohol consumption as a means of expressing personal liberty, see Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic,* 59-92.

from the damned (however temporary that might have been for some) and sacrilegious, yet sufficiently permeable in its performative boundaries that a given actor could theatrically cross from one side to the other. Thus, camp meetings combined the all too worldly and otherworldly, intermingled dissolute souls with the deeply devout, and paired the sensuality and brevity of human life with the possibility of spiritual rebirth and eternal afterlife. Somehow, and somehow not surprisingly at all, this rich amalgam presented an enthralling and rapturous experience for participants, many of whom returned year after year to enjoy the events in one way or another.

Chapter Nine:
Meeting's End: Conclusion

During the period stretching from the 1790's to the 1850's, camp meetings evolved institutionally in two critical ways. First, they began as interdenominational phenomena that ultimately became a largely Methodist and Cumberland Presbyterian experience, a fact demanding answers to several questions: Why did other religious groups such as the initially supportive Baptists and Presbyterians retreat from the forest gatherings while Methodists embraced and succeeded with this approach to proselytization and worship? Struggling with Arminian theology's challenges to their historically Calvinist creed, while also more instinctively insular, Baptists withdrew from the events. Camp meetings' headlong embrace of what many Baptists perceived as a rash abdication of all things Calvinist—especially predestination and a limited atonement--simply proved too much. Of course, these characteristics contributed substantially to Wesleyan success and compelled many Baptists to journey more and more deeply into Arminian territory during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Baptists would also emulate camp meetings to some degree with their establishment of "protracted meetings," but that is another story with different characters, boundaries and themes. Baptists would not numerically surpass Methodists in the American marketplace of religion until the 1960s, but that occurred in a different world than one of rambunctious rural assemblies led by black-clad circuit riders.

On the other hand, most Presbyterians simply could not abide the ministerial democratization necessary to sustain camp meetings, insisting instead upon educated clergy who clearly understood as well as adhered to established doctrine and worship traditions. Despite camp meetings' undeniable roots in Scottish Communion Fairs, mainstream nineteenth century American Presbyterianism further determined that condoning the forest revivals' spectacular physical and mystical worship betrayed their fidelity to Biblically requisite decorum of worship. Moreover, camp meetings' emergent public roles for ordinary people—including minorities, women and children--eroded hierarchies that Presbyterians preferred to maintain in the interest of denominational and social order. Finally, the utter triumph of Arminian doctrine in camp meeting circles sent the theological heirs of Calvin, Knox and Tennent, of Geneva, Edinburgh and Pennsylvania's Log College fleeing the field to form their defenses and brandish the *Institutes*. They felt, perhaps justifiably, that surrender on this point would have likely sunk the entire Church. Nonetheless, many from this background came to accept the Wesleyan doctrines of free will, prevenient grace and potential salvation for all. However, they generally switched sides and became Methodists or Cumberlands, abandoning the tradition from which they emerged, and leaving orthodox Presbyterianism even as it defiantly renounced them.

Secondly, what factors rendered camp meetings and Methodists such a felicitous combination? Clearly, the gatherings emphatically embraced a number of Wesleyan motifs in existence long before the Gasper or Red River revivals. These included field

preaching, emotional appeals and charismatic sermonizing. Additionally, Wesley's radically egalitarian theology of potential salvation for all invited a concomitant enfranchisement of the masses in conducting worship. This outlook further embraced hymnody undertaken democratically, an authentic belief in the priesthood of every believer, plus a deeply pragmatic devotion to methods that ***worked*** in pursuit of converting souls and changing lives. Enduring and influential social movements also typically require both visionary, innovative leadership *and* a sense of ownership among the rank and file. Through Francis Asbury, an organizational virtuoso, American Methodism entailed both. The redoubtable but insightful Asbury understood when to lead firmly or vigorously, but consistently channeled populist impulses and celebrated religious democratization within the parameters he built and maintained. Traveling constantly and literally residing continuously among the faithful, Asbury seemed as much a product of *their* movement as its author, and could shrewdly make even his most authoritarian directives appear to be the Methodist people's will.[1] The bishop also knew promising innovations when he saw them, and readily embraced many popular initiatives.

