

His Truth is Marching On-Battle Hymn Refuted

By Dissident Mama on Mar 23, 2018

Social activist Julia Ward wrote "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in 1861, the same year that Henry Timrod composed his "Ethnogenesis" (the poem which kicked off part 2 of this series). In it, she penned that God will use His "terrible swift sword" to bring judgment upon "condemners" and "crush the serpent with his heel." The wicked this New Yorker wanted to vanquish was, of course, the Southern people. Howe, the daughter of a Wall Street Banker and Calvinist-turned-Unitarian, saw the Northern cause as a holy war - the Yankees' manifest destiny - and the Union as the army of God, whose cannons rained hellfire upon a peaceful people. Or God's "fiery gospel writ in rows of burnished steel," as Howe liked to call these weapons of conquest. "Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!" so goes the refrain.

Howe typifies the New England crusader mindset - a self-aggrandizing moral superiority that historian Clyde Wilson terms the Treasury of Counterfeit Virtue: "a kind of plenary indulgence that automatically pre-justifies the motives of American violence and the goodness inherent in America's acts to force the world into conformity with its ideal version of itself." You know, progress.

She also represents the consequence of what cultural historian Richard Webster called "secular monasticism," in which "every Puritan could become his own abbot, regulate his own day, weigh his own sins inside the dark cell of his own conscience and there prescribe and inflict the penance which he deemed just." Puritans were the predestined elect, so why not?

It was this "rational soul" of the Puritans and their secular descendants that was the absolute sovereign, not the Lord. It required a "spiritual police force no less cruel than Calvin's at Geneva," where (under his theocratic rule in the 1540s) 150 dissidents were burned alive on slow-burning pyres of green wood in an effort to promulgate adherence to the theologian's cleansed religion by civil means.

It was precisely Puritanism's rigid totalitarianism, rational asceticism, and adherence to a fluid theology (as described in part 1) that made it a

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breeding ground for the progressive ethos. Eventually gone were the Jesus followers, but what remained were rootless, majoritarian radicals, who aimed to “fortify the government of their own reason.”

Their vehement opposition to Scriptural traditions and Church heritage, and emphasis on personal interpretation made Puritanism intrinsically schism-prone. With each re-creation came gaping theological holes to be filled with differing ideologies, until God and Biblical justice were altogether abandoned for “social justice.”

Even when Calvinist-borne Congregationalism became the official state religion of Massachusetts, it still couldn't stop the constant splintering and “the spreading of the contagion of corrupt opinions,” as colonist Rev. Thomas Shepard described it. After all, change had always been at the heart of the Puritan ethic.

Yet, the core dogma of forging heaven on earth, a new Zion, held fast. It was simply passed from the hands of the Christian Hebraist fathers to their puritanical atheist sons. No longer necessary were parishes or pastors or even God. Statism became the new church and the zealotry of its members was/is stronger than ever.

People would eventually become trained in the habits of obedience to the religion of secular Puritanism, if beaten down enough through law, regulation, invasion, war, re-education, propaganda, and reconstruction.

Why recognize the reality of original sin and live your life in humble accordance when there is forced sanctification of the here and now?

That's the faith of the progressive Puritan. Presentist. Moralistic.

Hubristic. Perfectible. Activist. Ideological. Reform-minded.

Reinventing and forward thinking. “His truth is marching on.”

So, how else did this puritanical polity begin to unfold? Let's pick up where my last two blogs left off.

The Enlightenment

By the 18th century, the Enlightenment was taking root on both sides of the Atlantic with its core belief that human reason was sufficient for all

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earthly good. From that sprang the theoretical idea of “equality.” And not the Golden-Rule kind of concept of understanding that all men are made in the image of God and, thus, have dignity and worth, no matter his station in life or his unique differences. But rather the subversive kind of equality that wants to eradicate true human diversity. In other words, egalitarianism.

This social philosophy presupposes that people aren't distinct, none having his own talents and desires. What is paramount is the common, the greater good, no matter the cost.

Although some positives were born out of the Enlightenment, it also fostered vapid humanism over beautiful individualism. Ego over faith. Present over past. Man over God. Worldly over eternal. Voltaire over Jesus.

And depending on where and when it took hold, it could result in liberty (the American Revolution with Jeffersonianism) or mob rule (the French Revolution with Robespierre and the Reign of Terror ... and, of course, modern-day America with cultural Marxism).

The Age of Enlightenment also doubled-down on the Puritan notion of newness. As Thomas Paine's influential pamphlet “Common Sense” stated, “We have it in our power to begin the world again.”

The Great Awakenings

From the 1730s-1750s, the First Great Awakening took place both in the colonies and in England. The revivalists, such as Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards, countered the religion-is-dead notions of the Enlightenment and tried to unite pastors from different Protestant denominations.

The traveling missionaries spread the Gospel through dramatic sermons at large outdoor gatherings. The revivals were often received by hyper-emotional attendees and resulted in mass conversions.

The Second Great Awakening spanned the 1790s-1840s in the newly formed United States. This reprise gave rise to Christian social activism,

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most specifically the abolition, temperance, suffrage, and public-education movements, and also pinpointed evangelizing efforts to settlers moving West.

Though religious fervor abated, these Awakenings and their fire-and-brimstone preachers like Charles Finney had a lasting impact on America through not only their establishment of colleges and seminaries, but also their emphasis on democratization and social reform. The progressive hive-mind was spreading both theologically and politically.

