

## Effects of Postmillennialism during the Second Great Awakening

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The Second Great Awakening (SGA) was an important social movement and milestone in American religious history. Starting at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with its height during the 1820s and '30s in New England, its defining trait was a new emphasis on evangelism and reform, regardless of sect. These reforms took various shapes, including legal, cultural and historical. This new, nonsectarian reform contrasted sharply with religion in Colonial America, where religious conflict was relatively common and the modern idea of religious tolerance--that all sects of all religions should be treated equally under any government--was much less common. This changed following the revolution, and religious tolerance reached a new high along with secularism, but these violent struggles between Protestants did not emerge again during the SGA, even as religiosity became more important. Many reasons for this change are plausible, but the more widespread beliefs in postmillennial eschatology likely played a role in helping Protestants see each other as allies. Also of great importance was those who would pose a threat to the Protestant millennium, primarily Catholics. The anti-Catholic sentiment was more powerful because of this reform movement during the SGA and the perceived threat Catholics posed to an established Protestant America. While other religious groups would have been suspected as well, Catholics were the largest religious minority and the most politically active. The spread of postmillennial thought during the Second Great Awakening made Protestants become more tolerant of different Protestant sects and drove reform efforts, while simultaneously increasing hostility to Catholics and increasing nativism.

Postmillennialism is the central reason for the many reform movements of the SGA. Postmillennialism is an eschatology that states before the end-times and return of Christ, there would be an era of a Christian golden age of ethics on Earth. This time would be called a *millennium*.<sup>1</sup> There are at least three different parts to common Christian eschatology: one is the millennia as already explained, another is the second coming of Christ, and finally there is the last judgment. For Postmillennialists, both the Second Coming and the Final Judgement came after the millennium and would be "triggered" after the earth reached a certain state of piety in the millennium. *Millennium* used in this context simply refers to a really long time, not actually one thousand years, as one might think. This was the dominant view of Protestants during the SGA, even though it originated in America before then. Jonathan Edwards is commonly thought to have popularized postmillennialism during the First Great Awakening, but it was not as common then as it was during the SGA.<sup>2</sup> This ideology promotes activity, such as converting others and better living their faith, because not converting people will lengthen the time until Christ returns. This theology is why revivals and evangelism were central to the SGA. Revivals in this context were

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<sup>1</sup>James H. Moorhead, "Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800-1880," *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 3 (1984): 524.

<sup>2</sup>Moorhead, "Between Progress and Apocalypse," 527.

events to attempt to persuade through mass conversion. They could be in churches or rural areas, whatever the terrain allowed. The seeking of the millennium is also partially why Protestants no longer felt they were competing with one another; they had a common goal to make America a more pious place and they could better do that if they were unified. Postmillennialism promoted evangelism, evangelism promoted reforms to promote Christianity and limit social problems like drinking, and reforms promoted unity to those that agreed with the reform and distrust of those that did not.

Leading figures of the SGA and the spreading of Postmillennial thought included Charles Finney, who is now called the father of modern revivalism, and Lyman Beecher, father of the more famous abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe. These are just the two national faces put on the movement. Postmillennial thought had a way of breaking down old ideas, especially for the Calvinist Presbyterians. Going out and actively converting people is antithetical to traditional Calvinist theology, because it presupposes that men can be saved by other men as opposed to being predestined to be saved, which is a fundamental doctrine of Calvinism. This is not to suggest there was no pushback from the older traditional religious establishment. In fact, Beecher and Finney had public arguments about evangelism. Beecher in 1827 called Finney's revival tactics excessive and unwarranted.<sup>3</sup> Beecher seemed to support the idea of revivals overall, however, and he did meet with Finney to try and come to a consensus on how revivals ought to be run.<sup>4</sup> Beecher never fully conceded to Finney's idea about how revivals should be run, but Finney's methods were more effective and won out in the end. Finney had a particular way of preaching which historian Ray Allen Billington called the "New Measure."<sup>5</sup> Billington argued Finney's new measure preaching style included a certain veneration of exclusive Protestantism not present before, and this fed into the reform movement and, later, the anti-Catholicism as immigration ramped up a decade later. The problem here is not that Finney himself attacked Catholicism. He did not. It is that other groups and citizens took his preaching about sin and the need to reform, and they used it to push an anti-Catholic narrative. Finney's goals were primarily positive; he wanted to save souls through emotional persuasion and bring about Christ's return.

