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# *Culture and Politics:* **The American Whig Review, 1845-1852**

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This essay will elucidate the political culture of the American Whigs through the examination of Whiggery's premier publication and party organ, the *American Whig Review*. Because it appeared, uninterrupted, from January 1845 through December 1852, the monthly magazine is uniquely suited to the purpose. Moreover, the editorial policy of the journal was extremely stable. Its three editors maintained essentially the same political editorial policy: George H. Colton, 1845 through 1847; James D. Whelpley, 1848 through 1849; and George W. Peck, 1850 through 1852. The changing title of the journal did reflect the peculiar emphases of the various editors, as well as the mood of the times and the political agenda of the Whig party. The magazine was called *The American Review: A Whig Journal of Politics, Literature, Art and Science* from 1845-47, *The American Review: A Whig Journal Devoted to Politics and Literature* from 1848 through April 1850, and *The American Whig Review* from May 1850 through December 1852.<sup>1</sup> As the titles indicate, the emphasis on art and science died away first. Although literature remained a staple throughout the life of the journal, the number of pages devoted to it diminished after 1850.

This journal throws much light on influential American thinking at a crossroads in the nation's history. A study of its contents helps

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 750; hereinafter cited in the text as "Mott."

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to identify and understand the historical continuity between the America of the mid-nineteenth century and the America of today, but also to discern and assess the great distance traveled by American intellectual-political elites during the same period. In particular, an examination of the Whig journal alerts the reader to the fact that the last 150 years have brought a sea-change in the way that educated Americans understand their Constitution.

The author of this essay has opted in all cases to refer to the source by a shortened version of its third and final name, that is, simply as (the) *American Whig Review*.<sup>2</sup> This should cause no confusion, as the entire journal is catalogued and on microfiche today under the same title. Its contemporaries, however, referred to the journal alternately as the *American Review* or the *Whig Review*.

### *Importance of the Source and the Inquiry*

The *American Whig Review* published sixteen volumes and six times that number of issues over the eight years of its publication. All told, the ninety-six issues comprise some 10,000 pages, about half of which are the stuff of "political" journals, as opposed to literary criticism, book reviews, short stories (both fiction and non-fiction), poetry, scientific news, advertisements, and the like. Many of the articles in the *American Whig Review* appeared anonymously, especially in later volumes. Nevertheless, its roll of contributors was impressive. Leading politicians, teachers, and ministers contributed to its pages. Among the political contributors were Daniel D. Barnard, John Quincy Adams, Daniel Webster, Edward Everett, John C. Calhoun, Horace Greeley, and Henry Jarvis Raymond (Mott, 753).

The *American Whig Review* served as the major political and literary magazine of the national Whig party. It was common in those days (as now) to marry politics and literature, and the Democrats' counterpart journal, the *United States Democratic Review*, did like-

*Philosophical, religious, historical themes stressed.*

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<sup>2</sup> Over the course of eight years, the *American Whig Review* published sixteen volumes dated January 1845 through December 1852. Volume numbers changed semi-annually, and each volume contained six monthly issues. Hence odd-numbered volumes began in January of each succeeding year, while even-numbered volumes began in July. Pagination began anew with each volume, continuing consecutively through each issue until the next volume number. Volume numbers correspond to years as follows: I-II (1845); III-IV (1846); V-VI (1847); VII-VIII (1848); IX-X (1849); XI-XII (1850); XIII-XIV (1851); and XV-XVI (1852).

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wise. The two rival party organs were something more than news sheets or political propaganda. Indeed, they were vibrant, competing, and comprehensive intellectual and entertainment media, in addition to being sources of opinion and information. They were cultural expressions in the largest sense. The *American Whig Review* contained articles of various lengths and subject matter; true to Whig form, however, the longest articles developed philosophical, religious, and historical themes in detail, or else, provided in-depth biographical information on the leading "statesmen" of the day. The *Democratic Review* had begun publication earlier, in October of 1837, just as Jacksonianism itself had antedated Whiggery. It also had various titles and editors, but its editorial policy and publication frequency were not so consistent as those of the Whig journal. After 1846, the *American Whig Review* was every bit as much the era's journalistic model of excellence as the oft-vaunted *Democratic Review* had been before that time. Although relatively prosperous for a journal of that era, the *American Whig Review's* ultimate fortune hinged on the political fortunes of the Whig party, and it could not long continue publication after the devastating election of 1852. The *Democratic Review* outlived its Whig rival, publishing its last issue in October 1859, when it too succumbed to party sectional crisis (Mott, 677-78, 681-83, 754).

For Whigs, probably more than Democrats, literature and political rhetoric represented similar, closely related instructional devices for both individual and collective improvement. Whig literature was rarely ever for "idle" entertainment only and was almost always didactic. Whig literature conveyed, implicitly, the explicit pronouncements of Whig moral and political philosophy. Like other Whig publications, the *American Whig Review* was conceptually tightly knit. Although this essay concentrates on political culture, it should be borne in mind that the literature in the source is highly moralistic and related, often directly, to the political conservatism of the Whigs.<sup>3</sup> This does not imply, however, that Whig literature lacked depth or creativity. The years 1845 through 1852 were years of keen political two-party competition, and they were also a particularly prolific interval in the American (literary) Renaissance. The American Renaissance was perhaps the period of greatest flowering

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<sup>3</sup> James E. Mulqueen, "Conservatism and Criticism: The Literary Standards of American Whigs, 1845-1852," *American Literature*, 41 (November 1969), 355: herein-after cited in the text as "Mulqueen."

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in American literature, coinciding largely with the heyday of transcendentalism (approximately 1836-60), and the period is recalled chiefly by the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman.<sup>4</sup> Although modern literary and critical tastes have tended to deemphasize the importance of Whig writers in the American Renaissance, from an historical point of view it should be remembered that the two most successful—dare one say influential—books published in America during the whole nineteenth century were written by Whigs, and Whig women at that. They were Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) and Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850).<sup>5</sup> The *American Whig Review* carried literary works by both men and women and strongly endorsed the education of women, although not necessarily political participation by them.<sup>6</sup>

It is instructive to recall that the American public was both highly literate and moved to action by published material as early as colonial times, especially in New York and New England. The American Revolution was itself, in large part, an ideological struggle between republicanism, with English radical Whig antecedents, and monarchism linked to an assertive Tory aristocracy.<sup>7</sup> In the 1840s, universal white manhood suffrage and mass political campaign participation still captured the public imagination and was perceived as having immense importance. In an age of few other distractions, newspapers and magazines were as influential as they were partisan. The political essays and other writings printed in the *American Whig Review* were designed to persuade, as well as to expound. They comprise a cohesive body of Whig doctrine, senti-

*Public of  
Whig era  
heavily  
influenced by  
literature.*

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<sup>4</sup> See Francis Otto Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

<sup>5</sup> The popularity and influence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is well known and generally acknowledged. Less well known are the popular writings of sisters Susan and Anna Warner. Regarding the success of *The Wide, Wide World*, see Mabel Baker, *Light in the Morning: Memories of Susan and Anna Warner* (West Point, N.Y.: The Constitution Island Association Press, 1978), 54.

<sup>6</sup> The *American Whig Review*, vol. IV, no. 4 (October 1846), 416-26 and vol. VIII, no. 4 (October 1848), 373-74. All subsequent references to this source will be noted parenthetically by volume, number (using lower case *Roman* numerals), and page number (using Arabic numerals) within the text.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967), chapters 2 and 4; see also Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1992), ch. 10.

