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Religious Liberties:
Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy
in U.S. Literature and Culture, 1774-1889

by
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Abstract

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Late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American texts abound with representations of Catholic malevolence. But rather than simply indicating authorial bias against Catholic practitioners, these representations reveal anti-Catholicism’s fundamental importance to the U.S.’s emerging liberal democratic tradition. Catholicism stands in texts of this period at the intersection of the religious and the national, as writers across decades and genres struggle to reconcile liberal democracy’s promises of egalitarianism and tolerance with Catholicism’s ostensibly tyrannical hierarchy and dogmatism. Thus in addition to demarcating a religious identity and set of theological practices, Catholicism has long operated as a test case for the efficacy of liberal democratic notions of privacy, pluralism, and equality. Excavation of U.S. liberal democracy’s religious roots illuminates the ways in which that political tradition has aligned the nation with Protestantism and thereby ensured the mutual dependence, rather than the “separation” we so often take for granted, of church and state.

From the earliest writings of the Continental Congress to the late-nineteenth-century novels of Mark Twain, U.S. discourses of freedom and self-governance construct Catholics as political subjects aiming, as John Jay put it, to “reduce the ancient free Protestant Colonies to the same state of slavery with themselves.” Significantly, the
drama of Protestant-Catholic conflict often played itself out when Anglo-Protestant writers considered the U.S.’s place within the American hemisphere. Thus the passage of the 1774 Quebec Bill inspired contemporary discourses of religious privacy (chapter one); debates over U.S. expansion into western and especially Mexican territories produced discussions of pluralism and representational governance (chapters two and three); and mid-century contemplations if Haitian Catholicism (chapter four) forced many U.S. citizens to confront liberal democracy’s failure to adequately address the fact of racial as well as religious difference within the nation. In its insistence that U.S. political culture cannot be understood apart from anti-Catholicism, this dissertation demonstrates that, in their efforts to construct a religiously free public sphere, proponents of liberal democracy have over time rehearsed a discourse that fuses nation and religion.
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Several years ago, when I was waffling between fields, the late Elizabeth Dietz suggested to me that there might be a project that could unite my seemingly divergent interests in early modern religious conflict and U.S. political rhetoric. Frankly, at the time I was skeptical. But this is that project, and I dedicate it to her memory.
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Americans who happen to be Catholic: Protestant Secularity and U.S. Liberal Democracy

If you vote for Nixon, you ought to go to hell.
--Harry Truman

Former President Harry Truman’s 1960 warning to a San Antonio audience that a vote for Republican Richard Nixon could be grounds for eternal damnation was not only a deviation from the script with which the Kennedy campaign had provided him, but also a conflation of politics and religion strikingly out of place within a speech promoting the separation of church and state. Truman had come to Texas that October to convince Protestant voters that John F. Kennedy’s Catholicism should not stand in the way of his election to the presidency. Kennedy’s Catholicism had been a hot-button issue since the Democratic primaries, and as Election Day approached opponents of his campaign grew more vicious in their attacks.¹ In early September, the National Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom (NCCRF) compared Kennedy to Nikita Khrushchev in a front-page New York Times article also declaring that the “actions and policies of the Catholic Church have given Protestants legitimate grounds for concern about having a Catholic in the White House” (qtd. in Massa, 77). Though Nixon did nothing to silence such criticism of his opponent, neither did he ever make a serious attempt to marshal anti-Catholicism against the Massachusetts senator. In fact, throughout the 1960 campaign Nixon insisted that he was not trying to capitalize on his Protestantism and accused Kennedy of converting religion into a political issue. Still, in San Antonio, Truman went for the Protestant jugular. Accusing the Nixon camp of subscribing to the “un-American” principle of religious intolerance, he presented Kennedy as a potential victim of discrimination and configured the Democrat’s campaign as a test case for the U.S. electorate’s commitment to religious pluralism. Ironically, Truman’s own words
simultaneously assert the secularity of the U.S. political sphere and assign a religious—
moreover, a specifically Christian—significance to the individual’s ballot box decision.
A vote for Nixon, Truman argues, is a vote for religious establishment; and a vote for
religious establishment, he suggests, is a sin.

Truman’s religious defense of Kennedy was one of many launched by the Democrats during the 1960 campaign. Indeed, throughout his presidential run, Kennedy frequently made an example out of his own Catholicism when outlining his theory of religion’s relationship to the body politic. Responding to accusations that he would be obligated to enforce Vatican edicts rather than U.S. laws, in a speech delivered to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association on 12 September, 1960, Kennedy insisted:
“contrary to common newspaper usage, I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I
am the Democratic Party’s candidate for President who happens also to be a Catholic. I
do not speak for my church on public matters—and the church does not speak for me.”

In the nearly five decades since Kennedy defeated then Vice President Nixon, scholars across disciplines have struggled to define what his electoral victory meant for mid-
twentieth-century U.S. politics and what it still means for the relationship between
religion and the state, given the fact that no Catholic has since repeated Kennedy’s
success. At the heart of debate over the 1960 presidential race is the question of whether
Kennedy’s candidacy reshaped U.S. public culture—forcing previously impossible
alliances between Catholics, Jews, and African American Protestants—or whether public
culture reshaped Kennedy—forcing him to abdicate his Catholic convictions in favor of a
political rhetoric that effectively rendered him irreligious. For the purposes of this
project, however, the demographic and personal effects of Kennedy’s campaign are less
important than the language he chose to deploy when discussing the relationship between his Catholic practice and his desire to embody the executive power of U.S. liberal democracy. Having asserted in his Houston speech that he “believe[s] in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute,” Kennedy attempts to reproduce that separation on his own political body. His distinction between “a Catholic candidate” and “a candidate for President who happens also to be Catholic” thus stands simultaneously as a distinction between public life and private belief. Having relegated his Catholicism to the realm of privacy, Kennedy makes a case for his capacity to represent the people.

Kennedy’s decision to present himself as a privately religious public man is perhaps not surprising, because the relationship between church and state in the U.S. has been configured since the era of nation-formation as a relationship between the private (church) and the public (state). Thus when countering accusations that no Catholic could separate belief from action, Kennedy drew on a longstanding tradition of U.S. political discourse that seemingly separates church and state by situating religion within the private sphere. Mark Massa has recently argued that in positioning himself as a candidate who “happened to be Catholic,” Kennedy “outlined the most private model of piety’s place in public life ever advanced by a presidential candidate until Michael Dukakis” (99). Hyperbolic as its phrasing may be, Massa’s assertion usefully brings to light the fact that Kennedy worked hard at presenting his religion as a political non-issue, stating over and over again that how he prayed would have nothing to do with how he governed. Massa presents Kennedy’s recourse to privacy as recourse to secularism—titling the final section of his chapter on the former president “Profiles in Secularization” to communicate his sense of Kennedy’s cowardice (96). “Kennedy’s razor-thin
victory,\textsuperscript{4} Massa argues, "ushered in the end of ideology—religious ideology included"
(99). While I agree with Massa's assertion that Kennedy's success owed far more to his
self-alignment with religious privacy than to any wide-sweeping change in U.S. attitudes
toward Catholicism, I would argue that his equation of "secularization" with "the end of
ideology" not only elides the fact that secularism is an ideological position but also, and I
think more dangerously, renders invisible the longstanding links between Protestantism
and U.S. conceptions of the secular. In other words, even as he accuses Kennedy of
sidelining religion, Massa evokes a political tradition that, as I will demonstrate, is rooted
in assumptions of Protestant primacy. Through excavation of liberal democracy's
religious roots, my project illuminates the ways in which it has aligned the nation with
Protestantism and thereby ensured the mutual dependence, rather than the "separation"
we so often take for granted, of church and state.

While in our own contemporary moment the question of church and state may
seem a general one involving all religions, I would argue that Catholicism is an ideal site
through which to interrogate the parameters of U.S. liberal democracy, because it stands
in many texts at the intersection of the religious and the national. U.S. anti-Catholic
discourse draws on the long tradition of post-Reformation anti-Catholicism to construct
the "Catholic" as being both hyper-private—bearing a secret and unknowable interior—
and hyper-public—concealing that interior with visible but deceptive ritual. In U.S.
contexts, the split Catholic subject takes on political as well as religious significance and
comes to represent a threat to civil liberties, as writers across decades and genres struggle
to reconcile liberal democracy's promises of egalitarianism and tolerance with
Catholicism's ostensibly tyrannical hierarchy and dogmatism. The symbiotic relationship
between liberal democracy and Protestant theology is thus most clearly evident in U.S. discourses of anti-Catholicism, and Catholicism offers an opportunity to reexamine the liberal logics of privacy and individualism that have long structured U.S. discussions of pluralism, equality, and national solidarity. Charting the echoes of the Continental Congress's characterization of Catholicism as "dangerous in an extreme degree to the Protestant religion and to the civil rights and liberties of all America" through later writings by figures such as Catharine Sedgwick and Herman Melville, I show how discursive constructions of the "Catholic" bring the tenuous balance (or imbalance) between church and state to light. By equating tyranny with papacy, writers of this period were often able to forge convincing arguments for liberal equality based in secular policies and the proliferation of a national democracy. But these demands for religious freedom and equal justice were based in a rhetoric that assumed citizenship to be "Protestant" and thus denied full civic status to "Catholic" subjects. As a result, I would argue, the "Catholic" has long facilitated the production of a discourse through which the imagined but never realized separation of church and state upon which U.S. liberal democracy depends is maintained.

The coding of religion as private and state as public in the U.S. stems from what liberal political theorists such as Richard Rorty often refer to as the Jeffersonian or Enlightenment compromise, which allows for religious belief in liberal society as long as an individual's religious practice does not interfere with the lives of others (Rorty, 169). Because the U.S. lacks legislation clearly dividing church and state, this "compromise" stands in for national secularization by constructing religion as an individual rather than social concern and thus ostensibly removing it from public life. But though it may seem
natural to separate religion from the state by making it a matter of personal conscience, I would argue that the Enlightenment compromise does not offer a general freedom of religion guaranteed by an irreligious state but rather in the U.S. has tacitly defined the state as "Protestant" in order to secure the liberal democratic principles of individual freedom, plurality, representational government, and egalitarianism. In other words, although it seems to deftly manage the church/state question by granting individuals the right to private religious choice, in its conflation of "separate" and "private" U.S. liberal democracy does not simply fail to legally divide church and state, but rather it renders them mutually constitutive. Protestant notions of individuality place limits on state power, and the state in turn constructs citizenship in terms of Reformed theology. The liberal public sphere can thus be read as a site upon which citizenship—regardless of the specifics of individual belief or non-belief—is necessarily configured as "Protestant." Thus when Kennedy articulated his position as that of a candidate who "happened to be Catholic," he was in effect announcing himself to be a Protestantized Catholic—a Catholic who was, by virtue of his commitment to U.S. liberal democracy, "not Catholic."

* * * * * * *

Until very recently, religion had almost ceased to be a concern for critics working in the field of U.S. literary studies. Perhaps because criticism that does take up this topic has traditionally operated within a model of U.S. exceptionalism, or perhaps because literary scholars assume religion to be an issue important solely to the religious, in the
past three decades the field has produced few sustained studies of religion's centrality to U.S. public culture. Thus this project's roots lie in the work of critics such as Perry Miller, Nathan Hatch, and Sacvan Bercovitch. Often, and rightly, accused of promoting exceptionalism and eliding the problem of U.S. empire-building while equating "high culture" and citizenship with white masculinity, these critics nonetheless recognized early on the inextricable links between religious discourse and the formation of national identities. Still, despite their careful attention to the nuances of religious and political rhetoric, these critics at times tacitly and at times explicitly construct the U.S. as a Protestant nation. Bercovitch's analysis of the Jeremiad makes no mention of Catholicism, even though the Puritanism upon which he bases his analysis of U.S. culture often defined itself in opposition to the Catholic Church and its High Protestant progeny. And in the introduction to his seminal study of democracy and eighteenth-century Christianity, Hatch writes, "Although Roman Catholicism in this period experienced a measure of democratic ferment, this book has an explicit Protestant focus in order to trace the rise of a full-fledged populist clergy," suggesting that Catholicism does not warrant serious discussion in a study of U.S. democracy (12). Thus even in foundational studies of the relationship between U.S. religious traditions and political philosophy, Catholicism appears as a marginal concern—if, indeed, it appears at all. Taking seriously Anglo-Protestant imaginings of the Catholic from the era of nation-formation into the nineteenth century, this project demonstrates that anti-Catholicism is a fundamental though overlooked feature of U.S. politics and shows how the liberal democratic tradition emerged out of a discourse that constructed the nation as "free" by placing it at odds with the Catholic.
Critical work that does place the Catholic at the center of inquiry—most notably histories of Catholic immigrant experience and anti-Catholic discrimination, as well as the recent literary scholarship of Jenny Franchot and Susan Griffin—emphasize its importance to Protestant identity formation but tend to elide its shaping influence on U.S. politics. In other words, scholars have not assessed Catholicism’s role in the construction of the very public culture from which it has been traditionally excluded. This critical silence may stem from the tendency to treat Catholicism as an identity rather than a flexible category not necessarily bound to specific bodies. Such an equation, I would argue, forces scholars to attribute anti-Catholicism to Protestant animosity toward Catholic religious practice, thereby rendering opaque the discourse’s centrality to discussions of secularism and the liberal democratic state. In other words, this project suggests that by equating discourses of the “Catholic” with actually Catholic people, scholars of anti-Catholicism have equated U.S. liberal democracy with Protestantism and treated that political system simply as something to which Catholics deserve equal access and within which they deserve equal representation. This line of criticism leaves the underlying premises of the liberal democratic model intact and thus inadvertently maintains the sense that universal citizenship can be achieved through equalized access to Protestant conceptions of private and public space. It also has the potential to perpetuate discussions of U.S. religion that privilege Christianity, because it renders Protestantism the default inroad to civic life. Thus although my work draws heavily on the field of Catholic history, in treating Catholicism as a discursive category rather than an embodied identity, Religious Liberties excavates the U.S. liberal democratic tradition’s religious
roots and casts a critical eye on the discourses of tolerance and pluralism that have long sustained it.

I use the term “liberalism” to refer to the long tradition of political philosophy—stemming in part from the social contract theories of thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau—that places the autonomous individual at the center of political and social concern. Locke imagined humans to be “naturally in . . . a state of perfect freedom to order their actions,” as well as in a “state . . . of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another” (101). Reciprocity thus facilitates the liberal social contract: civil society is properly achieved when individual subjects mutually agree upon—that is, freely enter into contract to abide by—certain norms or laws. “Liberal democracy” extends the reach of reciprocity to government itself, as citizens are imagined to be consensual participants in the construction of the state, which in turn works to further their interests. John Rawls, for example, defines the ideal liberal democratic state as one granting “an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system for all” (Theory, 302). Liberalist thinkers have over time articulated a variety of theories about the relationship between state and subject.10 Rather than representing a monolithic system of thought, the liberal paradigm encompasses a range of theoretical, political, and economic positions. As critics and historians of liberalism have noted, late-eighteenth-century liberal thinking, characterized in part by debates over the relationship between individual rights and responsibilities, drew its force not only from social contract theory but also from evolving notions of Christian virtue and the Scottish Enlightenment’s construal of the economic man.11 This project will evaluate the ways in which anti-Catholicism contributed to the
development of this tradition in the early and nineteenth-century U.S., arguing that the seemingly natural liberal democratic ideals of privacy, pluralism, and representational equality grew in part out of a discursive tradition that positioned the individual subject against the dogmatic power of the Catholic Church.

Hatch has not been alone in his assessment of Catholicism as a force antithetical—or at least peripheral—to liberal democracy. In fact, one of the reasons Catholicism has received such spotty attention from literary critics and scholars of U.S. politics alike is that the anti-Catholic discourse of the period I am examining continues to frame current discussions about liberal democracy. Rawls, for example, presents Catholicism as the foil for his concept of “political liberalism.” Making his case for pluralism’s power to stave off factional violence, Rawls writes, “In the society of the Middle Ages, or less united in affirming the Catholic faith, the Inquisition was not an accident” (Political Liberalism, 37). Rawls could have chosen any system demanding absolute homogeneity among its followers—Nazism, for example, comes to mind—and he chose the Catholic Church, suggesting that whatever else liberalism might be it is not Catholic. Similarly, in his work on Supreme Court jurisprudence, Sanford Levinson uses the word “catholic” to refer to “definitive” interpretations of the constitution and argues that it would be more appropriate for Constitutional theorists to take a “protestant” approach—“protestant” here meaning a flexible approach open to the possibilities of difference and willing to celebrate plurality. Though not an attack on Catholicism per se, Levinson’s work presents it as the testing ground for U.S. legal theory, suggesting that it is the sticking point of liberal politics. The same might be said of Phillip Hamburger, whose sprawling history of church-state relations recognizes the importance of anti-
Catholicism to the rise of liberal politics and yet refers to the “gradual Americanization of Catholics,” as if Catholic and “American” identities were naturally at odds with each other. In its focus on representations of Catholicism and their relationship to the tenants of liberalism, this project brings to light the unexamined critical assumption that Catholicism really is a force with which U.S. liberal democracy must contend and shows how that assumption has over time produced a culture in which peaceful secularism appears simply as the absence of the Catholic.

At stake in this excavation of Catholicism’s centrality to U.S. politics is further reassessment of the concepts of privacy and individuality that have traditionally underpinned the liberal democratic model. Michael Warner’s *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) offers perhaps the most comprehensive genealogy of public sphere theory to date. This important body of criticism, as Warner notes, has at once sought to complicate the public/private divide and to imagine a relationship between public and private that would secure safety, civil rights, and avenues of political participation for women and sexual minorities. And yet, despite years of work dedicated to highlighting the fallacy of separate spheres logic, when it comes to religion scholars frequently retreat into the imagined safety of privacy. Because it has so long neglected the issue of religion, I would argue, scholarship on U.S. public culture tends to valorize the public, treating it as the ideal site of free and democratic exchange. Russ Castronovo and Dana Nelson’s recent collection *Materializing Democracy*, for example, begins with a call to “return democracy to the political” and divest it of private moralizing. Warner, too, seeks to revitalize public space in “Zones of Privacy,” arguing that the loss of public sex outlets relegates sexual identity to the realm of the heterosexist private. While I
sympathize with Warner's position and find his treatment of the public useful, I would argue that he does not sufficiently consider the public's history as a site of exclusion and thus gives too much credence to the notion that public space is the bastion of democracy. It may be for this reason that Warner's arguments for sexual liberation mirror the writings of J. Judd Owen, who evokes notions of "liberal rationalism" to argue that the development of national morality depends upon the construction of a more religiously-infused public culture.¹⁶ The interest in public culture shared by Warner's ostensibly radical sexual politic and Owen's more conservative religious one reveals a blind spot in arguments that treat the public as the inroad to egalitarian exchange—namely the fact that the very concept of the public in the U.S. has always depended upon a discourse of anti-Catholic exclusion that assumes privacy to be the prerogative of the Protestant.

Though undeniably concerned with how Anglo-Protestant writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries conceived the liberal democratic tradition vis-à-vis the Catholic, in its focus on representations of the U.S.'s position within its continental locale Religious Liberties draws on critical work interested in theorizing "America" as hemisphere rather than nation. In the past decade, scholars across the humanities have attempted to come to grips not only with the history of U.S. colonial aggression around the American continents but also with the ways in which the field of American studies has contributed to the imperial project by rehearsing the rhetoric of U.S. exceptionalism. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease's Cultures of United States Imperialism (1993) initiated the critical movement now generally referred to as Trans- or Post-national American study, and since the 1990s critics from various disciplines have worked to re-infuse the signifier "America" with continental significance.¹⁷ This approach is especially useful
for a project interested in Catholicism, not only because religion is in general a transnational phenomenon, but also because since its inception the U.S. has been perceived by many Anglo-Protestants as the lone Protestant nation in a Catholic hemisphere. Thus although I focus my analyses on literary and political works produced by U.S. nationals, each chapter of this dissertation examines texts concerned with the ostensibly Protestant country’s relationship to extra-national spaces identified as “Catholic.” Taking seriously eighteenth- and nineteenth-century understandings of the U.S.’s connection to French Canada, the unincorporated western frontier, Mexico, and Haiti, this project demonstrates that the U.S. liberal democratic tradition has never been a purely inward-looking, Anglo-Protestant construction but rather always has been engaged with debates about Catholicism’s role within the broader context of the American hemisphere.

Building on Jay Grossman’s recent assertion that studies of the nineteenth century must take into account the discursive traditions established in the early national era, this project charts anti-Catholic discourse from the late-colonial era through the nineteenth century. Each chapter examines works across genres to show how anti-Catholicism mediated liberal democratic crises such as the rise of pluralism, national expansion, and war. My first chapter, “Birth of a Protestant Nation: Catholic Canadians, Religious Pluralism, and National Unity in the Early U.S. Republic,” charts the founding and enduring relevance of the seemingly insignificant Quebec Act of 1774 to the process of U.S. nation-formation. Through the Quebec Act, George III extended the southern border of what had been French Canada and granted its residents rights to self-government and Roman Catholic practice. Following the act’s passage, revolutionaries
argued that the extension of Quebec into the lower colonies signaled an alliance between the English monarchy and papal hierarchy. The chapter’s first section analyzes the Continental Congress’s responses to the act’s legalization of Catholicism in colonial Quebec to show that the concept of national religious pluralism that undergirds U.S. liberal democracy emerged from an anti-Catholic discourse that positioned “Protestantism” as the guarantor of religious liberty. I then turn to the writings of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison to show how in the early national era the figure of the Catholic embodied the potential horror of both national and international religious establishment. I argue that as the discourse of national religious liberty forged during the Quebec crisis evolved into one of personal religious liberty, representations of Catholicism allowed political theorists to shift the burden of separating church and state from the state onto the religious “choices” of private citizens.

Recognizing this political history’s formative influence on U.S. literature, my second chapter, “Strangers in the Text: Democratic Expansion and the Roots of U.S. Nativism,” argues that early fictional representations of Catholic tyranny laid the groundwork for the U.S.’s emerging Nativist culture. As I demonstrate, early national novels participated in ongoing political discussions about the relationship between national pluralism, territorial expansion, and the future of democracy through their figurations of the Catholic. Tracking an anti-Catholic logic from James Madison’s Federalist theories, through early national novels such as Charles Brockden Brown’s Wieland (1798), Tabitha Gilman Tenny’s Female Quixotism (1801), and Catharine Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie (1827), and finally to Lyman Beecher’s infamous Nativist polemic A Plea for the West (1837), this chapter highlights anti-Catholicism’s centrality
to early national conceptions of pluralism. In charting this previously unrecognized discursive genealogy, the chapter revises scholarly accounts of the Nativist movement of the 1830s and 40s, which have tended to attribute that movement’s inception to rising Catholic immigration rates. Placing these novels within the context of contemporary concerns about democracy’s potential degradation into majoritarianism and the frontier’s capacity to convert individual difference into national cohesion, this chapter reads the figure of the Catholic as both an embodiment of early national fears of democracy’s limits and a critique of its dependence on perpetual territorial expansion. What Beecher’s *Plea* shares with the narrative literature that precedes, I argue, is a sense that the frontier simultaneously bears the promise of democratic expansion and the possibility of becoming Catholicized space. His work can thus be read not as a simple reaction to a sudden influx of Catholic bodies, but rather as part of a long line of cultural productions evincing anxiety over the new nation’s capacity to encompass difference.

Chapter three, “Democracy’s Crusade: The Crisis of Representation in Writings of the Mexican War,” brings this literary and political history to bear on the U.S.’s 1846 invasion of Mexico, arguing that the anti-Catholic discourse of earlier periods underpinned justifications of violent U.S. territorial expansion. While numerous scholarly works have brought to light the ways in which narratives of race and nation furthered the imperial project during this era, far less attention has been paid to religion’s complex role in U.S. accounts of the Mexican War. Through readings of the pro-war news editorials and literary works such as George Lippard’s *Legends of Mexico* as well as the anti-war dispatches of Margaret Fuller, I show that writers on both sides of the war debate—whether they viewed it, as Fuller did, as an affront to democracy or as, in the
case of Lippard, an opportunity for the southwestward spread of U.S. Protestant and democratic forms—marshaled anti-Catholic rhetoric to make a case for the sanctity of liberal democracy. However, even as war discourse generally promoted the primacy of U.S. governmental forms, the U.S.’s forceful acquisition of lands already populated with Catholic subjects generated debate not only over the foreign Catholic’s capacity to adapt to liberal democracy but also, and more importantly, over the efficacy of liberal democracy itself. In other words, the Mexican War marks a significant turning point at which Anglo-American Protestants favoring and disparaging the war alike were forced to confront not only the specter of a new kind of citizen imagined, because Catholic, to be inassimilable to the U.S.’s liberal democratic system, but also the limits of the pluralist and representational logics that underpinned that very system.

In its readings of two very familiar, canonical texts, my final chapter, “Following the Leader: Anti-Catholicism and the Failure of Pluralism in Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Benito Cereno,” demonstrates that the anti-Catholic logic long buttressing U.S. conceptions of equality ultimately contributed to antebellum writers’ confrontation with the democratic state’s dependence upon slavery. Throughout the pre-war period, abolitionist writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe frequently compared the slave system to the Catholic Church in hopes that such comparison would motivate readers suspicious of Catholicism to take steps toward emancipating black Americans. Anti-Catholicism, in other words, formed the foundation of the fantasy that slavery was not an essential component of the U.S. liberal democratic system but rather an aberration, an incursion of Catholic-style injustice into an otherwise just system of Protestant egalitarianism. Recognizing the prominent position Haiti and its revolution held in the minds of Anglo-
Protestant Americans contemplating the prospect of African American liberty, this chapter reads Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* alongside Melville’s *Benito Cereno* and argues that the action of both novels turns on representations of that island’s Catholicism. But where Stowe’s narrative in the end constructs African American citizenship as a product of the rejection of Haiti and its black Catholicism, Melville keeps the specter of Haiti center-stage while representing the failure of communal bonds and the insurmountable divides produced by religious and racial difference. Thus, I argue, although Stowe and Melville equally engage with the antebellum project of aligning slavery with the Catholic and liberty with the Protestant, where Stowe finds hope in such a project, Melville finds only the end point of liberal politics.

While numerous studies of anti-Catholicism have demonstrated its centrality to the development of Protestant identity, this project is the first to unearth the discourse’s seminal and lasting influence on the U.S. liberal democratic tradition. Rather than simply demarcating a religious identity or theological practice, Catholicism has long operated as a test case for the efficacy of liberal democratic notions of privacy, pluralism, and equality. Conceived of as a force of intolerance and cruelty, Catholicism stands at the imagined edge liberal democracy, a threat to the pluralist state both because it is itself a rigid hierarchy antithetical to equality and because it demands recognition. The Catholic therefore represents that which the liberal state must never become—a coercive system of dogmatic absolutism that threatens the sovereignty of individual conscience—but it also paradoxically represents that which the egalitarian state must accommodate—difference of belief, of practice, of opinion. In its insistence that U.S. political culture cannot be understood apart from anti-Catholicism, this project demonstrates that, in their efforts to
construct a religiously free public sphere, proponents of liberal democracy have over time rehearsed a discourse that fuses nation and religion. The liberal democratic state, though imagined as one that separates religion from politics, has always already been defined in religious terms as "not Catholic." Its promises of equal dignity among different citizen-subjects are therefore inseparable from the logic of religious exclusion, and its promise of a free public sphere is in effect a promise of universal privacy. Thus religion becomes liberty in the U.S., and Protestantism becomes freedom, and the state becomes secular by keeping the Vatican at bay.
NOTES

1. Kennedy's detractors counted among them the prominent Protestant ministers Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale, founder of the NCCRF (which would come to be known as The Peal Group). For a detailed account of their deployment of anti-Catholicism against Kennedy and of the Kennedy campaign's response, see Thomas Carty (esp. chapter three) and Mark Massa (esp. chapter six).

2. It is worth noting that the only serious Catholic presidential candidate since Kennedy, John Kerry, framed his conception of the relationship between religion and public service by quoting Kennedy's Houston speech during his 13 October, 2004 presidential debate with the evangelical Protestant incumbent, George W. Bush. Misquoting his predecessor only slightly, Kerry asserted: "As President Kennedy said when he ran for president, he said, 'I'm not running to be a Catholic president. I'm running to be a president who happens to be Catholic'... And I think that everything you do in public life has to be guided by your faith, affected by your faith, but without transferring it in any official way to other people" ("Third Bush-Kerry Debate").

3. Historians such as Philip Gleason and Charles R. Morris have read the Kennedy election as both a sign of U.S. culture's increasing religious tolerance and as a mark of Catholic assimilation into U.S. society. In contrast, Mark Massa's most recent work on Catholicism and U.S. culture asserts that public life forced Kennedy to adopt a secularism at odds with traditional Catholic commitments and suggests that the price Kennedy paid for election—the disavowal of his religious beliefs—indicates the ongoing centrality of anti-Catholicism in the U.S. political arena. In a work committed to unhinging the often tacit polarization of Catholicism and "Americanism," John McGreevy argues that it was
not simply Protestant religiosity that structured opposition to Kennedy's campaign, but also the rise of a liberal intellectual movement that understood Catholicism to be antithetical to scientific empiricism.

4. Though Kennedy was the clear Electoral College victor, he won the popular vote by just over 118,000 votes—the narrowest margin since Woodrow Wilson's 1916 defeat of Charles Evans Hughes.

5. Although its first amendment prohibits both the establishment of a national religion and federal interference into individual religious practice, the Constitution does not declare the U.S. to be a secular nation. In fact, the phrase “separation of church and state” comes not from the Constitution itself but rather from Thomas Jefferson's 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, in which he argued that the first amendment had built “a wall of separation between church and state.” It is worth noting that in recent years some U.S. politicians have called into question the notion that the first amendment protects U.S. citizens from religion. During his bid for the vice-presidency in 2000, for example, Florida Senator Joseph Lieberman called for a return of religion to the public sphere, arguing that the bill of rights makes no provision for “freedom from religion.” President George W. Bush echoed this call in his 2004 State of the Union Address, in which he announced his intent to open up public funds to “faith-based” charitable initiatives and urged Congress to amend the Constitution in order to protect the “sacred” institution of marriage from homosexuals.

6. See also Bodo, Cochran, and Heimert. Of more general value to this project have been recent religious histories of the U.S. such as those by Fink and Stark, Gaustad and Smith, Noll, and Bonomi.
7. See, for example, Kaplan's critique of Miller in *Cultures of United States Imperialism.*

8. Studies by Ignatiev, Fisher, and Gillis offer broad historical pictures of Catholic immigration and community-formation in the U.S., as well as insight into how different Catholic immigrant communities assimilated into U.S. public culture. Hueston's analysis of the Catholic press's efforts to respond to Nativist attacks is also useful in this context. I am, further, indebted to the accounts of anti-Catholic and Nativist public policy by Billington, Roy, Jenkins, Massa, and Higham.

9. Although this project centers around anti-Catholic discourse and is thus partly concerned with the ways in which texts construct and use a religious Other, it is not an identity politics project. Rather than discussing the bodies and lived experiences of people who identify as Catholic or the set of material practices that constitute Catholic religious performance, I will focus on the socially constructed site of discursive exchange signified by the word "Catholic." My thinking in this vein owes much to Rey Chow's definition of the Other as a site of representation rather than displacement. The payoff of this approach is its resistance to easy, identity-based explanations of animosity. If the "Catholic" need not be described only as a foil for the "Protestant," then it becomes possible to theorize anti-Catholicism's role in non-religious sectors. Thus rather than treating Catholics as the people against whom Protestants define themselves, my project will consider how the "Catholic" as an idea facilitates the construction of a national discourse of liberal democracy. I should note that I am equally invested in treating Protestantism as a discursive category rather than a fixed identity or set of beliefs. Juster and Macfarlane's work nicely points out the fact that Protestantism is a constructed category informed by the discourses of race and gender.
10. While it would be impossible to generate a comprehensive list of works on the liberalist framing of self and society, a few studies are of particular use to this project. Rawls's *Political Liberalism* offers an important revision of his own earlier work to argue that modern society's should organize around a universally accepted, political concept of justice (rather than the shared "moral beliefs" he argued for in *A Theory of Justice*).

Andrew Murphy's discussion of social contract theory highlights its fraught relationship to religious tolerance and individual belief. Also useful within the context of this project are K. Anthony Appiah's, Seyla Benhabib's, and Martha Nussbaum's recent works on the links between self, identity, and community. Amy Gutmann's edited collection *Freedom of Association* addresses the critical silence surrounding the question of association within the liberal democratic paradigm, and Mark Warren argues in *Democracy and Association* that liberal democratic systems thrive only when the individuals comprising them engage in a variety of associative practices. Important recent critiques of liberal conceptions of the self include Carole Pateman's and Charles Mills's convincing assertions that social contract theory and liberalism have traditionally relied upon the logics of patriarchy and white supremacy; Amy McCready's "The Ethical Individual," which argues for a rethinking of the self along the lines of "conscience" rather than liberal individualism; and Wendy Brown's *Politics out of History*, which offers a critique of the discourse of "rights" that characterizes much liberalist discourse.