Differences & independence as spelled out earlier in the series, the vast differences between North and South had existed from the very beginning. Cultural, religious, economic, and political.

Southerners were in large part conservative, upholding social patterns of culture and heritage, not knocking them down. Distrustful of democracy, they were agrarian, poor farmers, landed gentry, rural folk, indentured servants, ladies and gentleman, entrepreneurs, soldiers, and clannish refugees.

Northerners were chiefly ideologues, repudiating tradition, not preserving it. Corporate and majoritarian, they were commercial, industrial, urban folk, mercantilists, bankers, peddlers of easy money, seafarers, and conquerors and savers of the unwashed masses.

While the colonies were under British rule, these disparities really didn't cause much of a fuss. But once the sections joined forces to secede from England, create a republic, and govern it first under the highly decentralized Articles of Confederation and then the more consolidated U.S. Constitution, hostilities grew.

During the Revolutionary War, Southerners fought not to obtain the "abstract universal rights" of equality, the general will, and progress (as did many New Englanders), but rather to resist King George's "disrespect" toward the colonies. They wanted to defend their rights as Englishmen: Common Law, property rights, and prosperity through self-determination.

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Constitutional crises

Centralization was key for New England, whereas decentralization was fundamental for Southerners. This was keenly typified by the Virginia representatives at the Constitutional debates.

“Patrick Henry questioned the authority of the Philadelphia Convention to presume to speak for ‘We, the people’ instead of ‘We, the states,’” explains historian William J. Watkins, Jr. “In [Henry’s] view, delegates should have only recommended amendments to the Articles of Confederation.”

And it was George Mason who insisted on the Constitution having enumerated powers and negative liberties. This catalyzed the creation of the “Bill of Rights,” which James Madison wrote based upon Mason’s “Declaration of Rights” for Virginia from 1776.

“Mason countered that a national, consolidated government would overburden Virginians with direct taxes in addition to state taxes, and that government of an extensive territory must necessarily destroy liberty,” Watkins adds. Thus, Mason was one of only three Constitutionals delegates who refused to sign the document.

“... He wanted a clear line between the jurisdictions of the federal and state governments, including the judiciary, because he feared the shared powers would lead to ‘the destruction of one or the other.’” Prescient. The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions (written by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson respectively) further prove this decentralist Southern position, which today we proponents call “original intent” and opponents call the “Lost Cause.”

American “Exceptionalism”

In “The Pilgrim’s Progress,” Puritan preacher John Bunyan wrote, “The way to the Celestial City, lies just through this town, where the lusty fair is kept; and he that will go to the City, and yet not go through this town, must needs go out of the world.”

The literary classic speaks of spreading the message of Puritanism beyond the borders of Massachusetts. Granted, Christians are called to be

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fishers of men, sharing the Good News with humanity. But what the Puritans ended up spreading was progressivism. Change we can believe in.

“It has been our (America’s) fate not to have an ideology, but to be one.”
– Historian Richard Hofstadter

That is what America has become. She is the ideology. Always new. Always purifying. Always growing. Manifest Destiny. “We are five days away from fundamentally transforming the United States of America,” admitted Barack Obama, October 30, 2008. Progress and predestination now and then.

The artwork symbolizing this creed (pictured at the top of the blog) is called “American Progress.” Like an oil-brushed Julie Howe, the angelic female Progress is adorned with “the star of empire” on her forehead as she readies and leads us toward an era of modernity, democratic advancement, and westward expansion all the way to the Pacific.

This rallying cry was underpinned by the idea of divine providence: that God endowed America’s exceptionalism and, by virtue, her growing dominion. So by the 1820s, many Puritan inheritors had become moral crusaders in the burgeoning territories.

Steeped in the Puritan ethic – a works-based path to salvation that played down the tenet of original sin – these reformers sought to civilize the Indians and Catholic immigrants settling the frontier, readying themselves for their eventual taming of that uncouth creature known as Johnny Reb.

Some Southerners succumb

Interestingly, “it was Southerners who embraced the great national wars against Great Britain in 1812 and Mexico in the 1840s ... (and) the concepts of national greatness and manifest destiny,” explains historian John Devanny.

In fact, it was Virginia-born James Monroe who purchased Spanish Florida. He also gave us the influential Monroe Doctrine. It was a policy that put European powers in check, isolating the U.S. from their sphere of

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influence. But the doctrine also enabled the U.S. to seek its own ambitions in all of the Americas sans Old World competition.

It was Thomas Jefferson who made the Louisiana Purchase from France, doing so for unencumbered trade access to the Mississippi, but still doubling the size of the U.S. It was Virginian John Tyler who pushed for and signed a bill annexing Texas, permitting its statehood.

It was North Carolina-born and Tennessee-raised James K. Polk, who secured the Oregon Territory from Britain. He also acquired California and much of the Southwest through the Mexican-American War.

And it was Virginia-born Henry Clay, known as the "Great Compromiser," who made a name for himself as a Kentucky politician by promoting the "American System" - a high-tax, pro-national bank, pro-central authority, nationalistic philosophy. In other words, Hamiltonianism.

There were notable exceptions, like John C. Calhoun, John Randolph of Roanoke, John Taylor of Caroline, and Jefferson before and after his presidency. But still, many influential Southerners seemed to have temporarily succumbed to the progressive mentality.

But all that changed with the election of 1860. It was the tipping point that gave "Dixie a 'national consciousness,'" as Devanny describes it, snapping the duped Southern statesman out of his malaise and rekindling in him his localist and limited-government heritage.