Furthermore, why did the Wesleyan and Cumberland camp meeting movement find such extraordinary resonance among Americans of this period? Manifestly, the First Great Awakening and American Revolution swept away much that upheld a sense of

[1] Bishop Asbury never owned a home, living on the road, at camp meetings, and as a guest in Methodist homes around the country.

order, while also creating a perception of possibly limitless social, political and cultural change. Nevertheless, these events had bounds, particularly the American Revolution. By 1800, there appeared a new world of stability in ways that disappointed, and instability in ways that frightened. Class differences, social obstacles and economic hierarchies remained; personal hardships, human venality and exploitative cruelty persisted. On the other hand, much that granted structure, certainty and meaning in pre-Revolutionary America departed with the Crown and the world it maintained. People who had expected more, and *less*, from the volatile eighteenth century looked in new places for deliverance. The camp meeting movement ignited and institutionalized a religious and cultural revival that addressed many of these issues satisfyingly and convincingly. Inevitably, the Revolution failed to deliver A New Jerusalem, universal brotherhood or truly egalitarian democracy; the society created by it ineluctably disappointed through human shortcomings. Whereas the new American compass pointed in many ways toward social anomie, economic anxiety and a new arena of materialist, individualist competition that dealt in decidedly sharp elbows, camp meetings furnished community *and* self-identity, divine order and purpose, celestial

meaning and assuredness, to say nothing of a temporary but hopeful realm heralding a perfect eternal one.[2] The words of Tocqueville captured some of this fittingly:

> If ever the faculties of the great majority of mankind were exclusively bent upon the pursuit of material objects, it might be anticipated that an amazing reaction would take place in the souls of some men….
>
> It is not then wonderful if, in the midst of a community whose thoughts tend earthward, a small number of individuals are to be found who turn their looks to heaven.

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[2] Two works offer relevant illumination here, one originating in camp meeting literature and the other far afield from it. Ellen Eslinger's *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* identifies camp meetings' impetus in the diverse socio-economic and political anxieties afflicting early Kentuckians: traumatic and all too recent memories of persistent warfare with Native Americans, the British and settlers loyal to Great Britain; bitter and selfish political squabbles on the local, state and national level; not a poverty stricken, but decidedly volatile economic sphere characterized by sharp competition, individualist rather than collectivist pursuits of success, and the difficulties of land acquisition by virtue of speculators' dominant role. *In toto*, this created a surfeit of what legendary sociologist Emile Durkheim designated as "anomie," referring to a lack of order, direction, meaning, and assuredness. Hence, camp meetings provided divine, supernaturalized, spiritual direction, meaning and assurance in place of those traits in society. See Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1999). Also see Emile Durkheim and Anthony Giddens, *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: The Free Press, 1968); Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991); Nikos Passas and Robert Agnew, eds., *The Future Of Anomie Theory* (Lebanon, NH: Northeastern, 1997); Marco Orru, *Anomie: History and Meanings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
Conversely, political sociologist James C. Davies' J-curve theory of revolutions postulates that revolutionary movements are most frequently catalyzed by sharp reversals of progress following a period of dramatic achievement. Essentially, when present reality diverges negatively and sufficiently from expectations generated by a phase of considerable accomplishment, then consequent dissatisfaction facilitates revolution. This theory—one Davies buttresses with considerable historical evidence—can be interestingly applied to camp meetings as being religiously insurrectionary in not only their worship norms and conceptualization of God, but in social structure and relations. The American Revolution generated momentous hopes of a changed, reformed and re-conceptualized world, some of the hopes even appearing in Millennialist guise. However, the world never changes as much as revolutions promise or suggest. They inevitably disappoint supporters, disinherit--*above all*--their most sanguine dreamers, and even fail to deliver on some of their most basic ideals. In this model, rural Americans of the early nineteenth century found themselves frustrated with undelivered secular promises, unavailing political solutions to the world's suffering, and dissatisfied with curtailment of Revolutionary trajectories. Consequently, many embraced a revolutionary religious movement as an alternative means of achieving change, both in the world so far as practicable, and more importantly, in their hearts and souls, as well as in their cosmologies of eternal values, achievement and justice. See James C. Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution," *American Sociological Review* 27, no. 1 (February 1962): 5-19.