11. James Kloppenberg argues, for example, that tensions within the traditions of Christianity, Republicanism, and free-market economics allowed Americans of the late-eighteenth century to craft a liberal discourse centered on a broad notion of virtue (see chapter two). Joyce Appleby offers insight into the intersections of liberalism and
revolution, pointing out, among other things, the ways in which twentieth-century liberalism has shaped contemporary critical understandings of revolution. Other useful accounts of the contested place of liberalism in the eighteenth century include Ian Shapiro’s analysis of Hobbes and Locke, which importantly revises C. B. Macpherson’s notion of possessive individualism; and John Dunn’s more recent work on the history of political theory.

12. The essays in R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach’s edited collection offers several different contexts for thinking about Catholicism and liberalism. The volume as a whole suggests that, rather than operating outside of or in opposition to the liberal tradition, Catholic theology and practice have significantly shaped U.S. political philosophy.

13 In more recent work on the problem of diversity within the liberal democratic state, Levinson unpacks the “implications of the subsuming of religious identities within the more secular—or at least nonsectarian—culture of American constitutionalism” by analyzing the confirmation hearings of Catholic nominees to the Supreme Court (Wrestling, 193). I would suggest that Levinson’s impulse to play out the drama of conflict between religion and the state on the bodies of Catholic jurists is no accident and in fact betrays a suspicion typical of liberal political theorists that Catholic belief and practice really do stand in opposition to the “secular—or at least nonsectarian” realm of U.S. democracy. In line with Massa, Levinson argues that jurists identified as Catholic, like Kennedy, “have been forced to proclaim the practical meaninglessness of their identification” (194).
14. It would be impossible to list the entire corpus of work on the development of public space and the private sphere, but important early studies include those by Habermas and Hartz. Also useful within this context is Calhoun’s edited collection on the Habermasian public sphere. For useful accounts of women and public culture, see: Levander, Berlant, Kelly, and Ryan; Warner and Berlant’s work on public sex; and Kaplan’s analysis of the complex and mutually constitutive relationship between the “domestic” and the “foreign.”

15. Russ Castronovo and Dana Nelson, eds. *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*. (Durham: Duke, 2002). Wai Chee Dimock does briefly take up the question of religion in her contribution to this collection, but she does so mainly to debunk the Kantian idea that individuals relate to each other in society through mutual “contracts” with an omnipotent God. Dimock’s quite convincing argument is that the notion of a third-party God prevents people from forging direct ethical “contracts” with each other.

16. Although the theoretical basis of his argument is what he calls “liberal rationalism,” Owen’s claim is similar to the one Gedicks, who argues that that the privatization of religion has created a United States public unequipped to deal with the vagueness of the First Amendment.

17. For more on the transnational move in Americanist inquiry, see: Rowe’s *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism,* and *The New American Studies* as well as his edited collection, *Post-Nationalist American studies;* Giles’s *Virtual Americas;* and Brickhouse’s *Transamerican Literary Relations.* Also of interest in this vein are the recent special issues of *PMLA: America: The Idea, the Literature* (118.1) and *The
Radical History Review: Our Americas: Political and Cultural Imaginings (89). The founding of a new journal, Comparative American Studies, dedicated solely to critical work deploying a hemispheric methodology further speaks to the volume of interest in this developing methodology.
Birth of a Protestant Nation:

Catholic Canadians, Religious Pluralism, and National Unity in the Early Republic

Canada acceding to this confederation, and adjoining in the measures of the United States, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this Union; but no other colony shall be admitted into the same, unless such admission be agreed to by nine states.

(Articles of Confederation, art. 11)

Article XI of the Articles of Confederation—drafted in 1777 and ratified four years later—grants special status to the province of Quebec by providing for its immediate admission into the federation of American states.¹ That the Continental Congress would extend this open door offer to Quebec is perhaps not surprising, given that since its inception in 1774 the congress had made several attempts, both diplomatic and military, to incorporate the northern colony. Traditional accounts of late-eighteenth-century American relations attribute these attempts, Article XI among them, to fear that a revolution against Great Britain could not succeed in the absence of hemispheric alliance.² Within this context, Article XI appears as a final effort at conciliation, a measure taken in the midst of war to secure intra-continental peace. Viewed in another light, however, the article seems to serve a very different function. Conceded to the British Empire by France in 1763, Quebec, though governed by Anglo-Protestants, housed a predominantly French Catholic population. And though the Continental Congress gestured toward union with Quebec throughout the 1770s, inhabitants of the
lower colonies remained suspicious of their Catholic neighbors and often doubted whether Catholic subjects could in fact participate in egalitarian government. Congress even referred to the 1763 Treaty of Paris as “an inglorious peace, formed under the auspices of a Minister [George III] of principles...unfriendly to the protestant cause, and inimical to liberty” (Jay, 83-4). Read against the backdrop of ongoing debates about Quebec’s place within the American lexicon, Article XI seems less an invitation to merge than a declaration of difference. Its special provision for annexation reifies the border between Catholic Quebec and the lower colonies even as it promises that border’s erasure.

Article XI’s simultaneous assertion of unity with and distinction from Catholic Quebec embodies ongoing late-colonial discussions about the relationship between religion and nation. As I argue in the first section of this essay, the concept of national religious pluralism that would come to underpin U.S. liberal democracy developed in opposition to Anglo-American Protestant imaginings of French Catholicism. Through analysis of the Continental Congress’s public reactions to the passage of the Quebec Act in 1774, I show how the process of U.S. nation-state development depended on a marshalling of anti-Catholic discourse that positioned “Protestantism” as the guarantor of religious liberty. In making this claim, I am suggesting in part that hemispheric American study should include more serious consideration of Canada. Recent discussions about comparative and transnational methodologies have tended to focus on what Ralph Bauer calls “Ibero-/Anglo-American Studies,” granting less attention to the legacy of Franco-colonial pursuits (281). Perhaps because of the perceived ubiquity of Catholicism in the southern American states, studies of the Americas often treat the Protestant/Catholic divide as little more than one facet of racial or cultural difference. An
examination of early U.S. relations with Quebec demonstrates how religious conflict persists despite ostensible racial homogeneity and brings to light religion's centrality to the development of nationalist discourse. In imagining Canadian Catholics as subjects whose private lives were entirely dictated by papal rule, Anglo-Protestant colonists constructed themselves as freely private subjects capable of shaping a religiously plural—and therefore "liberal"—nation that could accommodate diversity because it was "not Catholic."

As the uniting colonies became the United States, Quebec ceased to occupy a central position in discussions of the relationship between religious freedom and national sovereignty. The "Catholic," however, remained a salient signifier in early national disputes over the rectitude of religious establishment. In this essay's second section I turn to writings by James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine, whose disestablishmentarian arguments often hinged on anti-Catholic constructions of "Protestant" citizenship. I have chosen to examine these writers not because they represent something exceptionally "American," but rather because their status afforded them the power to dictate public policy, and the discourse they produced still sets the terms of debate over religious liberty in the U.S. While numerous theories of church and state materialized in the early national period, it is Jefferson's letter to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut that has structured two hundred years of Supreme Court jurisprudence. I also focus on these figures because they did not officially espouse any particular Protestant religious practice or belief. Their recourse to anti-Catholicism thus reveals less of a commitment to the prosperity of Protestant churches, than the extent to which a post-Reformation logic permeated early U.S. notions of liberty and naturalized
the notion of private citizenship. Through analysis of Jefferson’s Danbury letter as well as Notes on the State of Virginia (1781), Madison’s Memorial and Remonstrance (1785), and Paine’s The Rights of Man (1791), I chart the process through which the discourse of national religious liberty forged during the Quebec crisis evolved in the early national period into one of personal religious liberty, in which the burden of separating church and state shifted from the state onto the private citizen. The “Catholic” figures prominently in these writings, representing the potential horror of national establishment by serving as convenient shorthand for theocratic tyranny. Anti-Catholicism thus paradoxically produced in this period a discourse of liberal democracy premised upon religious diversity.

The concept of privacy has long underpinned liberalist thinking and stood as a necessary component of liberal conceptions of individual freedom. Richard Rorty perhaps most clearly articulates privacy’s importance to liberalism when he speaks of religion, describing “the happy, Jeffersonian compromise that the Enlightenment reached with the religious. . . which consists in privatizing religion—keeping it out of. . . ‘the public square,’ making it seem bad taste to bring religion into the discourse of public policy” (169). Rorty’s “happiness” allows him to treat privacy as natural and neutral, but “privacy,” like any other signifier, operates within a set of historical and cultural contingencies. C. John Sommerville points to the Protestant roots of private individualism when he notes that during the European Reformation, “[r]eligious salvation itself changed from a collective to a more individual matter” (129). And Thomas Franck, drawing on Sommerville, has argued that the Reform shift from Catholic to Protestant religious forms “did not guarantee freedom of conscience, but it did emphasize the
inauthenticity of coerced communitarian conformity and led in time to the ‘secularization of personhood and association’” (Franck, 596). While Franck’s notion of Catholicism as a brand of “coerced communitarian conformity” might reflect his own suspicions of the “Catholic” rather than some objective reality, and he is, like Rorty, surprisingly naïve about the connection between Protestantism and secularism, the point he shares with Sommerville is an important one. However natural it might seem to render religion a matter of personal conscience, within the context of Anglo-American politics the very idea of religious privacy derives from post-Reformation theologies of private judgment that positioned the individual as a rational subject capable of fashioning his or her own religious conscience without the interference of a dogmatic clerical or governmental hierarchy. The liberal commitment to privacy is thus inseparable from Protestant understandings of individual religiosity. In late-eighteenth-century America, the connection between Protestantism and privacy would come to structure not only the discourse of religious liberty but also that of religious pluralism as Anglo-Americans accused the Québécois of espousing religious homogeneity and presented Protestantism as an alternative system embracing religious difference.

My argument might surprise readers of Ray Allen Billington and Jenny Franchot, whose groundbreaking work on anti-Catholicism posits it as the vehicle through which U.S. Protestants have historically produced a unified “Protestant” identity. While this study owes much to their work and that which has grown out of it, I would argue that in ignoring the early national period this body of criticism has elided the ways in which anti-Catholicism facilitated the construction of a unified national identity centered on a concept of Protestant difference rather than unity. “Protestantism” does not operate in
early-national texts as a cohesive identity formation but rather appears as a system that—unlike "Catholicism"—can accommodate a plurality of beliefs, including Catholicism, because of its commitment to privacy. In leaving the connection between privacy and pluralism unquestioned, critical discourse on church and state has perpetuated a logic of private and public that equates privacy with freedom and establishes "Protestantism"—rather than the legal separation of religion and politics—as the means of safeguarding liberty for the greatest possible number of individuals. It has also tended to ignore the ways in which U.S. conceptions of religious pluralism paradoxically grew out of anti-Catholic discourse. Generally depicted as an unreasoning and unreasonable purveyor of papal fiat, the figure of the "Catholic" looms large in early U.S. discussions of religious liberty. Unfettered, it appears as the greatest threat to a liberal democratic order, but privatized and contained, it becomes proof of that order's success.

The Quebec Act and the War for (Religious) Independence

In June of 1774, Britain's king George III made good on his decade-old promises to the French monarchy by signing the Quebec Act into law. On its surface, the act did little more than codify the conditions to which he had agreed when Louis XV surrendered all Canadian territories to England at the close of the Seven Years War. In addition to extending the new colony's western and southern borders, the act made provisions for Canadians to retain rights to their property under French-style civil law while guaranteeing them the protections of the British legal system. Most relevant to this essay, however, is the fact that the act also included a lengthy section on the Québécois' Roman Catholicism, declaring that "His Majesty's Subjects, professing the Religion of the
Church of *Rome* of and in the said Province of *Quebec*, may have, hold, and enjoy, the Free Exercise of Religion of the Church of *Rome*, subject to the King’s supremacy” (Shortt, 1:572, emphasis original). Far from being a magnanimous assertion of ecumenical spirit, the Quebec Act was in many ways designed to forestall Canadian revolt by maintaining the status quo in Quebec. The act contained an explicit territorial limitation—“Provided always, That nothing herein contained, relative to the Boundary of the Province of *Quebec*, shall in anywise affect the Boundaries of any other Colony”—indicating that the crown had no intention of enforcing Canadian civil laws or tolerating Roman Catholicism beyond the borders of the formerly French colony (Shortt, 571). The Quebec Act might thus be read not only as the belated fulfillment of a contract between imperial powers, but also as a strategy for dealing with the problem of Anglo-Franco difference within the expanding British Empire by containing French Catholicism within a strictly delimited, if newly enlarged, territorial space.

But whatever the crown’s intentions, the Quebec Act generated unrest among Anglo-American Protestants as soon as word of its drafting reached the colonies. For though the act merely fulfilled conditions already laid out in the 1763 Treaty of Paris, and the fact that in practice it actually curtailed the power of Canadian priests by making them "subject to the King’s [rather than the pope’s] supremacy,” many colonists viewed its passage as proof that George III harbored papal sympathies. On the eve of the bill’s signing, an anonymous vandal defaced the bust of George III that stood in Montreal’s Place d’Arms in such a way as to make clear the perceived connection between the monarch and the Vatican: the bust’s face was blackened, and around its neck hung a rosary made of potatoes and bearing the inscription, “*Voila le Pape du Canada, ou le sot*
Anglois [Behold the pope of Canada, or the English fool]” (Wade, 1:68). As Francis Cogliano has noted, colonial perception of the act as an indication of monarchical Romanism likely stemmed from the already raging debate over Episcopal establishment in the lower colonies. “With the Quebec Act,” he writes, “[colonists] came to fear that the English were determined to establish popery itself in North America rather than simply to give precedence to the popish Anglican Church” (46). Such fear is evident, for example, in the list of resolutions drafted by the newly-formed Continental Congress in September 1774, the tenth of which states that, “the late act of parliament for establishing the Roman Catholic religion and the French laws in that extensive country, now called Canada, is dangerous in an extreme degree to the Protestant religion” (Ford, 1:34-5). Thus although the Québécois had been their peaceable neighbors and fellow subjects for over a decade, official recognition of Roman Catholicism inspired concern over the primacy of Protestantism among Anglo-American colonists.

Given the long history of Catholic-Protestant conflict in Europe generally and Great Britain specifically, it is perhaps not surprising that the crown’s sanctioning of Roman Catholicism in Quebec inspired religious concern among Protestant colonists. What is less readily obvious, however, is why Anglo-American reactions to the tolerance of Catholicism in Quebec also bore an almost hysterical anxiety over the potential loss of civil and social liberty. In denouncing the Quebec Act, the Continental Congress defined it not only as “dangerous in an extreme degree to the Protestant religion,” but also as threatening “the civil rights and liberties of all America” (Ford, 1:35, emphasis added). This denunciation echoed the sentiment expressed in the Boston Gazette on 22 August 1774, which declared the bill an attempt “TO CUT OFF ALL THE LIBERTIES OF THE
REST OF AMERICA by means of Quebec” (qtd. in Cogliano, 47). While it may be tempting to attribute this anti-Catholicism to simple religious or ethnic prejudice, the slippage between discourses of religious and civil liberty evident in early American political dissent is neither natural nor coincidental. What the Quebec Act and its aftermath reveal is that anti-Catholicism was central to the process of U.S. nation-state formation, because the emerging discourse of U.S. liberal democracy depended simultaneously upon the construction and rejection of “Catholic” otherness and the promise of religious liberty for Catholic practitioners within the new nation. Anti-Catholicism did not, therefore, merely generate enough disdain for the crown to facilitate a break with England. It also laid the groundwork for a discourse that ultimately would equate universal but diverse “Protestantism” with national cohesion in the face of diversity. It is thus not possible to reduce American anti-Catholicism to the status of British or European import, because in the emerging U.S. the discourse uniquely facilitated the development of a liberal democratic notion of religious pluralism.

The small body of scholarship that exists on the Quebec Act tends to treat it simply as one more catalyst for colonial revolt or a crisis that ended with the construction of the new nation. Largely unexamined in this critical discourse is the fact that the act forced colonists to face both the challenge of territorial proximity to those defined as religious others as well as the more basic problem of intra-national religious diversity. This is not to say that religious conflict had been absent from the American colonies prior to the act’s passage, but the Quebec Act crisis was unique, because it brought to light the tension between national solidarity and religious pluralism and then mapped that
tension over the colonies as whole. A young Alexander Hamilton would articulate this tension in his *Remarks on the Quebec Bill* (1775), arguing that the act,

invests the King with absolute power over a little world. . . and makes such ample provision for the popish religion, and leaves the protestant, in such dependent disadvantageous situation that [George III] is like to have no other subjects, in this part of his domain, than Roman catholics.

(175)

For Hamilton, the danger of the Quebec Act is its potential to eliminate Protestantism from the northern colony. In time, he suggests, all that will remain will be "Roman catholics; who, by reason of their implicit devotion to their priests, and the superlative reverence they bear to those, who countenance and favor their religion, will be the voluntary instruments of ambition" (175). Hamilton’s concerns suggest that anti-Catholicism in the late-colonial era was tied directly to concern over the relationship between Anglo and Franco territories. In this way, the Quebec Act’s influence would extend well beyond the immediate crisis it produced and the revolution that followed in its wake. A persistent discourse of anti-Catholicism would continue to allow colonists to make the transition from British subject to “American” citizen by facilitating the construction of a governmental system in which religious liberty would be guaranteed through the privatization of individual religious conviction.

Anti-Catholicism’s centrality to emerging American discourses of liberal democracy and religious freedom is perhaps most evident in the lower colonies’
ostensibly contradictory reactions to the Quebec Act. On the one hand, colonial leaders treated the act as a measure designed to eliminate the possibility of inter-colonial unity against the crown. In his notes for a speech delivered to the Continental Congress in October 1774, for example, Massachusetts delegate Robert Treat Paine points to the act’s “evils” as the “Regulating & training [of] one Colony [. . .] agt. the Rest.” John Jay pushed this sentiment even further in his *Address to the People of Great Britain*, sent to England on behalf of the Continental Congress on 21 October of the same year.

Although Jay was the primary author of this *Address*, his name does not appear in the finished product, because the address was a corporate publication designed to represent the Congress as a whole. The address argues that the “dominion of Canada is to be so extended, modeled, and governed,”

as that by being disunited from us. . . their numbers daily swelling with Catholic immigrants from Europe, and by their devotion to Administration, so friendly to their religion, they might become formidable to us, and on occasion, be fit instruments in the hands of power, to reduce the ancient free Protestant Colonies to the same state of slavery with themselves.

(Jay, 87-8)

Jay’s *Address* places the Catholic residents of Quebec in opposition to their southern neighbors and treats that opposition as if it were a kind of international struggle. Despite their status as British subjects, the Québécois appear as foreigners in this address,
enemies supported by an “Administration, so friendly to their religion” that the threat they pose is national as well as religious. It does not matter that the “administration” to which Jay refers is the Protestant monarchy that also governs his colonial compatriots and the British people to whom he writes. Within this logic, there is little to distinguish religious from national affiliation.

Jay describes the lower colonies as “ancient free Protestant” territories, indicating that it is not governmental support of religion in general that concerns him but rather the possibility of specifically papal theocracy (88, emphasis added). The colonies are free, in Jay’s rendering, because Protestant. In this merging of the Protestant with the liberal Jay is not alone, as Paine’s speech notes also conflate Protestantism and equitable government. Speculating on the possible effects of repealing the Quebec Act, Paine asks, “Will it break the feudal system, will it convert [the Québécois] to Protestantism?” Here, Paine equates the collapse of the feudal system with the adoption of Protestant theology. Separated by a mere comma, religious and civil conversions become part of the same process, as the shift from Catholicism to Protestantism brings with it the progression from absolute to representative government. Of course, what neither Paine nor Jay address is the fact that any effort to repeal the Quebec Act would simultaneously be an effort to retract the religious liberty already granted to the Québécois. The conflation of Catholicism with feudalism thus allowed the Continental Congress to present its arguments for eliminating governmental support for Catholicism from all British colonies as if they were in fact arguments in favor of civil liberty.

By placing the “Catholic” at odds with the “free,” Jay and his fellow colonists are able to refer to the Quebec Act as being “hostile to British America” and thereby remove
the Québécois from the category of "British" (Jay, 88). Through the construction of trans-Atlantic Protestant nationality, Jay makes his case for the residents of Britain proper to support the American colonists in their fight against the Quebec Act. "Nor can we suppress out astonishment," he writes,

that a British Parliament should ever consent to establish in that country a religion that has deluged your island in blood, and dispersed impiety, bigotry, persecution, murder and rebellion through every part of the world.

(88)

In Jay’s Address, the line between nations is a religious one. He asserts that "the intervention of the sea that divides [the Americas and Great Britain]" does not justify the "disparity in rights" between American colonists and English subjects living in proximity to the crown. At the same time, Canada remains "that country"—distinct from "your island" in a way that the lower colonies are not—because its residents are mostly Catholics of French descent. Thus even as Jay attacks Quebec on the grounds that it represents the dangerous merging of church and state, he promotes the development of a pan-Protestant nationalism that will both unite Protestants across the Atlantic and drive the "Catholic" out of Great Britain.

Had the lower colonists responded to the Quebec Act merely by railing against the Catholic Québécois, it might be possible to read their ire as little more than an indicator of animosity born from difference. However, less than a week after Jay completed his Address, he and Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee composed an
address to the Québécois that articulated a different sentiment. This address, too, was written for the Continental Congress and listed no author on its cover. The Congress commissioned a French translation once it was completed, and Benjamin Franklin's friend Fleury Mesplet printed the translated copies for distribution in Quebec. "When the fortune of war, after a gallant and glorious resistance, had incorporated you [the Québécois] with the body of English subjects," this address begins, "we rejoiced in the truly valuable addition" (Lee, 106). This assertion of joy may seem out of step with Jay's earlier depictions of Catholic tyranny, but the characterization of Quebec as a "valuable addition" is not just empty flattery. Jay and Lee's address ends with a very real invitation:

We only invite you. . . to unite with us [the lower colonies] in one social compact, formed on the generous principles of equal liberty, and cemented by such an exchange of beneficial and endearing offices as to render it perpetual. In order to complete this highly desirable union. . . choose Delegates, to represent your province in the continental Congress to be held at Philadelphia on the tenth day of May, 1775.

(112)

Scholarship on the Quebec Act has tended to treat this address as diplomatic subterfuge intended to stave off conflict with the northern colony. And while such a reading might explain the apparent duplicity of the Continental Congress, it also assumes that the addresses to Great Britain and Quebec do not share a common logic. But the two addresses do not in fact contradict each other, and together they illustrate the beginning
development of a U.S. liberal democratic discourse that would construct religious pluralism against notions of the “Catholic” even as it encouraged the inclusion of Catholic people within the nation-state. In other words, it is possible to see in the Continental Congress’s seemingly conflicting responses to the passage of the Quebec Act the seeds of the discourses of religious pluralism and privacy that would come to structure U.S. liberal democracy.

One of the main purposes of Jay and Lee’s address to the Québécois is to undercut French Canadian loyalty to the crown by suggesting that the Quebec Act poses a threat to religious liberty. The two write:

The words of the statute are—that those “laws shall be the rule, until they shall be varied or altered by any ordinances of the Governor and Council. . .” Such is the precarious tenure of mere will, by which you hold your lives and religion. The Crown and its Ministers are impowered, as far as they could be by Parliament, to establish even the Inquisition itself among you.

(Lee, 109, emphasis original)

While Jay and Lee may have been correct in their assertion that the British crown was not seriously interested in protecting its subjects’ liberty, their rhetoric betrays a sense that Catholicism itself is antithetical to equitable government. They opt not to emphasize the fact that British law prohibited the practice of Catholicism and that the clause subjecting Catholic liberty “to the King’s supremacy” rendered the Québécois defenseless against
impositions of compulsory Protestant practice. Instead, they evoke that most salient example of Catholic despotism: the Inquisition. George III—head of the Protestant Church of England—becomes in this passage a papal despot, and the threat he and his ministers pose to Catholic subjects is one of Catholic-style religious intolerance. Jay and Lee's address to the Québécois is thus structured by a seemingly paradoxical logic under which monarchical governance represents a threat to the practice of Catholicism because it is itself "Catholic."

If the British monarchy appears as a Catholic dictatorship in Jay and Lee's address, the Continental Congress operates as an alternative governing body that offers tolerance and protection to Catholics precisely because it is itself "not Catholic." "And what is offered to you by the late Act of Parliament," Jay and Lee ask, "Liberty of conscience in your religion? No. God gave it to you" (Lee, 109). Where the British ministry mistakenly believes in its own power to grant religious liberty, the congress makes no such mistake. They present "liberty of conscience" as a God-given right, independent of the social and governmental. And the best way to protect this a priori entitlement to free conscience, Jay and Lee argue, is representative government. The "first grand right," they explain, "is that of the people having a share in their own government by their representatives chosen by themselves, and, in consequence, being ruled by laws, which they themselves approve, not by edicts of men over whom they have no control" (Lee, 107, emphasis original). The motivation for Quebec to join the lower colonies is thus ostensibly obvious: while the British monarchy has demonstrated a willingness to protect the practice of Catholicism in particular, the elected members of the Continental Congress will protect the more basic right to "liberty of conscience" and
thereby guarantee a general right to individual religious conviction. Within this model, representative government safeguards religious freedom and pluralism by protecting its citizens' private beliefs. Democratic representation converts "edicts of men" into laws that can protect practitioners of Catholicism from Catholic-style tyranny.

The address to Quebec concludes with an assertion that religious difference need not preclude national cohesion. "[P]ut your fate, whenever you suffer injuries which you are determined to oppose," they instruct the Québécois, "not on the small influence of your single province, but on the consolidated powers of North-America" (Lee, 113). In this move, the address seems at odds with Jay’s address to Great Britain, which asserts the primacy of national Protestantism in making its case for the fair treatment of American colonists. National identity appears territorial rather than religious here, as a shared continent is imagined to facilitate the consolidation of power. But Jay and Lee’s construction of continental power depends equally upon a rejection of the "Catholic," as they urge the Québécois to weed out those "who prefer the favor of [governmental] Ministers, and their own private interests, to the welfare of their country" (Lee, 112). Any effort to retain governmental support for Catholic practice appears antithetical to the development of national unity, as it signifies mere personal selfishness. Curiously absent from this address is any mention of the fact that in most of the lower colonies church establishment was still in force.12 Thus the "liberty and happiness of the whole Canadian people" depends upon their rejection of state support for Catholicism and union with "free Protestant" colonies that levy religious taxes against and enforce church attendance laws upon dissenters. My point is not that Jay and Lee were somehow attempting to dupe or mistreat Catholic Canadians. What I want to stress is the fact that within the
Continental Congress’s logic, the boundary between the emerging U.S. and its foreign neighbors creates a national space in which religious liberty and “Protestantism” are synonymous. In order to incorporate themselves into the “American” lexicon, the Québécois must exchange the material religious protections offered to them by the British crown for the less tangible promise of freedom through private subjectivity.

Reaction to Congress’s address in Quebec was mixed and lukewarm. The address circulated widely among the Québécois, but loyalists and the Catholic clergy made sure that the anti-Catholic address to Great Britain also made its way into the northern colony. Anglo-Canadian merchants ardently favored a break with Britain, but they represented a small fraction of Quebec’s population. Little textual evidence remains of the Québécois’ particular opinions about the unfolding crisis—the only bilingual newspaper in the province was the loyalist Gazette, and fewer than twenty percent of French Canadians could read or write during this period. Since most refused to join either the Continental Army or the militias that British Governor-General Guy Carleton established to stave off attack, it seems likely that the Québécois generally wished to remain neutral when it came to the unfolding colonial crisis. In Montreal, merchants gathered to discuss the possibility of electing delegates for the Philadelphia convention, but in the end the province sent no representatives. In 1775 the Continental Congress launched a brief and ineffective military campaign against the northern colony, which effectively quashed the possibility of union. Supposing this attack might seem to undercut earlier arguments in favor of peaceful cohabitation, it is important to remember that the Continental Congress had presented religious pluralism as possible only within the borders of a nation organized around “Protestant” ideas of privacy and individualism. To the British, Jay
writes that there is “much virtue, much justice, and much public spirit in the English nation. . . Permit us to be as free as yourselves” (Jay, 89). To the Québécois, he and Lee write of Switzerland’s Cantons: “Their union is composed of Roman Catholic and Protestant States, living in the utmost concord and peace” (Lee, 112). At stake in both of these letters is the idea of nationhood itself; without the nation, there is no guarantee of virtue, of justice, of peace. Thus Congress’s promise of religious liberty could extend to the Québécois only if they assented to incorporation within a national body that would not force them into actual Protestant practice but would rather “Protestantize” them by replacing their legal protections with “liberty of conscience.”

By the time Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Quebec no longer appeared as a potential ally but had rather become a foreign foil against which the emerging nation could define itself. The final draft of the Declaration accuses George III of “enlarging [Quebec’s] boundaries, so as to render it at once an example and fit instrument for introducing the same rule into these [lower] colonies.” This grievance repeats earlier claims that the crown wished to “cut off” liberty to the continent via Quebec, but it is worth noting that in his original draft Jefferson refers to “these colonies” as “these states.” (Jefferson, 237). Members of Congress edited the line—perhaps in the name of diplomacy, perhaps to distinguish the United States from its colonial past—but the trace of Jefferson’s noun remains. Though still embattled, the colonies had become states, and Catholic Quebec posed a threat to their new status, because the boundary around those states was religious as well as geographic. Indeed, as a condition of the 1783 Treaty of Paris, George III relinquished the territory he had added to Quebec in 1774, thus granting much of what is now the northern mid-West to the newly-formed
United States. But though the second Treaty of Paris officially concluded the dispute over the northern border, demarcating the U.S. in opposition to the “Catholic” as well as British Canada, the Quebec crisis echoed through the decades following treaty’s signing, as the U.S. was forced to confront the problem of religious difference within its own borders. In the post-Revolutionary era, the logic of privacy that structured Anglo-colonial discussions of Quebec would come to structure official discourses of U.S. liberal democracy, as inhabitants of the new nation began to imagine themselves not as Protestant colonial subjects living proximate to Catholic colonial subjects, but as religiously diverse citizens living proximate to each other.

“In America, a catholic priest is a good citizen”:
Privacy as Freedom in the New Republic

In the aftermath of a war fought in part on religious grounds, inhabitants of the new U.S. faced the challenge of developing a discourse of national unity that could encompass religious difference. The “Catholic” presented a particular problem to this process, because, as we have seen, it had served as a foil against which the nation constructed itself as “free” in the first place. How could colonies that had waged a war against the “Catholic” now operate as states united under the rubric of a nation that welcomed religious dissent—even from Catholics? For many, the remedy to this difficulty lay in religious disestablishment. At the time of Revolution, most of the colonies supported officially established churches, and when those colonies became states they by and large retained their civil sectarianism. As delegates considered the federation’s future, the question of national religion became a serious issue, and
arguments favoring disestablishment began to surface. James Madison offered an early articulation of the sense that religious establishment would ultimately destroy rather than promote national cohesion in 1785, when he argued that Virginia's proposed bill to fund Christian religious instruction demonstrated how “the majority may trespass on the rights of the minority” (Madison, 30). At stake in the separation of church and state, according to Madison, is national identity itself. “The magnanimous sufferer under this cruel scourge [of religious intolerance] in foreign Regions,” he writes, “must view the Bill as a Beacon on our Coast, warning him to seek some other haven” (35-6). Official religion operates paradoxically here: rather than laying the groundwork for a unified national identity it threatens to convert the national landscape into a scene of faction and persecution. What the states should unite around, then, is the universal tolerance of religious difference.

Of course, in making his case for the proliferation of national religious liberty through disestablishment, Madison conjures up the specter of the “Catholic” as a warning. Of the proposed Virginia bill he writes, “It degrades from the equal rank of Citizens all those whose opinions in Religion do not bend to those of the Legislative authority. Distant as it may be in its present form from the Inquisition, it differs from it only in degree. The one is the first step, the other the last in the career of intolerance” (33, emphasis added). The echo of Jay and Lee is no accident, as the Inquisition metonymically represents all forms of religious oppression. But where Jay and Lee treated the Quebec Act as proof of the crown’s desire to erode American civil liberties by cultivating Catholicism in a non-Anglo territory, for Madison the Virginia law represents the threat posed to religious liberty from within the nation by a tyrannical ruling class.
The “Catholic” has thus become an intra- rather than extra-national threat, the danger being that the states will succumb to the lure of autocracy. “Who does not see,” Madison asks, “that the same authority which can establish Christianity, in exclusion of all other Religions, may establish with the same ease any particular sect of Christianity, in exclusion of all other Sects?” Enforced religious homogeneity will only lead to strife, he argues, and “slaken the bands of Society” (31, 35). Within the new nation, then, the danger is not that a foreign force will interfere with religious liberty, but that citizens will interfere with each other. The only measure against this kind of tyranny, according to Madison, is state assurance that religion will be “left to the conviction and conscience of every man... to exercise it as these may dictate” (30). The solution to religious oppression, in other words, is privacy.