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ment, moralizing, and social commentary. Moreover, the magazine's impact was, directly and indirectly, significant. The circulation of the *American Whig Review* was three to five thousand at any given time. The *Review* influenced directly a much larger national partisan readership, however, given that copies often changed hands several times. As a Whig forum, it influenced a smaller group of political activists and thinkers, leaders who shaped and defined the Whig party and who, through party members and machinery, influenced the public at large. Published in New York City alongside the *Democratic Review*, the *American Whig Review* significantly shaped the political debate of the time and contributed to the ebb and flow of intellectual ferment and public opinion nationwide.

January 1845 through December 1852 also corresponds to the height, decline, and sudden death of the American Whig party. The contents of the publication illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of evolving Whig political culture, as well as the chosen posturing of the party as it grappled with events and trends in that pivotal period of American history from the annexation of Texas to the dissolution of the Second American Party System. The period is also of interest because developments from 1845 through 1852 bear directly on the march of sectionalism in the United States, which quickened after 1850 and culminated in secession and civil war.

Since important elements of Whig political culture persisted in the Republican party, a complete understanding of today's Third Party System requires some knowledge of Whig antecedents. Moreover, Whig political culture was bigger than the party itself, and Whiggery, as an integrated and coherent way of thinking and patterning one's life, continued to influence American society and politics beyond the bounds of section or Whig and Republican party contexts.<sup>8</sup> Lincoln's "Whiggish" approach of accommodation and compromise helped heal a nation and, in time, reinstated two-party and national political stability. To some extent, American middle-class values today were shaped by the Whig outlook examined in this essay. Resurgent American political and philosophical conservatism of recent decades has notable Whig components—ironically, especially in the South. Indeed, few would deny that significant changes affecting the Third American Party System may bode a

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 3, 21-22, 54, 178-79, 299, 301-05; hereinafter cited in the text as "Political Culture."

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Fourth. To the extent that the post-Cold War era may come to resemble the previous century in various ways, including the distribution of effective governmental power in accordance with the American *federal* system, as well as easier ballot access for third-party challengers, the experience of the only mass party in American history to disappear is of current interest.<sup>9</sup>

### *Political Orientation and Context*

The *American Whig Review* was endorsed as the official organ of the Whig party by leading Whigs, representing every section of the country. It was truly the “Whigs’ national periodical.”<sup>10</sup> The magazine would remain “impeccably Whiggish” and express “bourgeois orthodoxy” for its entire lifespan.<sup>11</sup> It was Whig leaders, including Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, who founded the journal (Mulqueen, 355). Moreover, Daniel Webster, Rufus Choate, Alexander H. Stephens, George P. Marsh, Daniel D. Barnard, Hamilton Fish and John P. Kennedy were all among the signers of a resolution, stating:

Earnestly approving the plan of such a National organ, long needed and of manifest importance, the undersigned agree to contribute for its pages, from time to time, such communications as may be necessary to set forth and defend the doctrines held by the United Whig Party of the Union (Mott, 750-51).<sup>12</sup>

The first editor, twenty-seven year old George Hooker Colton, was the author of the well-known poem *Tecumseh*. He was apparently unrelated to the biographer of Henry Clay, the Whig pamphleteer Calvin Colton, although both graduated from Yale and worked in New York.<sup>13</sup> Somewhat oddly, it seems today, George Colton felt obliged to justify the appearance of the new periodical in his “Intro-

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<sup>9</sup> See Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development, From the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 243, 251-56.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party* (New York: Columbia, 1985), 10; hereinafter cited in the text as “Thomas Brown.”

<sup>11</sup> Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford, 1991), 382; hereinafter cited in the text as “Sellers.”

<sup>12</sup> Mott says the resolution was printed on the fourth page of the cover through 1851, but microfiche does not reveal this.

<sup>13</sup> Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College with Annals of the College History*, vol. 6 (New York: Holt, 1912); and *Biographical Notices of Graduates of Yale College* (1913). Supplement to the obituary record, by the same author.

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ductory" message to the readership by reaffirming the legitimacy of political parties in the American constitutional republican process (I, i, 1).

While Whigs may not have liked all the "givens" of political reality, including organized political parties and universal white manhood suffrage, they also knew that they had to accept them in order to wrest power from the Democracy (as the Democratic party was then called) and to redirect the nation's course.<sup>14</sup>

*Whigs  
stressed  
common good.*

Advantages of universal suffrage outweighed the "great evils connected with it" (IV, v, 442). Even so, Whigs, more than the Democrats, ran decentralized party operations, and they detested party "politicians," preferring instead to have "statesmen"—those who considered the interests of the whole country over parochial or merely partisan interests (Thomas Brown, 8). Moreover, Whigs would often substitute a moral appeal for party loyalty when exhorting public support (*Political Culture*, 32). Colton, in his "Introductory" message, clearly distinguishes between the Whig and Democratic parties in 1845 from the Whig perspective:

The one is in all things essentially conservative, and at the same time is the real party of progress and improvement. It commends itself to the people, and is supported by them, not less for its rigid adherence to the Republican creed—for its unwavering support of constitutional and established rights, and its endeavors to preserve law, liberty, and order inviolate—than for the ameliorating and liberalizing tendency of its principles and policy. Such is that portion of the community who have justly adopted from the men of the Revolution the ever-honored title of WHIGS. In all that tends to give strength to the confederacy, and knit together its various sections by the indissoluble bands of a common interest and affection, the Whig party occupy the advance ground. Protection to the laborer and the producer, to the merchant and manufacturer; integrity and economy in the discharge of official trusts; the vigilant defence, as against the world, of national dignity and honor; the observance of honor and good faith in all our dealings with and treatment of other nations; the establishment and maintenance of a sound currency; an enlargement of the means of revenue, and a proper provision for its safe-keeping; an extension of the resources of the country by the construction of harbors, roads, and canals, as the wants of the people demand them; a vigorous administration of the laws; the separation of the seats of justice, by all possible barriers, from popular impression; the adoption, by constitutional means, of such regulations as

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<sup>14</sup> Glyndon G. Van Deusen, "Some Aspects of Whig Thought and Theory in the Jacksonian Period," *American Historical Review*, 63 (January 1958), 309.

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shall confine the exercise of Executive power within due bounds; the general promotion of knowledge, and an enlargement of the means of education;—these form an outline of the distinctive principles of the Whig party, and by these and other cognate sentiments and measures it will be known to posterity. . . . [E]ssentially anarchical in its principles and tendencies . . . [is] the party which has strangely arrogated to itself the title of Democratic. . . . [The Democratic party is] practically working to destroy the prosperity of the nation, to corrupt the morals of the people, to weaken the authority of law, and utterly to change the primitive elements of the government. . . . There is scarcely any dangerously radical opinion, any specious, delusive theory, on social, political, or moral points, which does not, in some part of the country, find its peculiar aliment and growth among the elements of that party. They are not content with sober improvement; *they desire a freedom larger than the Constitution* [emphasis mine]. They have a feeling, that the very fact that an institution has long existed, makes it insufficient for the growth of the age—for the wonderful demands of the latter-day developments. In a word, change with them is progress; and whenever the maddened voice of faction, or the mercenary designs of party leaders demand a triumph over established institutions and rightful authority, they rush blindly but exultingly forward, and call it reform. . . . To resist earnestly and unweariedly these destructive measures and principles, and, in so doing, to support freely and openly the principles and measures of the Whig party, is one great object of this Review (I, i, 1-3).

In order fully to comprehend the meanings inherent in the foregoing excerpt, one needs some explanation of the references made in it. First of all, the statement asserts that Whigs are progressive conservatives (see Mulqueen, 365-66). Indeed, the *American Whig Review* refers to itself in a later issue as “the organ, for the nation, of a just conservative PROGRESS” (II, i, 1; see also VIII, iii, 224). At the same time, Colton is quick to add that Whigs are one with the American “Republican” tradition as defined and handed down by the Founding Fathers. Specifically, Whigs are strict constitutionalists and idolize “Mr. Madison, . . . whom a better man or a purer patriot never exercised power in the Republic” (I, i, 12). Nevertheless, Colton then alludes to a tradition which reaches back even further, beyond the establishment of the United States, to “ever-honored” English Whiggery. The tradition carried with it certain connotations of both forward-looking reform and the maintenance of legislative authority against encroaching executive prerogative.<sup>15</sup> That said,

<sup>15</sup> George Rawlings Poage, *Henry Clay and the Whig Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 11.