> I should be surprised if mysticism did not soon make some advance among a people solely engaged in promoting its own worldly welfare.[3]

Having visited a thrilling camp meeting in 1850s South Carolina, Swedish traveler Fredrika Bremer described her railroad trip back to Charleston along with at least two thousand other pilgrims, among whom African Americans outnumbered whites two to one. As she recorded, "They sang the whole way, and were in high spirits."[4] This vibrant image elicits multiple questions and considerations. First, the apparent racial amity and buoyant African Americans reflect the idealistic, hopeful spirit of camp meetings but also sadly portend the following decades of racial injustice and segregation in American religion and society. The train ride tableau summons not only Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Celestial Railroad* with its depiction of tragic disparity between American technical achievement and socio-religious enlightenment, but also the role that means of travel played in *Plessy vs. Ferguson's* monumental betrayal of egalitarian ideals. Worth noting, however, the African American churches that flowed out of Wesleyanism—the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, African Union (First Colored) Methodist Protestant, Colored Methodist Episcopal (now Christian MEC), and other churches—maintained staunch commitments to early camp meeting style revivalism as well as racial justice in America. Somehow, the insurrectionary nature of the two

[3] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: *Volume II* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 620-621.
[4] Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, tr. Mary Howitt (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue & Co., 1853), 317.

entwined, manifesting likewise among Holiness and Pentecostal sects as they rebelliously diverged from mainstream Methodism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A hundred years after early American camp meetings' heyday, Pentecostalism's foundational Azusa Street Revival recapitulated multiple themes from the forest gatherings—ecstatic worship, seemingly bizarre displays of supernatural influence, physically demonstrative devotions, numinous occurrences, ***and*** defiantly interracial services with preaching by African Americans and women.[5] Press attacks on the unfolding drama at Azusa Street echoed those against early American camp meetings: "…devotees of the weird doctrine practice the most fanatical rites, preach the wildest theories and work themselves into a state of mad excitement in their peculiar zeal… night is made hideous in the neighborhood by the howlings of the worshippers…."[6] Clearly, camp meetings' experimentation with interracial harmony as well as empowerment of women, minorities, the poor and downtrodden survived in all these circles, reminding those willing to listen of radical Christian faith's socially transfigurative potential.

Moreover, the railroad appears somewhat jarringly as the chosen means of conveyance to a woodland religious campout instead of the much more traditional wagons, carriages, horses and even lowly carts. It augurs not only America's

[5] Marne L. Campbell, "'The Newest Religious Sect Has Started in Los Angeles': Race, Class, Ethnicity, and the Origins of the Pentecostal Movement, 1906-1913," *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 1–25.
[6] N. A., "Weird Babel of Tongues," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1906.

technological future, but also simultaneously questions camp meetings' role in that future of easy travel, denser populations and abundant church buildings. As it happened, post-bellum camp meetings adopted relatively fixed locations, many of which featured permanent worship structures and increasingly genteel accommodations, and to which railroads easily transported the weekend faithful or vacationing Methodists. Indeed, conspicuously middle class "camp meetings" such as Ocean Grove, New Jersey's longstanding endeavor showcased the same accoutrements as many Victorian holiday spots while stressing educational services for the already converted as much as conversion.[7] Camp meeting scholar Charles Johnson characterized the latter as "modern vestiges" bearing "only faint resemblance to their frontier predecessors."[8]

So what survived? What themes and practices of camp meetings became central to American Methodism and help in explaining its prominence in nineteenth and twentieth-century America? What aspects of camp meetings remained vital in evangelical worship long after the Second Great Awakening? Given Methodism's numerical predominance since the mid-1800's, its exceptional influence on worship in the

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[7] Troy Messenger, *Holy Leisure: Recreation and Religion in God's Square Mile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Wayne T. Bell, *Ocean Grove* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000); Brenda Parnes, "Ocean Grove: A Planned Leisure Environment," in *Planned and Utopian Experiments, Four New Jersey Towns*, ed. Paul A. Stellhorn (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Historical Commission, 1980), 28-47; Glenn Uminowicz, "Recreation in America: Ocean Grove and Asbury Park, New Jersey, 1869-1914," in *Hard At Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 8-38; Cindy S. Aron, *Working At Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102-111.