Catholicism posed a distinct problem to the logic of privacy as freedom that underpinned early national disestablishmentarianism, because American anti-Catholic discourse had long constructed the “Catholic” as a subject lacking private interiority. This claim may seem to contradict that of Franchot, who notes that antebellum anti-Catholicism assigned to the “Catholic” “a punitive interior, one disguised by any number of duplicitous architectural or behavioral exteriors” (Franchot, 182). Indeed, writers of the period often presented the “Catholic” as opaque, but equally at play in anti-Catholic discourse is a sense that the Catholic Church prevents its members from developing private subjectivity. Famed preacher Jonathan Mayhew’s pamphlet Popish Idolatry (1765) is typical of this double discourse. Mayhew does argue that Catholicism’s danger lies in its secrecy. “The agents of Rome,” he warns, “compass sea and land to make proselytes... And probably, there is no protestant country, in which there are not some
of them, at least lurking, if they dare not discover themselves” (50-1, emphasis original). Here, the “agents of Rome” conceal their true identities so that they might convert the unsuspecting. This is the secret and duplicitous interior of which Franchot writes. But a secret “Catholic” is not necessarily a private “Catholic,” and in the same pamphlet Mayhew articulates a sense that Catholicism is antithetical to privacy. A debunking of Catholic dogma, he argues, “is a defence [sic]. . . of the common rights of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting; all of which popery attacks and undermines.” Mayhew’s “Catholic” is not even free to respond to basic sensory stimuli as an individual. “We must not see, taste, or smell,” he writes, “but as the church is pleased to give us leave” (49). Within this logic, “Catholic” experience is perpetually mediated by church hierarchy, so there is no room for subjective, private personhood. The Catholic sees as the Church sees, tastes as the Church tastes, and thinks as the Church thinks, or it ceases to be “Catholic.”

The difficulty of incorporating a non-private subject into a nation emerging around the idea of freedom through private religiosity would become apparent in the Constitutional debates that led to the drafting of the Bill of Rights. Madison would eventually become the most influential proponent of the Bill of Rights, but during the early stages of Constitutional drafting he argued against the inclusion of amendments, claiming that they would do nothing to secure civil liberties. Madison suggested instead that the nation could guarantee rights to its citizens only by expanding its territorial holdings to encompass a variety of locales and people and thereby cultivating a diversity of interests within its borders. Though concerned with general rights and liberties, he often framed his arguments in terms of religion: “In a free government the security for
civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights," he writes in Federalist 51, "It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects" (Madison, Federalist, 292). Concerned about the possibility that majority-rule democracy would devolve into a system of forced homogeneity, Madison urged his fellow delegates to seek extra-Constitutional solutions to the looming problem of tyranny. And when he finally, in the name of compromise, acceded to the anti-Federalist demand for immediate amendment of the new Constitution, Madison’s logic of multiplicity would structure the relationship between church and state outlined in the Bill of Rights.

Stopping short of positively defining the role that the nation-state would play in securing or curtailing religious liberty, the Constitutional Convention settled instead for prohibitions against national religious establishment and congressional—but, importantly, not state or local—interference in the “free exercise” of religion. In this way, rather than separating the church from the state the Bill of Rights constructed religious practice as a local or individual matter and thus made provisions to protect the religious from the national but not vice-versa. Ultimately, this strategy of national unity through individual multiplicity would allow for the assimilation of Catholic subjects into the U.S., but it would also further the development of Protestantized national identity, as religious privacy came to stand in for a legal distinction between church and state.

Thomas Paine’s The Rights of Man (1791) offers perhaps the clearest articulation of the conflation of privacy with freedom that structured early U.S. discussions of church/state relations. Written as a rejoinder to Edmund Burke’s attacks on the revolution in France, The Rights of Man in part represents Paine’s attempt to extend the logic of the American Revolution to include the French, whose Catholicism rendered
them in the minds of many British and U.S. citizens fundamentally incapable of implementing democratic principles. In an attempt to rehabilitate the “Catholic” and include it under the umbrella of democracy, Paine writes, “The Inquisition in Spain does not proceed from the religion originally professed but from this mule-animal engendered between the Church and the State. . . Persecution is not an original feature of any religion; but it is always the strongly-marked feature of all law-religions, or religions established by law” (Rights, 168). If the Inquisition signified Catholic despotism in the late-colonial era, here Paine presents it as the manifestation of tyranny distinct from and even potentially at odds with Catholicism. This configuration marks a shift in perspective on the topic of religious liberty for Paine, who in 1776 compared the British Parliament to priests, arguing that “the phrase parent or mother country hath been jesuitically adopted by the king and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds” (Common Sense, 38-9, emphasis added). The threat to liberty, according to Paine’s post-Revolutionary model, stems from the merging of church and state rather than the mere presence of Catholicism.

Paine equates the separation of church and state with the “UNIVERSAL RIGHT OF CONSCIENCE,” which he says France will, “like America,” establish and protect (Rights, 168). Paine’s logic here is similar to that of Madison, in that it constructs the relationship between church and state as one between private (church) and public (state) and then configures the ideal political citizen as a religiously private subject. The privatization of religious belief allows Paine to claim that, “In America, a Catholic priest is a good citizen, a good character, and a good neighbor; an Episcopalian minister [sic] is of the same description; and this proceeds, independently of the men, from there being no
law establishment in America" (Rights, 168). Disestablishment allows Paine to rehabilitate the "Catholic," to convert the priest into a citizen by asserting that the U.S. political system has drained his religious power of political significance by relegating it to the extra-political zone of privacy. "America" becomes national terrain in which Catholics and Episcopalians alike can lay claim to the status of "good neighbor," because the state has no official religious character. Paine's elevation of the Catholic priest to the level of citizen, I would argue, marks a shift in the U.S. discourse of religious liberty. In the late-colonial era, religious liberty was defined as "not Catholic" against the imagined despotism of the foreign Québécois, with the line between Quebec and the lower colonies marking the edges of freedom and slavery. With the ratification of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, however, that division became personal rather than national, as the individual religious subject was forced to consent to government by a system premised on "Protestant" notions of private judgment and conscience. The "good" Catholic neighbor Paine describes is thus a "Protestant" Catholic—a Catholic who has assented to a set of structures in which religious practice must originate from an apolitical, private self rather than an externally imposed, politically interested hierarchy.

Paine's account of the good Catholic citizen in many ways echoes the position that Jefferson takes on religion in his Notes on the State of Virginia (1781). Arguing that the state has no jurisdiction over an individual's thoughts, Jefferson too introduces the figure of the neighbor:

The rights of conscience we never submitted [to government], we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God. The legitimate
powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others.

But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or
no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.

(Notes, 210)

Only five years earlier, Jefferson had accused the British crown of encroaching upon
Anglo-American liberties—of picking proverbial pockets—by allowing the residents of a
neighboring colony to practice Catholicism. Now, with the northern U.S. border
officially secure against the Catholic Québécois, he asserts that the private beliefs and
actions of national subjects are non-injurious to proximate parties. Significantly, he links
this assertion to the rise of Protestantism, stating that, “Reason and free inquiry are the
only effectual agents against terror. . . Had not free inquiry been indulged, at the aera of
reformation, the corruptions of Christianity could not have been purged away” (Notes,
211). It is, then, the historical as well as geographical eradication of the “Catholic” that
permits the simultaneous development of national unity and religious multiplicity.
Secure in the general “Protestantism” of U.S. religious policy, Jefferson makes his case
for tolerance.

Part of Jefferson’s project in Notes is to argue for religious disestablishment in
Virginia particularly and the U.S. more broadly. Like Madison, he stakes his argument
on the notion that enforced uniformity undermines national solidarity. “Subject opinion
to coercion,” he asks, “whom will you make your inquisitors?” His answer: “[f]allible
men; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why
subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity. But is uniformity of opinion desirable?
No more than of face and stature” (Notes, 211, emphasis added). Here again, though it may seem paradoxical, multiplicity bears a strong corollary to unity: the nation will succeed as nation only if it can accommodate variation within its borders. At the same time, of course, those borders must remain impermeable to the inquisitor who necessarily harbors “bad passions.” Unaccounted for in Jefferson’s theory of religious liberty—as in those of Madison and Paine—however, is the problem of consent. In order for the “good neighbor” model to work, each citizen must agree that religious belief is in fact a matter of private conscience and that the toleration of opposing beliefs is beneficial to society. What’s more, Jefferson’s neighborly statements assume that individuals will recognize each other as neighbors, rather than enemies, simply because they inhabit the same national space. Since the state’s role is a negative—it can neither enforce nor prohibit a particular system of religious practice—each private subject must determine the limits of his or her own tolerance. The burden of religious diversity thus lands squarely on the shoulders of individual citizens, as the state divests itself of responsibility for protecting religious practice or non-practice, belief or disbelief.

Jefferson most explicitly acknowledges the centrality of privacy to U.S. conceptions of religious liberty in an 1802 letter sent to thank the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut for its support of his presidential campaign. Having only narrowly defeated incumbent Federalist John Adams and fellow Republican Aaron Burr, the new President Jefferson owed his victory in part to the votes of religious dissenters who favored his disestablishmentarian policies.\textsuperscript{15} Thus to the association’s members he writes:
Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.

(Danbury Letter, 303, emphasis original)

Though it bore no official policy status at the time of its writing, this letter has become one of the most oft-quoted (and misquoted) missives about the relationship between church and state in the U.S. Jefferson’s “wall” has evoked two centuries of commentary and laid the foundations of church-state jurisprudence. Much critical discussion has centered on the question of what Jefferson actually meant by a “wall of separation”—the imagined height, permeability, permanence, and directionality of the discursive wall receiving a great deal of scrutiny. What has gone largely unexamined, however, is the fact that the wall’s very existence as metaphor depends upon Jefferson’s simultaneous assertion that “religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God.” Jefferson here assumes religious experience to be at once universal and universally individualized. Thus despite its ostensibly magnanimous overtures, Jefferson’s Danbury letter preserves the logic of privacy as freedom and thereby naturalizes the link between “Protestantism” and U.S. citizenship.
Though composed nearly thirty years after the Quebec Act crisis, Jefferson’s Danbury letter importantly echoes the Continental Congress’s assertion that an ideal government would commit itself not to one religious tradition over another—as the English crown ostensibly did when it agreed to tolerate Catholicism in Quebec—but rather to the general protection of the “god-given” right of “liberty of conscience.” Thus the brand of religious tolerance that Jefferson’s letter has come to embody within the context of U.S. liberal democracy draws its strength from an earlier discourse that defined the emerging nation against the “Catholic” by aligning religious liberty and pluralism with the “Protestant.” Significantly, the proponents of religious establishment against whom Jefferson positioned himself were not Canadian Catholics but rather U.S. Protestants advocating the legal fusion of Protestantism and citizenship. This would suggest that during this period anti-Catholicism did not merely target actual Catholic practitioners but instead facilitated the development of a discourse of religious freedom flexible enough to respond to a variety of situations, including encroachments on religious liberty by Protestant citizens. Still, the fact remains that because of its reliance on a “Protestant” logic of individual freedom through privacy, Jefferson’s wall does not separate church from state; it merely reifies the anti-Catholic logic that structured early national configurations of freedom and obfuscates the religious roots of U.S. secularism.

Epilogue: Cheese Wheel of Fortune

Jefferson wasn’t the only person ringing in the 1802 New Year by expressing gratitude. That morning, the itinerant Baptist preacher John Leland arrived at the White House leading a six-horse wagon bearing a 1,235 pound wheel of cheese for the new
president. The cheese—the largest of its kind at the time—had been pressed in September 1801, in the small town of Cheshire, Massachusetts. Cheshire’s majority Baptist and Republican population had responded to Leland’s call to produce a gift honoring Jefferson’s disestablishmentarianism by dedicating their kitchens to curd-production and seasoning. Despite the fact that the project required hundreds upon hundreds of gallons of milk, only “Republican” cows were allowed to contribute to the cause—“Federalist” bovines being excluded—as nine hundred separate households prepared curds for the giant cheese. Once the cheese was cured, the townspeople painted its crust red and inscribed it with the motto, “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.”

Leland then began a month-long trek to Washington with the ripening comestible, depositing it and a short address from Cheshire’s residents at the president’s front door. “We send you a CHEESE . . .” the address read in part, “It is not the last stone in the Bastile [sic], nor is it of any great consequence as an article of worth, but, as a free-will offering, we hope it will be favorably received” (Dreisbach, 12-13). Conjuring up the image of French despotism, the Baptists construct themselves as political prisoners now free—and exercising “free-will”—in a new era of national tolerance. The cheese was favorably received: Jefferson met it with open arms and then displayed it, despite its overpowering stench, inside the White House.

As Daniel Driesbach has noted, the Cheshire cheese rapidly achieved folkloric status and was even immortalized in verse by Republicans and Federalists alike. One Republican “Ode” asserted the cheese’s American-ness, proclaiming it, “Superior far in smell, taste, weight, and size,/ To any ever form’d ‘neath foreign skies” (Dreisbach, 15).
Federalist poets were less generous in their readings of the cheese. One in particular used it to point out the blind spot in Jefferson’s arguments for liberty:

‘Twas made by our own Cheshire ladies,
And making Cheese their only trade is;
By their fair hands the curd was made,
Without one sooty slave to aid;
‘Tis not with us as in Virginia,
Where dairy maids all come from Guinea.

(qtd. in Dreisbach, 16, emphasis original)

Here, Jefferson’s position as liberator seems rightly in question, as the writer reminds readers of his slaveholdings. But whatever people thought of Jefferson, Dreisbach argues, for a short time his cheese operated within public discourse as “an emblem of the religious dissenters’ aspirations for liberty of conscience” (24). This is likely true, though Dreisbach equates aspirations for liberty of conscience with the desire for religious freedom, and so he argues that Jefferson’s “wall” metaphor and the Cheshire cheese both demonstrate the Republican commitment to a separation of church and state. While I find Dreisbach’s narration of the cheese incident to be quite useful and compelling, I would like, in closing, to suggest that the Jeffersonian cheese, like Danbury letter, demonstrates not a division between but rather the mutually constitutive
relationship of church and state that grew out of early U.S. discussions of religious pluralism.

The oft-ignored feature of Jefferson's interactions with the Danbury and Cheshire Baptists is the fact that he interacted with them as Baptists. Having gained election in part by promising to safeguard the freedom of conscience, Jefferson was forced to recognize and even offer thanks to constituents on the basis of their religious affiliations. The letter sent to Danbury demonstrates an acknowledgement of the important role religious groups played in the developing U.S.'s theater of politics. Jefferson sensed that he owed something—if only a thank you—to the people who had put him in office. The giant cheese arrived as a gift from a town unified around and drawing little distinction between its religious and political identities. Cheshire men were Republicans, because they were dissenters, and they were dissenters because they were Baptists. A symbol of pluralism and tolerance the cheese was not: the townspeople filtered out "Federalist" milk that likely came from the farms of their Congregationalist neighbors. So while Dreisbach claims that the letter and cheese represent different aspects of the same principle, I would argue that the principle has never been the separation of church and state. Rather, in Jefferson's letter writing and cheese eating it is possible to see how religion and politics remained tethered to each other even in the era of national disestablishment. In constructing the national subject as privately religious, the early discourse of U.S. liberal democracy may have kept the Inquisition at bay, but it also ensured that religious groups would have an ongoing investment in state politics, as the never-clearly-defined limits of privacy would be continually renegotiated for centuries to come.
NOTES

1. During this period, the signifiers “Quebec” and “Canada” were virtually interchangeable designations for the northern colony. The territory’s proper name was “the province of Quebec,” but Anglo-Americans often referred to it as “Canada.”

2. Murray Lawson articulates this view of Article XI most explicitly, reading the article against the backdrop of the Quebec Act. Other useful studies of diplomatic relations between Quebec and the lower colonies during this period include Victor Coffin’s *The Province of Quebec and the Early American Revolution*; George Wrong’s *Canada and the American Revolution*; and Gustave Lanctot’s *Canada and the American Revolution 1774-1783*.

3. I draw a distinction between the “Catholic” as a discursive site—which I indicate with quotation marks—and the people who engage in Catholic religious practice. I similarly distinguish the concept of “Protestantism” out of which I argue U.S. discourses of religious pluralism grew from the set of people and theologies that constitute various Protestant religions. Scholars take up the subject of U.S. Catholicism have charted the religion’s development by excavating the history of anti-Catholic discrimination in
America, but they have not assessed the “Catholic”’s role in constructing the very culture from which it has been traditionally excluded. This critical silence may stem from the tendency to treat Catholicism as an identity rather than a flexible category not necessarily bound to specific bodies.

4. Stephen Feldman points out the fact that religious traditions such as Judaism and Islam make no distinction between private conscience and public will. He argues that the U.S. insistence upon religious privacy is necessarily anti-Semitic in that it normalizes Christian doctrines of individuality. Feldman paints an overly monolithic picture of U.S. Christianity—only parenthetically distinguishing Roman Catholicism from Protestantism (which he treats as a unified whole) and ignoring those Protestant/Christian sects such as Mormonism or Jehovah’s Witnessing that make public evangelism a condition of membership. Still, his argument makes the important point that religious privacy has its roots in the particular tradition of mainstream Protestantism and is a political construct no more natural than theocracy.

5. See Ray Allen Billington’s *The Protestant Crusade 1800–1880* and Jenny Franchot’s *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with the Catholic*. Studies of U.S. anti-Catholicism that build on Franchot’s claim that antebellum Protestants used the “Catholic” to define themselves as Protestant include Tracy Fessenden’s “From Romanism to Race: Anglo-American Liberties in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin,*” and Susan Griffin’s *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction.*

6. The act’s wording closely mirrors that of the Treaty of Paris, which reads: “De Son Coté Sa Majesté Britannique convient d’accorder aux Habitants du Canada la Liberté de
la Religion Catholique... en tant que le permettent les Loix de la Grande Bretagne” [For his part, his British Majesty agrees to afford the inhabitants of Canada the right to Roman Catholic practice... insofar as the laws of Great Britain permit], (Shortt, 1:100).

7. The clause “subject to the King’s supremacy” caused perhaps the greatest amount of confusion among both Anglo- and Franco-British subjects, because English law expressly prohibited the practice of Catholicism. Coffin argues that in signing the act in to law George III significantly reduced the power of the Catholic Church in Canada. “[T]he Quebec Act had strictly and narrowly defined the real position and power of the Church,” he argues, “it had stripped it of nearly every vestige of its old temporal prestige, and of every right of pretension to any but a strictly religious status. Further, the Act had in all probability actually diminished the revenues of the Church” (443). The “King’s supremacy” clause thus entitled George III to suspend or terminate the very religious rights that the act ostensibly guaranteed.

8. In fact, the anti-Catholicism deployed by American colonists during this period drew on an extant British tradition of anti-Catholic discourse reaching back to the era of Reformation. In both Britain and Anglo-America, for example, eighteenth-century Protestants treated terms such as “popery” and “Romanism” as synonyms for “Catholicism,” and the figure of the despotic pope appears in texts on both sides of the Atlantic. American Protestants thus in some ways defined themselves as “American” by marshalling a discourse very similar to that through which England had previously defined itself as “English.” Colin Haydon’s study of eighteenth-century English anti-Catholicism offers useful insight into the discourse’s British history.
9. See Lawson, Coffin, Lanctot, and Wrong.

10. As Derek Davis has noted, dispute over the question of church establishment generated tension between the members of different (often Protestant) religious sects throughout the colonial era and into the nineteenth century. In most colonies, Anglican or Congregational establishment was the rule, and members of other sects were taxed to support the established church but barred from holding public office. Catholics were a particular target of religious discrimination in the colonies—only three allowed Catholics to vote; Georgia refused to admit them as residents; New Hampshire threatened them with imprisonment, and New York promised to execute priests. Most colonial governments also persecuted religious dissenters such as the Quakers and Moravians—imprisoning them especially for refusing to fight in the war against Britain. Newer sects such as the Baptists and Methodists also ran into difficulties in colonies that required prospective pastors or ministers to apply for preaching licenses (Davis, 27-38, 153).

11. There has been little scholarly discussion of the Quebec Act in the past several decades. In one of the most recent in-depth studies of the act and its aftermath, Lanctot characterizes the Continental Congress as “duplicitous,” and notes that once defenders of the act obtained a copy of Jay’s Address to the People of Great Britain and translated it into French for Canadian readers, many Québécois “were filled with indignation at the perfidy of the two-faced Congress” (36).

12. While colonies such as Rhode Island and Pennsylvania had been founded in part to offer refuge to religious dissenters, most of the other eleven colonies retained official ties to the Congregational or Anglican Church through the revolutionary era. In 1833, nearly
a half-century after the ratification of the Constitution, Massachusetts became the last state to disestablish.

13. Analysis of the 1775 invasion of Quebec is available in Lanctot, 62-189.

14. For a detailed account of Madison’s role in the ratification of the Constitution and his views on the pitfalls of democracy, see Robert Goldwin’s *From Parchment to Power*, especially chapters four and five.

15. John Ferling’s *Adams vs. Jefferson* offers a detailed and compelling account of the hotly contested 1800 presidential election.

16. The Supreme Court first referenced Jefferson’s letter in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879), in which it both misquoted the letter and upheld the states’ power to criminalize polygamy. The Court would again, and more importantly, refer to the Danbury letter in the landmark *Evers v. Board of Education* case (1947), in which Chief Justice Hugo Black declared that the wall between church and state must be “high and impregnable,” even as the court ruled that children attending Catholic schools were entitled to public transportation subsidies. The body of scholarship on Jefferson’s “wall” metaphor runs both long and deep. Useful recent studies include: Daniel Dreisbach’s *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation between Church and State*; Frank Lambert’s *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America*; and Philip Hamburger’s *Separation of Church and State*.

17. Recently, for example, James Hutson’s claim that Jefferson’s insistence on a “wall of separation between church and state” reflected more a desire to infuriate his Federalist detractors than any serious commitment to secularism has sparked debate across
numerous disciplinary and political vantage points. “Those on the right welcomed [this conclusion],” Hutson writes, “because in their view it degraded the wall of separation metaphor from a judicial dogma to the common currency of political controversy. For the same reason, their antagonists resented it” (776). For a detailed discussion of this controversy, see the “Forum” section of The William and Mary Quarterly 56.4 (October 1999): 775-824.

18. Andrew Jackson’s supporters would outdo the residents of Cheshire by providing him with a 1,400 pound cheese in 1835. The cheese sat ripening in the White House for two years, staining the floor of the Entrance Hall. When Jackson invited the public to share it with him in 1837, the cheese was devoured in two hours.

19. I am greatly indebted to the work of Daniel L. Driesbach, which includes the most comprehensive narration of the Jefferson cheese story to date.
Strangers in the Text: Democratic Expansion and the Roots of U.S. Nativism

At the close of Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (1798), Carwin, the villainous Catholic ventriloquist, removes to the western frontier. Hounded by Ludloe and at risk of retribution for wreaking havoc on the Mettingen community, Carwin “hide[s] himself,” as the narrator Clara explains, “in a remote district of Pennsylvania” (229). Despite the fact that he infiltrated her home, threatened her with rape, ruined her reputation, and perhaps drove her brother to homicidal madness, Clara expresses hope that Carwin’s westward move will make him a productive member of society. “He is now probably engaged in the harmless pursuits of agriculture,” she assures the reader, “and may come to think, without insupportable remorse, on the evils to which his fatal talents have given birth” (229). Clara’s own words reveal that she does not in fact know what Carwin is doing in the West—she can only speculate about what pursuits he “probably” enjoys, and she can only hope that he “may come to think” remorseful thoughts. And yet, despite her lack of information, Clara appears fairly convinced of the frontier’s capacity to change Carwin’s outlook and alter his behavior. Thus in her final words on Carwin, Clara indulges in a fantasy that positions the emerging nation’s western frontier as the ideal site for housing and rehabilitating unruly, religiously different subjects. It is from the vantage point of remote Pennsylvania, rather than the community in which he committed his atrocities, that Clara imagines Carwin will finally recognize the cost of his ventriloquist cruelty and give up what he describes as his “passion for mystery, and a species of imposture” (192). Likewise, it is the nation’s periphery that can embrace the deviant Catholic and convert him into an American farmer. Ostensibly removed from the local
but still contained within the national, Carwin emerges in Clara’s concluding summation as an ideal Catholic citizen: distant, repentant, hardworking, harmless.

Written a decade after the battle over Constitutional ratification, in its final words on Carwin Wieland hints at ongoing early national debates about the new nation’s ability to encompass difference and protect individual liberties. Specifically, I would argue, through Clara’s strained insistence that the frontier will reinvent Carwin, the novel offers a critique of the contemporary notion that territorial expansion would safeguard the emerging U.S. system of liberal democracy against popular tyranny. This theory of democracy-via-expansion received perhaps its clearest treatment in James Madison’s Federalist 51, first published in 1788 in response to anti-Federalist concerns that U.S. democracy would devolve into majoritarianism. Madison argues in Federalist 51 that pluralism alone can prevent the formation of a powerful, nation-wide majority. “Whilst all authority in [the United States] will be derived from and dependent upon the society,” he writes, “the society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority” (292).\(^1\) Importantly, Madison’s plan for the fostering of factional difference requires what he calls an “extended republic,” a space large enough not only to accommodate difference but also to produce it (293).\(^2\) His optimism about the promise of national pluralism is thus premised largely upon a convenient forgetfulness—an attack of amnesia regarding the populations already inhabiting the territories into which the democratic nation is to extend itself. Equally, and for the purposes of this project more importantly, embedded in Madison’s equation of “extended” and “free” is the sense that the democratic system itself can never solve the
problem of popular tyranny. Rather, according to this model, democracy depends for its survival upon a plan of perpetual extension that positions the frontier as the site through which the minority outsider secures the promises of citizen-subjectivity. It is this model that, I would argue, Clara clings to at Wieland’s close when she imagines that the frontier can neutralize the threat Carwin poses to the wellbeing of others.

Madison makes his case for civic plurality by drawing an analogy between it and religious diversity. “In a free government,” he writes, “the security for civil rights must be the same as that for religious rights. It consists in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects” (292). That Madison would evoke religious liberty specifically when presenting his plan for the general protection of rights is not surprising because, as numerous scholars have noted, religion served in the early national era as a litmus test for the efficacy of the emerging democratic system. Taking this body of criticism as my starting point, in this dissertation’s first chapter I argue that early U.S. understandings of pluralism grew out of an anti-Catholic discourse that simultaneously aligned Catholicism with monarchical hierarchy and privileged a Protestant concept of privacy over the legal separation of church and state. Catholicism, in other words, appears as a homogenizing threat to diversity in early nation texts—even those ostensibly promoting religious equality for Catholic practitioners. In this chapter, I show that the mutually constitutive relationship between the discourses of pluralism and expansionism produced a new understanding of Catholicism in the in the post-ratification era, as the figure of the Catholic resurfaced to represent not only the external threat of hierarchical rule that monarchy posed to democracy but also the internal threat of popular tyranny that democracy posed to itself. Where, as I demonstrate in chapter one, in prior
decades Anglo-Americans imagined that religious privacy would prevent the development of theocracy, by the 1790s the concept of plurality through territorial expansion had become a substitute for the legal separation of church and state. In numerous early national novels, however, territorial expansion does not reduce the threat of Catholic rule but merely postpones its inevitable rise. As I will show, works such as Brown’s *Wieland*, Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s *Modern Chivalry* (1797-1815), and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827) use the Catholic to articulate concern that the kind of territorial expansion Madison advocated was at best a stop-gap measure against democratic disintegration that would ultimately render the nation vulnerable to tyrannical design.

At stake in this excavation of early national depictions of the Catholic is a reassessment of the temporal parameters that have traditionally structured inquiries into U.S. anti-Catholic discourse. Scholarship on anti-Catholicism tends to elide its salience in the post-Revolutionary era—an era critics often, I think mistakenly, treat as one of national religious good feeling. This elision has produced a critical narrative that presents the 1820s as a decade in which anti-Catholic murmurs interrupted thirty years of religious tolerance and spawned the virulent Nativism characterizing the three decades leading up to the Civil War. Critics generally attribute the 1830s “resurgence” of anti-Catholic sentiment to rising immigration rates, arguing, as Ray Allen Billington does, that the arrival of European Catholics in the U.S. “stirred ancient antipathies to the point where an anti-Catholic movement could become an important factor in the nation’s life” (32). This cause-and-effect explanation of Nativism requires both a negation of the importance of early national anti-Catholic discourse and a willingness to place the burden
of Nativism onto immigrant bodies. Rather than treating the 1820s as a decade in which immigration awakened long-dormant anti-Catholic sentiments, I will demonstrate that the Nativist polemic drew on longstanding debates over the place of the Catholic in an expanding U.S. society to articulate the problem of individual liberty within a democratic system. Specifically, I will show that Lyman Beecher’s infamous anti-Catholic diatribe *A Plea for the West* (1835) shares with these earlier writings concern over democracy’s power to maintain itself through the process of national expansion. The reevaluation of post-Revolutionary anti-Catholic discourse will not only decenter the immigrant-as-origin paradigm currently governing critical accounts of Nativism, but also facilitate the recognition of a previously ignored literary genealogy—one that tracks from Madison’s early political theories through the fictional works of writers such as Brown and Sedgwick and finally informs the expository prose of Beecher’s *Plea*. Beecher’s *Plea*, I argue, makes explicit that which was already implicit in the nation’s earliest fictional productions: namely, the Catholic’s capacity to represent the possibility that territorial expansion would not offer equal protection to all democratic citizens.

* * * * * *

However optimistic Clara might be about Carwin’s newfound profession and remorse, at the end of *Wieland* Brown himself does not seem to share that optimism and in fact has constructed a narrative that undercuts Clara’s insistence that the Catholic villain can become a useful citizen. Clara’s hope for Carwin hinges on his adoption of
frontier agrarianism; she presumes his pursuits “harmless” at the novel’s close, because they must be agricultural. But such a presumption requires Clara to forget that when she first encountered Carwin he ostensibly was engaged in farm life already, sporting attire that, combined with his “rustic” gait, made him seem like any of the locals “frequently to be met with on the road, and in the harvest field” (49). His pursuits, in other words, are already agricultural, though far from harmless. Thus the novel’s ending eerily echoes its beginning, as Carwin has simply set out for a slightly more remote space. Ed White has recently pointed to Carwin’s position as frontier rustic, arguing that in assuming that early national novels are allegories of the nation and the problem of democracy, critics have failed to consider the ways in which these texts engage with local histories and geographies—such as, in the case of Wieland, the Paxton riots and the publication of Robert Proud’s History of Pennsylvania. While I find his exegesis of Carwin’s rural status useful and, perhaps more importantly, recognize that my own study falls into the category of criticism with which he is taking issue, I would argue that in focusing exclusively on the local White loses sight of Wieland’s connection to contemporary debates over Catholicism’s relationship to the nation. Thus while I share White’s sense that “[r]eligion is undoubtedly a central concern” of the novel, I am less convinced that it is so “less in a sense of ideology or even psychology than as a kind of ‘feeling of structure’” (49). Rather, I would argue, the novel is deeply concerned with the ways in which religious ideology might conflict with liberal democratic ideology, and it is specifically interested in the relationship Catholicism bears to egalitarian government and democracy.
From the outset of *Wieland*, Brown makes clear the fact that Mettingen is a community founded on the liberal principle of individual religious freedom. The elder Wieland, Mettingen’s founder and Theodore and Clara’s father, was a strict adherent to a Protestant religion of his own design, but as Clara explains, he “did not exact from his family compliance with his example” (13). The children’s mother thus retained her Moravian commitments unmolested, as her husband “refused to interfere with her arrangements” and claimed to follow his system of worship “not, accurately speaking, because it was the best, but because it had been expressly [sic] prescribed for him.” “Other modes,” Clara asserts, “if practiced by other persons, might be equally acceptable” (13). Significantly, the elder Wieland adopted his pluralistic stance toward religion after reading a book by “one of the teachers of the Albigenses, or French Protestants,” and containing “an exposition of the doctrine of the sect of Camissards, and an historical account of its origin” (10). As Caleb Crain notes, the Albigenses were not “Protestants” per se—their society predated the Reformation—but they and the Camissards were members of sects that the Catholic Church at different times violently repressed. Father Wieland’s commitment to the fostering of religious difference thus developed in part out of a long tradition of opposition to Catholic dogmatism. His children, for their part, have inherited that commitment along with the Mettingen estate. Clara explains that although the younger Wieland and Henry Pleyel are close friends, they embrace creeds that are “in many respects opposite” (27). Wieland is devoted to his personal—and probably fanatical—theology, while Pleyel is a skeptical devotee of Enlightenment rationalism. The two often discuss the subject of religion “with candour [sic] as well as with skill,” but they neither reach nor ever expect mutual consensus, and
ultimately each respects the other's private judgment (27). Thus a legacy of anti-Catholic revolt carries on at Mettingen, as the inhabitants reject ideological congruence in favor of plurality and equality.

If the Mettingen community for a time succeeds in adopting a liberal model of free public discourse, religious moderation, and academic inquiry, the arrival of the Catholic Carwin signals the beginning of that community's end. Even before the Wielands and Pleyels become aware of his presence, indeed even before the reader encounters him, Carwin disrupts Mettingen's quietude by undermining its epistemological foundations. His early impersonations of Catherine confuse Wieland and Pleyel and, as White points out, circumscribe their mobility. Pleyel, for example, ceases his efforts to convince Wieland to relocate to Europe when he "hears" Catherine's voice tell him that his lover Teresa de Stolberg is dead. Knowing that Catherine is nowhere near, Pleyel assumes that the voice must emanate from an otherworldly source—a "source that cannot fail"—and he accepts its claims as true (44). Carwin's commitment to sensory deception places Wieland squarely within what Jenny Franchot has identified as the tradition of antebellum anti-Catholic discourse that presents the Catholic as bearing "a punitive interior, one disguised by any number of duplicitous architectural or behavioral exteriors" (182). Within this discursive tradition, which has its roots in post-Reformation rhetoric, Catholicism cultivates an inviting surface to distract Protestants while it erodes their individual liberties. Rituals, vestments, stained glass windows, and music operate within a conspiracy of deception, dazzling the eye and ear while the Church turns parishioners into slaves. In Wieland, the biloquist Carwin embodies this Catholic duplicity through his faulty vocals, which he uses to seduce and control the
Protestant Wielands. Thus in the figure of Carwin, Brown makes flesh the period’s ostensibly contradictory understandings of Catholicism. On the one hand, the Catholic appears as a rustic and lowly peasant; on the other, he seems an external ruling force that demands—and indeed receives—absolute compliance.

