The Transbellum and Traumatic History



How can acts of periodization produce historical frameworks commensurate to the vast trauma and shock of the Civil War?

Where’s Wesley?



Because psalmody was transmitted through a fluid mix of printed books, manuscript compilations, and oral tradition, hymn tunes and texts were frequently mixed and matched, and tune names likewise varied.

Digital Encyclopedias and Opportunities



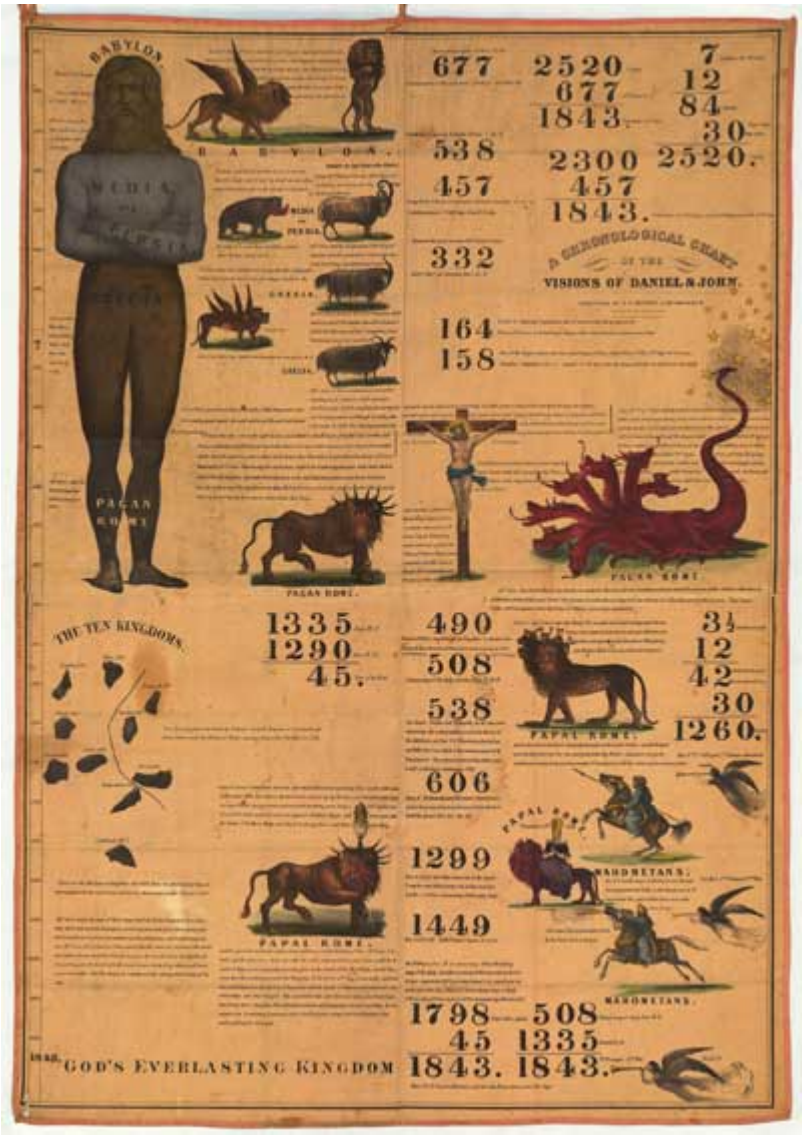
The View from Mount Vernon

Open Letter



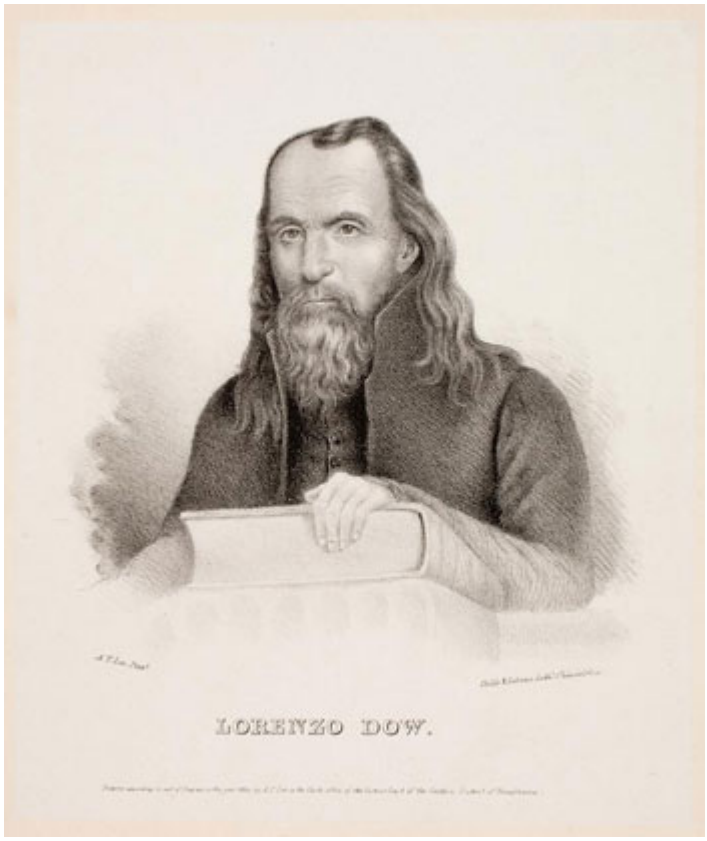
An open letter from Chef Kevin Mitchell to Chef Nat Fuller.

Print and Evangelicalism



I was struck by the thin pamphlet's integration of word and image: in ten engravings, the booklet plotted out the life of the Christian soul.

Editor's Introduction



Historians interested in religion and politics in the early American republic have long seen the American Revolution as the catalyst of profound change, with political independence, disestablishment, and nation building stimulating religious growth. Only recently, however, have historians begun to investigate how conceptions of "religion" and "politics" changed in relation to each other in the aftermath of the Revolution, with religion reshaped in the context of mass politics, and politics freighted with an expanding array of religious interests and competing visions of religion-inflected nationhood. As the eight stimulating essays in this issue show, the meanings of religion and politics moved in several directions at once in the early republic. With multiple versions of the relationship between religion and politics proliferating through cheap print, freedom of expression, and geographic expansion, the religiously splintered, relentlessly politicized construction of national identity was anything but consensual.

> Each one of these lively essays highlights a different aspect of religion's relationship to politics.

Kate Engel's essay on Jedidiah Morse and the Illuminati scare of the 1790s points to the gap between hysterical reactions to religio-political change on one hand, and historical clarity on the other, about exactly what was changing, and how religion and politics operated to mediate it. If the momentous shift toward secularization identified by theorists of American religion began to take shape in the 1790s, where did that shift begin, and how was it related to