[8] Charles Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 251.

United States, plus its eventual position as both an evangelical *and* mainline church, answers to these questions go far in explaining American religion generally.

Significantly, camp meetings provided the cultural institution through which many of the radical and initially suspect religious innovations of the Eighteenth Century's Great Awakening suffused the national consciousness and achieved predominance in evangelical circles. These included outdoor preaching, ministerial itinerancy and clerical celebrity among those who stood in camp meeting pulpits. The gatherings also generated an enduring appeal for spontaneous worship, accessible music and lay exhortation. As discussed above, the camp meeting practice of exhortation by the poor, women and minorities ebbed and flowed as a characteristic of evangelical worship, but never disappeared and eventually became commonplace in many Holiness or Pentecostal services, as well as finally more mainstream Protestant churches. Emotional sermons, heartrending testimonials and passionate congregational responses stood central to camp meetings and remained so ever after in evangelical circles. Further, popular preachers' employment of vernacular speech revolutionized public oratory in many denominations and beyond, while consecration of humble campgrounds generated an American custom of endowing sacralization upon a place, independent of its past or ordinariness. Not least, camp meetings enshrined noisy and boisterous worship that rang with democracy, egalitarianism and hope.

Going further, camp meetings as a social format defined the nature of large American gatherings forevermore through their emphasis on traveling luminaries,

stirring music, American exceptionalism and social if not economic egalitarianism. Collective events have also appropriated the meetings' reliance on kinship ties, establishment of temporary domesticity and fictive kinship, along with celebratory foodways, rites of passage, and multiple venues of entertainment or creativity. Communal ecstasy, group cohesion and personal definition figured significantly in the legendary woodland assemblages and continued afterwards to inform the American style of big, communal happenings. Camp meetings likewise set precedents by featuring powerfully transcendent moments along with opportunities to forge new and supportive relationships while invigorating one's life with a sense of clear purpose and profound meaning. In keeping with American values of individual choice and democracy, freedom of speech and self-determination, camp meetings invited the uninitiated and skeptical while allowing the presence of those who protested or denounced the proceeding. Ironically, these opponents combined with assorted rowdies, tipplers and pleasure seekers in expanding the prospects for expression, entertainment and self-definition that so rollickingly animated the events.

We can see the echoes of camp meetings down through American history, from temperance meetings to Bonnaroo, from Populist rallies to college football Saturdays. They lived on at Seneca Falls and Woodstock, in protests against slavery and marches opposing war in Vietnam or Iraq. Whether among 60s radicals ostensibly challenging American norms, 90s college students supposedly celebrating 60s radicalism by attending Grateful Dead concerts, modern progressives occupying Wall Street along with

that movement's inevitable penumbra of critics, or the Super Bowls of all those decades, the camp meeting tradition continues to resonate in myriad ways as surely as it did at Asuza Street, the Scopes Trial, Billy Graham revivals or the Million Man March.

Camp meetings forged a uniquely American style of transitory community that blazed on in attendees' memories and continued to define participants for years to come—and American public get-togethers ever since. Inarguably successful vehicles for their express purpose of evangelism, the outdoor assemblies also shaped American modes of family reunion and courtship, performance and celebrity, music and public speaking, all the while offering unprecedented avenues for common people's self-assertion and personal meaning. The events also combined three fundamental facets of American culture in an astonishingly rich yet combustible amalgam: freedom of religion, free enterprise and free expression. One could embrace salvation, sell tooth powder, liquor or camping equipment, or not so quietly condemn camp meetings' apparent hypocrisy. Some people did all of these--although with conversion serving as the most likely culminating event. Deeply American, the camp meeting tradition continues to guide us as we gather, providing a compelling and evocative cultural touchstone at the core of American public experience.

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Vita

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