Brown is careful to emphasize the connection between Carwin’s Catholicism and his ability to execute his designs on the Mettingenites. Responding to Clara’s astonishment that he managed to fully infiltrate her family so quickly, Carwin explains that he has had access to her house through her servant, whom he has seduced. “You will not be surprised,” he says after admitting to his sexual exploits,

that I should sometimes profit by your absence, and adventure to examine with my own eyes, the interior of your chamber... I scrutinized everything, and pried every where. Your closer was usually locked, but it was once my fortune to find the key on a bureau. I opened and found new scope for my curiosity in your books. One of these was a manuscript which essentially agreed with a short-hand system which I had learned from a Jesuit missionary.

(197)

The Jesuit he met in his journeys through Spain taught Carwin to read and thereby rendered Mettingen legible to him in a way that his Protestant education in England could
not have. It is through this reading that Carwin learns Clara's unspoken thoughts and gains useful insight into the workings of her community. He downplays his manipulations by telling her, of the book, "If I had been a profound and malignant imposter, what plenteous materials were thus furnished me of stratagems and plots" (197). Here Brown makes an important distinction between Carwin's ability to read Clara's short-hand and his ability to "read" the situation he has created. He seems not to realize that, regardless of whether he is responsible for Wieland's behavior, his biloqual machinations have disrupted the lives of everyone residing at Mettingen—perhaps Clara most of all. Thus a Catholic education reveals the Wielands' secrets to Carwin, but it also distorts his moral compass and makes him incapable of recognizing the difficulty he has caused.

Although Carwin's Catholicism provides him with a means of infiltrating Mettingen, it is important to note that his religious difference is also what motivates Clara and her family to welcome him into their circle. Pleyel's early revelation that Carwin is a convert to Catholicism fuels Clara's interest in the stranger and motivates the Wielands to seek his company. The Catholic warrants attention, then, because it raises all kinds of questions about the limits of their liberalism. "Carwin was an adherent to the Romish faith," Clara says to explain her curiosity, "yet he was an Englishman by birth, and, perhaps, a protestant by education"; "What," she wonders, "could have obliterated the impressions of his youth, and made him abjure his religion and his country" (66). Here, Clara draws an important connection between Carwin's religious and national affiliations. In "abjuring" Protestantism, he has renounced the England of his birth; in relocating to Spain, he has "obliterated" the Protestant tradition in which he was raised.
In the new space of the United States, however, Carwin’s Catholicism need not preclude entrance into a liberal, Protestant community. Intrigued but not repulsed by Carwin’s religious difference, Clara is desirous of further interaction and pleased when he joins the Mettingenites at her brother’s home. Pleyel has suggested that Carwin’s conversion might not have been genuine, but despite their best efforts the Mettingenites can detect neither insincerity nor fanaticism in his Catholic performance. Anxious to make his circle available to the stranger, Wieland invites Carwin to spend the night with his family and to attend future evening discussions (69). Thus although Carwin ultimately becomes a villain in Wieland, at the novel’s open he represents a desirable difference—a seemingly inassimilable figure through which the Mettingenites can test their commitment to ideological pluralism. That test, of course, fails when Carwin’s desire for control trumps his interest in egalitarianism.

In its depiction of a liberal community not under siege from but rather welcoming to a disruptive religious outsider, Wieland shares a thematic concern with other novels of the period, including Tabitha Gilman Tenney’s Female Quixotism (1801) and Brackenridge’s Modern Chivalry. Female Quixotism has received renewed critical attention since its reissue in 1992, and recent studies of the novel treat it, I think correctly, in part as a political allegory reflecting anxieties about the condition of the newly formed United States. Taking as their starting point an 1804 letter in which the former Federalist President John Adams articulates a connection between libertine seduction and democracy, critics such as Linda Frost have noted Female Quixotism’s engagement with contemporary debates over the limits of popular government within the U.S.’s emerging liberal democracy. Indeed Tenney would have been familiar with these debates: her
husband Samuel Tenney was a prominent Federalist senator who ardently supported the Adams administration and, among other things, voted in favor of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798. First published in the aftermath of the Republican Thomas Jefferson’s defeat of the incumbent Adams, Female Quixotism parallels the decline of familial and national sovereignty through depictions of the sexual adventures of a rising middle class. As Frost puts it, “O’Connor is a Federalist’s nightmare, the American dream of opportunity and personal endeavor gone wrong” (121). But while critical discussion of O’Connor’s class status and sexual behavior has nicely highlighted the novel’s participation in contemporary politics, missing from scholarly examination of Tenney’s work is an accounting of the suitor’s religious affiliation. When Dorcasina Sheldon, the quasi-protagonist of Tenney’s satire, asks why her father harbors so much disdain for O’Connor, her servant Betty’s reply is simple. “Perhaps, ma’am,” she tells Dorcasina, “[Mr. Sheldon] has found [O’Connor] to be a papish, and does not want you to marry a man of that religion, for fear he should not make a good husband” (79, emphasis added). Through the ever-insightful Betty’s hypothesis, Tenney makes explicit that which has loomed at the novel’s margins ever since the “Irishman” O’Connor’s arrival: the possibility that the ill-intentioned impostor is a Catholic and thus unfit for entrance into the Sheldon household. It is in confronting Catholicism that the Sheildons confront the problem of religious difference.

Dorcasina is quick to counter Betty’s postulation, though not, importantly, by exonerating O’Connor of the charge. “My father is too liberal, in his sentiments, to make that objection,” she argues, “even if he knew it to be the case” (79). Dorcasina makes a strong argument in favor of religious pluralism. She tells Betty, of her father, “He has
taught me to believe that the good and virtuous, and sincere, of all religions, will be accepted of God, and that [god] is not displeased with the variety of forms in which he is worshipped" (79). But while this pluralist logic might hold some appeal, within the context of the novel it proves disastrous. Whatever O'Connor's actual religious affiliation—this is the only time Tenney alludes to it, and she never resolves the question—his interest in Dorcasina does not extend beyond her substantial income. His affection is feigned, his chivalry a sham, and beneath his benevolent exterior beats the heart of an unrepentant libertine. For Betty, Catholicism seems appropriate shorthand for the suitor's many shortcomings. But to Dorcasina, O'Connor's possible papism is simply one more reason to cling to him. Accusations of papism only strengthen her resolve to marry, because they convert O'Connor from a licentious usurper into a persecuted religious dissenter. Thus it is Dorcasina's "liberal" sentiment that leaves her vulnerable to exploitation, because it motivates her to incorporate the menacing Catholic into her happy home. The problem in *Female Quixotism* is not, then, that Dorcasina is too weak to repel O'Connor's advances. Rather the problem is that in the name of pluralism, Dorcasina, like the Wielands, invites the Catholic in.

*Modern Chivalry* is similarly concerned with the relationship between liberalism and Catholicism, but Brackenridge's sprawling narrative is more explicitly concerned with the public sphere than either *Wieland* or *Female Quixotism*. Dana Nelson has recently noted *Modern Chivalry's* conspicuous absence from "the list of must-reads for those who study the political and literary legacy of the early republic" and convincingly suggested that the work's length (800 pages), more than occasional tedium, and often unwieldy heteroglossia have all made it a less than popular object of study (24). Nelson,
however, argues that it is precisely Modern Chivalry’s representational complexity that makes it a useful tool for understanding early national debates about democracy. “In its assessments of democracy,” Nelson writes, “the novel expounds reasonability against rationality. . . it insists over and over again that democracy’s lack of susceptibility to formula. . . is a positive good” (32, emphasis original). In other words, Modern Chivalry’s sometimes unmanageable narration can serve as an index of Brackenridge’s position on early national debates about the necessity of consensus and political uniformity. In both its narration of Farrago’s adventures and its expository “observation” sections, the novel celebrates the concept of balance and “makes political diversity central to the health of a democratic representative order” (31). While I find Nelson’s argument that the concepts of narrative and political representation should be considered in tandem compelling, and I agree with her general assessment of Modern Chivalry’s commitment to diversity and balance, I would like to point out the fact that throughout Brackenridge’s narrative the dangers of democratic excess and bureaucratic imbalance are often embodied in Farrago’s Irish Catholic servant, Teague O’Regan. Thus although Modern Chivalry might offer an attractive picture of representation’s necessity to democratic freedom, it does so in part by presenting the Catholic as an inassimilable threat to communal cohesion. As a result, the reasonableness and balance that the novel advocates are often achieved once the Catholic is removed from public life.

Over the course of Brackenridge’s lengthy narrative, Teague is (among other things) nearly elected to Congress, invited to join a Philosophical Society, solicited to negotiate Indian treaties, considered for candidacy in a Presbytery, employed as an excise officer, and mistaken for a judge, a winged-monster, a sans culottes, an apothecary, and a
talking beast. Teague endures these misrecognitions, in good "Catholic" fashion, in between crossing himself, evoking the saints, and over-indulging with food and prostitutes. Farrago, for his part, spends much of the novel either convincing Teague to decline his many offers or convincing people that his "bog-trotter" is not what they imagine him to be. When, for example, a Philosophical society offers to make Teague a philosopher—the Captain having declined membership—Farrago tells him the philosophers "want to take skin off of you, and pass you for an over-grown otter, or a muskrat" (26). It is only through this subterfuge that Farrago prevents Teague's enrollment in the society, for the philosophers are quite prepared to admit him.

Brackenridge's narrator asserts that the society is full of unqualified members, because its standards have fallen so low and its commitment to cronyism so intensified that "the bare scratching the backside of a neighbor has been known to procure a fellowship" (23). Universal membership eligibility—complete equality, in other words—has eroded the society's boundaries and destroyed its credibility. "This is no unusual thing with institutions of this nature," the narrator notes, "though, by the by, it is a great fault. For it lessens the incentives of honor" (23). Importantly, within the novel's action it is the Catholic Teague who stands as specific proof of this "great fault." In order to demonstrate its commitment to openness, the society invites the uneducated and superstitious Catholic into its fold. Modern Chivalry thus plays out the problem of universality—of catholicity—on the body of the Catholic, as the society demonstrates itself not vulnerable but rather welcoming to incursion.

During Teague's Congressional run the Captain tells voters, "I would rather you send the weaver [another candidate], though I thought that improper, than to invade my
household, and thus detract from me the very person that I have about me to brush my boots, and clean my spurs” (13). Here Farrago’s duel motives for keeping Teague out of public office are clear. On the one hand, he demonstrates a perhaps aristocratic desire to retain the Irishman’s labor for himself; Teague is, after all, a fine boot brusher. But on the other hand, Farrago is expressing a sense that even within a democracy some candidates are more qualified than others. He would rather the townspeople “send the weaver” to Congress if that means he can keep Teague by his side, but he initially thought the weaver’s candidacy “improper,” because the weaver’s opponent is “a man of education” (13). This seemingly simple and comic episode stands in line with what Nelson identifies as Brackenridge’s “passionate argument for the necessity of voting experts into office,” but it also highlights one of the central problems—indeed the problem that would divide the Federalist and Republican Parties—of liberal democracy: the question of who is most “expert” at representing the people. The weaver probably has more in common with and direct access to his prospective constituents than does the “man of education,” but unlike his opponent he knows nothing of governmental procedure and the law. Thus the question arises: what does the representative represent—the state or the people? This is not an easy question, and it is in fact a faulty question, because it ignores the mutually constitutive relationship between the “people” and the “state.” But Brackenridge’s narrative ultimately avoids addressing this question altogether by displacing the anxiety it produces onto Teague’s Catholic body. Farrago’s horror at the prospect of the city electing an uneducated weaver is superceded only by his horror at the prospect of it electing Teague. The state’s open invitation to Catholic inclusion appears the most immediate crisis in this episode, rather than the larger,
lingering question of what "representation" means within a democracy. Thus the Catholic allows *Modern Chivalry* to dubiously maintain that balance of which Nelson writes, as it generates a crisis of inclusion that can be immediately solved by the eradication of Catholicism.

That Brackenridge, Tenney, and Brown would similarly deploy the Catholic in works concerned with the state of liberal democracy in the early U.S. is telling, because the three embraced very different political perspectives and even supported opposing parties at the turn of the nineteenth century. Tenney’s work evinces, as critics have demonstrated, a Federalist bent in its suspicions about the invasion of middling class subjects. But Brackenridge was a Jeffersonian populist who served as mediator during the Whiskey Rebellion and whose loyalty to the Republican Party landed him an appointment to Pennsylvania’s Supreme Court in 1799. Recently, critics have argued that traditional accounts positioning the “early” Brown as a radical Republican and the “later” Brown as a conservative Federalist fall flat, especially given the slipperiness of terms such as “radical” and the fact that Brown’s literary career spanned just over a decade (Brown died at 38). Thus it is not possible to simply chalk these writers’ depictions of Catholic difference up to a particular political commitment. Rather, I would argue, these dissimilar fictional works similarly construct a discourse of Catholic strangeness to present the potential difficulties that pluralism and egalitarianism posed to national cohesion, because the Catholic had since the earliest days of U.S. nation-formation stood as the test case for liberal democracy. Thus rather than appearing, as it did in earlier decades, as the all-powerful inquisitor or priest, in these late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century novels the Catholic also comes to represent the treacherous
everyman—the presumptuous peasant laborer who demands entrance into and full representation within the liberal community. In each of works, liberal democracy embraces the Catholic, and once inside the Catholic threatens to undo the very system that welcomed it.

If the Catholic operates in these works as a dangerous stranger that the liberal community cannot help but welcome into its fold, then in Wieland—the work most interested in the connection between pluralism and expansionism—it also appears as a force that, once inside, is impossible to eradicate. Brown suggests this impossibility when he describes the Mettingenites’ failed efforts to rehearse a Saxon poem in which “the exploits of Zisca [sic], the Bohemian hero, [are] woven into a dramatic series and connection” (73). Edward Cahill has recently argued that the reference to this “final exercise of aesthetic sociability... stands as a representation of the wide spectrum of aesthetic experience conceivable in Brown’s world,” and that in ignoring the multiple possibilities that imaginative pursuit offers in works such as Wieland critics have imposed a false binary between “reason” and “imagination” onto the Brown canon (31-2).

While Cahill’s suggestion that Brown viewed imagination as a potential component—rather than the antithesis—of moral development and rationality is quite convincing, absent from his discussion is consideration of the fact that the Saxon poem in question tells the story of a successful military campaign against the Catholic Church. In the fifteenth century, Jan Žižka led the Hussite army to victory against Sigismund, the German king aligned with Pope Martin V in his efforts to reinstate Roman Catholicism in what is now the Czech Republic. This performance thus creates an opportunity for the Wielands to enact a scene of Protestant victory. It also, significantly, offers a means of
removing the Catholic from their own midst. "The language [of the poem] was familiar to all of us but Carwin," Clara tells her reader, "[his] company, therefore, was tacitly dispensed with" (75). However else it might function in Wieland, the Saxon poem holds the promise of Protestant primacy. Despite its potential, however, the poem is never performed, and the story of Žižka remains unspoken and unexplained in Brown’s narrative. Pleyel fails to arrive at Mettingen on the day set aside for the poem’s performance, and Wieland cannot go ahead in his absence (77). When it becomes clear that Pleyel’s arrival is not immanent, Clara returns home to find Carwin hiding in her closet. The episode thus presents a two-fold narrative of Catholic resilience. Neither the Mettingenites nor Brown speak the story of Protestant Bohemia’s vanquishing of the Vatican, and the seemingly absent Carwin has in fact been with Clara all along.

Clara’s final assertion that Carwin no longer poses a threat because he has decided to “hide himself in a remote district of Pennsylvania” (229) is significant not only because it speaks to the Catholic’s continued residence within the nation, but also because it stands as a corrective to contemporary notions that territorial expansion could protect individual rights by calling into question the very notion of “remoteness.” After all, Mettingen itself is a sparsely populated community situated outside of the city in Schuylkill and surrounded by farmland and wilderness. It bears, in other words, all the markings of the frontier. But Carwin’s residence there and his agrarian affect did not reduce his desire to govern the actions of those around him. Clara’s plan for Carwin’s reform thus seems to require an infinite project of national expansion—the Catholic must move ever westward if it is to leave Protestant America in peace. Describing both Madison’s arguments for plurality and Brown’s later fragment “Memoirs of Carwin the
Biloquist,” Hsuan Hsu has recently noted that within the logic of freedom-via-expansion “[d]emocratic space, imagined as a continually expanding network of equivalent and self-sufficient cells, provided both a justification and a mechanism for mapping and incorporating new colonial territories” (137). While Hsu is interested in the ways in which “Memoirs of Carwin” destabilizes the imagined connection between expansionism and U.S. nationalism, I would argue that Wieland similarly, though perhaps less explicitly, casts doubt on the imperial nation’s ability to protect individual rights. At the novel’s end, the native-born Clara and Pleyel depart from the Americas, leaving the Pennsylvania frontier to Carwin. The West thus becomes in Wieland not a site of democratic expansion but rather the ever-expanding domain of the Catholic. The landscape of democratic fantasy—the horizon of perfect equality through difference—comes to house the novel’s religious villain, and the state of the emerging union is left in question. In decades to come, the ending of Wieland would echo through anti-Catholic and Nativist polemics, as nineteenth-century writers struggled to define themselves as free, democratic, “native” Americans.

* * * * *

James Fenimore Cooper’s The Pioneers (1823) depends for its construction of frontier pluralism on the deployment of anti-Catholic discourse. At the novel’s open, New St. Paul’s Church stands at the center of, indeed embodies, debate over the relationship between religion and communal life. Cooper writes that New St. Paul’s had been constructed “under an implied agreement, that, after its completion, the question
should be fairly put to the people, that they might decide to what [Protestant]
denomination it should belong” (116). But unbeknownst to the rest of Templeton, the
church’s architect Richard Jones is an ardent Episcopalian who has already promised his
Diocesan that “both the building and the congregation [will] cheerfully come within the
pale of the Protestant Episcopal church” (117). This explains why Jones designed the
church’s edifice in secret, keeping quiet about his plans for the steeple and revealing the
Roman arch windows only at the last possible moment. Jones’s efforts to convince his
neighbors of the propriety of Episcopal primacy have, however, failed. Perhaps out of
protest against Jones’s dogmatism—or indignation over the ostentatious windows—no
one in Templeton showed up at the polls when it came time to cast denominational votes.
As a result, New St. Paul’s interior remains bare, and religious services take place in
another, secular building. The failed vote on New St. Paul’s denominational future not
only indicates the incommensurability of ostensibly similar (Protestant) religious
practices, but it also suggests that religious conflict might resist the kind of resolution that
representative democracy has to offer. No vote, no consensus, no peace. In this way,
Cooper’s *The Pioneers* can be read not as a harbinger of Nativism to come, but rather as a
novel entrenched in longstanding debates about the relationship between religion and U.S.
liberal democracy. The danger to Templeton—to the United States—lies not in the
migrating body, but in a governmental system that cannot sufficiently contend with
religious diversity.

It is onto this contentious scene that Mr. Grant, an Episcopal clergyman hired by
Jones, arrives. Though his presence initially inspires suspicion among the residents of
Templeton, in his inaugural Christmas Eve service Grant manages to circumvent
sectarian conflict by divesting his practice of its most formal rituals. "His orthodoxy had no dependence on his cassock," Cooper writes of Grant, "he could pray. . . without the assistance of his clerk; and he had even been known to preach a most evangelical sermon, in the winning manner of native eloquence, without the aid of cambric handkerchief!" (126-7). Grant’s liturgical flexibility appeases Templeton’s congregants, and Cooper attributes this appeasement to the fact that "when [Grant] had ended, there was not one of his new hearers, who did not think the ceremony less papal and offensive, and more conformant to his or her own notions of devout worship, than they had been led to expect from a service of forms" (127, emphasis mine). Cooper’s deployment of "papal" is telling here, as it suggests that the congregation’s anxieties about Episcopacy stem more from an aversion to Catholicism than from intra-Protestant animosity. In this way, the people’s positive reaction to Grant’s sanitized public worship echoes Hiram Doolittle’s earlier response to Jones’s christening of New St. Paul’s. Jones had originally wanted to call the church simply "St. Paul’s," but Doolittle insisted upon the "slight addition of calling it ‘New St. Paul’s,’ feeling less aversion to a name taken from the English Cathedral, than from the saint" (118). Thus the processes of naming and staffing the church to suit the diverse community both involve the elimination of vestiges of the “Catholic.” Once the church is pronounced "new," its reference point is an English landmark rather than a saint, and once Grant strips the "Catholic" ritual out of his religious practice, the residents of Templeton can unite around his liturgy. The displacement of democratic dispute onto the figure of Catholicism thus allows Cooper—as it did Brackenridge before him—to circumvent democracy’s pitfalls and avoid
grappling with the real problem of how democracy might cope with the reality of ideological diversity.

If Cooper’s novel depends for its depiction of plurality on the eradication of an imagined but not present Catholicism, then Catharine Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie considers the question of how Catholic bodies might circulate in a majority Protestant society. In her recent study of anti-Catholicism in nineteenth-century U.S. and British fiction, Susan Griffin uses Catharine Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie (1827) as a marker to indicate the antebellum popularity of tales exposing the horrors of Catholicism. She notes that “George Bourne’s Lorette (1833). . . the ‘prototype’ of convent exposés, shares Frank Luther Mott’s list of ‘Best Sellers’ with Catherine [sic] Sedgwick’s Hope Leslie and Susan Warner’s Queechy, domestic novels that critics have recently made standard texts in studies of nineteenth-century American culture” (30). While Griffin’s evaluation of the late scholarly reclamation of Hope Leslie is an accurate one, like most critics of the early-nineteenth century she ignores one of the novel’s most salient features: its anti-Catholicism. Hope Leslie shares more than just best-seller status with Lorette; both works are concerned with uncovering the dangers and duplicities of Roman Catholicism. Thus although Griffin’s work significantly extends the temporal and spatial boundaries of the study of anti-Catholicism to include the late-nineteenth century (a period often ignored in this context) and both sides of the Atlantic, in positioning the “domestic novel” against the escaped nun’s tale she implies that anti-Catholicism was a theme relegated to certain forms in this period rather than a discourse operating within a variety of literary genres. In a recent essay on the novel’s relationship to questions of authority, Susan Harris briefly notes that Sedgwick “shared her contemporaries’ distrust of Roman
Catholics” and argues that the Sedgwick corpus presents “the Church as an authoritarian structure and the faithful as dupes of a crafty priesthood” (281). This assertion may be correct, but I would argue that in chalking Sedgwick’s anti-Catholicism up to ethnocentrism, Harris presents too simple a picture of the author’s work. Further excavation of the anti-Catholicism in *Hope Leslie* not only reveals the discourse’s pervasiveness in the early-nineteenth century, but it also brings to light the ways in which the figure of the Catholic both produced and mediated anxiety about the fraught relationships between individual liberty, territorial expansion, and national solidarity within the early U.S.’s developing liberal democracy.

In its first volume, *Hope Leslie* positions the frontier in opposition to the city in order to depict precisely the kind of democratic pluralism Madison had earlier described. Having grown disillusioned with his fellow Puritans, William Fletcher has moved his family west to Connecticut and built his house at a distance from the settlement. Sedgwick writes that Fletcher “was mortified at seeing power, which had been earned at such a dear rate... sometimes perverted to purposes of oppression and personal aggrandizement,”

He was shocked when a religious republic, which he fancied to be founded on the basis of established truth, was disturbed by the out-break of heresies; and his heart sickened when he saw those, who had sacrificed whatever man holds dearest to religious freedom, imposing those shackles on others from which they had just released themselves at such a price.
Weighed down by the burdens of theocracy, Fletcher endeavors to construct a tolerant and plural society within his own household. Though he and his immediate family are staunch Puritans, Fletcher and his wife welcome the Anglican Mrs. Grafton into their home, and they do not force Magawisca to convert to Christianity. This is not to say that there is no friction within the Fletcher home—Mrs. Fletcher tries to persuade Magawisca to trade the Great Spirit for the Holy Father, and Everell amuses himself by tweaking Mrs. Grafton’s high church sensibilities—but compulsory Puritanism is not the rule, and religious conflict seems more interpersonal than structural. Thus the Fletcher household seems for a time to embody and indeed hold itself together through Madison’s notion of a “multiplicity of sects.” Having removed to the frontier, the Fletchers can afford the luxury of tolerance.

Of course, the Fletchers’ experiment does not last, as the brutal conflict between English settlers and Native Americans eventually reaches their front door. But though this novel is unquestionably interested in Indian-white relations, for the purposes of this essay what matters most is that, like Wieland before it, Hope Leslie tells the story of a community invaded by a Catholic pretender. When he arrives in Sedgwick’s seventeenth-century Boston setting, Sir Philip Gardiner sports the requisite Puritan attire and closely cropped hair, and he seems a man devoted to the community’s religious principles. “[A] nice critic,” writes Sedgwick, “could not detect the most venial error in his apparel” (124). And though he arouses suspicion on the Friday he passes over wild
turkey in favor of cod, Gardiner manages to convince Hope Leslie and her fellow diners that his eschewal of poultry stems from a sincere commitment to self-denial rather than “Romanist” tendencies (148). Sedgwick reveals Gardiner’s “real” identity to her readers long before it becomes apparent to the novel’s characters, when she interpolates Gardiner’s letter to his friend Wilton into the text. Explaining his decision to move to New England, Gardiner writes, “I was tired of playing a losing game. . . . I had some compunctious visitings at leaving my king when he hath such a cruel need of loyal servants. . . . [but] I have retired till dame fortune shall see fit to give her wheel a turn in my royal master’s favor” (198). A not-so-loyal loyalist, Gardiner has abandoned Charles I to history and come to Boston in search of Thomas Morton.13 In order to pass freely through Puritan society, Gardiner has assumed Puritan garb and disguised his mistress Rosa as a pageboy: “we must play the part of pilgrims,” he tells Wilton, “till we [are] quite independent of the favour of the saints” (199). The Catholic thus poses an unseen threat, bearing, as Franchot has noted, an attractive exterior that conceals duplicity and danger.

Despite its prefatory promises to both illustrate the character of pre-Revolutionary America and bring to light the “high-souled courage and patriotism” of Native Americans, *Hope Leslie* is deeply concerned with the place of Catholicism within a majority Protestant community. Though Gardiner poses perhaps the greatest threat to Hope, he is not the only villainous Catholic in Sedgwick’s novel. Near the novel’s end Hope finds herself stranded on an island amidst a band of Italian sailors. Prohibited from entering Boston due to their destructive behavior, the sailors have withdrawn to sleep off their revelries. When Hope implores the drunken Catholics to save her one replies, “[t]here’s
no reward could pay for you, honey,” and then they pursue her, “hooting and shouting” all the while (240). Hope escapes certain sexual assault only by allowing Antonio Batista, who has retired to a small boat apart from his fellow sailors, to believe that she is his patron Saint Petronilla. Seeing Antonio as her only chance of escape, Hope gives him a “relic” in the form of her bracelet and asks him to convey her to Boston (242). Bowing low and crossing himself, Antonio complies. Sedgwick’s narrator recognizes the potential blasphemy of Hope’s act but absolves the heroine of wrongdoing by asserting that “protestant as she was, we hope she may be pardoned for thinking that she might without presumption, identify herself with a catholic saint” (242). Thus Sedgwick presents Protestant appropriation of Catholic tropes as a reasonable means of self-preservation—though Gardiner’s similar behavior offers proof of his treachery. Most important to this analysis, however, is not the distinction Sedgwick makes between Hope and Gardiner but rather the one she draws between Gardiner and the Italian sailors. For if Gardiner—a friend to monarchy and clericalism alike—stands as a representative of an old, aristocratic form of tyranny, then the Italians in Hope Leslie offer a different picture of Catholicism by embodying the terror of uncontrolled and uncontrollable mob rule. Gardiner is cunning and deceptive, but refined; the Italians are rapacious and superstitious, but ruthless. Through narration of their very different interactions with Boston society, Sedgwick illustrates the dual threat that many early-nineteenth-century Anglo-Americans viewed the “Catholic” as posing to democratic rule: the return of monarchy and the rise of a hungry lower class.

Unlike Tenney, Brackenridge, and Brown, Sedgwick does not depict an open or “liberal” society intent on welcoming the Catholic outsider. Indeed, Hope Leslie draws
much of the force of its (not fully successful) critique of racial and sexual inequality from its setting. But though the novel’s accounts of Puritan sex codes, racial violence, and sumptuary laws suggest that the culture’s dogmatic insistence on homogeneity runs counter to solidarity and prefigures its undoing, at Hope Leslie’s close it is the removal of the Catholic Gardiner that signals the return of peace to Boston society. The ship explosion that destroys the imposter and his concubine—as well as the always unpleasant Jennet—proves fortuitous not only because it ensures Hope’s future safety from the aging libertine, but also because “it prevent[s] a premature discovery of [Magawisca’s] escape” from prison (336). The spectacular nature of Gardiner’s death, in other words, produces a time-lag that allows the novel’s duel heroines to reassert their proper places in society. Hope returns home and eventually marries her longtime love Everell Fletcher; Magawisca conveniently decides to depart from Boston in search of her father and the remnants of her massacred tribe. Thus if Cooper preserves the tenuous solidarity and pluralism of Templeton by stripping the “papism” out of Grant’s public worship, then Sedgwick restores order to Boston society by blowing the Catholic Gardiner up. While numerous scholars have noted that Hope Leslie’s ending ultimately reaffirms the very racist logic its critique of Indian Removal would seem to contradict, less attention has been paid to the fact that the novel cannot incorporate live Catholics into its closing scenes and thus offers them up as a sacrifice to domestic and communal happiness. Sedgwick does not even present Gardiner’s body at the novel’s end: the narrator informs readers that it was never found, perhaps because “Satan had seized upon that as his lawful spoil” (348). This hyperbolic postulation makes it seem that Gardiner, rather than Puritan absolutism and perpetual ethnic conflict, has been the problem in Boston all
along. Concern over society's vulnerability to difference, in other words, is displaced onto the disappearing Catholic body.

In the characters of Gardiner and the Italian sailors, then, *Hope Leslie* presents a picture of Catholic incursion barely thwarted by Protestant diligence. There is, however, one Catholic who manages to permanently disrupt Sedgwick's Boston community: the frontier priest who converts Faith and blesses her union with Oneco. Despite Hope's efforts to keep her sister close by tolerating her difference, Faith escapes from Boston to rejoin her Native American family. Magawisca earlier predicts Faith's departure by explaining to Hope that her sister is, by "virtue and duty," bound "to Oneco. She hath been married according to our simple modes, and persuaded by a Romish father, as she came from Christian blood, to observe the rites of their law" (331). Magawisca's warning complicates the notion that Faith is lost to her white community simply because she has crossed a racial divide and "gone native." Rather, it seems, Faith cannot re-enter Puritan society, because the Catholic proscription of divorce has bound her permanently to her Pequot husband. Here, then, the impossibility of permanent return for Faith seems less a function of her adopted Indian culture than a product of the machinations of a "Romish" priest. The Catholicism that Hope was prepared to tolerate in order to keep Faith within the community ultimately proves through its own inflexibility incompatible with "Protestant" life. Although Magawisca describes her as "the wild flower" that cannot survive in Puritanism's garden of discipline, Faith appears in this final lengthy accounting as a Catholic casualty, a subject locked in by "virtue and duty" and devoid of agency in the face of papal hierarchy. Significantly, the priest who has converted Faith never in fact enters *Hope Leslie's* action but instead remains at the novel's textual and
territorial margins. Barred from participation in Boston society, the Catholic has moved west; but though his domain is the far frontier, his influence extends back to the city. In Faith’s return to the West, the story of the Fletchers comes full circle—the frontier invades their home and destroys the possibility of real solidarity in the face of difference. Thus ultimately in Hope Leslie the West does not appear as the hopeful site of democratic exchange and faction-breaking. Rather, left unattended, it has become a site of Catholic despotism threatening the unity of Protestant community.