what anxious writers like Morse thought was happening?

Kirsten Fischer's essay on the world-traveling philosopher John Stewart calls attention to the heterodox religious ideas coursing through the Atlantic world in the midst of revolutionary political change. Unlike Jedidiah Morse, who upheld biblical revelation and ministerial leadership as essential for social order, Stewart espoused a materialistic form of monism based on respect for the vitalism within matter as the key to both egalitarianism and social order. Stewart's ability to expound on his heretical ideas throughout the early Republic reflected a tolerance for radical new ideas that coexisted with, and perhaps helped inspire, American anxiety about social chaos.

Supporting Fischer's findings about American hospitality to heterodox ideas, Chris Beneke's essay argues that religious coercion in the early republic was relatively minimal. Challenging historians who take the passage of state laws against blasphemy as evidence of the political power evangelicals wielded, Beneke points to the rarity of actual charges of blasphemy, the political freedom Jews and Catholics found, and the general popularity of irreverent and secular thought. While evangelicals developed impressive organizations to promote their religo-political visions, their achievements fell far short of their aspirations.

While Fischer and Beneke highlight the extraordinary political freedom for religious expression that existed in the early republic, Maura Jane Farrelly points to the strong reservations about this freedom expressed by the Roman Catholic Church, and to real tension between religious freedom in the U.S. and nineteenth-century Catholic teaching. While scholars specializing in American Catholic history have long recognized this tension, hyper-vigilance with respect to protestant intolerance has led other scholars to reduce concern about the growing influence of Catholicism in the early republic to simple bigotry.