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Colton's statement then begins to enumerate (sometimes implicitly) the policies, assumptions, and programs American Whigs stood for: classless economic and national interest; high moral character in government service; patriotism, national honor, and integrity in foreign affairs; paper money with lowered specie ratios to enhance credit availability; sale of public lands for revenue; protective tariffs to raise revenue and to shield developing American manufactures; a national bank; a broad-based program of internal improvements; an independent judiciary; a Chief Executive with vigorous enforcement responsibilities but little policy voice or proactive role; and public and private education. To provide contrast, Colton portrays the Democrats as the "flip-side" of the Whigs. Democrats are impulsive, irresponsible, "anarchical." They seek a kind of freedom not sanctioned by the Constitution, and their policies and programs represent change beyond prudent, sober bounds. The quoted excerpt summarizes the political orientation of the *American Whig Review*, and it is clearly one that takes into account Whig experience during the Age of Jackson.

### *Whig Political Culture*

*Jacksonian democratization viewed as inimical to social harmony.*

The staple of Whig political culture was the Anglo-American "country-party" tradition, which evinced both Protestant piety and high regard for property rights. Whigs also shared the concerns of classical republicans, believing that the continued existence of the republic depended on the virtue of its people and the effective operation of checks and balances in government. The twin threats to republican government in this thought-world were despotism and anarchy. It was no coincidence that the patron saint of Whiggery was James Madison. Experience in the Jacksonian era convinced Whigs that authority had been concentrated too much in the executive branch and needed to be shifted back to Congress. Too much authority was also exercised by states, to the misfortune of any possible unified national purpose or direction. Most of all, Whigs interpreted the democratization of politics during the Age of Jackson as a danger to property rights, social harmony, and good order, i.e., to the more prudent politics of consensus and deference. For Whigs, the purpose of government was "not to implement popular will but to balance and harmonize interests" (Political Culture, 31, 74-76, 87, 91, quote 77).

The country-party tradition is better understood when

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counterposed against the “court” in English history. English Whigs were not “country” in the sense of being anti-urban or anti-cosmopolitan; on the contrary, the country-party included not only landed gentlemen but also bourgeois business and middle-class interests, as well as Protestant Dissenters. American Whigs did not want to return America to a preindustrial agrarian state; indeed, Whigs supported development of mixed urban-rural society and a complex, diversified economy. The key was balance, a desired *synthesis* of progress and stability, order and improvement. If they idealized any social environment at all, Whigs probably preferred the town, provided the town could preserve rural values while conferring the benefits of urban living, such as thriving marketplaces, law and order, and artistic expression. Whigs conceived that agriculture in the country would actually benefit from a strong urban, industrial home market. In cities Whigs also sought to synthesize rural morality with urban economic dynamism. Whigs tended to be family-oriented, and they applied their sense of personal relationships in a model paternalistic family to society at large. In this way, government represented the conscience of the body (family) politic. Whigs were defenders of middle-class morality, and therein existed a significant overlap with evangelical Protestantism. Indeed, that coincidence extended the reach of the Whigs to countless commonplace people, who may not otherwise have subscribed to Whiggery (*Political Culture*, 16, 31-32, 45, 49, 77-78, 116-17, 155, 168-69, 179, 182).

*Synthesis of progress and stability.*

Most Madisonian Republicans and Federalists became Whigs. Antimasons also joined Whig ranks, a function of Antimasonry’s crusading, moralistic character and Protestant antecedents, and perhaps a little classical republican suspicion of secret plots and conspiracies (*Political Culture*, 50, 55-57).<sup>16</sup> Yankee Protestants and British-American immigrants formed the predominant ethnic constituency of American Whiggery. People of New England extraction and members of New England Protestant sects mostly voted Whig, but other people in parts of the country hoping for internal improvements (e.g., eastern Tennessee) also did so consistently. The affluent were attracted by the party’s economic program. Many poor supported the Whig party out of their religious or ethnic iden-

*Appealed to highly diverse constituencies.*

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York: Oxford, 1983), 9, 20-21, 202, 217-19, 245, 253-54, 279; and Lynn L. Marshall, “The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party,” *American Historical Review*, 72 (January 1967), 461.

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tifications. Free blacks were drawn by the party's mild support of black suffrage. Businessmen and professionals tended to be Whigs and so did farmers producing for commercial markets and urban centers. In sum, Whig support was broad-based, and the Whig party enjoyed near-parity with the Democrats in almost all areas of the country. Even when Whigs lost presidential elections, their showing was usually strong in congressional, state and local elections. The extent of Whig support was fully half of the voting population for the entire period of this study (Political Culture, 12-13; Formisano, 283-84, 288-91; Van Deusen, 319-21).

*"Country-party" tradition provided common thread.*

The Whig party thus encompassed a broad range of heterogeneous adherents crossing boundaries of occupational group, socio-economic class, geographical region, religious denomination, and so forth. The country-party ideological outlook provided the common thread connecting the disparate components of the party. All in all, Whig policies and programs were remarkably coherent. The Whig objective was ordered liberty. To this end, society required Protestant morality and self-improvement. The central government, for its part, needed to become an active, purposeful agent of the kind of "balance" Whigs envisaged. Whigs were characteristically conservative in definitive ways. They attached great importance to social order, cultural heritage, and protection of property. The *American Whig Review* explicitly and frequently identified the Whig party as the conservative party. Whigs, however, fused important innovations—economic-entrepreneurial, religious-evangelical, and "modernizing"—with the basic conservatism of their political culture. Innovations, too, were part of the country-party tradition after all, but specific Whig innovations bear the unique stamp of nineteenth-century America (Political Culture, *passim*; Van Deusen, 315, 317; Thomas Brown, 215).

*An innovating conservatism.*

Despite variations of emphasis, most Whig leaders reflected this blend of conservatism and innovative tendencies. This kind of fusion was reflected in party journals like the *American Whig Review*. In regard to *economic-entrepreneurial* innovation, Whigs held that material changes, namely industrialization and improved technology, were better instruments of progress than were changes in political and social institutions. Increasing total wealth for everyone was the Whig alternative to perceived Jacksonian equal distribution. Whigs relinquished the "country-party's" traditional distrust of wealth and commerce and espoused a combination of moral philosophy,

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economic capitalism, and social paternalism. Moreover, Whigs developed an entrepreneurial ethos in which wealth was acknowledged as the just attainment for hard work and merit. Industrialists were commended for generating jobs and products benefiting everyone, whilst the very rich were encouraged to contribute excessive wealth to philanthropic causes (Political Culture, 9-10 and ch. 5).

*Religious-evangelical* innovations emerged for the most part from the Second Great Awakening, a national Protestant, interdenominational outburst of evangelical activity. The activity was geared towards morally transforming society and was marked by numerous religious crusades and benevolent societies dedicated to temperance, anti-slavery, charities, and solutions to social problems. The impact of the Second Great Awakening on Whiggery was straightforward, infusing the party with dedication to moral-social activism and also with the desire to redeem American society through Christian faith. National progress, properly conceived, displayed both material and moral dimensions. In addition, Whigs discarded the old religious contempt for wealth and praise for poverty. The growth of material prosperity, they believed, could very well lay the foundation for the millennium and the Second Coming of Christ. Transcendentalism indirectly, though substantially, bolstered this innovative point with its own view that, before society could move toward perfection, general prosperity and a modest quality of life for everyone were necessary to free individuals and society from the downward tendencies of incessant drudgery. Thus, religious virtues assumed an economic connotation, and capitalist virtues took on a religious coloration. The capitalist virtues of efficiency, rationality, education, uniformity, sobriety, industry, and discipline acquired a religious sanction similar to the one they had enjoyed among the Puritans two centuries earlier.