Perhaps the most explicit linking of liberal democracy’s dependence upon territorial expansion to the potential rise of Catholic tyranny in the U.S. is Lyman Beecher’s 1835 Nativist polemic A Plea for the West. First presented to the public in 1834 as a series of speeches about the dangers of Catholic immigration, Beecher’s Plea made its author notorious when it sparked an anti-Catholic riot in Charlestown, MA that ended with the burning of an Ursuline convent and left one person dead.¹⁵ The small existing body of scholarship on Beecher—who studied at Yale under Sedgwick’s cousin Timothy Dwight—tends to focus on his contribution to U.S. Protestant theology, and in the field of literary criticism Beecher has received almost no attention despite his prominence in the early-nineteenth century. Critical inattention to Beecher might stem from a sense that his anti-Catholic prose is somehow transparent, revealing little more than an explicit and vicious disliking of immigrants and their priests. In the most comprehensive study of Beecher’s life and work to date, for example, Vincent Harding argues that the Plea shows that Beecher’s “basic response for the Catholic power problem was restrictive immigration” (402).¹⁶ I would argue, conversely, that a closer look at Beecher’s Plea brings to light the ways in which expository Nativist writing of
the 1830s drew on an already extant body of U.S. fiction to give force to its anti-Catholic arguments. In other words, Beecher's *Plea* and writings like it did not suddenly spring up whole cloth as a new genre inspired by rising immigration rates. Rather, Nativist discourse grew out of a narrative tradition extending back to Brackenridge and Brown that presented Catholicism as the test case for emerging and expanding U.S. liberal democracy. Through his linking of Catholic strangeness and Western vulnerability to the decline of pluralism and liberty, Beecher participates in an anti-Catholic literary tradition long ignored by critics but central to nineteenth-century understandings of democracy.

Beecher's *Plea* begins with a description of the West that at once echoes and refutes Madison's earlier notion that multiplicity would breed national harmony. "[S]o various are the opinions and habits, and so recent and imperfect is the acquaintance, and so sparse are the settlements of the West," he writes, "that no homogeneous public sentiment can be formed to legislate immediately into being the requisite institutions" (16). Where in the early days of nation-formation Madison viewed the diffusion of national subjects as requisite for the prevention of faction, forty years later Beecher sees it as a process running counter to the development of necessary institutional infrastructures. Beecher's *Plea*, like many contemporary expansionist writings, presents the West as an unpopulated wilderness and in its elision of Native American settlements racializes U.S. nationalism by aligning it with whiteness. For the purposes of this project, however, most significant about Beecher's *Plea* is its argument that the nation's willingness to embrace the religious outsider does not result in national cohesion but rather threatens to undo the nation itself. Perhaps not surprisingly, it is the Catholic that embodies the threat to national solidarity in Beecher's *Plea*. The "safety of our republic
depends upon the intelligence, and moral principles, and patriotism, and property of the nation,” Beecher writes, arguing that foreign Catholics threaten U.S. solidarity because they are

unacquainted with our institutions, unaccustomed to self-government, inaccessible to education, and easily accessible to prepossession, and inveterate credulity, and intrigue, and easily embodied and wielded by sinister design.

(48-9)

Beecher’s picture of Catholicism here is reminiscent of Brackenridge’s Teague and Sedgwick’s Italian sailors—an ignorant Catholicism ready to surrender to believe without question what it is told and sacrifice rational individualism to either Church hierarchy or the lure of the mob. Once the nation invites such a Catholic in, the Plea argues, it will cease to be the democratic entity it once was.

Like Brown and Sedgwick before him, Beecher deploys the trope of the Catholic outsider to demonstrate the fragility of communal bonds. The Plea, for example, provides a list of objections that Beecher’s fellow Protestants might raise against its ostensible bigotry and paranoia: “But why so much excitement about the Catholic religion? Is not one religion just as good as another?” (79); “But are not the Catholics sincere?—why not, then, let them alone?” (84); “But have there not been great and good men in the Catholic church?” (85); and “But have not the Catholics just as good a right to their religion as other denominations have to theirs?” (87). These objections stand in as
representatives of dissension within Protestant ranks, fissures in what Beecher would like to see as a seamless commitment to Protestant nationalism. To them Beecher responds that Catholicism has managed to deceive Protestants, and he presents his *Plea* as an uncovering of said deception. "This is the religion so powerful in the combined energies of the earth and heaven," Beecher writes, "so enslaving and terrible in its recorded deeds, and yet in its present appearance, so mild, meek, unassuming, and munificent, which is coming among us, a comparative stranger" (134). The "us" of this sentence is at once the body of U.S. citizens *and* the body of U.S. Protestants; Beecher makes no distinction between the two. The stranger is a comparative one—like "us," yet not "us." The danger the Catholic poses to the national and Protestant body is its ability to shroud despotism and slavery under a false mantel of munificence. In other words, while the Catholic may appear to be the very kind of minority that liberal democracy seeks to protect, in reality it represents the threat from which democracy must protect itself.

Beecher's *Plea* not only presents Protestants as the perpetual potential victims of Catholic tyranny, but it also suggests that Protestants who are willing to accept Catholicism are guilty of a crime against the nation. Beecher refers to the tolerance of Catholicism as "an anti-republican charity," suggesting that religious and national identities are inseparable and that Republicanism cannot thrive beyond the bounds of Protestantism. Pluralism, in this context, becomes a sign of national decline and a harbinger of both civic and otherworldly apocalypse. "[I]f we do fail in our great experiment of self-government," Beecher warns,
our destruction will be as signal as the birthright abandoned, the mercies abused, and the provocation offered to beneficent Heaven. . . O, thou beloved land! Bound together by the ties of brotherhood and common interest, and perils, live forever—one and undivided!

Beecher’s logic in this passage relies on a sense that the U.S. represents not merely an experiment in democracy but also an effort to model government on the precepts of Reform theology. His concept of individual liberty—of self-government—is inseparable from universal Protestantism. Thus the success of the “great experiment of self-government” he describes relies on the exclusion of Catholic subjects from positions of power. Individual liberty can be paradoxically preserved only through the curtailing of Catholic liberty.

It is through this equation of Protestantism and Republicanism that Beecher justifies his argument for the disenfranchisement of Catholic subjects. “The great experiment is now making. . .” he writes, “whether the perpetuity of our republican institutions can be reconciled with universal suffrage” (40). His answer to this question is an indirect but nonetheless resounding “no.” “The simple fact,” Beecher argues, “that the clergy of the Catholic denomination could wield in mass the suffrage of their confiding people, could not fail, in the competition of ambition and party spirit, to occasion an eager competition for their votes, placing them at once in the attitude of the most favored sect” (57). Here Beecher articulates the central paradox of liberal democracy: universal suffrage and equality always already bear with them the potential
for totalitarian majority rule. This was the danger anti-Federalists recognized when they initially opposed the Constitution and that Madison pointed to when outlining his expansionist theories. The significant difference between Beecher and his predecessors, however, is that to him the risk of tyranny posed to democracy is external rather than internal. Beecher fears not the rise of an elite ruling class, but rather the invasion of U.S. governmental and social structures by foreign, Catholic powers. "They do design the subversion of our institutions," he argues, "If our light continues, their darkness passes away; and if our prosperity continues, their overturnings cannot be stopped till revolution has traveled round the globe, and the earth is free" (120). Here the success of the U.S. heralds the liberation of the world—the outward spread of democracy—but that success can only be ensured through the maintenance of Protestant control over the West, a goal achievable only through the curtailing of Catholic voting rights. Thus for Beecher the West does not hold the promise of multiplicity but rather in its potential to house Catholic subjects presents a challenge that democracy can overcome only through undemocratic practice.

Although Beecher's *Plea* is by and large a vitriolic rail against Catholicism and an argument against equal participation for Catholics in the realm of politics, it also significantly articulates a sense that Catholics can be productive U.S. citizens as long as they do not have access to governmental power. "I have no fear of the Catholics, considered simply as a religious denomination," Beecher writes, "Let the Catholics mingle with us as Americans" (60). Beecher here echoes the sentiment put forth decades earlier by Thomas Paine in *The Age of Reason*. Discussing the emerging nation's religious diversity, Paine argued that "[i]n America, a Catholic priest is a good citizen, a
good character, and a good neighbor; an Episcopalian minister [sic] is of the same description; and this proceeds, independently of the men, from there being no law establishment in America” (168). But while Paine viewed the complete disestablishment of religion as the means through which religious equality could be achieved, for Beecher it is the primacy of Protestantism alone that can convert the Catholic into a citizen. Beecher argues that he would be in complete favor of Catholic freedom within the U.S., were it not for the despotism inherent to Catholicism itself. “Did the Catholics regard themselves only as one of many denominations of Christians, entitled only to equal rights and privileges,” he writes, “there would be no such cause for apprehension while they peaceably sustained themselves by their own arguments and well doing” (66). The problem with Catholicism, he implies, is that it cannot peacefully coexist with other sects. The only way to safeguard the American people, then, is to drive the Catholic out of the West and make sure that the expanding nation retains a Protestant majority. The Catholic is welcome within the expanding nation, as long as through its territorial expansions the nation remains “not Catholic.”

In Beecher’s *Plea*, then, it is possible to see not the sudden resurgence long-dormant ethnocentrism but rather the ongoing process of liberal democratic discourse production in the U.S. Though there is no denying his disdain for Catholicism, at the heart of Beecher’s *Plea* lies concern over democracy’s majoritarian tendencies and a deep interest in averting the threat that these tendencies pose to individual citizen-subjects. The solution he reaches is not unlike, as my first chapter demonstrates, the solution that political thinkers such as Madison and Jefferson embraced in earlier periods: the linking of U.S. nationalism to a general but diverse Protestantism that could, by virtue
of its power, protect all varieties of religious practice. Tellingly, Beecher’s rancorous *Plea* is also not all that different from Alexis de Tocqueville’s contemporaneous assessment of Catholicism in the U.S. In the first volume of *Democracy in America* (1835), de Tocqueville attempts to show that U.S. Catholics are more open and committed to egalitarianism than even their Protestant neighbors. “I think it is wrong to regard the Catholic religion as a natural enemy of democracy,” de Tocqueville writes, “Catholicism is like an absolute monarchy. Remove the prince and conditions are more equal in it than in republics” (275-6). Wilson Carey McWilliams has noted that de Tocqueville’s optimism about the place of Catholicism in the U.S. rests on a sense that “Catholics [are] lucky, because America impose[s] only a kind of purification of a faith already egalitarian at root” (121). Eliminate priestly power, according to this model, and Catholicism will become a bastion of equality. Of course, it is difficult to say whether Catholicism without priests would still Catholicism. Thus although it differs in tone from Beecher’s *Plea*, de Tocqueville’s *Democracy* similarly addresses the problem of majoritarianism by stripping power away from the Catholic and making it subject to Protestant rule. Democracy survives in America by fostering an egalitarianism that is at once plural, expansive, and “not Catholic.”
NOTES

1. Madison’s linkage of democracy with multiplicity might seem commonplace in this twenty-first-century moment, as Wilson Carey McWilliams has noted, when Madison wrote the fifty-first *Federalist* the connection he drew was radical and new. “Historically,” McWilliams writes, “multiculturalism has not often been associated with democracy; more often, it has been the practice of empires and hegemonies, the condition of a policy of divide and rule” (120). Madison himself was not unaware of the imperial impulse to rule by division: in a letter sent to Thomas Jefferson just a few months before the publication of *Federalist 51*, he writes that, “Divide et impera, the reprobated axiom of tyranny, is under certain qualifications, the only policy, by which a republic can be administered on just principles” (“Letter to Thomas Jefferson,” 151). Although it is true that Madison’s *Federalist 51* describes a system of government distinct from centralized monarchy, I would suggest that the binary opposition that McWilliams draws between hegemonic empire and the liberal democratic state ignores the imperial impulse that underlies Madison’s own pluralist logic.

2. Madison qualified this equation of pluralism and expansion to Jefferson by stating that “[a]s in too small a sphere oppressive party combinations may be too easily formed agt. the weaker party; so in too extensive a one, a defensive concert may be rendered too difficult against the oppression of those entrusted with its administration” (Madison, “Letter to Thomas Jefferson,” 152). He is not, however, as clear in *Federalist 51* about what he perceives as the necessity of limiting of territorial expansion.
3. Walter Berns goes perhaps too far when he asserts that “[w]hat we see as cultural differences they [Madison and his cohort] saw as religious differences”—such a facile equation elides regional difference within the nation as well as the deep and important distinctions between, to give just a few examples, different indigenous groups, European immigrants, African and African-American slaves, and U.S.-born whites. Berns is, nonetheless, correct in his assertion of the salience of religious difference in the early national era (94).

4. Although popular discourse often presents the U.S. as a secular nation, in reality the Constitution does not legally separate church and state. The First Amendment prevents the state from establishing official religion and interfering with religious exercise, but it does not specifically outline religion’s relationship to legal structures, and neither does it prevent religious organizations from pursuing and obtaining state power. Useful studies of the limitations of the First Amendment include those by Evans, Feldman, and Hall.

5. John Higham’s oft-quoted study of post-1860 U.S. Nativism begins with the assertion that the word “Nativism” is “distinctly American, a product of a specific chain of events in eastern American cities in the late 1830s and early 1840s” (3). Similarly, Jenny Franchot begins her seminal study, by noting that, “From the 1830s on, American Protestants were challenged not just by internal dissension and Catholic immigration, but by the surprising aesthetic attractions of Catholic Europe,” thereby positioning 1830 as the logical starting point for studies of U.S. anti-Catholicism (16, emphasis added). Caroline F. Levander echoes this historical trajectory and explicitly links anti-Catholicism to immigration when she argues that the “anti-Catholic movement in
nineteenth-century America initially developed in reaction to the dramatic increases in immigration beginning in the 1830s, primarily from Roman Catholic Ireland" (57-8). Tracy Fessenden's work on abolitionist discourse and Nativism similarly charts anti-Catholicism through immigration patterns, explaining that the "middle third of the [nineteenth] century. . . saw the arrival of nearly 3 million Catholic immigrants, whose perceived intemperance, sexual license, and conspiratorial designs on American institutions animated white Protestant preaching and political action more consistently than did the evils of slavery or racism" (229).

6. See, for example, Ed White's response to Shirley Samuels's claim that "early American fiction rests on 'an allegory of America and the dangers democracy poses'" (45).


8. Franchot's study, which has set the terms of critical discussion of anti-Catholicism for the past decade, makes only passing reference to Wieland and never mentions the villain Carwin. Instead, Franchot contends that Wieland—though he is a Deist—bears the marks of "Catholic" superstition as he descends into madness and collapses into a "violent and eroticized interiority" (83).

9. See, for example, Frost, Harris, and Traister. Scholarship on Tenney's novel is not anomalous for this. In an essay placing Charles Brockden Brown's Wieland within the context of contemporary tracts about sexual and religious infidelity, Shirley Samuels notes that the "mixture" of sexual and political themes was so "common in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writings. . . that the rhetoric of sexuality and the family became
nearly interchangeable with that of religion and politics" ("Wieland: Alien and Infidel," 46). While it would be counterproductive to assume that the family always equals the nation in early U.S. texts, recognition of the potential interchangeability of the sexual and the political brings to light the tension between public and private in this period.

10. Adams writes that democracy “is a young rake who thinks himself handsome and well-made, and who has little faith in virtue... Democracy is Lovelace and the people are Clarissa. The artful villain will pursue the innocent lovely girl to her ruin and death” (19).

11. See Verhoeven and Levine. The essays included in the recent *Revising Charles Brockden Brown* collection are generally concerned with rethinking Brown’s political commitments and with blurring the distinction critics have traditionally made between his fiction and non-fiction writings.

12. Scholars of the early national period recently have begun to reconsider Federalism’s political legacy and revise historical narratives that position it simply as a form of elitist tyranny antithetical to the populist aims of Jeffersonian Republicanism. Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara Oberg, for example, note that members of the Federalist Party at the turn of the nineteenth century “proved far more open to the rights of Indians, women, and African Americans than their Jeffersonian opponents, who championed individual freedom and participatory politics” (10). The Federalists’ complicated positions on racial and sexual matters are described in detail in Zagarri and Finkelman. Though the essays in Ben-Atar and Oberg’s collection are often in tension with accounts of what has been characterized as the rise and fall of Federalism, those earlier studies have importantly
shaped critical understanding of the Federalist legacy. Of particular note is Elkins and McKitrick’s vast and detailed analysis.

13. Gardiner’s religious affiliation remains somewhat ambiguous throughout Hope Leslie. Thomas Morton, one of the novel’s “real” historical figures, was an ardent supporter the Church of England, a Protestant sect that retained many of Catholicism’s formal aspects and was often accused of papism by both Puritan reformers and the low-church Protestants of Sedgwick’s day. Gardiner’s friendship with Morton might be meant to signify allegiance to the Anglican Church, but it could also simply indicate his loyalist leanings. In this essay, I am less interested in uncovering Sedgwick’s intentions regarding the depiction of Gardiner as religious subject than in exploring the ways in which her “Catholicizing” of his character contributes to the novel’s discussion of pluralism’s relationship to communal cohesion.

14. Judith Fetterly, for example, argues that the novel ultimately abandons the project of extending equality to racial others in part because Sedgwick feared that “her case for the equality of white women would be undermined if she made the same case for racially other women” (95).

15. For a detailed history of the convent and its burning, see Shultz.

16. Harding is quick to downplay the violence that Beecher’s speeches appear to have incited—referring to the Charlestown incident as a “scandal”—and perhaps not as critical of Beecher’s notion of a “Catholic power problem” as he might be. Still, Harding’s book usefully charts the development of Beecher’s theology through time and nicely situates him within his ever-shifting historical context.
Democracy’s Crusade: The Crisis of Representation in Writings of the Mexican War

Melinda Rankin’s *Texas in 1850* justifies its call for Anglo-Protestants to settle the recently-annexed state by asserting that a Protestant Texas will not only ensure the continued prosperity of the United States but also mark a step toward wresting the nation’s southern neighbor from the clutches of the Catholic Church. “The importance of elevating Texas to a high point of moral power and efficiency,” Rankin argues, “is evident from her present and prospective influence over Mexico” (17). Should the United States succeed in firmly rooting Protestantism in Texas, she promises, “a weapon sharper than a two edged sword shall be unsheathed in Mexico, which shall pierce her false religion to the seat of life” (55). Thus although deeply concerned with the new state’s relationship to the rest of the U.S., *Texas in 1850* evinces a striking transnational sensibility in its interest in the religious future of the American hemisphere. “To elevate the moral condition of a country,” Rankin writes,

containing a population of millions of souls under the influence of a religion which in point of absurdity might compare with paganism, *within the limits of our own continent*, presents an object sufficiently important to enlist an immediate and energetic action of Christians throughout the United States. While the heathen *abroad* are sharing in their benevolent and philanthropic efforts, let not the heathen *at home* be forgotten.

(56, emphasis added)
Here the missionary effort is at once foreign and domestic: Mexico retains its status as a country distinct from the U.S., but it nonetheless falls within the rubric of American "home" because it occupies the Western hemisphere. For Rankin, then, the boundary of the continent is as significant as that of the nation, and the U.S. operates within the limits of the Americas not as a rapidly-growing imperial power bent on conquering Mexican territories but rather as a pious, Protestant force obligated to provide religious instruction to proximate nations. By placing Mexico within the confines of the "home," Rankin is able to make her case for the importance of Texas: a strong Protestant presence in the southwestern U.S. will create a ripple effect, and once Mexico, by virtue of emulating the rest of the U.S., has thrown off the shackles of Catholicism it will be an adequate co-tenant in the continental home.

Rankin’s configuration of the continent as "home" complicates Amy Kaplan’s assessment of the "double meaning of ‘domestic’ as both the space of the nation and of the familial household" (18). It is precisely this “dubleness” of meaning, Kaplan argues, that through the intertwining of the seemingly “separate spheres” of male and female life in the nineteenth century facilitated the production of a discourse of the “foreign” to justify U.S. imperial pursuits. While Kaplan’s work importantly addresses the connections between gendered notions of domesticity and imperialism in the nineteenth-century U.S., in its concentration on national and familial manifestations of the domestic it ignores contemporary conceptions of the American continents as “home” and in so doing, I would argue, elides the centrality of Protestantism to nineteenth-century understandings of the place of U.S. liberal democracy within the Americas. Her sense that the “concept of foreign policy depends the idea of the nation as a domestic space
imbued with a sense of at-homeness, in contrast to an external world perceived as alien and threatening” might stem from the fact that her study of U.S. depictions of the Mexican War focuses on writings produced by women living far removed from the material production of U.S. empire in North America (25). Though born and raised in New Hampshire, Rankin moved to Mississippi in the mid-1840s and spent the better part of her adult life residing between Texas and Mexico, making only occasional trips to the northern states to raise funds for her missions. Thus Rankin experienced the national border as a shifting and permeable boundary that operated within the larger geo-political space of the continent. For Rankin, it is the absurdity of Catholicism that highlights the limits of the continent, and it is through a fantasy of Protestant expansion that she converts the Mexican national into the “heathen at home”—an American but not U.S. subject. Her missionary plan thus requires neither the further incorporation of Mexican territories into the U.S. nor the absolute rendering of Mexico as “foreign.”

While its paternalist logic of Protestant obligation might seem on the one hand a simple justification of aggression toward Mexico, *Texas in 1850* also importantly highlights the confusion over the relationship between religion and nation that structured many nineteenth-century discussions of U.S. expansion in general and the Mexican War specifically. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the war’s supporters and detractors alike often conflated its territorial aims with political ones and as frequently equated the war’s potential to extend democracy into Mexico with its potential to drive Catholicism out. The small body of scholarship addressing anti-Catholicism’s relationship to public perceptions of the Mexican War has tended to focus on either the war’s relationship to contemporary Nativist movements or Anglo-Protestant soldiers’ reactions to encounters
with Catholic practice in Mexico.¹ Such work has brought to light the important intersections between mid-nineteenth-century representations of Catholicism and discourses of the foreign. What has been missing, however, from scholarship on the Mexican War—a war fought in the minds of many to secure liberty via expansion throughout the North American continent—and Catholicism is consideration of anti-Catholicism’s ongoing relationship to U.S. liberal democracy. If, as I argue in chapter two, early-nineteenth-century understandings of national pluralism hinged on a discourse of territorial expansion that simultaneously created and managed a crisis of Catholic citizenship, in later decades the U.S.’s forceful acquisition of lands already populated with Catholic subjects generated debate not only over the foreign Catholic’s capacity to adapt to liberal democracy but also, and more importantly, over the efficacy of liberal democracy itself. Suddenly, Catholicism appeared not as a foreign force poised to encroach upon the fragile frontier but rather as a domestic element threatening to challenge the U.S.’s claims of plural equality.

Scholarship on the anti-Catholicism of the 1830s and 40s has tended to focus on explicitly Nativist cultural productions, analyzing the social and political movements organized around limiting Catholic immigration.² While such work has enlarged the scope of critical inquiry into nineteenth-century politics and offered new ways of charting the history of U.S. exclusionism and the importance of gender to that history, it has often ignored the ideological similarities of ostensibly “low-culture” works aimed at representing in detail the horrors of Catholicism and contemporary “high-culture” works concerned with rendering transparent the workings of the democratic state. In this chapter, I will read pro-war news editorials and George Lippard’s sensational novel
Legends of Mexico (1847) and alongside contemporary anti-war works such as Theodore Parker's "Sermon of War" and Margaret Fuller's European dispatches to Horace Greeley's New York Tribune to show that concern over Catholicism's relationship to the process of U.S. empire-building was central to works produced across genres and on both sides of the war debate. Bringing these seemingly disparate works together allows for recognition of the fact that the Mexican War operated in the minds of many Americans not only as a conflict that could signal the extension of slavery across the southwest, but also as a battle over the U.S.'s religious landscape. As the writers I examine contemplated the war, they also contemplated the problem of intra-national difference—religious as well as racial. Thus the Mexican War marks a significant turning point at which Anglo-American Protestants favoring and disparaging the war alike were forced to confront not only the specter of a new kind of citizen imagined, because Catholic, to be inassimilable to the U.S.'s liberal democratic system, but also the limits of the pluralist and representational logics that underpinned that very system.

Rankin's plea for Texas evinces the common contemporary concern that Catholicism in the Americas could pose a significant threat to U.S. Protestants. In 1844, the American Protestant Association, a New York-based Nativist group dedicated in part to evangelizing Catholic populations within the U.S., held a contest for the best essay on the dangers of Catholicism. The winning submission (one of twelve), Romanism Incompatible with Republican Institutions, concludes with a stark picture of Catholic rule in the Americas: "Are we [U.S. Protestants] willing to see the high offices of our government under the control of a foreign priesthood? . . . Are we willing to welcome the Inquisition and 'Autos da Fe—in a word, are we willing to become what South America
now is?" (100, emphasis added). For this piece’s anonymous author, “Civis,” the line between religion and the state collapses under the weight of Catholicism, as the “foreign priesthood” seeks governmental rather than congregational power, and the mere toleration of Catholicism appears tantamount to the sanctioning of that most spectacular example of Catholic theocracy: the auto da fé.3 Significantly, Civis configures the Catholic threat in terms of the American continents; the danger of Catholicism is here, as it is for Rankin, heightened by territorial proximity. The Catholicism of the Americas, Civis asserts, differs in appearance from that of Europe. “The essential characteristic of the papacy is despotism,” he writes, but then he offers a distinction: “In Europe she is all pomp and magnificence; she there wears a regal air—here she affects equality. Like the double Janus [sic], she has a face for the old world and another for the new” (107). It is precisely this egalitarian affect, worn out of necessity in the Americas, that according to Civis will allow the Catholic Church to infiltrate and destroy U.S. political culture. The liberal democratic state, in its zeal to embrace religious plurality, will unwittingly admit a seemingly benign Catholicism into its midst, and then it will begin its rapid transformation into South America.

In its conflation of religious with civic despotism, Civis’s Nativist polemic is not unique. Indeed, as I demonstrate in previous chapters, the “Catholic” had long figured as a dual tyrant—pope and dictator, bishop and king—in political, literary, and popular U.S. discourse. It is in part for this reason that the U.S.’s 1846 declaration of war with Mexico generated confusion among Anglo-American Protestants, as the war’s territorial aims became inseparable from its potential political and religious consequences. Although the 1830s marked a period of political reform in Mexico that included the abolition of tithing
and the general weakening of Church power, in 1846 U.S. Protestants still generally imagined Mexico to be a Catholic nation. Thus despite the fact that the Polk administration worked diligently to bill the war as an attempt to collect on outstanding Mexican debt, and despite the fact that abolitionists worked equally as hard to present it as an attempt to add slave states to the union, in the popular press the war quickly achieved a more iconic status. Lippard's *Legends of Mexico*, a propagandistic account of general and future president Zachary Taylor's Mexican military exploits, opens with the battle cry, "Ho! for the New Crusade!" (11). This cry, which Lippard repeats over and over throughout the text, recasts the conflict as a holy war, one fought for ideology and religion as much as wealth and land. Significantly, Lippard's "crusade" is not, as the word's history would suggest, a territorial war between Christians and Muslims but rather and intra-Christian battle pitting Protestants against Catholics. And this "crusade," Lippard argues, is a natural outgrowth of the continent's history. "Search the history of the North America People," he insists, "behold them forsake the shores of Europe... not for the lust of gold or power, but for the sake of a Religion, a Home" (15). Here Lippard conveniently omits the history of French and Spanish Catholic settlement in North America, and European colonization appears as a quest for Protestant religious freedom. The Mexican war, *Legends* holds, is merely an extension of that older model: it is not a war for wealth and power but rather a war for religion, in this case Protestantism, and home.

In her remarkable study of the U.S. imperial project's centrality to sensationalist depictions of race, class, and urban space, Shelley Streeby places *Legends* within the context of Lippard's larger interest in providing land for white U.S. citizens through the
extension of the nation's western border. Espousing a politico-territorial philosophy not unlike that of James Madison, Lippard, as Streeby puts it, hoped that "'free' Western lands might serve as a safety valve for... domestic and economic antagonisms and that U.S. expansion would mean the extension of the area of freedom rather than the violent conquest of other nations" (52). Indeed, one of Lippard's strategies in Legends is to downplay the importance of white ethnic difference by defining the "American" in terms of "Northern European" rather than "English" ancestry. "We are no Anglo-Saxon People. No!" Lippard asserts, "All Europe sent its exiles to our shores... Germany and Sweden and Ireland and Scotland and Wales and England, aye and glorious France, all sent their oppressed to us, and we grew into a new race" (16). As Streeby notes, Lippard's construction of this "new race" of Americans "crucially depends upon the construction of Mexicans as a 'mongrel race, moulded of Indian and Spanish blood,' that is destined to 'melt into, and be ruled by, the Iron Race of the North'" (55). Lippard's rejection of Anglo-Saxonism, in other words, entails the assertion of a new kind of white supremacy, one that extends the boundaries of whiteness in order to enlarge the "American" lexicon—even to include, aye, the glorious French—until it represents an unstoppable continental force. While I find Streeby's account of Lippard's rewriting of the parameters of whiteness convincing, I would argue that a more extended accounting of Legends's presentation of the Catholic highlights not only the difficulty he had maintaining this new "inclusive" model of whiteness but also his sensational work's investment in the southward spread of U.S. liberal democracy.

Streeby notes that Lippard focuses almost obsessively in Legends on the dead and dying bodies of U.S. soldiers, arguing that, like many pro-war writers, by "representing
Mexicans as a threat to the bodies of the nation-people, Lippard urges readers to unite despite their differences” (59). It is this reading that she applies to Lippard’s depiction of the bloody death of an Irish American soldier, Ringgold, whom Lippard describes as having come “from the desolated fields of Ireland,” and whose dies, “torn in two, by a combination of horrible missiles, which bear his mangled flesh away, whirling a bloody shower through the air” (54-5). As Streeby concedes, it is impossible to know Lippard’s actual motive for depicting the dismemberment of an Irish immigrant. On the one hand, such a representation might encourage readers to see the Irishman as an American patriot willing to die serving his new nation’s interests. On the other, the “sensational excessiveness of this account... might attract a reader who particularly enjoys reading about the destruction of the Irish immigrant” (59). For my purposes, however, the effect of this gory scene on Lippard’s readers is less important than its ultimate removal of the Irish family from the U.S. landscape. When Ringgold dies, his young wife and baby are conveniently behind him—the Irish wife, for some reason, has opted to follow her soldier-husband onto the battlefield. “She place[s] the gory head upon her lap,” Lippard writes, “and with her face bent down [says] not a word, but [weeps] in silence” (54). Streeby reads this scene as a sentimental one intended to garner sympathy for the Irish family and thereby convert the immigrant into an American. Importantly, though, Lippard himself cannot return the Irish to the U.S. “Day came again,” he tells the reader, “the armies passed away, the battle whirled far to the south—the Woman, and the Dead Man and the Child were still together, there, upon the field of Paolo Alto” (55). The U.S. army leaves the woman and the corpse for which she grieves behind, and when some figures identified only as “they” finally appear to bury the dead Catholic solider his
widow disappears into the wilderness. Thus the sentimental project fails for the Irish in *Legends*, and the frontier is incapable of actually turning the Irish family into an American family, because Lippard cannot narrate the full integration of even newly “white” Catholics into his U.S. lexicon.

Lippard’s detailed description of the annihilation of the Irishman Ringgold also seems significant in light of the contemporary controversy over foreign-born soldiers waging in the wake of the St. Patrick’s Battalion fiasco. The San Patricios, as the battalion members were called, were mostly foreign-born soldiers who defected from the U.S. army and fought for Mexico under a shamrock-adorned flag.⁵ Although it is not possible to say for certain why some Irish American soldiers chose to defect, it is clear that Mexican officials deemed religion a key factor. Throughout the war, Santa Anna commissioned the printing and mass distribution of pamphlets and broadsides urging Irish American soldiers to choose the Church over their adopted state. One 1847 supplement to Santa Anna’s general appeal for U.S. defection was entitled “Mexicans to Catholic Irishmen” and begins: “Sons of Ireland! Have you forgotten that in any Spanish counter it is sufficient to claim Ireland as your home to meet with a friendly reception from authorities as well as citizens?” (qtd. in Miller, 66).⁶ This appeal stands in stark contrast to Lippard’s notion of the “new race” of Americans: the Irish American’s home is not the U.S. but rather the Ireland of his birth and “Spanish” Mexico. Other, similar publications more directly questioned the U.S.’s capacity to provide a real home for the Catholic. A perennially savvy observer of U.S. public culture, in an 1847 broadside Santa Anna referred to anti-Catholic riots in the northeast asked Catholic soldiers:
Can you fight by the side of those who put fire to your temples in Boston and Philadelphia? Did you witness such dreadful crimes and sacrileges without making a solemn vow to our Lord? If you are Catholic, the same as we, if you follow the doctrines of Our Savior, why are you seen murdering your brethren? Why are you antagonistic to those who defend their country and your own God?

(qtd. in Hogan, 144)

Here, religion rather than nationalism establishes solidarity, and Catholics who do not defect become the real traitors. Trans-Atlantic Catholicism, according to this logic, will rescue both the Mexican and the Irishman by ensuring victory over the Protestant foe.

Santa Anna’s message to Irish Catholics bears material as well as religious appeal. “Why, then, do you rank us among your enemies?” he asks, “Is it because you wish to have a grant of land that you may call your own?” Recognizing the desperate financial straits in which many immigrants found themselves upon arriving in the U.S.—and further recognizing the sub-standard pay that enlisted men received in the U.S. army—Santa Anna makes potential defectors an offer difficult to refuse. “[O]ur hospitality and good will towards you tenders you what by force you can never possess or enjoy,” he contends, promising, “as much property in this land as you may require, and this under the pledge of our honor and holy religion.” In making this promise, Santa Anna offered an alternative to prevailing models of pluralism governing U.S. imperial policy: it is not a wide and expanding U.S. frontier that offers hope and equality to the despised immigrant,
the religious dissenter, and the oppressed minority but rather Mexico, a different nation entirely. Thus if Lippard’s story of the Irish American family ends with the landless widow wandering off into obscurity, Santa Anna’s defection advertisements present a picture of Irish prosperity in Mexico. Shared religious practice trumps any fantasy of unity through whiteness. “Our sincere offers have already been realized with many of your countrymen,” the desertion appeal insists, “who are living as our own brothers among us” (qtd. in Miller, 66). Mexico, in other words, is already delivering on a promise the U.S. will only fail to keep: it has welcomed the Irish Catholic into its fold as if he were not an immigrant, and it has watched him flourish upon its soil.