Eric Schlereth's essay on Robert Dale Owen further complicates historical understanding of the relationship between religion and politics in the early republic, and Catholicism's role in that relationship. Focusing on Robert Dale Owen, a political leader from Indiana with a colorful background in religious infidelity, Schlereth calls attention to the power Owen achieved among Democrats, the political party strongly supported by Catholics. With puritanical Whigs opposed to both Catholics and free thinkers, and Democrats opposed to Whigs, religious combinations operating within party machines help explain Owen's success.

Linford Fisher's essay on "foreign" missions reveals another combination of religious forces with far-reaching political implication. Rooted in European missionary societies active during the colonial period, American missionary societies became bases of America's global outreach in the early republic. Once on the periphery of European empires, America became an imperial center, with missionaries in foreign fields exporting religio-political theories developed

in America along with programs for individual salvation.

Seth Perry's essay on religious performance suggests how fraught with irony such evangelical efforts could be. Focusing on the life of "crazy" Lorenzo Dow, Perry shows how successful Dow became in parading his own apostolic poverty as a critique of the wealth and political authority of religious elites. After amassing considerable property as a result of his success as a religious performer, Dow entertained the idea of establishing a religio-political empire of his own.

Looking into much darker forms of religious interaction with politics, Edward Blum's essay on Satan shows how importantly religious hatred and fear figured in antebellum political discourse. Casting political opponents in league with Satan, both explicitly and by innuendo, not only sharpened differences to the point of denying any possible resolution, but also conjured visions of imminent chaos engulfing all. These appeals to Satan, Blum argues, gave rein to hatred and disorder as they paved the way to war.

Each one of these lively essays highlights a different aspect of religion's relationship to politics. Their diversity illustrates the different directions this relationship took in the early republic, and the historical understanding to be gained by resisting simple ideas about how that relationship worked. No less important, this splendid collection reveals the unstable boundary between religion and politics in the early republic, and the porous character of that boundary as Americans vied with each other to define the nation.

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Automatic Writing and Group #1



Automatic Writing

If, as the scholar claims, a photograph is a sudden death, if the historian's citational practice is cousin to the photographer's, is citation a form of dissection? We can easily picture history's body on the autopsy table, but such metaphor allows us to stop short of mortification, the conceit a kind of body bag shielding us from the corpse. The historian, however, holds in her hand the blade beneath which perforations emerge, each image or fact a spillage issuing from a tissue of forensic interest—proof of what, exactly? An earlier era would have made of the corpse a moral lesson, "its being laid in the dark and silent grave, there putrifying and rotting and becoming exceeding loathsome and being eaten with worms an image of the misery of hell." But we prefer to figure the historical not as corpse but as ghost, saying, with the scholar, "there is no word or image that is not haunted by history." We believe such hauntedness saturates the present and affects the living, and in this sense perhaps all historians are Spiritualists, each asking the material for access to another realm, one outside the archive. Such mediumship is called *sensitivity*, its crucial question not, *Is there life after death*, but where does the outside commence and how do its boundaries touch our own? History now not only behind us, the question allows us to speak of our death long before our death, the photograph a cup held to catch gossip at the parlor door. With it I put my right ear to the archive and hear Martha say: "Mr Billings sends much love to you all, and so does Mrs B says she is very much obliged to Abby for those little socks, they are the prettiest she ever saw—"