*Religious and economic virtues fused.*

Whigs also added to their conservatism a tendency toward sociological, *modernizing* innovation. Whigs embraced an American "Victorianism," central to which was the encouragement of modernization as a process adapting American institutions and culture to the rapidly changing needs of the Jacksonian and immediate post-Jacksonian era.<sup>17</sup> Modernization was implicit in their compre-

<sup>17</sup> See Daniel Walker Howe, "Victorian Culture in America," in Daniel Walker Howe (ed.), *Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 7; and Cyril Edwin Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization: A Study in Comparative History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 7.

hensive economic, cultural, social, and moral program. They not only accepted economic development but the cultural changes which reinforced it. Indeed, they encouraged ethnic assimilation and religious interdenominationalism, and they welcomed increased labor supply from all quarters. Whigs also looked forward to industrialization and technical innovation. To encourage economic (and moral) improvements, they supported education, increased literacy and social mobility, as well as value changes towards greater productivity, cosmopolitanism, empiricism and time-thrift. Indeed, the Whig value structure fostered the kind of economic and social changes that Whigs wanted to see.<sup>18</sup> Whig conservatism and modernizing innovation did not contradict but, rather, complemented each other. Whigs sought to harness change to make the future better than their present in both material and social terms. Whigs brought old traditions to bear on emerging circumstances while modifying those traditions in light of the new age—i.e., they developed *traditions of modernity*.

What was to become known as the “American System” (policies of federally sponsored internal improvements, tariff protection, and national banking) actually took shape in the “national” wing of the Republican party between 1816 and 1828. Indeed, some aspects of Whig economic theory can be traced back to Alexander Hamilton. However, Henry C. Carey, a Whig who became the first American economist of international repute, gave the American System modern sophistication. He systematized the old “Madisonian Platform” (IV, vi, 543) and provided the Whigs with analysis relating taxation, infrastructure and money supply to market operations and wage rates, also distinguishing between intracommunity “commerce” and extracommunity “trade” (XIII, i, 79-86; and see X, v, 526-31; XII, iv, 376-87; and XIII, v, 443). Henry Clay would be the foremost proponent of the American System in all its sophistication. From time to time, he augmented the system with new but consistent economic and social programs designed to be “modernizing,” that is, to foster progress on a large scale. Indeed, the American *System* ultimately became the “highly organized articulation of Whig political culture” (Political Culture, 48-49, 108-15, 136-39, 182, 235, quote 137; see also Marshall, 462; and Thomas Brown, 217).

<sup>18</sup> Richard D. Brown, “Modernization: A Victorian Climax,” in Howe (ed.), *Victorian America*, 29.

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Daniel Walker Howe has delineated three themes that suffuse Whig literature: *improvement*, giving conscious direction to the forces of change; *morality*, conceived as corporate as well as individual duty; and the *organic unity of society*, an emphasis on the interdependence of different classes, sections, and interests for the common weal (Political Culture, 21). Here we shall point to three related but more comprehensive categories of Whig thought: *historicism*, *organicism*, and *didacticism*. While encompassing the themes highlighted by Howe, these categories help to define with more precision the theoretical aspects of Whig political culture.

### *Historicism*

Although the greatest American historian of the age, George Bancroft, was a Democrat, Whigs generally were more interested in history than were Democrats. The Whigs' sense of national identity was bound up with traditions and institutions—with continuity with the past. The past possessed heavy presumptive superiority over contemporary theory and over the often fleeting whims of majority opinion. The "bare change of majorities" did not justify changes in law (I, i, 3). The Past and the Present were linked by "indestructible patrimony" (I, v, 484). Whigs tended to regard history in a religious sense, as if history, and especially American history, were sanctioned by God:

*Traditions and institutions outranked whims of the majority.*

There is no nation on the face of the earth or in the records of history, if we except the Jews, whose origin, circumstances and progress have been so purely providential as ours; none which owes so little to itself and so much to the Ruler of its destiny (V, iii, 232).

Indeed the name Whig was rich in pre-Revolutionary historical associations; perceived in this way through prevailing associations, the American Revolution was the climax of history:

In England, the Whigs professed a hatred of kingly usurpation and oppression, and on the first occasion cut off the head of a tyrant—in this country they wrote the Declaration of Independence, and then wrought out its sentiments in the battles of the revolution (I, ii, 120).

In 1776, "the world was born again. . ." (IX, vi, 567). "[T]he Deity [was] made a party" to the contract of the Constitution (II, i, 7), and the "Law" was his divine will (I, i, 3; II, iv, 335). Democrats, on the other hand, were far more likely to view the American Revolution instead as a liberation from history. Democrats more often felt encumbered by the traditions, common law, and institutions of the past. To them, majority opinion sanctioned discontinuity, or rather, a

*Democrats sought liberation from history.*

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new continuity for the future that would become history (Political Culture, 69-70, 82, 88, 152-54).<sup>19</sup>

*For Whigs, democracy should "level-up" and "preserve."*

Historicism shaped the Whig sense of acceptable change and hence their definition of progress. Progress had to regard precedent. History was the "legacy which every generation bequeaths to posterity" (V, iv, 381). There had to be compelling reason to change the status quo, and any change had also to be graduated and specific, so as not to upset the balance, order, and harmony of society. A different kind of change would be regarded as a vitiator. This included change clamored for by temporary majorities and so often pandered to by the Democrats—"as if democracy consisted not in levelling-up and preserving, but in reducing all things to an equality of degradation and ruin" (I, i, 2):

[T]ime is a far better test of excellence, than any faculties [men] can possess. . . . [F]or "the present was born of the past." It was there that its infancy was nursed; that the foundations of its being were laid; and it is there, and there alone, that we can trace its pedigree and test its legitimacy. . . . (I, v, 494).

The Past was the standard of civilization; ignore it, and civilizations must fall (II, i, 91-3). Whigs specifically attacked Democrats for not having the same historical sense, and Whigs were convinced that because they did not have it, extended rule by Democrats must lead to the "break up [of] all the foundations of . . . government" (I, i, 18). Whigs refused to view the majority as a legitimate agency for change, unless that majority happened to filter its passions and defer its judgment, trusting in other men, "natural leaders" more properly suited to direct the course of change and to weigh the prudence of change in each case. History had changed and should continue to change, according to Whigs, through the actions of great men, i.e., through those who were most worthy: *detur digniori*. The concept goes far towards explaining Whig preoccupation with statesmanship and emphasis on the development of individual leadership characteristics. Whigs were conservative hero-worshippers. Consider this passage written about Clay:

[We] may trust him for his measures, because we know the soundness and elevation of his principles. The distinction conveyed by these two words is but little understood by the corrupt and superficial *politician* [emphasis mine]. Principles we would never sacrifice,

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<sup>19</sup> See Joseph L. Blau, *Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy: Representative Writings of the Period 1825-1850* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1954), xx-xi and ch. 20.

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but we hesitate not to say, that there are times when we would prefer men to measures[.]—Although a mistake in the latter might perhaps work temporary injury[, that is far preferable to ] . . . corrupt principle, engrafted by corrupt men into our institutions—into the very elements of our national life (I, i, 79-80).