Although from its outset Lippard’s Legends presents itself both as an articulation of the power of the new, white American race and as an account of the U.S.’s religious quest for Mexico, equally at play in the work is a sense that the Mexican War is a fight for liberal democracy. Throughout, Lippard attempts to align the war not only with the crusades but also with American Revolution. “Yes,” he exclaims, “the children of Revolutionary veterans, took the rifle of ’76 from its resting place, over the hearth, and examined its lock, by the light of the setting sun, and ere another dawn, were on their way to the south, shouting as they extended their hands toward the unseen land—‘Mexico!’”(12). Here, the trajectory from 1776 to 1846 is material as well as ideological, as the son uses the father’s revolutionary rifle to fight the new crusade. Lippard’s efforts to link the Mexican War to the Revolution in the minds of his readers extends even to the book’s title page, which bears an epigraph misquoting Thomas Paine’s The Crisis, announcing: “We fight not to enslave, nor for conquest; But to make room upon the earth for honest men to live in.”7 Lippard’s evocation of Paine—however inaccurate—serves a
dual purpose. On the one hand, it legitimizes Lippard’s support of U.S. expansionist efforts in Mexico by configuring those efforts as necessary for the perpetuation of democratic rule and thereby denying their connection to conquest and slavery. On the other, it converts the revolutionary Paine into crusader by linking his democratic speech to the cry for holy war. The distinction between religion and politics dissolves in Paine’s speech at the border between the U.S. and Mexico, and although Legends is not as explicitly anti-Catholic as Nativist publications of the same period (Civis’s among them), for Lippard conquest of the southern nation is equally a victory for democracy and Protestantism.

Importantly, Lippard appears to recognize the fact that his “new Crusade” would entail the violent destruction of Mexican as well as “American” bodies. While it is true, as Streeby notes, that Lippard fetishizes the mangled corpses of white U.S. soldiers, he does also give space within his narrative to the physical sufferings of the nation’s ostensible enemies. In one particularly wrenching scene, the aftermath of a fire-fight leaves an elderly Mexican man mortally wounded. The U.S. soldier who has stabbed the man watches “the blood pouring in a stream from the wound in his chest,” and is horrified (112). Lippard writes from the soldier’s point of view, narrating how the young man sees the older man “writhing before his eyes, while his daughters, with their bared bosoms, [seek] to staunch the flowing of the blood, which hiss[es], warm and flowing from his heart” (113). Suddenly wracked with remorse and grief, the young soldier flings “himself upon the floor, and with his hands, presse[s] over the wound, madly endeavor[s] to stop the blood, that glide[s] through his fingers, and dash[es] into his face” (113). In this passage, Lippard moves animosity toward the Catholic from the safe space of
abstraction and places it within the bloody realm of corporeality. In so doing, Lippard acknowledges the power of the anti-Catholic tradition he is evoking. For decades—indeed since the dawn of U.S. nationhood—anti-Catholic activists had endeavored to pretend that their position was non-violent and that their rhetoric posed no real threat to people who practiced Catholicism. Even Lyman Beecher downplayed the material consequences of anti-Catholicism in *A Plea for the West*, in which he wrote, of the Massachusetts riot that his own speeches had incited, “the late violence done to Catholic property at Charlestown is regarded with regret and abhorrence by protestants and patriots throughout the land” (61). Directing the violence of the mob at “Catholic property” rather than bodies, and ignoring the fact that the burning of the convent left several nuns and their charges homeless, Beecher presents the riot as a regrettable but ultimately victimless incident. But with his depiction of the dying Mexican father, a man whose blood hisses with steam as it meets the cool air, Lippard refuses to shy away from anti-Catholic brutality. His crusade, then, is both glorious and bloody.

Like Rankin, Lippard presents the continent as the U.S.’s domestic domain, and it is for him ultimately a religiously-inflected understanding of the continental imperial project that seemingly justifies U.S. violence against Catholic Mexican bodies. “God Almighty has given the destiny of the Continent, into the hands of the free People of the American Union…” he argues, “Our destiny is to possess this Continent, drive from it all shreds of Monarchy, whether British or Spanish or Portugese [sic], and on the wrecks of shattered empires, built [sic] the Altar, second to the BROTHERHOOD OF MAN” (16). The U.S.’s southwestern expansion, for Lippard, is not itself imperialist but rather anti-imperialist as it drives the European powers out of the hemisphere and makes way for a
new, American Protestant democracy. In its conflation of the spread of Protestantism and the flourishing of democratic rule, Lippard’s Legends is typical of much pro-war literature produced in the mid-nineteenth century. Jeremiah Clemens’s 1856 novel Bernard Lile; an Historical Romance, Embracing the Periods of the Texas Revolution, and the Mexican War, for example, begins with its eponymous protagonist explaining to his wife why he must leave their happy home to go defend the Alamo. “There is a low, sweet voice forever whispering in my bosom, go,” he explains,

In a war begun and carried on to secure the right of self-government, and the higher right of interpreting the word of God according to the light of our own reason, rather than the corrupt and interested relations of Romish priests, the powers of good cannot be indifferent. Every drop of blood shed in such a cause is hallowed.”

(21)

For Clemens, Mexican rule threatens both the “right of self-government” that democracy would ideally guarantee and the “higher right of interpreting the word of God” that most Anglo-American Protestants would have viewed as the exclusive virtue of their own religious tradition. And like Lippard, Clemens is not entirely uncomfortable with the notion that religious war produces wounded bodies. Tyranny in Mexico is a product of the Roman Catholic priesthood, and thus the Mexican soldier is a fleshy obstacle to
American freedom, and the Anglo soldier lying dead in the shadows of the Alamo is a martyr for religious as well as civil liberty.

Arguments that success in the endeavor against Mexico would protect U.S. liberal democracy by staving off Catholic encroachment from the south were not relegated exclusively to the popular press. In an 11 May, 1847 editorial, Thomas Ritchie of the Washington Daily Union, mouthpiece of the Polk administration, accused Mexicans of holding designs on U.S. liberties.9 "It is not as a religious body, but as an engine of the state that the Catholics of Mexico look upon us with a hostile eye," Ritchie writes,

It is for their own special political purposes—to retain their vast possessions, which impoverish the nation—to sustain their own hierarchy, which lords over the people—to preserve their power, which weighs down the rest of the community into the clough of ignorance and slavery—that they are thus solicitous and active. It is a zeal for the mammon of unrighteousness—not for the welfare of souls—which animates the Catholics of Mexico”

(qtd, in Pinheiro, 59)10

Believing that even Anglo-Protestants who did not support a war against Mexico would rush to fight a war against Catholicism, Ritchie attempts in this article to capitalize on the anti-Catholicism of the increasingly popular mid-century Nativist movement to garner support for the Democratic Party’s expansionist policies. Here, as in the writings of
Lippard and Clemens, the "Catholic" appears not as strictly religious subject but instead as a politically interested party bent on imposing hierarchy, via Catholicism, upon democratic citizens. What's more, Ritchie's editorial manages to displace the question of slavery that hung perpetually over debate over Mexico onto the Catholic body. The Democratic Party is not, in this configuration of the war, attempting to extend the reach of slavery by converting Mexican territories into southern states. Rather, the party is struggling to free an already enslaved Mexico from the despotic grip of Catholic theocracy, and in doing so simultaneously secure the civil liberties to which U.S. Anglos have grown accustomed.

Although Ritchie intended his article to draw support for the administration's war, his article provoked an immediate backlash, as Polk's Whig opponents capitalized on the opportunity to present the president as a Catholic-hater. The U.S.'s Catholic voting population had largely supported the Democrats during the 1844 election cycle, so Ritchie's article provided Whig strategists with an opportunity to erode the President's base. As John Christopher Pinheiro has noted, papers such as the New York Evening Express and other Whig publications pointed to the anti-Catholic sentiment that structured pro-war arguments and urged Irish and German Catholic readers to mobilize their voting power against the President. The New York Tribune, run by Horace Greeley, lambasted the administration for waging "a war not only of races, but of religion," and even the Nativist New York Evening Express referred to the war effort as "unchristian" (qtd. in Pinheiro, 62). Ritchie's editorial threatened to damage the administration not only at the polls but also in its diplomatic relations with Mexico itself. Afraid that Mexican Catholics would be more likely to fight against the U.S. if they viewed the war
as an attack on their religion, the President worked diligently throughout the wartime era to separate his territorial aims from questions of national religion. Thus at Polk’s urging, Ritchie retracted his editorial, but the Whigs had already dealt a serious blow to the administration’s credibility. But regardless of Polk’s actual position on Catholicism, what the Ritchie editorial fiasco demonstrates is the fact that the discourse of liberal democracy had become so entwined with that of anti-Catholicism that there was little room for the administration to lay claim to the importance of its war with Mexico without seeming to endorse religious persecution.

The Whig press’s rush to defend Catholicism took the Polk administration by surprise, because Whig efforts to discredit the President generally drew on the increasingly popular discourse of anti-Catholic Nativism for their force. From the beginning of Polk’s term, his Whig opponents worked to convince the U.S.’s Protestant populations that he owed his 1844 victory to Catholic voters and that he was thus obligated to execute public policies favorable to the Catholic Church. The issue came to a head in May of 1846, when Polk met with New York’s Roman Catholic Bishop John Hughes to discuss the possibility of appointing Catholic priests as chaplains to the U.S. army. Up until this time, army chaplains had been exclusively Protestant, and Polk seems to have been convinced that the presence of priests among the soldiers would not only alleviate religious tensions within the army itself (nearly thirty percent of enlisted men were foreign-born in 1846, and many soldiers were Irish and German Catholics) but also serve as a gesture of religious good will toward Mexican Catholics. Whatever Polk’s actual intentions, however, his meetings with Hughes sparked immediate controversy, as Whigs accused him of pandering to the Church in order to sew up support
and votes. On May 29, just ten days after Polk’s meeting with Hughes, the New York Herald accused the prelate and president of colluding to exchange favors and votes for influence. According to the paper, Hughes and his “friends and worshippers” supported the Mexican War effort so that “the Catholic Church of Mexico [could] be blended with that of the United States” (qtd, in Pinheiro, 55-6). The Daily Sun, an explicitly Nativist publication, asked in a similar vein whether the relationship between Polk and Hughes wasn’t dangerous to the nation as a whole: “Are the free people of this great Republic to be placed at the mercy of a Church, whose entire history is stained with the blood of persecution and butchery and intolerance, because a certain Bishop of that Church can influence a certain number of Catholic voters for any party who may choose to purchase them” (qtd. in Pinheiro, 81). Within the logic of these accusations, Polk had jeopardized the nation’s political and religious future by taking steps to accommodate the nation’s ever-enlarging Catholic population. Significantly, none of Polk’s critics ever suggested that the presence of Protestant chaplains in the army marked a dangerous merging of church and state—it was only when the president moved to incorporate the Catholic into the engine of U.S. expansion that the war’s religious undertones became a problem for the Whigs.

Thus the Polk administration found itself frozen between two discourses as it attempted to justify its aggressive, unprovoked, and unjustified incursion into Mexican territories. On the one hand, the administration could not capitalize on the virulent anti-Catholicism of the contemporary Nativist movement, because to do would have been to potentially alienate Catholic voters and damage diplomatic relations with Catholics in Mexico. On the other, any gestures of solidarity with Catholicism on Polk’s part
provided immediate fodder for his Whig opponents. And even beyond the specific realm of federal politics, the anti-war movement was itself often premised upon an anti-Catholic logic. Opponents of the Mexican War generally pointed to its potential to increase the power of slaveholding states and this throw off the imagined balance of power in the federal government, but equally at play in anti-war discourse was a sense that although the U.S.’s goal of spreading liberal democracy—and Protestantism—across the American continents was a sound one, the particular strategy of war would in the end not further that goal. In a sermon delivered on 7 June, 1846, for example, the prominent Unitarian minister Theodore Parker asserted that the Mexican War was wrong not because it was furthered a violent imperialist impulse but rather because it was unnecessary. “I know the Mexicans are a wretched people,” Parker says,

I know [they] cannot stand before this terrible Anglo-Saxon race. . .

Considering how we acquired Louisiana, Florida, Oregon, I cannot forbear thinking that this people will possess the whole of the continent before many years. . . But this may be had fairly; with no injustice to any one; by the steady advance of a superior race, with superior ideas and a better civilization.

(23-4)

Parker’s injunction against the war on the one hand lends credence to Greeley’s critical characterization of it as a “war of races.” Indeed, as numerous scholars have noted,
arguments on both sides of the war debate often depended upon racism for their force. For the purposes of this project, the most significant aspect of Parker’s racialized imperialist logic is the way in which it interfaces with the longstanding U.S. discourse equating Protestantism with egalitarian governance. Parker’s “better civilization” is the U.S. liberal democracy: it is the “idea of America,” he argues, “that all men are born free and equal in rights” (24). Importantly, this American civilization is not only “Anglo Saxon” in Parker’s understanding—a definition at odds with that of Lippard—but also “Protestant” because its citizens are “descended from the Puritans” (25). It is their Puritan heritage, Parker argues, that should alert Northern Anglos to the evils of the Mexican War. Protestantism, in other words, makes it possible for people to recognize the injustice of war—even when that war is waged to further the inevitable decline of a religiously and racially different people.

Residing in Italy at the time of both the Mexican War and the beginnings of Italian Unification, Margaret Fuller saw in the rapidly shifting European landscape a picture of the territorial dramas unfolding in the Americas. Fuller explains that the efforts of the secularist Italian revolutionaries—efforts she viewed as necessary correctives to the theocratic despotism of Pope Pius IX—inspired her to reflect upon the situation of her own nation as it forced its way across the continent. In her eighteenth dispatch, fittingly entitled “New and Old World Democracy,” Fuller writes, “Then there is this horrible cancer of Slavery, and this wicked War, that has grown out of it. How dare I speak of these things here?” (165). But her physical distance from the U.S. does not, Fuller asserts, prevent her from viewing the nation’s problems clearly, because the
European situation, one she characterizes as a battle against papal tyranny, provides an index of the march of democracy:

I listen to the same arguments against the emancipation of Italy, that are used against the emancipation of our blacks; the same arguments in favor of the spoliation of Poland as for the conquest of Mexico. I find the cause of tyranny and wrong everywhere the same—and lo! My Country the darkest offender, because with the least excuse, foresworn to the high calling with which she was called,—no champion of the rights of men, but a robber and a jailer; the scourge hid behind her banner; her eyes fixed, not on the stars, but on the possessions of other men.”

(165)

The Italian enslavement Fuller compares to the material ownership of human beings on U.S. soil is Catholic theocracy, and the “emancipation” of which she writes consists of the ousting of Pius IX from the Roman government. Though staunchly against the Mexican War—a war in her mind waged over prospective slave territories—in making her argument for its “wickedness” Fuller invokes the specter of Catholic slavery and dogmatic rule. Thus her dispatch, despite its anti-war politics, shares with the pro-war writings of Lippard, Clemens, and Ritchie the rhetorical strategy of equating Catholicism with despotism and correlating its demise with the rise of liberal democracy.
Though suspicious of the Mexican War itself, Fuller seems convinced that
democratic forms can in fact spread across a region—even one populated, like Italy or
perhaps Mexico, with Catholics—once they take root in a few citizen-subjects.
Significantly, Fuller places her hope for democracy onto the private individual,
suggesting that liberal democracy is a natural by-product of the process through which the
state becomes distinct from its citizens' individual ideological constraints. Writing of the
revolutionary murmurs in Northern Italy, Fuller argues that although Leopold II has tried
to maintain despotic order in Tuscany, "Private culture has not been in vain, and there is,
in a large circle, mental preparation for a very different state of things from the present,
with an ardent desire to diffuse the same amid the people at large" (142). Here, Fuller
extends the reach of democracy to Catholic subjects; the Tuscans, though Catholic, are
capable of adapting to a "very different state of things" if only they will relinquish their
attachments to the current state of government and cultivate a culture of privacy within
their individual circles. Significantly, the spread of democracy to these regions of Italy
will only be possible, in Fuller's configuration, once the pope has been fully removed
from the realm of civic power. Though she is most immediately concerned with the
development of a free and ostensibly secular press, Fuller's recourse to privacy echoes
the earlier U.S. discourses of individual citizenship that I describe in previous chapters.
"Privacy" would have signaled a "Protestant" as well as liberal democratic subject to
Fuller's nineteenth-century audience. Again, although critical of the Mexican War,
Fuller's logic is strikingly similar to that employed by the war's proponents. In Italy, she
sees the developing democratic Roman government as having claim to all surrounding
territories, and though she is not ready to extend the same imperial right to the
slaveholding U.S., Fuller does seem convinced that it is democracy’s prerogative to displace the “Catholic.”

Fuller’s optimism about the Catholic’s capacity to embrace democracy is relegated exclusively in her dispatches to the European continent. Addressing mid-century rumors about Catholic plots against the U.S., Fuller writes, “[T]here is a report here that they are trying to get an Italian Consul for the United States, and one in employment of the Jesuits. This rumor seems ridiculous; yet it is true that Dr. Beecher’s panic about the Catholic influence in the United States is not quite unfounded, and that there is considerable hope of establishing a new dominion there” (188). Fuller’s evocation of Beecher’s *A Plea for the West* situates her dispatches within an already extant discourse of Protestant panic about Catholic power in the Americas. And like Beecher, Fuller does not simply speak of Catholicism in the abstract; this dispatch—aptly named “The Pope and His People”—articulates a sense that Catholics are generally unfit for public duty in the liberal democratic U.S.:

I hope the United States will appoint no Italian, no Catholic, to a Consulship. The representative of the United States should be American; our national character and interests are peculiar and cannot be fitly represented by a foreigner, unless one like Mr. Ombrosi of Florence, he has passed part of his youth in the United States.”

(188)
Here the U.S.'s "national character" appears as "not Catholic," by default, and the Catholic body poses a threat to the body politic because, by virtue of its Catholicism, it cannot uphold the precepts of liberal government. The distinction between "Catholic" and "foreigner" blurs, as Fuller places the Italian and the Catholic on the same plane, equally incapable of correctly pursuing the U.S. nation's interests. Reiterating this sentiment, Fuller argues that "whenever there shall be a collision between the Priest and the Reformer [within a single body], the Priest shall triumph," suggesting—as did many U.S. writers before her—that the Catholic subject's primary alliance is to the Church and thus perpetually at odds with the secular state (189). As long as papal power prevails, there can be no liberal Catholics.

Fuller's twenty-fourth dispatch, "Noble Sentiment and the Loss of the Pope," again treats the Italian revolution as an index of the U.S.'s ongoing imperial project. "Future, is more alive here [in Italy] at present than in America," she writes, "My country is at present spoiled by prosperity, stupid with the lust of gain, soiled by crime in its willing perpetuation of Slavery, shamed by an unjust war, noble sentiment much forgotten even by individuals, the aims of politicians selfish or petty, the literature frivolous and venal" (230). Here Fuller charts what she sees as the U.S.'s failure to reach its fullest potential. The nation's rush to defend and indeed extend the reach of slavery through war with Mexico has "spoiled" and "shamed" it, and Fuller writes that it is now in Europe, where Catholic despotism seems daily on the decline, that she sees "my America" (230, emphasis original). Here, Fuller's geographic model is ideological rather than territorial, and her discovery of "America" in Europe coincides with her witnessing of the collapse of Catholic theocracy. The "noble sentiment" nowhere to be found on the
American continents is resuscitated in the almost-liberated Italy and paired in Fuller’s dispatch title with “the loss of the Pope.” Paradoxically, the “American” spirit Fuller—who could not in her twenty-first dispatch imagine a Catholic subject faithfully representing the U.S. nation—sees in Europe is one borne by Catholic practitioners; the Italians liberating and being liberated in Rome and by and large practitioners of Roman Catholicism. The war on the American continent, however, is one waged against a nation identified as “Catholic” by its majority Protestant neighbor. Thus the clash of Catholicism and liberal democracy that she outlines throughout her dispatches is not centered on the presence or absence of actual Catholic practitioners within the democratic state but rather depends more generally upon Catholicism’s proximity to the state. Catholic Europe can be “America” insofar as it maintains a division between papal and state power.

Fuller concludes her lament for “America” in this dispatch with a biting critique of the recent U.S. election cycle. “I do not deeply distrust my country,” she asserts,

She is not dead, but in my time she sleepeath, and the spirit of our fathers flames no more, but lies hidden beneath the ashes. It will not be so long; bodies cannot live when the soul gets overgrown with gluttony and falsehood. But it is not the making of a President out of the Mexican War that would make me wish to come back.

(230, emphasis added)
Although her goal is in some respects the converse of his, like Lippard Fuller evokes the revolutionary parent when making her case against the Mexican War. The father's spirit smolders beneath, and liberal democracy sleeps among the ashes produced by an unjust quest for slave lands. And though Fuller contends that the promise of democracy cannot sleep forever, she significantly points to the working machinery of the U.S. governmental system as her motivation for remaining in Europe. The "making of a President out of the Mexican War"—the 1848 election of army general and Legends hero Zachary Taylor to the White House—seems to Fuller not proof that the U.S.'s representational democratic system is running smoothly, but rather an indication of how illiberal and treacherous the nation has become. Thus the material processes of liberal democracy in the U.S. are not, as Fuller describes them, in themselves sufficient to guarantee fair representative governance. The newly-elected President Taylor does not embrace her socio-political views, and so Fuller chooses to remain in Catholic Italy to chronicle the demise of papal theocracy and hail the rise of a more promising, though not American, "America."

Fuller's outrage at the Taylor election, and her assertion that his presidency was somehow invalid because it marked the national dominance of a party and a politics dissimilar from her own, is not unique and in fact articulates a sentiment increasingly common during the Mexican War era that liberal democracy's representative figures might not be adequately equipped to represent their constituents. In other words, although Fuller makes an explicit attack on the new Taylor administration, her concern that the popularly elected head of the executive branch could not further her interests as an individual citizen is shared among writers of a variety of political positions during this period. Indeed, even as U.S. writers on both sides of the Mexican War debate sang the
praises of liberal democracy, seeing the war either as a mark of its continental expansion or as a threat to its promises of tolerance and equality, the soundness of the very representational logic on which the U.S.'s liberal democratic system rested was perpetually at issue throughout the war period. The question of the president's capacity to represent his constituents was particularly salient during Polk's single term, largely because of his policies regarding Catholicism. When, for example, the New York Herald article I cited above excoriated Polk for meeting with Bishop Hughes, it did so by suggesting that the President was dependent upon the prelate's "friends and worshippers" for votes. Though this article undoubtedly was meant to suggest that the Polk administration was beholden to the nation's Catholic population, and thus somehow disconnected from the U.S.'s "real" citizenry, it carries with it the more general concern that any particular faction could achieve enough power and influence to convert a public representative into a private interest puppet. Thus although the Herald was specifically worried about the President's relationship to America Catholics—those living in the U.S. as well as Mexico—at stake in its ostensible exposé of presidential pandering to Catholic populations is the larger problem of political representation itself. But significantly, it is at the moment when it confronts the possibility of "Catholic" influence and faction that the newspaper decries the logic of egalitarian political representation.

In the same vein, the Nativist Daily Sun's assertion that the "great Republic" of the U.S. would, in the event that it annexed territories inhabited by Catholic Mexicans, be suddenly placed at Catholicism's mercy because Bishops could "influence a certain number of Catholic voters for any party who may choose to purchase them" highlights not only a distrust of the "Catholic" citizen-voter but also a profound concern over the
perceived vulnerability of liberal democracy in general. Although the Sun never suggests, oddly enough, that Protestant churches might sway their congregants to support particular candidates, embedded in its critique of the Polk administration and the ongoing war is the general fear that the efficacy of political representation ultimately rises and falls with each individual candidate's relationship to the public. In other words, through its vicious anti-Catholicism, this Sun article subtly articulates the possibility that representative democracy will not necessarily ensure either fair governance for everyone or the reciprocity between state and subject that is central to the liberal democratic order. That the "Catholic" is the specific catalyst for this discussion should come as no surprise because, as I have shown in previous chapters, it played a foundational role in the development of liberal democratic discourse in the U.S. in the first place. But while in the early national period liberal democracy's promise seemed to lie in its "Protestant" capacity to encompass religious difference, including Catholicism, by the mid-nineteenth century the "Catholic" appears more as a threat to than a necessary component of the liberal democratic order.

Articulating a slightly different concern, in a virulently racist 1846 article denouncing the Mexican War the National Intelligencer asked its readers:

Do we expect we can melt into our population eight millions of men at war with us by race, by language, by religion, manners, and laws? Do we hope we can make citizens of the seven millions of Indians that are bigoted, ignorant, idle, lawless, slavish, and yet free?
Religious and racial differences combine in this formulation, as the Mexican population is presented as being unequipped for entrance into the U.S. lexicon. "Slavish" though free, Mexico's ties to the Catholic Church have left its citizens in idle ignorance, "bigoted" against the Anglo-Protestants that would welcome the southward spread of democracy if only such spreading would not put their own nation at risk. The Intelligencer here positions Catholic Mexicans and Indians as "bigots," and thereby attempts to convert its own irrational, racialized and religiously inflected discourse into a reasonable concern for the fate of democracy. The article's implied argument is that Mexicans cannot seamlessly "melt" into the U.S. population—cannot, in other words, Protestantize sufficiently to reduce the threat they pose to the national order. The danger of the Mexican War, then, is its potential to change the U.S.'s voting demographic and hand the southern states over to papal rule. Of course, the perception of this threat requires a sense that liberal democracy cannot survive in the absence of a Protestant voting majority and a conviction that Catholicism would not only alter the representative body governing the nation but also, and more seriously, threaten the fragile and tenuous system of representative rule itself.

Thus in the debates over the rectitude of the Mexican War, the discourse of anti-Catholicism does not simply reflect animosity between actual Anglo-Protestant Americans and their Catholic neighbors but rather brings to light the ongoing problem of mutual church/state dependence within the structure of U.S. liberal democracy. Because the "Catholic" had long operated within liberal democratic discourse as the threat that
democracy must internalize and contain, when the Protestant U.S. public faced the possible annexation of thousands of miles of territory already inhabited by people imagined to be Catholic, the result on both sides of the issue was concern for the sanctity of republican institutions. Though Lippard celebrates what Fuller laments—the lionizing and ultimate election of Mexican War “heroes”—at the heart of his work as well as hers lies concern over Catholicism’s uneasy relationship to nationalism and a more general anxiety about liberal democracy’s failure to adequately manage religious difference. In the end, Lippard cannot bring himself to represent the Irish family whole and happy within U.S. national space, and neither can he fully reconcile the violence playing out against Mexican bodies with the ostensibly lofty goals of U.S. imperialism. Similarly, despite her commitments to liberalism and despite having witnessed first-hand the rise of secularism in a Catholic nation, Fuller cannot imagine a world in which Catholics play key roles in democratic state politics, The Catholic body, in other words, never makes an entirely complete transition into the American body, and the logic of representation falls apart in the shadow of the Vatican as well as at the mouth of the Rio Grande.
NOTES

1. Until very recently, scholarly work on anti-Catholicism and the Mexican War has tended to focus on determining whether the war elevated anti-Catholic sentiment among Anglo-Protestants or facilitated the consolidation of U.S. national and white identities. Ted Hinkley, for example, argues that the Mexican War did not incite a significant amount of new anti-Catholicism in the U.S. Isaac McDaniel’s dissertation on this topic echoes Hinkley’s argument in some respects, though McDaniel treats Nativism as a phenomenon centered around ethnic rather than religious difference. Useful, more general studies of U.S. perceptions of the war and military experience in Mexico include those by Johanssen, Winders, Lander, Mahin, and McCaffrey. The most recent examination of anti-Catholicism’s specific relationship to the Mexican War is John Christopher Pinheiro’s dissertation, which convincingly links the anti-Catholic discourse of the 1830s and 1840s to the rise of manifest destiny.

2. See, for example, Streeby’s analysis of early-nineteenth-century popular culture. Other useful studies of Nativist discourse include those by Roy, Knobel, and Griffin.

3. Autos-da-fé (acts of faith) were elaborate Inquisitional ceremonies during which the Catholic Church publicly read the sentences of supposed heretics. Importantly, although the Church would announce the sentences, only the secular authorities could carry them out, and only the secular authorities could sentence an inquisitional victim to death. The last auto da fé was held in Mexico in 1850.

4. William Dusinberre’s brilliant study of James K. Polk’s simultaneous careers as president and slavemaster nicely articulates the ways in which tensions over territorial
expansion and the extension of slavery shaped both Northern and Southern perceptions of the declaration of war against Mexico (see especially chapters 11 and 12).

5. The Saint Patrick’s Battalion leader, John Riley, deserted the U.S. army in April of 1846, and by August 1847 he and the Mexican government—including General and President Antonio López de Santa Anna—had successfully recruited more than two hundred other soldiers to fight in what was essentially Mexico’s foreign legion. The majority Irish Catholic San Patricios were largely defeated by the U.S. army in the battle of Churubusco on 20 August, 1847. General Winfield Scott ordered court-martials for the survivors, strategically placing the Catholic Colonels Bennet Riley (no relation to the San Patricios’ leader) and William Harney (who happened to be of Irish descent) in charge of the proceedings. Ultimately, the U.S. army executed forty-six of the surviving San Patricios; the remaining men—John Riley among them—were given fifty lashes, branded with a “D” for deserter, and forced to perform heavy manual labor for the duration of the war. For more detailed accounts of the Saint Patrick’s Battalion, see Hogan, Miller, Stevens, and Wynn.

6. Though he made special overtures to Irish Catholics, Santa Anna welcomed all defectors—even Anglo-Protestant ones—and promised them signing bonuses of at least ten dollars. Dollar amounts increased if prospective foreign fighters brought with them arms, supplies, or more men (for a reproduction of Santa Anna’s general call for defection, see Miller, 64).

7. Paine’s Crisis IV actually reads: “We fight not to enslave, but to set a country free, and to make room upon the earth for honest men to live in.” Streeby convincingly suggests that Lippard’s misquotation is purposeful and “shows how important it was to
U.S. imperialists to establish distinctions between the U.S. Mexican War and the Spanish conquest of Mexico, even as the parallels between the two remained a source of endless, if uneasy, fascination’’ (56).

8. It is worth noting that although Jeremiah Clemens was rather successful in the realm of politics—serving as a U.S. district attorney, state legislator, and senator in Alabama—he never achieved the literary fame of his cousin Samuel.

9. Ambler provides a detailed account of the important roles Ritchie played in Virginia politics and the Polk administration.

10. I am greatly indebted to Pinheiro’s dissertation on anti-Catholicism and Manifest Destiny during the Mexican War, especially for its excavation of news stories about Catholicism and the war effort.


12. As Paul Bergeron notes, in May of 1846, Polk “turned his attention to an unusual aspect of strategy—namely, the conciliation of the Catholic Church in Mexico.” (81). Responding to the president’s request that Catholic priests be assigned to troop units in Mexico, Bishop John Joseph Hughes of New York volunteered to go to Mexico himself. Although Bergeron has nicely excavated the history of these meetings between Polk and the Catholic Bishops, he is perhaps too quick to celebrate what he sees as Polk’s “genuine concern for the traditional U.S. commitment to the freedom of religion” (81). Although it is impossible, and for the purposes of this essay unimportant, to know Polk’s actual feelings about religious liberty and Catholicism, his decision to deploy priests to Mexico was undoubtedly strategic.
13. According to Reginald Horsman, for example: “The catalyst in the overt adoption of a racial Anglo-Saxonism was the meeting of Americans and Mexicans in the Southwest, the Texas Revolution, and the war with Mexico. In confronting the Mexicans the Americans clearly formulated the idea of themselves as an Anglo-Saxon race. The use of Anglo-Saxon in a racial sense, somewhat rare in the political arguments of the early 1830s, increased rapidly later in the decade and became commonplace by the mid-1840s” (208-9).

14. For detailed analysis of the Risorgimento and its effect on U.S. Catholics, see the late Peter D’Agostino’s work (especially part one).

15. Scholars have traditionally read Fuller’s dispatches within the context of nineteenth-century travel writing. Though somewhat beyond the scope of this project, Bailey’s analyses of Fuller’s writing abroad are useful. For more on how Fuller’s travel influenced the development of her political commitments, see Steele.