Discursive Glance

Photography's Expanded Field

its spine a hinge

between the twenty first and nineteenth centuries

the book in the archive
opens

where history
would have poetry reflect on itself

ghost-image of the frontispiece
kissing its progenitor

through tissue
I write this

not as a lyric subject
but as one subject to another time

faint stain on my countenance
an ink

a logic
like the concept of conscience

continually returning to haunt itself
I mean I am most myself

not as the original
etching

or as the accident
transfer made by age on the title page

but as the tissue
the transparency

that enables history
to make the book a mirror of itself

when its covers close
it touches its own image through me

I can’t say it sees
the philosophy of sleep

fatigued soul
partially withdrawing itself

from physical structure
gathering inwardly

a history
of history reading itself

a willingness to make inroads
into the invisible

evidence
not readily apprehended

by established categories
less a question of the veracity of another world

or time persisting
than of the desire

to visit it
when I close the book

it goes to sleep
touching itself

and begins to dream
pictures

not language
who can say another’s desire is false

tissue between
text and image

each of us enmeshed
with its other

Return

an entire day given over to
headache   a kind of pencil

pierced through the visual field

at the lake in the park an egret

next to the sculpture of an egret
like the rhyme of *sight* and *sign*

one by one the passersby say
“what the hell”   because

I heard my dead father talking

on a cell phone   on the path

behind me   the old man also
wearing his cologne   proves

rhyme is uncanny   one word
haunted by another   sidereal

migrainous aura   I’m crying

rhyme   the concept of the other

in the same   another world in this one
I can find words for only a fragment

Group #1

Dearly belated—we err, we errand where the photographic & the transcendental meet in time & thought. A picture is there even when we can’t see one, the image in the world like the soul sojourns in the body, all the stranger for its latency. Dim at first sight, pleasant in miniature, the woods look subliminal. Pines’ trunks as brown stippled black as the ground of needles is soaked ochre & pricked with green, we turn to stronger light & find the fugitive spirit embodied. The longer we look & the brighter, the more the image seems ours only, a mirror with a memory. The trees, too, seem dearly copied, clear and distinct, but unreal where touched by another. Perhaps it’s there the image most remains to be seen, or it waits there to be developed—it’s hard to say. Perhaps this feeling of monopoly, love, in its selfishness, likes in likeness. Perhaps its grip stains our image of this world.

Discursive Glance

Photography’s Expanded Field

My body on its back—

asleep and yet
not my body

it seemed I was in the world
I was not

Gradually my senses opened
Calm and happy and deeply interested

I was a traveler
and death only a circumstance

I couldn’t see

a road steep into pine country
snow on the ground

white and untrodden
I lost my way

but a stranger directed me
Afterwards I found

the direction wrong
but I’m as sure someone spoke

as I would be if she’d spoken the truth
Incredulity proves nothing

whether recognized or not
whether understood or not

A fact is true
it exists

a piece of the universe
Then it was over

I came back
They brought me up the faded steps

red-patterned with roses
I saw the hat-tree with my old coat

and I listened to their feet
I did not notice or think

I had been left in the cold
and had come back

spasmodically
and in fragments

The windows of my room were open
wind washed in

vast accumulating waves of thought
They say the senses fear death

but I was a mind against matter
Lord—

I had said

Give me solid fact
noise I can hear

motion I see
Move these substantial objects

A table
stir it

A cabinet
open and close it

Let shake
the atmosphere

and earth
As a farmer in church has

his special prayer for rain
so give me

something solid
and I will believe

to be born is the door
to die is the hinge

Open the liminal
and I will go in

Not in This World To See His Face Again

because I tired of what I know
& my manner of knowing it

I looked in at the photograph

outside the window
travel smearing the fields

it is always hard to tell
where the image lies

between departure and arrival

little napkin of smoke
laid over the face of it

I looked in at his sleeping face

history toward which we carried
flowers made of his hair

oh mother how tired I shall be
singing

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This article originally appeared in issue 12.3 (April, 2012).

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Why Institutions Matter



Presented as part of the special Politics Issue

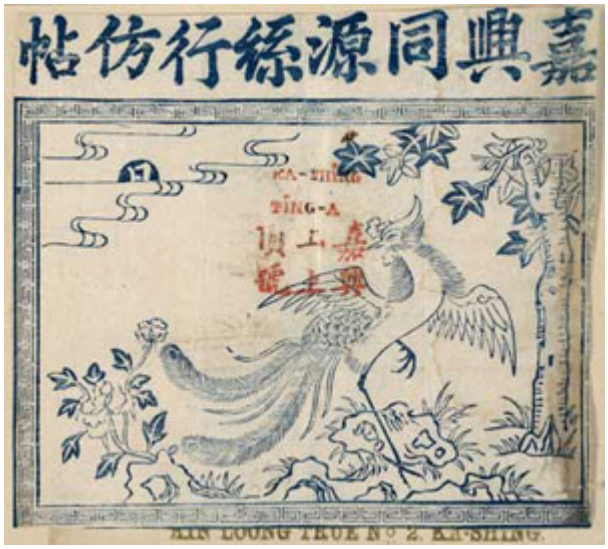
Contingency is in; inexorability is out.

The Haunted Castle: A Connecticut journalist’s journey into the African slave trade



You don’t show up in a predominantly Muslim country during Ramadan and just start asking questions.

Hard Times: The exhibition



Economic panics are telling historical moments that reveal the structural complexities of the interdynamics between the global and local.