Historicism conditioned the most telling Whig criticism of the Democratic party. Instead of standing on the shoulders of great men, the Democrats destroyed the achievements of their fathers. In 1852, in an article entitled “Whig Principle and Its Development,” the *American Whig Review* called the Democrats “simply a destructive party” (XV, ii, 135). Whigs looked at Democrats and saw precisely the same iconoclasm that had doomed the French Revolution and which, unchecked, threatened to stifle the fruition of American liberty (I, i, 4). The preservation of freedoms won depended upon each generation’s binding itself to those succeeding, since “we are taught by experience” (I, i, 19). Whigs took seriously the admonition concerning the price of freedom and the vigilance required. As interpreted in Whiggery, it meant in part that the stability of the government and society depended on withstanding unnecessary and destructive change wrought by popular agitations (Political Culture, ch. 4, esp. 71-72).

*Democrats likened to French Jacobins.*

The viewpoint of the *American Whig Review* stemmed from two sources: a value judgment that what the Founding Fathers had produced was good and should endure *prima facie*, and a preference for civilization over nature. In other words, man had already made tremendous strides and won many hard-fought battles to improve the wretched, barbarous state of his prior existence. Civilization was the beneficent sum total of past experience, of what man had learned through trial and error, through toil and hardship. Civilization was what man had gained through blood, sweat, and tears over the ages. History furnished the “very framework of general knowledge” and was the source for deriving “relation, significance and life” (III, iv, 370). Whereas the Jacksonian era had engendered political, literary, and artistic romanticism (Sellers, 75),<sup>20</sup> Whigs sought to counter romantic political notions and to remind society that human progress had resulted from hard work and dedication to certain ends. Nature without human effort and the proper goal-orientations was neither

*Civilization rises above nature.*

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<sup>20</sup> See Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920*, vol. 2 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1958).

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kind nor forgiving. Progress was deliberate, not the wash of universal Providential or human benevolence, nor anything *transcendental* either. “[G]reat designs [were] long considered and carefully planned out. . . (I, i, 4). Children were not little angels by hand of nature, but by instruction and discipline. Good adults were those who kept their baser passions in line, while purposing themselves in the accomplishment of positive industry. “Reality persists though romance may deny it” (Political Culture, 34, 36, 38)<sup>21</sup>:

[T]he great field of literature, philosophy, and morals . . . from the nature of things, are so closely blended with all other elements that go to compose a state, as to make whatever influences affect these vitally, affect also, for evil or for good, the entire political fabric. We have the voice of history to this conclusion, since great governments have never fallen but by being first corrupted and undermined by the speculations of ignorant, or fancy-ridden, or designing men (I, i, 3-4).

When exercised by the masses, neither so-called “enlightened self-interest” nor the “utilitarian principle” proved superior to the lessons of experience (II, iv, 340). Moreover, it would be hard to improve on near-perfection, since the nation already possessed “an ideal form of government, the dream of ancient heroes . . . , a stable republic” (V, iii, 233). Whigs were not about to place their “blind trust in man’s natural and unaided capacity for self-government” (II, v, 449) when United States “institutions were, in the main, as perfect at the very first as they are now, or probably ever can be” (IX, iv, 404). It could hardly be otherwise, since “the great Ruler of events [had] shaped the natural features, the general history and the political institutions of [the] country” (V, iii, 234).

*Unfolding  
good of  
history  
threatened by  
apocalypse.*

To Whigs, history constituted a gradual unfolding as man discovered and mimicked more of the perfect, divine pattern, while maintaining the good he had already gained. Anglo-American history had so far unfolded unprecedented political liberty and material quality of life. The United States had “grown great and prosperous” *because* of the Constitution and Union as formed (I, i, 21). The process, however, was not inevitable or predetermined but depended critically on the virtue of the people. It depended on the people’s adhering to the Founders’ own “policy of conservation

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<sup>21</sup> Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford, 1989), 68; hereinafter cited in the text as “Kohl.”

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looking to the future" (X, i, 39). "All governments, then, fail alike without permanent public virtue to direct and to guard them" (II, i, 97). This Whig conception related to the classical republican concern for civic virtue and to notions of good citizenship in a liberal society from the very founding of the American republic.<sup>22</sup> Virtue, however, was both means and ends in Whig *organic* theory, which held that original Virtue inherent in American institutions also better facilitated private virtue than in any previous form of government (VI, iii, 242-245). "The Whig political program, together with the institutions and values which promoted it, were necessary" for nothing less than "the triumph of civilization over barbarism" (Kohl, 64). The Spanish Empire served as a negative reference point for many Whigs. The message was that republics and empires *could* fail or go terribly awry, but that the American republic was heir to all the right religious, political, economic, and cultural requisites for unbounded prosperity and social progress. Whig historicism made Whigs, strangely, intensely apprehensive and optimistic at the same time (Political Culture, 217). If Whig fears were apocalyptic, their hopes were utopian (Kohl, 68). To the Whig way of thinking, the future of the nation was yet to be decided between two vitally contrasting possibilities (Sellers, 392-93). Whigs prayed "the closing prayer of the patriot to his successors, *remember the deeds of your fathers, and by them receive guidance for the future*" (VII, i, 28). All the while, although less after 1852, they kept a faith that all things would eventually work towards good and toward the great fulfillment of destiny:

We believe in the education which Freedom gives its children. We are looking forward to the end of the experiment with confidence. We regret nothing in the past. We are hopeful of the future (IV, v, 442).

### **Organicism**

Whigs typically viewed society as an organism, in which each part reached a harmony of interest with other parts, thus benefiting the whole (Political Culture, 217). More specifically, Whigs conceived of the Federal Union as a *national* social organism and not a mere compact of separate states; that is, Whigs regarded the nation as a permanent Union bound by the Constitution, notwithstanding

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<sup>22</sup> See Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), esp. part 2; and Richard C. Sinopoli, *The Foundations of American Citizenship: Liberalism, the Constitution, and Civic Virtue* (New York: Oxford, 1992).

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*American  
nation a  
permanent  
Union.*

factional divisions between states or functional divisions among state and federal responsibilities and interests (Mulqueen, 357; Political Culture, 228, 234). “[T]he Constitution was made for the general interest and welfare of one mighty people, . . . not for the petty interest of divided sovereignties” (V, vi, 564). Sovereignty, meaning the “whole of political power” (X, i, 40), was invested in the nation-State. In practical terms, however, organicism involved social accommodation and political compromise. Whigs would “maintain the just ground already compromised . . . [and] encourage and sustain every proposition that look[ed] to renewed negotiation” or “arbitration” (III, ii, 128). Indeed, for the benefit of the nation and the Whig party, the *American Whig Review* stated as its goals to keep “free from all sectional doctrines, and sectional prejudices”; to avoid sectarian bias *within* Christianity; and to “shun . . . any partisan or personal divisions” (II, i, 1-2). This approach to journalism and politics made sense only from the standpoint of a political culture in which the whole was discernibly more than the sum of its parts, the community greater than the sum of individuals.

*“Society  
constitutes  
man what  
he really  
is.”*

[S]ociety [is] an organic whole, which, in the order of nature, if not of time, is so before the individual, that it not only modifies, but actually creates his rights, relations, and duties, and makes him, in fact, a different being from what he would be out of society—just as in every other true organization, a part, severed from the whole, as a hand, for example, cut off from the body, is no longer the same thing that it was before. . . . It is thus that society constitutes man what he really is, rather than that man constitutes society (II, v, 445).

Whigs focused on preserving the whole by forbidding the introduction of elements that bred “ruinous dissension” between parts (II, i, 2), “lest the contending interests and passions of the parts . . . endanger the safety of the whole” (VI, v, 441).