16. James Ombrosi was the U.S.’s consul in Florence at the time of Fuller’s writing.
Following the Leader:

Anti-Catholicism and the Failure of Pluralism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Benito Cereno*

In December of 1861, the famed orator and abolitionist Wendell Phillips twice delivered an address detailing the life of “the soldier, the statesman, the martyr, Toussaint Louverture.” Phillips’s stated goal in this address was to convince his audience that “the Negro race, instead of being that object of pity or contempt which we usually consider it, is entitled, judged by the facts of history, to a place by the side of the Saxon.” That Phillips would evoke the long dead Louverture at a moment when his own nation verged on collapse over the issue of slavery is no surprise because, as numerous critics have noted, the Saint-Domingue slave revolts and the subsequent establishment of a free Haiti seemed to many antebellum Anglo-Americans a microcosm illustrative of the potential outcomes of emancipation in the United States.¹ The same year that Phillips regaled the Boston and New York crowds with tales of Louverture’s heroics, fellow abolitionist Elizur Wright argued that “the war now raging on this continent involves nearly the same elements that entered into the revolutionary history of the French part of the island St. Domingo.” A shared history of European conquest and African slavery, according to Wright, made the lessons of Saint-Domingue’s violent transformation into Haiti “unspeakably important to our government at this moment” (1).² Freed from colonial rule and reassigned its indigenous name by former slaves in 1804, Haiti carried a past that appeared to correlate with the U.S.’s mid-nineteenth-century present, and it moved through a present that promised to shed light on a post-bellum future. The story of the Haiti, according to Wright and Phillips, will be the story of the United States.
Tellingly, in Phillips’s address the Haitian past is religious as well as racial—Catholic as well as black—and Louverture stands for the abolitionist not only as representative of the promise of black citizenship but also as the hope of religious pluralism. Describing Louverture’s final push for the liberation of Saint-Domingue, Phillips reminds his audience that, “it was 1800, at a time when England was poisoned on every page of her statute-book with religious intolerance. . . when every State in the Union, except Rhode Island, was full of the intensest [sic] religious bigotry.” In contrast to this world of Anglo-Protestant intolerance, Phillips argues, Louverture stood as a beacon of religious as well as equity. “This man was a negro,” Phillips tells his audience and then accuses,

You say that is a superstitious blood. . . He was a Catholic. May say that is but another name for intolerance. And yet—negro, Catholic, slave—he took his place by the side of Roger Williams, and said to his committee: “Make it the first line of my Constitution that I know no difference between religious beliefs.”

By situating Louverture both next to Williams and firmly in 1800, Phillips manages to elide the fact that the sixth article of Haiti’s 1801 Constitution, drafted by Louverture himself, provides for Catholic establishment in the new nation. “La religion catholique, apostolique et romaine,” the article reads, “y est la seule publiquement professée” (The Catholic religion, Apostolic and Roman, is the only one publicly professed). Thus Louverture was not, it seems, a man overly committed to the ideals of secular
nationalism, and Haiti, despite Phillips’s insistence, was no Caribbean Rhode Island. But what matters, for the purposes of this chapter, is neither the revolutionary’s theocratic leanings nor the abolitionist’s historical amnesia but rather Phillips’s recognition that an accounting of the Haitian Revolution necessitated an accounting of religious as well as racial difference. Haiti’s present, Phillips realizes, is a Catholic present, and the liberation of its slaves could pose a challenge to the popular antebellum notion that Catholicism was slavery’s analogue and Protestantism a prerequisite for freedom.

Phillips’s strained—and dubious—disavowal of the importance of Louverture’s Catholicism to the Haitian state reflects in part what Tracy Fessenden has recognized as the link between antebellum anti-Catholicism and the rhetoric of abolition. Building on Jenny Franchot’s observation that Nativist tracts often held the slave’s position above that of the Roman Catholic, Fessenden notes the similarities between the images of the “kneeling slave” that filled the pages of antislavery publications and the “imploring figure[s] of the captive nun, the Inquisitorial subject, or the sexually vulnerable child,” that graced the pages of contemporary anti-Catholic publications (229).\(^5\) Indeed, it was just this discursive symbiosis that likely led Harriet Jacobs to assert in her autobiography that the “secrets of slavery are concealed like those of the Inquisition” (35).\(^6\) But although Fessenden importantly excavates the logic of religious exclusion that underpinned the U.S. abolitionist movement, her assertion that “slavery eventually (barely) displaced ‘Romanism’ as the primary object of American Protestant attentions” runs the risk of downplaying both the long history of Catholicism’s relationship to American imaginings of race and the continued significance of “Romanism” to U.S. understandings of democratic citizenship throughout the nineteenth century. As
Phillips's effort to convert Louverture into a Caribbean Williams suggests, in the era of
civil war the discourse of racial citizenship was inextricable from the discourse of
religious citizenship, as anti-Catholicism continued to structure U.S. conceptions of
liberal democratic subjectivity. If, as I suggest in chapter three, Mexico came in the
1840s to stand for the imagined threat of foreign and racialized Catholic incursion into
the U.S.'s territorial and political spheres, then in the era of Civil War Haiti operated as a
fantasy site through which Anglo-American Protestants could play out the ongoing
domestic drama of racial and religious difference.

Despite its prominent place in contemporary discussions of slavery and the future
of the U.S., Haiti has only recently begun to receive sustained attention from scholars of
the antebellum period. In the past decade, critics turning their attention to Haiti have
opened up fruitful avenues of inquiry not only into how the complexities of race, class,
and the colonial past have shaped that country's politics and social life, but also how the
Saint-Domingue revolution and the rise of Haitian nationalism have influenced global
politics since the nineteenth century. Taking seriously Anna Brickhouse's assertion that
examination of Haiti brings to light the fact that, "the nineteenth century is as much the
legacy of earlier transnational formations as the forerunner of later ones," this scholarship
has been especially attentive to the ways in which inter-American colonial and national
interactions have contributed to the development of hemispheric conceptions of race
(407). What has received less attention, however, is how the imagined Catholicism of
Haiti's inhabitants—slave and free alike—posed a problem to U.S. understandings of
freedom and threatened to undo the logic of Protestant primacy that had, as I demonstrate
in previous chapters, underpinned that nation's liberal democratic tradition since the late-
eighteenth century. Even those studies that do, as Fessenden's does, ostensibly place the Catholic at the center of inquiry tend ultimately to subsume questions of religion to those of race. In doing so, I would argue, they rehearse a discourse that renders invisible the centrality of Protestantism to the project of liberal democracy. This is not to say that race does not matter within the liberal democratic paradigm. Rather, it is to say that keeping the Catholic in focus brings to light the mutually constitutive relationship between the ostensible secularism of U.S. politics and the racially infused discourse of liberal citizenship.

In this chapter, I will discuss the representations of Catholicism and its imagined relationships to race and liberal citizenship in two works popular with both the audiences of their day and with current literary critics: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*. Although critics such as Fessenden and Franchot have examined these works' depictions of the Catholic separately, in pairing them together this chapter brings to light their mutual deployment of the trope of Catholicism to articulate the problem of racism within U.S.'s liberal democratic system. Though very different in their perspectives on race and religion, both of these works engage with the prevalent contemporary notion that racially different bodies could establish reciprocal relationships through mutual positioning against Catholicism. That the Catholic would appear in works mainly concerned with the crisis produced by the push for emancipation and the extension of legal citizenship to black bodies is no surprise, because, as I have shown in earlier chapters, U.S. notions of egalitarianism and multiplicity have always drawn their force from the fabrication of Catholic absolutism. Thus in turning to the looming conflict over racial pluralism, Stowe and Melville turn to the Catholic. But
while Stowe embraces the fantasy that exposure to and rejection of Catholicism by people defined as “black” would at once provoke recognition of black citizenship by people defined as “white” and facilitate the development of a black Protestant nationalism (importantly, for the racist Stowe, beyond the U.S. border), Melville proves more skeptical of anti-Catholicism’s capacity to produce democratic subjects, and in *Benito Cereno* the liberal project stalls out on racial as well as religious divides. Still, though they reach almost contradictory conclusions, considered together these two works highlight Catholicism’s centrality to mid-century discussions of racial equality, and they demonstrate that the U.S. liberal democratic paradigm’s dependence upon anti-Catholicism not only countered efforts to foster religious pluralism but also stunted the prospects of racial equality.

**“Not in Hayti”: Anti-Catholicism and Black Patriotism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin***

Near the close of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the escaped slave George Harris sends a letter to a friend detailing his post-emancipation plans. “The desire and yearning of my soul,” he writes, “is for an African *nationality*. I want a people that shall have a tangible, separate existence of its own.” (608, emphasis original). Having suffered forced labor, physical deprivation, and family separation under the U.S. slave system, George has exchanged the fantasy of a racially plural national space for one in which citizenship and blackness are equivalent. But before he articulates what such a new space might look like, George provides his friend with an example of what it cannot be. “Not in Hayti,” he insists, “for in Hayti they had nothing to start with... The race
that formed the character of the Haytiens was a worn-out, effeminate one; and, of course, the subject race will be centuries in rising to anything” (608-9). Carolyn Berman has argued that, the “gratuitous insult about the ‘effeminate’ French makes little sense coming from George,” who not only counts among his family members the French Creole Cassy and Madame de Thoux, but who also has received his education in France (341). Implicit in Berman’s assessment of the gratuitousness of George’s insult is a sense that it is not the character who speaks here but Stowe herself. Berman notes, I think correctly, that George must reject Haiti in order for the novel to make its case for Liberian colonization. By placing her attack on Haiti in George’s mouth, in other words, Stowe is able to present departure from the American hemisphere as the natural choice of blacks rather than the preferred scenario of racist whites. The move to Liberia thus appears at the end of Stowe’s narrative as a rejection of the empty promises of French effeminacy and Catholicism—and, by extension, an acceptance of responsibility for a black nationalism that is at once masculine and Protestant—rather than a migration necessitated by the persistent structures of U.S. slavery and racism.

While I agree with Berman’s assessment of the centrality of George’s rejection of Haiti to Stowe’s project of African colonization, I question whether that rejection really “makes little sense” to the novel as a whole. For though it might seem out of place given its complex depictions of Afro-Franco intermingling, considered within the context of the novel’s representations of Catholicism, George’s dismissal of the Haitian paradigm makes nothing but sense. For throughout Stowe’s novel it is precisely the rejection of Catholic forms, rituals, and spaces, I would argue, that facilitates that production of black national identity. In other words, Catholicism appears in _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ not only as
an analogue for slavery but also as a structure through which black bodies must pass in order to develop the sensibilities required of a productive liberal subject. Indeed, as Fessenden recognizes, George’s own journey from slavery to Black Nationalism begins with the adoption of external markers of Catholicism and ends with his rejection of the system those markers ostensibly indicate. Having applied a “little walnut bark” to turn his “yellow skin a genteel brown” and dyed his hair black (182), George no longer resembles the escaped slave notice promising reward for his capture, and he passes through Kentucky largely unmolested under the guise of his adopted “Spanish complexion” (180). Fessenden notes that if “George can, presumably, wash the Catholicizing burnt cork from his face once in Canada, still the imperializing aims of Stowe’s Protestant America require his further removal to ‘glorious Africa’” (244). And while I agree with Fessenden’s assessment of this removal as one that ultimately situates both the Catholic and the former slave safely outside of the U.S. border, equally significant is Stowe’s sense that it is Catholicism, rather than slavery even, that African American must reject in order to gain entrance into the liberal democratic community. The breaking of his fetters makes George physically free, but it is the turn away from Catholicism that makes him a plausible nationalist.

Recognition of Stowe’s reliance upon representations of Afro-U.S. disdain for the Catholic allows for an extension of Charles Mills’s important argument about the deep racial assumptions that underlie the liberalist concept of the social contract. Reorienting the notion of reciprocity that has traditionally structured social contract theory stemming from the works of thinkers such as Locke and Rousseau, Mills argues that the “Racial
Contract is that set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements. . . between the members of one subset of humans, henceforth designated. . . as ‘white,’

to categorize the remaining subset of humans as ‘nonwhite’ and of a different and inferior moral status, so that they have a subordinate civil standing in the white or white-ruled polities. . . in any case the general purpose of the Contract is always the differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to the nonwhites as a group.

(11)

Through its de facto definition of the contracting body as white, Mills argues, social contract theory has at once perpetuated and buried the white supremacist logic that undergirds global politics in the age of the liberal democratic state. While The Racial Contract offers a significant critique of liberalism’s tacit racism, it does not address the fact that the foundational social contract theory Mills cites also developed in the aftermath of Reformation and thus has also always assumed reciprocity to be the prerogative of Protestant bodies. Thus it is the removal of Catholic-face that allows George to announce: “As a Christian patriot, as a teacher of Christianity, I go to my country,—my chosen, my glorious Africa!” (610, emphasis original). This is not to deny the importance of George’s race to the novel’s resolution; after all, it is because he has been defined as black that George cannot live as a free, “Christian patriot” within the
United States. Nevertheless, the fully-formed public self, the black patriot who freely chooses, is within Stowe’s model a Protestant Christian who has inhabited but freely chosen to throw off the trappings of Catholicism.

If George’s simultaneous move from slavery to freedom and Catholicism to Protestantism is metaphoric in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—after all, George never actually practices Catholicism—then his counterpart and mother-in-law Cassy offers a picture of material religious conversion along with political transformation. Explaining to the battered Tom how she came to live with Simon Legree, Cassy says, “I was brought up in luxury [in New Orleans]. . . I went to a convent, and there I learned music, French and embroidery, and what not; and when I was fourteen, I came out to my father’s funeral” (515-16). Cassy’s early life, then, was one of Creole Catholicism, her education catechismal and French. But the Catholic Church in which she has been raised does not protect Cassy from U.S. slavery—her father’s death signals both her departure from the convent’s walls and her physical entry into the slave system in which she was always, though she did not feel it, entrenched. Even more serious in Stowe’s work is Catholicism’s failure to prepare Cassy spiritually for the burdens of slavery. Though they are ostensible equals within the slave system, Tom appears as a Protestant foil for Cassy—one who is ideologically free if physically fettered. When they meet on the Legree plantation, Cassy urges Tom to exploit the other slaves in order to save himself, arguing, “And what of those miserable low dogs you work with, that you should suffer on their account? Every one of them would turn against you the first time they got a chance.” (513). Tom simply replies: “Poor critters. . . what made ’em cruel?—and if I give out, I shall get used to ’t, and grow, little by little, just like ’em... I’ve lost
everything in *this* world, and it's clean gone, forever,—and now I *can't* lose Heaven, too; no, I can't be wicked, besides all!” (513). For Tom, the social contract is a religious contract. The responsibility he feels for his fellow slaves is inextricable from the responsibility he feels toward his evangelical Protestantism. But this is something inaccessible to Cassy, who simply tells Tom, “There’s no law here, of God or man, that can do you, or any one of us, the least good” (512). Cassy has been raised with religion—with a manner of Christianity no less—but it is the wrong kind of religion; it is a religion that allows her to justify what Stowe sees as hopeless and selfish despair. But the Protestant Tom, Bible-reading to the end, never loses sight of the obligation he owes to his fellow slaves.

It is Tom’s socially interested Protestantism that ultimately serves as the catalyst for Cassy’s physical and, within Stowe’s text, spiritual emancipation. When Cassy tells Tom that “the sisters in the convent used to tell [her] of a day of judgment, when everything is coming to light,” he suggests that rather than seeking vengeance upon her captor she should “go to him that can give you living waters!” (522-3). As Berman notes, “Stowe links Cassy’s violent resolve to Catholic dogma”; like the French nuns who educated her, Cassy seeks an apocalyptic end to her earthly trials (340). Cassy’s gradual transformation from slavish wretch to enlightened citizen is configured as a conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism. When Tom says, “[I] won’t make much odds to me how I come [to be wicked]; it’s the *bein’ so*—that ar’s what I’m a dreadin’” (513), Cassy falls to the floor and groans, “O God a’ mercy! you speak the truth! O—O—O!” (513). The transformation is nearly complete when Tom asks her to read his Bible. Confronted with the text—a sure sign of Protestantism—reading “Father forgive them, for they know
not what they do,” Cassy “threw down the book, and, burying her face in the heavy masses of her hair, she sobbed aloud, with a convulsive violence” (514). The violence of Cassy’s sobs replaces the violence she intended for her captors, and in the end she chooses to leave the plantation through subterfuge rather than bloodshed. Upon arrival in Montreal, Cassy completes her conversion not only to Protestantism but also to full liberal subjectivity. “And, indeed, in two or three days,” Stowe writes, “such a change has passed over Cassy...[that she] yielded at once, and with her whole soul, to every good influence, and became a devout and tender Christian” fit to join George in his quest for a black nation (607). Thus Stowe position’s Cassy’s narrative as a progress narrative—one in which the journey from slavery to freedom is two-fold: a literal journey marked by a geographic move first North to Catholic Canada and then East to soon-to-be-Protestant Africa, and a journey of the interior marked by the relinquishing of Catholic isolation and superstition in favor of Protestant rationalism and commitment to community.

Cassy’s northeasterly move counterbalances Tom’s own continental journey, which Berman nicely compares to a descent into spiritual ruin. “Tom first travels from purgatory in Kentucky [the Shelby farm],” she argues, “to a shimmering devil’s paradise in New Orleans [the St. Clare estate], and then moves on to a Louisiana plantation [Legree’s] in the middle of hell” (332). Importantly, Tom’s southern trajectory always leads him deeper into Catholic as well as slaveholding territory. Though descendants of Huguenots, the New Orleans St. Clares bear all the markings of Catholic excess and are indeed, as Fessenden has noted, “discursively Catholicized” (241). Marie St. Clare, the picture of selfish motherhood, languishes on her couch all day, indulging her every whim
while proclaiming herself a “perfect martyr” (258). Her husband seems a lord of misrule whose laziness has permeated the entire household and whose very vests, “stained with wine,” testify to an intemperance Stowe’s readers would have recognized as “Catholic.” (256). The house itself evokes a dark Catholicism; it is “an ancient mansion, built in that odd mixture of Spanish and French style,” and upon seeing it for the first time the St. Clares’ Calvinist cousin Ophelia declares that although it is “a pretty place,” it “looks rather old and heathenish” (252-3). Though situated squarely within the boundaries of the nineteenth-century United States, the St. Clare estate evokes times and spaces far removed from antebellum Anglo-Protestantism. Even worse, its dazzling exterior threatens to seduce the otherwise pious Tom, whom Stowe, always true to her own racism, characterizes along with all people of African descent, as “an exotic of the most gorgeous and superb countries in the world, [who] has, deep in his heart, a passion for all that is splendid, rich, and fanciful” (253). Taken in by the brilliant exterior of the St. Clare mansion, Tom is temporarily blinded by “enjoyment,” as he loses sight of the household’s inner decay, and he stands vulnerable beneath the dazzling array of Catholicized space as well as beneath the injustice of slavery. The two systems, Catholic and slave, merge to form the deceptively lovely architecture of Augustine St. Clare’s New Orleans home, and both threaten—though they ultimately fail—to undo Tom’s piety.

If the St. Clare estate stands as an excessive and dilapidated Creole space structured by a kind of de-ritualized Catholicism, then the Legree plantation where Tom’s journey finally terminates represents the theocratic threat that many of Stowe’s contemporaries would have viewed the Catholic Church as posing to the U.S. liberal
democratic order. As Fessenden notes, despite Stowe’s insistence that Legree is a New England atheist, the slaveholder’s French surname,¹⁰ his invectives against “infernal old Methodism” (489) and his cry of “I’m your church now,” (482) would have resonated with Stowe’s Anglo-Protestant readers as proof of his close relationship to the horrors of Catholic absolutism. Importantly, it is Legree’s attempts to gain ideological control over him, rather than the institution of slavery itself, that Tom loses his life resisting. When Legree demands that Tom beat the slave Lucy into submission, Tom tells him, “Mas’r Legree, as ye bought me, I’ll be a true and faithful servant to ye. I’ll give ye all the work of my hands, all my time, all my strength; but my soul I won’t give up to mortal man” (540). Here, Tom acquiesces to the system of slavery even as he refuses to comply fully with its demands. Because Legree has purchased him, Tom feels contractually obligated to give his strength and time to performing slave labor, but he views the bill of sale that binds him to Legree as one that extends only as far as his own conscience. It is, ultimately, Tom’s refusal to “convert” that ends his life; he relinquishes his body in order to preserve his relationship to his god and his fellow slaves. Importantly, unlike George and Cassy, whose contemporaneous rejections of slavery and Catholicism within Stowe’s narrative render them fit for participation in an imagined black national space, Tom never emerges as a full civic subject in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Instead, he dies an allegorical figure—in a chapter fittingly and perhaps ironically entitled “The Martyr”—idealized by Stowe’s narrative for his “wondrous words and pious prayers” (584) staunchly Protestant but safely depoliticized.

Significantly, within *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* the successful, material journeys of African Americans toward liberty and national consciousness resist the Saint-Domingue
paradigm that hovers at the novel's margins. Long before Tom arrives on the Legree plantation, the New Orleans slaveholder Augustine St. Clare responds to his brother Alfred's assertion that slaves "must be kept down" by stating, "It makes a terrible slip when they get up... in St. Domingo, for instance" (391). To the slave master St. Clare—benign as his rule is supposed to be—the danger of slave revolt is synonymous with the danger of unbridled Catholic bodies. When Alfred asserts that he is "not afraid to sit on the escape valve" and let tensions boil between himself and his slaves, St. Clare warns him that, "The nobles in Louis XVI.'s time thought just so; and Austria and Pius IX. think so now; and, some pleasant morning, you may be all caught up to meet each other in the air, when the boilers burst" (391, emphasis original). Within St. Clare's analogies, both slave and slaveholder appear as Catholic. Louverture's Catholic masses represent the threat of revolt; the theocratic nobles of pre-Revolution France and the papal armies of mid-nineteenth-century Europe represent the unforgiving power of the master.

Standing in the midst of his New Orleans estate, an estate that both Fessenden and Franchot have identified as bearing the marks of Catholicism, St. Clare configures the U.S.'s slave system as a battle between opposing Catholic forces. But for all of its foreshadowing of violence, for all of its promises of bloody revolution, Uncle Tom's Cabin in the end tells the story of boilers that never burst. And they never burst, I would argue, because within Stowe's novel the Catholic absorbs and ultimately allows for the displacement of the pressures of the slave system. By trading his Catholic-face for Christian patriotism, George manages to escape both the fetters of chattel slavery and the limitations of Catholic existence. By trading her Catholic vengeance for Protestant piety, Cassy emerges as a good mother and potential citizen of Liberia. And by rejecting the
convict's promises of retribution—divine or otherwise—Tom surrenders to Legree's fists and departs from the plantation a Protestant martyr. In the end, then, the rejection of Haiti as physical space necessarily includes a rejection of the model of revolt that made Saint-Domingue into Haiti in the first place. Securely Protestant, the reconstituted black family poses no real threat to the standing of U.S. whites even as it forms a new nation.

Thus for Stowe, in Uncle Tom's Cabin the promise of black liberal subjectivity is equally contingent upon African American adoption of anti-Catholic modes of discourse and physical departure from U.S. territory. It is the rejection of Catholicism, within the context of Stowe's fantasy, that unfetters the black interior—even if the black body remains enslaved—and prepares it for participation in the public sphere. This recourse to anti-Catholicism, rather than simply suggesting religious bigotry on Stowe's part, reflects a longstanding trend in the U.S.'s liberal democratic model and participates in a discursive tradition that places the Catholic in opposition not only to the Protestant but also to the free. Through its fantasy of pan-Afro-Protestantism, Uncle Tom's Cabin effectively removes the revolutionary black body from the American hemisphere—simultaneously disavowing Louverture's power and his commitment to the Catholic Church—and resituates it in a distant site imagined as African and non-violent.

Appearing in serial form just three years after the publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin, Melville's short novel Benito Cereno would similarly take up the Catholic in posing the question of whether black bodies could enter into the American social contract. But where Stowe finds in anti-Catholicism a solution, however inadequate, to the difficulty of racial difference, for Melville the Catholic operates as a constant reminder of the liberal tradition's exclusionary logics. The fantasy of racial pluralism through religious
homogeneity that structures Stowe’s novel and undergirds much antebellum abolitionist discourse meets its end aboard Melville’s San Dominick and in the Spanish monastery where his story’s namesake is laid to rest.

“Like a whitewashed monastery”:

Anglo-Protestant Blindness and the Limits of Liberalism in Benito Cereno

When Captain Amasa Delano of Massachusetts edges his whale-boat close enough to get a good look at the distressed San Dominick slave ship, it appears to him through the mist and fog it “like a whitewashed monastery after a thunderstorm.” Melville’s narrator is quick to assure the reader that Delano’s reading of the ship is warranted, asserting that “it was no purely fanciful resemblance which now, for a moment, almost led Captain Delano to think that nothing less than a ship-load of monks was before him.” The narrator rationalizes Delano’s interpretation by explaining that,

Peering over the bulwarks were what really seemed, in the hazy distance, throngs of dark cowls; while fitfully revealed through the open port-holes, other dark moving figures were dimly descried, as of Black Friars pacing the cloisters.

(163)
Thus to Delano and the narrator alike the ship seems a floating Catholic space: its hull fit to be “perched on some dun cliff among the Pyrenees,” its port-holes resembling tiny cloister windows, the black skin of the men who secretly control its helm shrouding them like vestments. Upon even closer inspection, Delano revises his account of the ship, and the narrator notes that the “true character of the vessel was plain—a Spanish merchantman of the first class,” refurbished but still carrying the marks of its prior existence “like [a] superannuated Italian palace” (163-4). Though stripped, once clearly viewed, of its monastic status, the ship remains a representative of Catholic Europe, its architecture at once reminiscent of Spain and Italy. Eyeing the San Dominick alone off the coast of Chile, Delano confronts the monastery, the colonial Spanish fleet, and the crumbling Italian estate. He confronts, in other words, the Catholic.\(^\text{11}\)

Tellingly, Delano’s perception of the San Dominick as Catholic is nearly simultaneous with his realization that it is nation-less. When the mate first spots the damaged vessel, Delano notes through his glass that “the stranger... showed no colors; though to do so upon entering a haven, however uninhabited in its shores, where but a single other ship might be lying, was the custom among peaceful seamen of all nations” (161). As bereft of flags as it is of sails, the San Dominick moves at the whim of the tides and claims no civic space as its own. The ship’s personnel further emphasizes its placelessness; its dead owner Aranda was a Spaniard, its barely viable captain is Chilean, and its human cargo represents a mixing of sailors and slaves whose national attachments seemingly have been rendered moot by circumstance. In defining this floating Catholic space as religiously rather than nationally affiliated, Melville places Delano’s read of the ship squarely within contemporary discourse that situated Catholicism in opposition to
nationalism. It was precisely this understanding of Catholicism’s treacherous transnationality that led Samuel Morse to argue in 1835 that foreign Catholics could never fully integrate into the U.S.’s liberal democratic system. “Priests have ruled them at home by divine right” Morse writes of Catholics,

their ignorant minds cannot ordinarily be emancipated from their habitual subjection, they will not learn nor appreciate their exemption from any such usurpation of priestly power in this country, and they are implicitly at the beck of their spiritual guides.

(Chapter V)

Catholicism, according to Morse, travels across borders in the bodies of its practitioners, and those bodies remain Catholic even in the face of new national identifications. Thus although Delano’s “undistrustful good nature” prevents him from feeling unease when first viewing this flagless monastery (162), Melville’s narration suggests from the novel’s outset that something is not quite right, and that the key to what is wrong aboard the San Dominick lies with the complex relationship between the religious—especially the Catholic—and the national.

Like much of the Melville corpus, Benito Cereno has received and continues to receive a great deal of critical attention. Largely overlooked by critics past and present, however, is the short novel’s interest in Catholicism’s capacity to represent simultaneously the horrors of slavery and the limits of liberal subjectivity. Even
Franchot, whose work is generally committed to highlighting the centrality of Catholicism to U.S. literary productions, ultimately downplays Melville’s deployment of Catholic tropes, characterizing the Catholic in *Benito Cereno* as a marginal concern, “no longer a rival imperial power but, to the contrary, a conspicuous anachronism peripheral to the narrative[’s] contemporary urgencies” (163). Those “contemporary urgencies,” according to Franchot, form the “‘knot’ of slavery and racism embedded in the New England conscience” (163). The problem of racial difference, she concludes, is the “real” problem at the heart of *Benito Cereno*, and through the novel’s borrowing of anti-Catholic discourse “the ship’s hull [discloses] that antebellum American secrets are those of race, not religion,” even as “those aboard retreat back into the mute Catholic interior” (180). The shortcoming of Franchot’s otherwise insightful reading of *Benito Cereno* is, I think, two-fold. First, despite her study’s impressive scope and depth, Franchot remains in the end committed to the assumption that even if “elite fictions” share an interest with “popular” literary productions, they still operate at a distance from the popular and thus must by default perform a task different from it. It is this assumption—the assumption that Melville cannot be as dedicated to Romanism as his sensationalist contemporaries—that seems to lead Franchot to view the Catholic as a peripheral rather than central concern for the “elite” Melville.

The second, and I think more serious, sticking point of Franchot’s reading of Melville is that, for all of its nuanced sensibilities about racial difference, it assumes the Catholic to be always imagined as—if not “white,” exactly—“not black.” This assumption becomes especially clear in Franchot’s assessment of the *San Dominick* as a “nautical metonym of the Dominican-led Inquisition” (173). There is certainly textual
evidence to support her reading: the “two long, sharp-ribbed settees of Malacca cane, black with age” that sit in Cereno’s cuddy are for Delano as “uncomfortable to look at as inquisitors’ racks,” and the chair in which Babo shaves Cereno seems to the Duxbury captian “some grotesque engine of torment” (211). The specter of Inquisition thus hangs over the San Dominick, infusing even the furniture with the weight of an auto da fe. But while the name “Dominick” may have evoked for Melville’s readers the priestly order responsible for the Inquisition, the complete moniker “San Dominick” more likely would have conjured up a history of West Indian colonization and Afro-Caribbean revolution. This is what Eric Sundquist recognizes when he notes that by “changing the name of Benito Cereno’s ship from Tyral to the San Dominick, Melville gave to the slave revolt a specific character,” and that when “Melville altered the date of Amasa Delano’s encounter with Benito Cereno from 1805 to 1790, he accentuated the fact that his tale belonged to the age of democratic revolution, in particular the period of violent struggle leading to Haitian independence presided over the black general Toussaint Louverture” (175-6)\(^\text{13}\). Still, for all of its attention to the late-eighteenth-century history of Caribbean slave trade and revolt, Sundquist’s analysis makes no mention of Catholicism either as it appears in Melville’s work or as it circulated in the public discourses consumed by his antebellum audience. Rather than subsuming the question of religion to the question of race, I would argue, Benito Cereno compellingly suggests that the U.S. liberal democratic tradition’s reliance upon anti-Catholic discourse is inseparable from its commitment to white supremacy. Captain Delano’s voyage charts not a move from “Romanism to race,” but rather the destruction of the liberal fantasy that anti-Catholicism could serve as a tool for extending the boundaries of pluralism to include racial difference.
From the moment he boards the *San Dominick*, Delano incorrectly reads the relationship between Cerenio and the slave Babo as both mutually affectionate and Catholic. The ailing Cerenio seems to Delano “like some hypochondriac abbot” (169), and his servant appears in “nothing but wide trousers. . . which, with his composed, deprecatory air at times, [make] him look something like a begging friar of St. Francis” (176). Delano’s fantasy maintains the hierarchy of the slave system: if Babo is a friar, then Cerenio is his, however ailing, abbot. Still, the Catholicized space of the Spanish ship appears until the novel’s revelatory end as a site that allows for what would have been impossible in Delano’s *Duxbury*: reciprocity between racially different bodies. Seeing Babo grasp Cerenio’s arm and prop him up, Delano can only “bethink him of the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other” (176). “Faithful fellow!” Delano exclaims of Babo, “Don Benito, I envy you such a friend; slave I cannot call him” (176). Later, when Babo emerges bloody and distraught from the cuddy in which he shaves Cerenio, Delano imagines the cut on the slave’s face as indicative of “a sort of love-quarrel” rather than either the brutal system of domination it is meant to represent or the clever ruse it actually is. Importantly, it is the cuddy—with its inquisitional chairs, “meagre crucifix,” and “thumbed missal” (211)—in which Delano not only recasts the master-slave relationship as a love bond but also feels himself “relieved from former uneasiness, and, for various reasons, more sociably inclined than at any previous period in the day” (213). Thus the trappings of Catholic space not only facilitate the production of Delano’s interracial delusions about Babo and Cerenio, but they also allow him to imagine for a short while that the Anglo-Protestant, African slave, and Hispanic Catholic can
triangulate to form a system of egalitarian sociability. Thus the Catholic offers the Massachusetts sailor a fantasy space in which reciprocity crosses racial as well as religious lines, and men can interact without the uneasiness produced by difference.

As numerous critics have noted, Delano’s sociable attitude toward both Cereno and Babo stems in part from a deeply rooted racism that prevents him from “seeing” the actual state of affairs aboard the San Dominick. But it is important to bear in mind the fact that Delano’s inability to recognize the lengths to which Babo and the other slaves have gone to ensure their own self-preservation is also contingent upon his over-determined reading of the Spanish Catholic Cereno’s potential duplicity. From the moment he sets foot on the San Dominick’s decks, Delano finds himself fighting off a sense of “uneasiness” that he attributes to the Spaniard’s odd behavior. In a brilliant reassessment of the Melville corpus, Geoffrey Sanborn argues that “the truly indigestible element in Delano’s ‘system’ is not savagery [as critics have often suggested], but deception,” and the real source of Delano’s unease is “the hollowness of apparently theatrical behavior” (188-9). This is evident in the Massachusetts captain’s nagging sense that Cereno’s infirmity might be “an attempted disguise to conscious imbecility” (171), or a cover for “secret vindictiveness,” (184) or perhaps even an indication “wicked imposture” aimed at Delano himself (185). Seeing his own ship the Bachelor’s Delight on the horizon, Delano suddenly finds himself fearing that the San Dominick might, “like a slumbering volcano, suddenly let loose energies now hid” and violently impose itself upon his possessions and men (192). Delano’s blinding concern over Cereno’s performance in many ways echoes the anti-Catholic discourse of both the novel’s 1799 setting and Melville’s own antebellum milieu. As Franchot has demonstrated, and as I
have shown in earlier chapters, at the very heart of U.S. anti-Catholicism is fear of the
duplicitous Catholic exterior and the dangerous interior it is imagined to conceal.
Paradoxically, it is Delano’s suspicion of the Catholic Céreno that maintains a shaky
peace on the San Dominick. As long as Delano concentrates on scrutinizing Céreno’s
performance, he remains incapable of correctly reading Babo’s performance, and
everyone on board the ship remains tenuously locked in the charade of camaraderie. The
Catholic, in other words, absorbs the pressures of difference and seems for a moment to
serve as the ideal site onto which racial tensions can be displaced.