Whigs did not relegate individuals to moral or practical insignificance, nor did they equate the productive roles of individuals with so many cogs in a wheel; nevertheless, Whigs did perceive the synergistic effect of individuals’ working in concert upon their respective communities, as well as the synergistic effect of states’ working in cooperation with each other upon the greater national organism—the Union. There was an “assimilative power” to the process, which “shapes itself a body from surrounding materials” (I, v, 491). Indeed, the State became, like all organic agents, “endowed by the Creator with a faculty little short of intelligence” (VI, iv, 364). Moreover, the State was itself a “moral agent” (III, iii, 273-89). The

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State possessed a “national conscience, “ and “likewise a national religion [i.e., Christianity]. . . , something . . . widely different [from] an established church” (II, iv, 340). Whig historicism made the decisions abided by and inculcated within the Constitution “*ipso facto* the decisions of the national organism” (II, i, 3). According to its organic theory:

*Christianity  
"national  
religion" but  
not "estab-  
lished  
church."*

The [C]onstitution and laws made in pursuance thereof, should, according to a sound theory, become the national mind—the same to the State that the individual soul is to the body. It should be that through which the nation thinks and wills, whilst no other public sentiment or public will is to be regarded as of any validity or entitled to any respect. Its justice, at least so far as interpretation is concerned, should be the national justice—its principles the national conscience (II, i, 3).

Whigs tended to value the greater over the lesser; the Whig approach to social and political issues was holistic, from the top down, as it were. What was regarded as good for the collectivity was also said to benefit its parts (Thomas Brown, 4). What was good for the nation must be good for all the states. What was good for the community was considered best for all the individuals in that community. When Whigs looked from the bottom up, they judged good individuals to be good *citizens* first, then good church and family members, and only afterwards did they consider the relative merits of individual tastes, talents, and areas allotted to individual caprice (see X, iv, 418). “[I]ndividuals . . . singly, [were] weak and depraved,” their “highest liberty” consisted in “binding” themselves to larger identities (II, v, 450). Individual well-being and happiness were predicated upon larger unities, beginning with the union of man and woman in marriage (II, i, 89) and extending to all their “moral, social, and political relations” (II, iv, 332; see also II, v, 440-41). So-called “personal freedom” from such relations broke down civilizing influences and, if widespread, would create “a savage state” (III, vi, 614). The Whig didactic inculcation of character was fully imbued with this tendency to consider the role of the individual in light of the greater wholes of which he was part.

*Good of the  
whole also the  
good of the  
individual.*

Whigs viewed the various “parts” of society and government as being both “naturally” and properly arranged hierarchically (Mulqueen, 358). Hierarchical relationships maintained balance and good order, and they arose by merit in a free society. The *American Whig Review* stated that national “sentiment must go from the best downward” (IV, v, 442) Indeed, the well-being of the “lower” de-

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*Hierarchical  
society  
benefits all.*

pended on the "higher" (II, v, 440-41). There were few conflicts of interest, according to Whig organic theory. Joint government-private corporations, even special government favors to certain monied or propertied interests, might be legitimate if services beneficent to the whole society could be provided. Whigs encouraged the development of purely private corporations as well. Whigs tended to think of such arrangements as victories for nonpartisanship and for intellect over prejudice and selfish interests (Political Culture, 52-53, 99, 104-05, 217). These measures served the object of the *American Whig Review* in uniting and harmonizing the parts within the whole (II, i, 2). Indeed, Whig organicism was such that differences in class interest were fervently denied. "Not only were the interests of the classes identical, but there were," when properly understood, "no [real] classes at all in America."<sup>23</sup> As long as the paths of wealth were open to all, everyone was both workingman and capitalist. Webster said "the people are all aristocrats" (quoted in Van Deusen, 308). The great writers of the age, most of whom were influenced by transcendentalism and Jacksonianism, also made little of class differences in the static sense but tended to view individuals in light of their potential. In American literature and political philosophy, the workingman and capitalist were never clearly differentiated; the two supposed antagonists became a composite image of the rising common man (Matthiessen, xiv-xv, 653). However, on this point Whigs vociferously attacked Democrats for spreading the insidious doctrine of class conflict for short-sighted political gain. The Democrats sought to break the natural alliance of interest between all classes in a free society by pitting labor against capital through political manipulation and demagoguery (I, v, esp. 446).

*No real  
classes in  
America.*

The Whig emphasis on hierarchy within organicism possessed immense practical importance. The nature of the whole in organicism could have been that of an undifferentiated, egalitarian mass. Such "majoritarian" unity was exactly the impulse Jackson had mobilized to bring about a successful ending to the Nullification Crisis with South Carolina in 1833.<sup>24</sup> To Whigs, however, the good of the whole was not to be measured or determined by num-

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<sup>23</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), 270.

<sup>24</sup> Robert V. Remini (ed.), *The Age of Jackson* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), xxv.

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bers, nor could the whole be broken by one state or section, nor even by the majority of states or people of the states:

There is in both [the State and the family] an organic, and not merely numerical or aggregated unity. There is in each a divine sanction, introducing relations, duties and obligations which never could have arisen from a mere contract [and which is] . . . distinct from a majority of . . . present wills (II, iv, 330 and 334).

Whigs specifically rejected Jackson's principle that the will of the majority was absolute and that all branches of government should defer to the popular will. Whigs shaped their organicism in such a way as to resist the fundamental doctrines of democracy that had encroached on traditional doctrines of republicanism in the Age of Jackson.<sup>25</sup> If Whigs exhibited romantic traits, it was in the way they conceived of the Union. In Whig political discourse the Union sometimes appeared as the counterpart of Emerson's mystical-romantic transcendentalist nirvana.<sup>26</sup> All classes and sections were to "transcend" their selfish interests for the good of the Union and so experience inestimable national harmony. Indeed, the balance and continuous dynamic equilibrium of disparate rights, sections, and interests constituted the essence, as well as the finest possible achievement, of the American nation in Whig political theory (Dalzell, xii). Politics was the art of consensus-building. Consensus was reached through compromise, and compromise was understood to be a process of "mutual adjustment and concession . . . evincing men's capacity for self-subordination in pursuit of the general welfare." Moreover, "nothing justified compromise so much as the preservation of the Union" (Kohl, 85). It is easy to see how Whig organicism begat a broadly nationalistic agenda.

*Whigs romanticized the Union.*

The way in which the idea of the Union grew to such great, albeit qualitatively defined, proportions in Whiggery carried profound historical implications. There was already a growth of popular nationalist sentiment after 1815, and this nationalism was by no means restricted to conservative elements.<sup>27</sup> Jacksonian Democrats draped

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<sup>25</sup> Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), xiv.

<sup>26</sup> Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., *Daniel Webster and the Trial of American Nationalism, 1843-1852* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973), xiii, hereinafter cited in the text as "Dalzell"; and William R. Brock, *Conflict and Transformation: The United States, 1844-77* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 38-39.

<sup>27</sup> See George Dangerfield, *The Awakening of American Nationalism, 1815-1828* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

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themselves in the flag as they forcibly removed the Five Civilized Tribes from the eastern portion of the United States and led the Anglo-Saxon march from sea to shining sea. O'Sullivan's racist rhetoric in the pages of the *Democratic Review* would have justified almost anything:

The Mexican race now see, in the fate of the aborigines of the north, their own inevitable destiny. They must amalgamate and be lost, in the superior vigor of the Anglo-Saxon race, or they must utterly perish. . . . This occupation of territory by the people, is the great movement of the age, and until every acre of the North American continent is occupied by citizens of the United States, the foundations of the future empire will not have been laid.<sup>28</sup>

*Qualitative  
versus  
quantitative  
nationalism.*

Whigs defined their nationalism in fundamentally different ways from the Democrats. Manifest Destiny posed a multi-tiered affront to Whig organicism. It did not mesh well with the Union as qualitatively conceived by Whigs, that is, as an entity involved in constant internal improvement over time. While Democratic nationalism was quantitative and spatial, Whig nationalism tended to be qualitative and linked closely to the moral premises of Whig historicism (Political Culture, esp. 20-21).<sup>29</sup> Indeed, this Whig form of nationalism later contributed to the Republican party's own impetus. "Freedom national!" would be the cry that marked Republican political departure from Whiggery; yet, it also illustrated the Republican debt to Whig nationalism and organic theory. There is an irony in the fact that the Democratic party became the "conservative" party vis-à-vis the Republican party after 1854. The concept of the Union, as developed by the Republicans, became the Whigs' greatest innovation.

A final aspect of Whig organicism concerns literature and oratory. It is noteworthy that the responsibility that Whigs assigned to statesmen—and editors (see XIII, i, 2)—for articulating Whiggery was very similar to the role that Emerson assigned to scholars in articulating, explaining, and illustrating transcendentalist principles. The statesman's insights, like the scholar's, would help to elevate society; hence the Whig term "popular elevation." Moreover, like Emerson, Whigs viewed literature as an instrument of nationalism.

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Julius W. Pratt, "John L. O'Sullivan and Manifest Destiny," *New York History*, 14 (July 1933), 225-26.

<sup>29</sup> Major L. Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), 108 and see chapters 3-5.

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Emerson believed literature to be a vehicle for molding and expressing a unique national cultural identity. Among Emerson's personal friends who bore his direct influence in their work were Carlyle, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Thoreau, Alcott, Jones Very, Margaret Fuller, Brownson, and Hawthorne. Emerson also profoundly affected Whitman, Melville, Julia Ward Howe, Lowell, Longfellow, Bryant, and Whittier. Excepting the Englishmen, all of these writers accepted Emerson's charge to create a national American literature and thereby contribute to an American identity free from European dominance. Literary reviews of, or actual works by, all the writers above were carried in both the Whig and Democratic presses, many in the pages of the *American Whig Review* and the *Democratic Review*. The *American Whig Review* carried an article by Whitman criticizing destructive kinds of change and opposing attempts to tear down St. Paul's Church in New York City (II, v, 536-38). The journal also carried works by Edgar Allan Poe, including *The Raven*, and critical reviews of works by Hawthorne, Melville, Longfellow, Emerson, and Elizabeth Barrett. Carlyle (as well as Shakespeare, Milton, Locke, and Macauley) was highly recommended reading (I, v, 487-89 and 493). Moreover, literary criticism in the *American Whig Review* was profoundly influenced by Coleridge's theory of organic art and largely consistent with Poe's theory of systematic composition (Mulqueen, 358, 360).

The way in which Whigs viewed their own literature and the value of literature in general was, however, subtly different from that of the Democrats. To Whigs, literature was not so much an exercise in originality as it was an effort to edify the national character. True literature could be imaginative and original, but it need not be completely distinct from European pattern and example. If it were *good*, literature—and for that matter the national identity—need not be different from all else, considering that there was much to be proud of, even to be copied, from England, the Renaissance, and classical antiquity. Whigs agreed that literature and rhetoric helped shape the national identity (I, i, 4), but they regarded the best literature and rhetoric as a distillation of universal experience rather than a creation *de novo*. Whig emphasis in literature was on wisdom: moral-ethical example, philosophical discourse, instruction, and the illustration of prudent sensibilities. These even took precedence over the story-line or literary artistry in most instances. Indeed, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* both

*Quality preferred to originality in literature and life.*

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developed religious themes and were highly sentimental and moralistic. In this way Whig literature was inextricably linked to the rest of Whig political culture. Characteristically, Whigs considered literature, too, "an organic part of society" (Mulqueen, 356). Literature, like politics and all aspects of intellectual and social life, was judged to have religious and moral bases. In nineteenth-century America, literature, including political rhetoric, performed an educational function on the one hand, while affirming group identity on the other (Political Culture, 25-26).<sup>30</sup> Whigs saw a close association among rhetoric, literature, moral philosophy, and political programs. They aimed to use the written word to teach society ethical norms, to motivate people without destroying the primacy of rationality, and to further Whig nationalism and Whig values generally. The *American Whig Review* was the written counterpart to the oratorical flourish and skill of Webster and Clay in the halls of Congress, just as it was often the written counterpart to the structured yet verbose Sunday sermons that issued from thousands of church pulpits at that time.

### *Didacticism*

The Whigs inherited certain "givens" from the Jacksonian era, among these universal white manhood suffrage. The high degree of effort that they poured into educating others toward their point of view was a way of addressing by positive action Whig misgivings about the ability of the masses to govern themselves effectively. We might call this strong emphasis their *didacticism*, a term that is not meant to suggest that their approach was merely propagandistic. Like it or not, the common man had been granted political power. Whigs could compensate for the danger posed by that fact by raising the level of the common man. American Whigs assumed moral responsibility for him. They used the print media as agents of moral redemption, as means for making people better. Whigs wanted to be known above all for their "moral heroism" (I, i, 2). With pride, the *American Whig Review* pointed out that, despite their defeat in the election of 1844, the Whig party retained "MORAL POWER" (II, vi, 547) and must always "hold the high ground of moral arbiters" (II, vi, 560). Whigs had to hold that position, because the people were

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<sup>30</sup> See James Playsted Wood, *Magazines in the United States* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1956), chapters 2-7.

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easily misled, especially by the wiles of the Democracy (I, i, 16-18). Elements of the American System and many voluntary Whig-sponsored undertakings, such as public schools, reformatories, asylums, and private benevolent societies, were also didactically oriented. It would be tempting to label the Whigs as simply neopuritan. But the broad basis of the party, together with the larger dimensions and the sophistication of Whig didacticism, belies this characterization.

Certainly, Whigs would have liked a puritanic code of morality to prevail, but the standards and enforcement methods they mostly chose to emphasize and support were of a self-directing sort: “[L]et it be said to all people, to all rulers, you are bound. Religion, morality, conscience bind you” (V, iv, 352). Granted, the ends would, hypothetically, be identical with puritanism, but the choice of means stands out. Even if Whig didacticism provided a nominal framework for a modern puritanism, the Whig exhortation towards self-control, self-restraint, self-discipline, and self-development acknowledged the personal nature of morality, the limits of governmental power in a free society, and the primacy of liberty over all else, even righteousness:

*Moral exhortation favored over compulsion.*

[R]epublicanism is the effort of the individual to free himself, in his own personality and independently of all others, from the oppressions of party, the fear of society, and the terror of one or of a number. The entire system of our government is clearly founded in a declaration of individual liberty. . . . Free men and free sovereignties—the individual shall be absolute master in his acknowledged private and political sphere; the State shall be absolute master in hers, . . . [but cannot] wrest his freedom from the citizen. . . (X, ii, 193).

The emphasis on self mirrored the Protestant ethic of a personal relationship to God and acknowledged that God intended a unique destiny for each and every individual (I, v, 541) as a separate moral being (II, v, 437) with a separate controlling will (II, iv, 334). This emphasis was also a realistic political appraisal from the standpoint of a mass political party. Moreover, the standards that Whigs emphasized were predicated on the assumption that “liberty has no real value without responsibility and order” (see II, vi, 614-22 and VII, iv, 406-18; *Political Culture*, 33). Indeed, responsibility and order were needed for the *sake* of freedom, to *insure* freedom. Freedom, understood as the ability of man to impose rational order and to implement rational desires, required that license and mere whimsy be substantially checked:

*Liberty requires responsibility.*

We claim to be a sincere lover of rational freedom. We certainly will

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yield to no democrat . . . in true devotion to those republican institutions of our own, by which this great experiment is being worked out. We have yet a true State, and, as organized by our heroic fathers, a noble polity. It is because we love them, that we must be forever opposed to all that ultra democracy, . . . which is daily threatening the most serious danger to our most valuable institutions. . . . [A] noble example of true self-government [is distinct] from that government of self which consists in the unrestrained indulgence of those animal passions that so often constitute the ruling impulses of the popular mind. . . . When shall we learn that the highest liberty consists in the power of binding ourselves (II, v, 448 and 450)?