Although Céreno is the figure who appears most readily as Catholic to Delano, it
is important to note that representations of “Catholic” power are embodied most clearly
in Benito Céreno’s African characters. Babo’s command, “Follow your leader,” would
likely have resonated with Melville’s contemporary audience as the kind of hierarchical
dogmatism thought to be the domain of the Catholic. The command itself is ambiguous:
it might refer to the new captain Babo; or to the bones of the former captain Aranda, now
nailed to ship’s figurehead; or even to the mock captain Céreno, who has managed to
preserve his own life through a complicity the other sailors ought to mimic. Its
positioning beneath Aranda, however, suggests that the command and the skeleton are
related. Sanborn has suggested that Aranda’s skeleton, once revealed in the chaos of
battle, forces Melville’s readers to “see the spectacle of savagery as a spectacle” (175).
While I agree in part with this assessment, I would argue that the description of Aranda’s
death and possible devouring would even more likely have resonated with Melville’s
readers as a parody of the Catholic sacrament of transubstantiation, and the apparent
cannibalism of Babo and Atufal would have suggested their participation in a system of
domination infused with Catholic theology. As Franchot and others have noted, anti-Catholic discourse often linked—and indeed still often links—the doctrine of transubstantiation, which holds the consecrated Eucharist to be a literal manifestation of Jesus’ flesh, to the practice of cannibalism (Franchot, 97-8). In Benito Cereno, Aranda’s body is at Babo’s orders “carried below,” and “nothing more [is] seen of it... for three days” (244). What happens to Aranda’s corpse below remains unseen and uncertain, but following its three day hiatus it returns to the surface as the ship’s new figurehead. Babo uses the skeleton as a teaching tool, pointing out its “whiteness” to the Spaniards and instructing them one by one to, “Keep faith with the blacks from here to Senegal, or you shall in spirit, as now in body, follow your leader” (245). The reference to “three days,” combined with the reappearance of Aranda’s white skeleton and the imperative to “keep faith” renders this scene a racialized resurrection narrative in reverse: Aranda is perhaps eaten, reappears in three days, and is finally nailed to the ship’s bow. The power and force of the revolutionary black body is thus fully implicated in the discourse of Catholicism. Cereno may be the “Spaniard,” but it is Babo who converts words into flesh and flesh into words, and it is Babo who forces his followers to “keep faith.”

For all of its deployment of religious tropes, Benito Cereno is not—as Uncle Tom’s Cabin is—a narrative of conversions, and the Catholic proves at its conclusion a literal dead end. Although Melville draws his novel’s concluding depositions almost word for word from those included in Delano’s original Narrative, he adds a line to his fictional testimony record describing Cereno as appearing before the Spanish court “in his litter, attended by the monk Infelez; of whom he received the oath, which he took by God, our Lord, and a sign of the cross” (239). In Melville’s version of the events, then,
Cereno has replaced the "monk" Babo—begging friar to his abbot—with an actual monk. If Cereno's words and actions on board the San Dominick were filtered through the surveillance of the monastic Babo, then once safely back in Spain they are entered into public record under the Infelez's watchful eye. It is Infelez who, by virtue of his power within the Church, can offer the oath and sign that authorize Cereno to speak. Indeed, once he has given his deposition, Cereno retires, "broken in body and mind," not to his native Chile, but with Infelez to the monastery on Mount Agonia in Peru, where he has given his testimony. The novel thus in many respects ends where it began: with Cereno leaning mutely on his friar, retreating into a Catholic enclave inaccessible to the Anglo-Protestant American Delano. It is there that the slave ship's captain dies not only in the company of his monks, but also beneath the gaze of his one-time captive and one-time captor. Mounted on a pole in Lima's Plaza, Babo's "head, that hive of subtlety...met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and...looked...towards the monastery...where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader" (258). The American Delano has, by this time, abdicated and disappeared from Melville's narrative, leaving the Catholic and the black as he found them: suspended beyond the bounds of liberalism, staring mutely at each other.

If Uncle Tom's Cabin indulges in the fantasy that a rejection of Catholicism can turn the enslaved subject into a liberal citizen, Benito Cereno destroys any such fantasy not only by denying the possibility of reciprocity across religious and racial lines but also by presenting the ostensibly liberal, Protestant subject as itself incapable of managing the problem of difference. Confronted near the novel's close with Cereno's melancholy, the Anglo-Protestant Delano can only tell the traumatized Catholic that "the past is passed..."
Forget it” (257). Importantly, Delano is not instructing Cereno to forget the terror of the slave revolt he has barely survived. Rather, Delano is hoping that amnesia will overtake the memory of his own blindness and lack of empathy. “[Y]ou were with me all day,” Cereno has told Delano, “stood with me, sat with me, talked with me, looked at me, ate with me, drank with me; and yet, your last act was to clutch for a monster, not only an innocent man, but the most pitiable of all men” (257). Here, Cereno presents not only a recap of the day’s events but also a failed model of liberal community. If the social contract is designed to facilitate connections between mutually engaged individuals, then it has, according to Cereno’s version of the events, reached its limit on the San Dominick: Delano looks at Cereno all day without ever perceiving the reality of his situation. At the same time, Cereno’s strained assertion of innocence ironically highlights the fact that Delano’s perception of him as “monster” was in many respects correct—though Delano was never his intended victim, the slave ship captain had long held designs on the liberty of others. The mistake Delano made when he viewed the scene aboard the San Dominick thus mirrors the mistake that many antebellum Anglo-Protestants—Stowe among them—made when they viewed the scene of American slavery: instead of seeing the liberal state enslaving black bodies, they saw a global Catholicism enslaving Protestant souls. It is this mistake that Delano wants to forget but that Melville insists in Benito Cereno remain at the fore of public memory. The displacement of slavery’s horrors onto Catholicism does not address the problem of different within the democratic state, and neither does the sacrifice of Babo save liberalism from its anti-Catholic commitments.
NOTES

1. Chris Dixon, for example notes that "[f]or some Americans, the Haitians' success in ousting the brutal French colonial regime that had inflicted so much hardship on its black subjects suggested the Haitian revolutionaries were heirs to the Americans' quest for independence. At the same time, however, for many Americans, Haiti conjured the most dreadful fears of all: black revolution and race war" (2).

2. The island's naming reflects its complex colonial history. The post-Revolutionary name "Haiti" is derived from the name "Ayiti," which the indigenous Taino seem to have called the island before Christopher Columbus renamed it "La Española" in 1492. The Spanish named their capital colonial city "Santo Domingo," and in the early-sixteenth century that name gradually came to refer to the entire island. French settlers on the island's western edge retained the patron saint's name and simply substituted "Domingue" for "Domingo" in the early-seventeenth century. In the nineteenth-century U.S., "Saint-Domingue," "St. Domingo," and "Haiti" were often used interchangeably to refer to the island. In this chapter, I will refer to the pre-Revolutionary French colony as Saint-Domingue and the post-Revolutionary nation as Haiti. St. Domingo refers to the Spanish portion of the island, which would become the Dominican Republic.

3. Phillips's further notes, of Louverture, "He was uneducated. You say that makes a man narrow-minded." Though beyond the scope of this discussion, these lines suggest that Phillips was also interested in the relationship between democracy and class.

4. For in-depth analysis of Louverture's rise to power and his relationship to the Catholic Church, see DuBois, especially chs. 8-13.
5. Franchot offers the particularly useful example of an 1841 diatribe in which the Nativist Joseph Berg asserts, “I count the poor slave... a freeman, when compared with the man who breathes the atmosphere of liberty, and yet voluntarily fetters his soul... to the sovereign will and pleasure of a popish priest” (171).

6. Jacobs’s work evinces concern that white American support of abolition could at any moment be diverted to the plight of the colonized Irish who, being “whiter” than black slaves, might seem a more compelling cause. Such concern perhaps explains why Jacobs begins her narrative’s sixth chapter with the assertion, “I would ten thousand times rather that my children should be the half-starved paupers of Ireland than to be the most pampered among the slaves of America” (31). Besides fitting into the larger context of American anti-Catholicism, by downplaying the sufferings of Irishmen Jacobs aligns herself with fellow African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass. In his recent study of Douglass’s anti-Catholicism, Richard Hardack notes that Douglass launched virulent attacks against the Catholic Church throughout his abolitionist career. These attacks, Hardack argues, stemmed less from Douglass’s personal disliking of Catholicism than from fear that the liberation of Catholic subjects would become the priority of Anglo-Protestants who might otherwise take up the cause of black emancipation. “For Douglass,” Hardack writes, “it would insult and denigrate blacks to see Americans first respond to the sufferings of the Irish” (125). Thus as Hardack puts it, in Douglass’s writings the “force oppressing Ireland is... explicitly transformed from the British political enterprise to ‘Romish superstition and priesthood,” and the Irish become victims of their own allegiance to a despotic church (124). Robert Levine, however, argues in an account of Douglass’s European travels that the abolitionist found in Catholic Rome a
cultural and racial mixing worth celebrating. Levine’s work suggests Catholicism’s malleability as a set of signifiers and nicely brings to light its divergent and often ostensibly contradictory uses in this period.

7. Recent useful studies include Dixon’s and Dubois’s, as well as those by Geggus and de Pamphile.

8. In presenting George’s escape as a function of his adoption of a faulty complexion, Stowe is referencing and playing on the minstrel blackface tradition, which members of different ethnic groups often deployed to align themselves with “whiteness.” In presenting George as a man who can use blackface to pass for “white,” Stowe not only highlights the “lightness” of the slave’s complexion but also “blackens” Hispanic bodies. Useful studies of the relationship between whiteness, blackface, and minstrelsy include those by Roediger, Rogin, Lott, and Gubar.

9. Mills’s approach to the social contract is similar to that which Carole Pateman takes in her earlier work, The Sexual Contract, in which she argues that within the liberalist paradigm the contracting body is always already assumed to be male.

10. Although Stowe herself never describes Legree as French, readers often identify him as such. For example in Old Plantation Days (c. 1902), Col. William Mallory’s narrator explains that he was once sold “to a Frenchman from Virginia by the name of LeBlanc. He was a half-brother to Simon Legree, whose character has been so well portrayed by Mrs. Harriet Beecher-Stowe in her story of ‘Uncle Tom's Cabin’” (3).

11. It is worth noting that Melville actually harbored more sympathy for Catholicism and Catholic religious practice than did many of his Anglo-Protestant contemporaries. As Emory Elliott has recently noted, though raised in a Dutch Reformed church by his
mother and one-time Unitarian father, Melville never himself embraced any particular Protestant sect and remained suspicious throughout his life of organized religion in general. It is perhaps for this reason, Elliott argues, that Melville’s sprawling epic *Clarel* concludes with its eponymous protagonist deciding that while “at the time of Martin Luther, Catholicism was in great need of reform...now it does provide the believer with important religious elements affecting the emotions, which Protestantism lacks, and for that reason Catholicism will outlast the Protestant churches” (198). Such ambiguity about Catholicism suggests that Melville is less interested in depicting its imagined degradations than considering its power as signifier.

12. Although critics and historians have paid a great deal of attention to the representations and experiences of “white ethnic” Catholics in the U.S., far less energy has been expended on the study of African American Catholicism. However, recent useful works on this topic include those by Davis, Hayes, Phelps, and Brown.

13. Sundquist refers to Melville’s altering of details—changing the ship’s name and date of voyage—because *Benito Cénero* is based on a story recounted in the *Narrative of Voyages and Travels* that a real captain named Amasa Delano published in 1817. Among the stories that Delano relates is one of his encounter with the Spanish ship *Tyral*, which in 1805 became the site of a violent slave mutiny during which the captain and his crew were taken hostage and forced into masquerade to fool Delano and his crew. Like the Delano of Melville’s tale, the actual Delano spent the better part of a day aboard the *Tyral*, trying to engage with its apparently reticent captain, “Don Bonito.” Delano’s revelation comes similarly to Melville’s: as his ship the *Perseverance* is about to depart, Captain Cénero jumps from the *Tyral’s* gunwale to Delano’s deck, and the *Tyral’s*
surviving Spanish sailors throw themselves overboard in an effort to escape. Thus although *Benito Cereno* is a work of fiction, it is based on another narrative, which Melville at times chooses to replicate and at other times chooses to change. The *Tyral* story of Delano’s *Narrative* is available in Richardson.

14. Delano’s refusal to believe that Cereno could “be in any way in complicity with the blacks” because “they were too stupid” also blinds him to the fact that the Africans are decidedly *not* in league with Cereno and have forced him to comply with their demands (201). Helen Lock argues that the novel’s “original reader” may have been “manipulated as skillfully by Melville as Delano is by Babo and the other slaves,” because many of Melville’s contemporaries, abolitionists and slavery advocates alike, would have shared Delano’s bigotry (56). As Lock further notes, Delano’s conclusion about the Africans’ inability to plot against him is also “one which the casual reader, because Delano’s is the perspective from which the main body of the narrative is told, has often taken at this point to be the author’s conclusion also, despite Delano’s lack of acuity” (56-7).
Losing Faith: Catholic Politics and the Liberal Tyrant in the Post-bellum Period

In the preceding chapters I have shown that U.S. liberal democracy emerged out of and took shape within a tradition of anti-Catholic discourse. But rather than merely noting that U.S. political culture has met Catholic practitioners at home and abroad with hostility, this dissertation highlights the affinities between the exclusionary logic of anti-Catholicism and the ostensibly inclusive system of liberalism to argue that U.S. conceptions of free citizenship have long depended upon an alignment of the nation with a general and de-ritualized Protestantism. *Religious Liberties* thus suggests that, despite a Constitutional amendment and more than two centuries of insistence to the contrary, church and state have never been separate in the U.S. Protestantism—imagined, unlike Catholicism, to be an open and all-encompassing system—has stood in for legal state secularity and thereby become requisite, not as a set of rituals and practices but rather as a basic worldview, for all “free” U.S. citizens. The secularism that lies at the heart of liberal democracy is thus not all that secular, and religious liberty in the U.S. has far more to do with religion than it does with liberty.

I have focused on the early national and antebellum periods, but it is important to note that concern over Catholicism’s and Protestantism’s respective places within the democratic republic continued to resonate in the post-bellum decades. The mid-twentieth-century fervor over Kennedy with which I introduced this dissertation thus marks not a sudden resurgence of anti-Catholicism but rather simply one more event in an ongoing series that began, as I have shown, in the earliest days of nation formation. So although they are beyond the temporal scope of this project, I will conclude with brief
readings of Henry Adams’s 1880 novel *Democracy* and Mark Twain’s satire of the same decade, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), in order to link the antebellum discourse I have analyzed to post-bellum politics. While both Adams and Twain rehearse the anti-Catholic rhetoric typical of nineteenth-century U.S. public culture, they importantly do so to critique the absolutism that they saw as being inherent to the liberal tradition. For Adams and Twain, in the rush to define the U.S. as “not Catholic,” proponents of liberal democracy had actually failed to define it as egalitarian and “free.” Thus if in earlier periods the Catholic stood as that against which the liberal state must construct itself, by the end of the nineteenth century it came to represent liberalism’s own exclusionary premises and tyrannical tendencies.

Responding to Senator Silas Ratcliffe’s defense of party politics, in a crucial scene of Adams’s *Democracy*, the Italian baron Jacobi draws a startling comparison. “I, too, like yourself, was once a good party man,” Jacobi sneers, “my party was that of the Church; I was ultramontane. Your party system is one of your thefts from our Church; your National Convention is our OEcumenical Council; you abdicate reason, as we do, before its decisions; and you yourself, Mr. Ratcliffe, you are a Cardinal” (63). The baron’s assessment of U.S. politics is part confession and part accusation. In admitting to an “ultramontane” past, Jacobi acknowledges his former support of the Catholic Church’s power over national sovereignty; in calling Ratcliffe a Cardinal, Jacobi suggests that his democratic antagonist has elevated party politics to the status of ecclesiastical dogma. “They are able men, those cardinals,” Jacobi continues, sealing his rhetorical victory, “I have known many; they were our best friends, but they were not reformers. Are you a reformer, Mr. Senator?” The baron’s careful use of past tense—the cardinals “were” his
best friends, but they “were not” reformers—implies that should Ratcliffe and his cronies continue to stymie the efforts of reformers, they will eventually fade from the political landscape. The baron’s final question silences the Illinois senator, a staunch opponent of reform whose civil service past includes ballot-box manipulation and bribery. Following this exchange, Ratcliffe finds his argumentative tactics to be increasingly “powerless against this impenetrable eighteenth century cynic,” and he is reduced to leveling ethnocentric insults at “that monkey-faced foreigner” (63). Mired in corruption and beholden above all else to the dictates of his party, Ratcliffe cannot tender an effective response to Jacobi’s charge that U.S. liberal democracy is no different from the Catholic Church against which it has defined itself. The ideological absolutism of which proponents of popular sovereignty once accused the papal state has infused the democratic lexicon and rendered the electorate impotent in the face of party dominance.

Through Jacobi’s attack on Ratcliffe, Adams crafts a critique of contemporary Washington and its politics that is ostensibly as objective as it is direct. “Baron Jacobi’s country had no special relations with that of the United States,” the narrator informs the reader, “and its Legation at Washington was a mere job to create a place for Jacobi to fill, he [therefore] had no occasion to disguise his personal antipathies” (62). An aging, irreligious diplomat occupying a superfluous position he does not need, Jacobi cares for neither church nor state and thus stands in Democracy as a foreign party whose fortune is not contingent upon Washington maneuverings. Jacobi’s investment in U.S. policy is minimal: he holds citizenship in a nation that requires no special consideration from the U.S., and his appointment is secure because of connections in his own country. Ratcliffe can call the baron a monkey-faced foreigner, but he cannot remove the Italian from his
post, and he cannot significantly alter relations between the U.S. and Italy. The baron thus speaks from a position of nearly absolute safety. Unlike most of the players in the Adams’s novel, he has nothing to lose in ranting about the papal pitfalls of U.S. liberal democracy. Importantly, as the narrator points out, neither has he much to gain. “Jacobi had little hope of success,” Adams writes, suggesting that the baron’s criticism will do nothing to change the corrupt system. Admitting to this lack of power, Jacobi asks the dilapidated post-bellum Virginian John Carrington, “What can an old man do?” (63). The party machine will lurch onward whether or not Jacobi raises an objection, and even if the machine falters the Italian will simply go home to Vienna. Thus when Adams places the comparison between U.S. senators and the Ultramontane in Jacobi’s mouth, he infuses that comparison with credibility. The U.S. may pride itself on its division between church and state, but under the careful scrutiny of a disinterested observer, Washington politics are indistinguishable from papal fiat.

Although Jacobi’s conflation of religious dogma and democratic state irritates Ratcliffe, a quasi-Protestant whose regular attendance at the Methodist Episcopal Church constitutes a public performance owing to political necessity rather than religious conviction (86), it is not the only such conflation to appear in Democracy. Nathan Gore of Massachusetts—one of Ratcliffe’s most devoted supporters, and ultimately one of the victims of his power struggle with the president—aligns religion and politics early on in the novel. Explaining to Madeleine Lightfoot Lee why he prefers not to discuss his political convictions, Gore says, “These are matters about which I rarely talk; they are like the doctrine of a personal God; of a future life; of revealed religion; subjects which one naturally reserves for private reflection” (45). Of course, Lee’s charming
interrogation is too much for the office-seeker to resist, and he finally relents: "since you ask for my political creed," he sighs, "you shall have it... I believe in democracy... I will faithfully serve and defend it" (45). Gore presents his relationship to both politics in general and democracy in particular as one of religious commitment. He is not merely dedicated to the democratic process, but rather subscribes to a "creed" that makes democracy itself an object of faithful devotion. Importantly, Gore's political and religious deities both bear the markings of Protestantism, as his political faith, like the doctrine of a personal god, is "naturally reserved for private reflection." Here, Gore makes what I see as the mistake central to both liberal thinking and the U.S. political tradition that grew out of the Revolutionary debates I described in chapter one: he assigns to private religiosity the status of "natural" and assumes all religion to be compatible with individual, rather than institutional, conviction. In so doing, Gore aligns the democratic state, a state in which he believes, with a longstanding discourse of Protestantism. Thus while Jacobi depicts the Catholic Church as a visible coercive force not unlike the party machine, Gore attempts to naturalize and render invisible Protestantism's central relationship to U.S. politics. Through Gore's and Jacobi's descriptions of Washington politics, then, Adams highlights the inextricable links between the U.S. liberal democratic paradigm and the Protestant-Catholic divide. Jacobi cannot criticize democracy's manipulations without referencing the Catholic Church, and Gore cannot tout democracy's virtues without aligning it with Protestantism.

Published in the dismal aftermath of Reconstruction at a moment when party politics threatened to destroy federal and state government alike, Adams's Democracy rests its critique of the U.S.'s political structure in part upon the tradition of anti-Catholic
discourse that I have traced through this dissertation. Framed by Jacobi’s early comparison, Ratcliffe’s corruption seems by the novel’s end a kind of Catholic corruption: his demands for loyalty and his insatiable appetite for power resonate with clerical absolutism and render him the Cardinal of Jacobi’s past. Importantly, however, for all of its alignment of national corruption with Catholic dogmatism, Democracy also evinces suspicion of the longstanding U.S. conception of Protestantism as the guarantor of individual liberty, plural egalitarianism, and political fairness. At the novel’s end, Gore’s unwavering devotion to U.S. democracy and the Protestant logics that underpin costs him everything: Ratcliffe betrays Gore in order to protect himself, and the Massachusetts poet departs from Washington bitter and unemployed. Gore’s commitment to individualism, his faith in democracy, and his unwavering loyalty to the representative thus earn him nothing. Cardinal Ratcliffe offers Gore up as a political sacrifice, and no amount of Protestant conviction can save him. Thus in its presentation of Ratcliffe through the perspectives of both the cynical, former Catholic Jacobi and the enthusiastic Protestant Gore, Democracy dismantles the Protestant logic of liberalism that had been central to the U.S. democratic paradigm since the era of nation-formation. U.S. governance, with its commitment to the free individual, does not appear in Adams’s novel as a corrective to the tyranny and corruption of Catholicism. Rather, by the novel’s close liberal democracy appears more and more similar to the dogmatic Romanism against which it has been ostensibly constructed. Party loyalty is the new religion, and against it difference and dissent are powerless.

In its alignment of post-Reconstruction political corruption with Catholicism, Adams’s Democracy stands in part as a corrective to critical accounts that treat anti-
Catholicism as an antebellum phenomenon supplanted at mid-century by discourses of racial difference. Tracy Fessenden, for example, parenthetically qualifies her assertion that “slavery eventually (barely) displaced ‘Romanism’ as the primary object of American Protestant attentions,” but nonetheless ultimately asserts that by the end of the nineteenth century U.S. discussions of politics and citizenship centered almost entirely around conceptions of the division between “black” and “white.” While there is no doubt that the Civil War and its aftermath forced longstanding discussions of race to the fore of U.S. public consciousness, the continued interest in and imaginings of Catholic tyranny displayed by post-bellum figures such as Adams suggests that that problem of religious difference and the fear of theocratic despotism survived beyond the war era as a significant component of U.S. culture. But even more important than its demonstration of ongoing concern over the place of Catholicism within the U.S. liberal democratic paradigm is the shift in perspective that Adams’s *Democracy* marks. For if in earlier decades the Catholic operated in literary and political texts as a cruel and outdated belief system that liberal democracy must at once resist and accommodate, in the century’s later decades Catholicism would come to represent the tyrannical force from which liberal democracy could no longer distinguish itself. While antebellum texts depicted Catholicism as antithetical to U.S. politics, by century’s end writers concerned about political corruption would begin to suggest that the seemingly antagonistic relationship between the two systems was in reality a relationship of mutual constitution. For Adams, Ratcliffe’s representative success owes not only to the fact that he hides his corruptions behind a desirable populist exterior, but also to an ideological absolutism that appeals to his constituents. Thus in the end, it is the cardinal who remains in Washington while the
reformers leave defeated. Disabused of their democratic and Protestant idealism, Gore and Lee abandon Washington to the falsely pious Ratcliffe, and Jacobi’s prediction that in time “the United States...[will be] more corrupt than the Church under Leo X” verges on fruition (43). Thus in Democracy there is no politician without the priest, no state without the church, and no liberal democracy without the specter of Catholicism.

If Adams’s Democracy offers a critique of U.S. liberal politics by highlighting their potential affinities to Catholicism, then Twain’s contemporary attack on technopolitical modernization, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, goes one step further to suggest that anti-Catholicism itself produces monolithic governance and despotism within the liberal democratic state. From its outset, Hank Morgan’s diary—the text constituting the bulk of Twain’s narrative—situates liberal society in opposition not to absolute monarchy but to the Catholic Church. In fact, when he arrives in Arthur’s court, in true liberal democratic fashion Morgan reads the rigid hierarchy of court society as a bi-product of Catholic power. “[I]n the king’s and the nobles’ eyes I was mere dirt,” he writes,

There you see the hand of that awful power, the Roman Catholic Church. In two or three little centuries it had converted a nation of men into a nation of worms. Before the day of the Church’s supremacy in the world, men were men, and they held their heads up, and had a man’s spirit of pride and independence... But then the Church came to the front...she invented “divine right of kings”...and she introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies, and
taught all the Christian populations of the earth to bow down to
them and worship them.

Morgan in effect absolves the monarchy of responsibility for despotism; the aristocracy
has merely inherited a political tradition born of Catholic design. The ire Morgan
reserves for the Catholic Church as structural force does not extend to the individual
king: "I liked the king," he says, "and as king I respected him—respected the office; at
least as much as I was capable of respecting any unearned supremacy" (57). Though the
monarch embodies precisely the totalitarian state that Morgan purports to disdain, placed
alongside the whole history and machinery of Catholicism he seems little more than a
kindly figurehead posing no serious threat to the democratic project and even meriting
respect. The liberal's enemy, in Morgan's view, is not the monarch but the priest.

Viewing the Catholic Church as the primary obstacle to civil liberty, Morgan
takes measures to prevent Catholic practice from taking root in his developing
community. He fosters "a complete variety of Protestant congregations," arguing that
because everyone in his society "could be any kind of Christian he wanted to; there was
perfect freedom in that manner" (64). Fearing a "united church," Morgan equates
universal religious liberty and equality with sectarian pluralism, and he views
Protestantism as the guarantor of that all-important plurality. "[A]ny kind of Christian"
means in this context any kind of Protestant, and the "perfect freedom" of Morgan's
mini-liberal democracy is the freedom to live within the bounds of Protestant diversity.
"I could have given my own sect the preference and made everybody a Presbyterian
without any trouble," he writes, proud of his magnanimity, "but that would have been an
affront to the law of human nature" (64). The configuration of religious establishment as
unnatural allows Morgan to suggest that it is natural for humans to choose their preferred
theologies from among a variety of Protestant options and that such choice will produce a
society of equals. Through his commitment to a model of freedom through universal
Protestant choice, Morgan in part aligns himself with the early U.S. political thinkers that
I discussed in the first two chapters of this dissertation. Indeed from the outset of his rise
to power in England, the Connecticut Yankee styles himself as an ideal democratic
governor not unlike the revolutionaries who crafted the parameters of early U.S.
governance. "To be vested with enormous authority is a fine thing," he explains to the
readers of his diary, "but to have the onlooking world consent to it is a finer" (52).
Consent is the critical component that, according to Morgan, separates liberal democracy
from theocratic monarchy and distinguishes his rule from that of the Arthurian line that
has preceded him. He rules the nation, because its citizen-subjects assent to his control;
and they assent, because he allows them the freedom of Protestantism.

Of course, as critics have long noted, the irony of Morgan's democratic rhetoric
lies in the fact that he governs less through a structure of reciprocity and consent than
through a carefully constructed culture of fear. Reveling in his elevated position and moniker, “The Boss,” Morgan assumes responsibility for and control over those below him on the social scale. When, for example, Sir Dinadin the Humorist finally publishes his collection of decidedly unfunny jokes, Morgan chooses to exercise the power of his position: “I suppressed the book,” he writes with a proud sense of entitlement, “and hanged the author” (284). While this episode, with its pithy delivery, is on the one hand humorous—after all, Dinadin has told thousands of flat jokes and irritating stories, but the mere presence of one especially tired anecdote in the collection is what ultimately leads to his doom—it is also, and quite literally, deadly serious. For what Morgan is really narrating in this account of Dinadin’s brief foray into print authorship is the power of absolute government to censor the press and execute the writers of unpopular opinion. He is thus narrating, and celebrating, the violent, coercive force of his own rule. Indeed throughout Connecticut Yankee it is clear that the people of England have accepted The Boss as their leader not through a process of choice and election, but immediately, and almost unconsciously, because they are afraid that he will blot out the sun (45), blow up their homes (51), refuse to perform “miracles” (160), or simply shoot them in the chest (282). Thus, as Derek Parker Royal has noted, “Hank may have been intended as the salvific spokesman of nineteenth-century liberalism, but throughout the novel his project is being undermined by his authoritarian tendencies” (13). Royal attributes these “authoritarian tendencies” to Morgan’s financial interests, arguing that the “conflict between the writer as revolutionary and the writer as capitalist found its full expression in the figure of Hank Morgan” (13-14). The drive for wealth, in other words, turns the would-be democrat into a tyrant. While I am convinced by Royal’s assessment of the
paradoxical mutuality that shapes capitalist and egalitarian interests in *Connecticut Yankee*, and while I think there is little doubt that the work stands in part as a critique of the capitalist impulse within liberal democracy, I would argue that equally at play in Twain’s novel is a sense that it is Morgan’s commitment to keeping the Catholic at bay that ultimately forces him to assume a position of totalitarianism.

Though Morgan’s admission that even his favored Presbyterianism bears the potential for theocratic tyranny suggests that religious establishment of any kind is the problem facing medieval England, the prospect of Catholic practice even in the absence of official establishment does not satisfy the liberal Yankee. Besides universal suffrage, Morgan’s ultimate goal is for his evolving nation “to overthrow the Catholic faith and set up the Protestant faith on its ruins—not as an Established Church, but as a go-as-you-please one” (285). Armed with the hindsight of post-Reformation subjectivity, Morgan plans to accelerate religious history—to produce Protestantism without Luther and Calvin—and thereby convert the English monarchy into a democratic state. The underlying premise of this plan, however, is that the “setting up” of Protestantism as the national religious standard is somehow categorically different from the establishment of Catholicism. It is, in other words, only through the disavowal of the potential for a generalized, “go-as-you-please” Protestantism to occupy the position of official religion that Morgan is able to craft his ideal liberal community. According to the absolutist Morgan, universal access to and choice between a variety of Protestant forms will produce equality among national citizens. By assigning this democratizing plan to the tyrannical Boss, Twain highlights its potential for ideological absolutism and calls its efficacy into question. What’s more, through Morgan’s equation of religious and
political reform, Twain brings to the fore the inseparability of church and state within the liberal democratic model the Yankee chooses to follow. Steadfast in his belief that a large-scale move from Catholic to Protestant will simultaneously produce a shift from oppression to liberty, Morgan works to bring egalitarian harmony to England by forcefully driving the Catholic out. Thus the ascendance of U.S.-style liberal democracy in Morgan’s new Old World is contingent not upon the legal separation of church and state, but rather upon the exclusion of the Catholic from the nation and the alignment of the state with compulsory though non-sectarian Protestantism. According to this liberal democratic paradigm, the one that governs Twain’s U.S. as much as Morgan’s England, everyone is free in a Protestant nation.

In placing defenses of Protestant nationalism in the mouths of corrupt senators and dictatorial technocrats, Adams and Twain render visible a feature of U.S. liberal democracy that literary and political scholars generally have ignored: namely, that tradition’s tendency to deny its own religiosity through unfavorable fabrications of the Catholic. In both of these works, Catholicism is not the archaic force that opposes progressive democracy. Rather, it is democracy’s spectral double, as both systems hide their designs on individual liberty behind promises of collective salvation. It is ultimately the recognition of this doubleness that can allow us—as it allows Adams and Twain—to see the Catholic not as a reference point that demarcates the line between freedom and slavery but as the site where U.S. liberal democratic logic confronts its own end. Protestantism, no matter how de-ritualized and diffuse, is an inadequate substitute for state secularity, and church and state will remain tethered to each other as long as
proponents of U.S. liberal democracy disavow that tradition's religious history and tacitly promote Protestant citizenship in place of secular nationalism.
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