Actions by free people must be tied to moral principles. To recur to terms of Whig historicism, the “pious politics of the [Fore]fathers” (X, iii, 293) proved the point and provided the example to follow. Further, Whigs believed that internally efficacious values were particularly needed for American progress and preservation.

Morality, broadly speaking, was to Whigs the basis of all human civilization, civilization defined as “the complete and harmonious development of man in all his appropriate relations to this world” (III, vi, 615). In American society, morality governed all social intercourse by providing consistency and cohesion in relations among free people. To prevent the decay of American civilization, didacticism was required in a process of “perpetual renovation” of morality (V, vi, 614). Like all forms of knowledge, morality would be lost if not passed along to every generation. The *American Whig Review* advanced the classical republican ideal of “Nicholas Machiavel,” who had taught that “people cannot retain their liberty, . . . but become incapable and forgetful of freedom with the decline of morals”:

Free institutions, he affirms, can exist only with a virtuous people, whose religion is not divided from their morality—with whom purity of manners sustains the sanctity of law—whose constitutions, founded at the first in right, may be reverted to as a source of *perpetual renovation* [emphasis mine] (I, vi, 644).

If many in a given society failed to learn important moral standards and such standards wore away through succeeding generations, that society would be engaged in the progressive unmaking of its own civilization:

It is the virtuous man only who, acting from deep and abiding principles, is ever consistent and uniform; the juggler and the knave must bend to circumstances, and adopt such schemes of villainy as

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the exigencies of his situation may require. We are earnest in this matter. It is a point of infinite moment (I, i, 19).

The *American Whig Review* alludes to the fable of young Hercules, who crushes a serpent in his cradle, and uses it to illustrate “the growth and development of moral heroism” required for America.

It is even so with us. . . . Serpents come to us in our cradles, and we must destroy them there, or be destroyed by them. We should be taught in our youth to fear nothing but doing wrong; to face down evil, not to flee from it; to crush the serpents. . . . We cannot become truly virtuous, except by disciplining ourselves into that force, and purity, and perspicacity of soul, in whose presence vice and falsehood lose all their attractions, and sink into impotence. . . (I, v, 487).

Whigs recognized the potential of free men to do good or ill and the propensities in every man to do either. They believed the propensities to do good would win out, if the proper soil were provided for human “seeds” to grow (I, v, 492). Whigs believed that “soil” to be the kind of values that should be internalized, and those were to be found in the Bible:

*Biblical  
morality  
basis of U.S.  
Constitution.*

How infinitely superior is the philosophy of the Bible. The Scriptures reveal a system of ends, of moral purposes, . . . [and the] moral perfection that awaits the soul. . . . The Bible . . . gives us the plans and purposes of God’s moral system [and] furnishes satisfactory grounds [for personal morality] (I, v, 539-40).

Indeed, the Bible was “the highest authority next to the Constitution of the United States,” and its “leading principles [were] identical with that Constitution,” giving “authority for its precepts” (XIII, ii, 124-25). In a free society, morality was the basis for prosperity and progress, because everyone’s freedom impinged on the freedom of everyone else. Besides the pervasive sense of Christian responsibility to be one’s brother’s keeper and to minister unto others, Whigs had a very clear sense of the friction that results in a free society from every kind of moral lapse and turpitude, whether related to litigation, business profitability, physical safety, or peace of mind. A distorted view of self and of human nature threatened social order:

Nine-tenths of [the “friction in the machinery of society”] is occasioned by men not knowing themselves, and those with whom they are in relation. They thrust themselves into places for which [God] never intended them, and place others in positions for which they have no fitness. The consequence is . . . rapid but disordered motion. . . (V, iii, 310).

The *American Whig Review* was convinced that “disordered motion”

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characterized its own time. It was caused by a “lack [of] integrity of purpose or vigor of faith” (II, iv, 387). Such “friction” also was considered the inevitable recompense for sin (I, v, 541). The *American Whig Review* gave as one specific example the “popular licentiousness” associated with the problems of Anti-Rentism in New York. That movement and its accompanying violence resulted from some poor people misunderstanding their moral obligation to pay just debts, and their actions provided disturbing evidence of the deterioration of respect for law and property rights (II, vi, 581-84). Popular education would help allay false feelings of class antagonism (V, vi, 625-26; and see X, iv, 417).

“Internal improvements” for individuals as well as nation.

Whig didacticism pertained to all three of the categories of innovation mentioned earlier—economic-entrepreneurial, religious-evangelical, and modernizing. Whigs taught thrift, sobriety, industry, and a sense of public responsibility, all of them dovetailing with the economic aspects of the American System and with the entrepreneurial ethos they supported. Whigs also taught the whole range of Biblical and Christian virtues (e.g., humility, magnanimity, temperance, piety, etc.), as well as the *love* of virtue, i.e., *rectitude*. These individual “internal improvements,” as well as those designed for the nation in the American System, would reverse the Democratic-inspired decline of American civilization and push the American Union upwards again, preparing the nation for nothing less than the millennial age evangelicals anticipated. The Whigs desired a “balance” in individual character, corresponding to their ideal of balance in society and government. Very often, George Washington [“who was the first Whig” (XV, ii, 124)] provided the model for that individual ideal (V, iv, 385); quite literally, Whigs wanted the United States to be “The Country of Washington” (VII, vi, 554).

Whig didacticism was a blend of reason, sentiment, and prescription, and it was the Whig way of implementing the strong modernizing component in their conception of the nation’s destiny. Their didacticism thus expressed a mindset of *reform*, not a reactionary outlook. Nevertheless, Whig didacticism frequently has a paternalistic and even patronizing air. Quoting Bolingbroke, the *American Whig Review* proclaimed:

Truth and reason are often able to get the better of authority in particular minds; but truth and reason, with authority on their side, will carry numbers, bear down prejudices, and become the very genius of a people (IX, i, 5).

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The self-directing standards that Whigs helped implant in the American public would in time blend with other influences and produce an individualistic ethos that was antithetical to Whig organicism. For Whigs, *theirs* were the minds intended to “form and rule the minds of the multitude” (I, i, 4), and individualism and interdependence need not have proved contradictory (Kohl, 77-79, 88-89). But the balance sought by the Whigs was subverted by other historical forces. The fact that so many self-made men were to reach different conclusions and that reasonable men were to disagree on so many issues caused no end of consternation for the American Whigs.

Whigs would have been aghast that the reform impulse started to employ statist and impersonal bureaucratic means, beginning with the Progressive movement and continuing through most of the twentieth century. That change reflected the retreat of Whig principles. The change was made possible in large part by twentieth-century interpretations of the post-Civil War constitutional amendments (especially the Fourteenth) that altered the federalist structure and shifted the center of power and authority undeniably from the states to the Union.<sup>31</sup> The spreading notion that government might provide human happiness contrasted sharply with the Whig outlook: Notwithstanding that “Government is moral power in the hands of a few over the many” (IX, v, 486), individual “effort [is] the cardinal principle of all virtue” (III, iv, 366) in the Whig view. “[A]ll that any institution . . . [could] do for [a man is] to furnish facilities, helps, incitements; he must do the work himself” (IV, i, 40). Even if the *pursuit* of happiness is a right, certainly there is no right whatsoever actually to *be* happy: “It is right that man should be happy, if he discharges aright his duties, and does nothing to make himself miserable” (II, v, 438).

*Personal effort the cardinal principle of virtue.*

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<sup>31</sup> Harold M. Hyman and William M. Wiecek, *Equal Justice Under Law: Constitutional Development, 1835-1875* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), xiii-iv.