The eschatological ideas put forward at the beginning of the SGA had a profound impact on some long-standing intra-Protestant feuds within the United States. Social movements like the SGA only exist in comparison to the previous culture, so understanding the time before it is crucial. In colonial Virginia there had long been conflict between the Anglican Church and other religious sects present in the state, most prominently Baptists. Between 1768 and 1775 at least forty Baptists were jailed for failing to get licenses to preach or for disturbing the peace, while other Baptists were frequently harassed by mobs supported by local leadership.<sup>6</sup> This Anglican establishment

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<sup>3</sup> Gary Hiebsch. "A Turning Point in American Revivalism? The Influence of Charles G. Finney's "Memoirs" on Historical Accounts of the New Lebanon Convention" *The Journal of Presbyterian History* 76, no. 2 (1998): 139.

<sup>4</sup> Hiebsch, "A Turning Point," 139.

<sup>5</sup> Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860 a Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (Chicago, IL: Quadrangle, 1964), 41-42. <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.214564/page/n55/mode/2up>

<sup>6</sup> John A. Ragosta, "Fighting for Freedom: Virginia Dissenters' Struggle for Religious Liberty During the American Revolution" *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 116, no.3 (2008): 126.

included getting tax dollars and their ministers having exclusive rights to baptism and consecrating marriages. Basically, the non-established sects used the leverage provided to them by the American Revolution to spring for disestablishment, with notable figures like Jefferson and Madison being champions of this cause. Virginia was not the only state with an established religion. Congregationalists, more commonly known as Puritans, were the dominant force in Massachusetts. There, the established religious system was less harsh on the non-established sects than the one found in Virginia, as plenty of exemptions from paying taxes to Congregationalist churches were present if you were of a different sect. But the overall public view in Massachusetts remained: public support of a church with tax dollars was necessary. Congregationalists' roots in the state went back to the founding, but even here we find dissenters wanting to be free of their tax burden. To summarize a very complex situation concisely, Massachusetts forced its citizens to support a church with tax money. That tax money could go to a church of your choosing as long as you file for it, but sometimes the application was rejected.<sup>7</sup> For example, in 1784, John Murry, a Universalist minister, was hauled before a county court of common pleas and fined for every marriage ceremony he performed. This was because they had rejected his independent church the previous year and thus he had no license and was not a legally ordained minister.<sup>8</sup> Murry was forced to appeal the decision and, in the next argument, the bias against the new Universalist faction finally showed itself when the prosecutor said that the independent church teaching was denying divine retribution after death and therefore was opposed to morality.<sup>9</sup> This rivalry with the Universalist church persisted during the SGA, but the reason for this was their ideas were directly counter to postmillennialism. Universalists believe that all people will be saved regardless of earthly action. This put them as outcast not because they were a different sect, but because the theological test for who was an acceptable member of society shifted due to the SGA.

Virginia disestablishment in 1786 served as a model for what was to come in American religious freedom. One could argue that the trend toward disestablishment started even before the SGA, and while that might be true, there is an important caveat. At the time of the American Revolution, religion was at a low point in the United States and particularly among national leaders. Obviously, Anglicans dropped in numbers due to the revolution, but even on a larger scale, religion was less important than it was previously in society which is evident by looking at the emerging national government and its founders. Between 1700 and 1740, for example, it is estimated that around 75-80 percent of the population were attending churches.<sup>10</sup> Even though church records are limited, it is thought that church attendance would have been at an all-time low during the revolution, probably due to disruption of the revolution. To be clear, it is not a matter of if a majority of people in the United States were Christian at the time; they were. It is a matter of how much public ritualistic religion people practiced and what religion was endorsed by the

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<sup>7</sup> John D. Cushing, "Notes on Disestablishment in Massachusetts, 1780-1833" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1969).

<sup>8</sup> Cushing, "Notes," 174.

<sup>9</sup> Cushing, "Notes," 175.

<sup>10</sup> "Religion and the Founding of the American Republic: Religion in 18th Century America." The Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel02.html>.

state. It does not mean religion was not practiced from home in great sincerity or that people stopped believing in God altogether, though Deism was prevalent among the founding fathers. From everything we can gather from comparing it to its colonial past, religion was less important publicly and legally during the American Revolution. This matters because the comradery provided by postmillennial feeling during the SGA built off the backs of religious freedom forged in this more secular period, but also expanded upon it.

During and following the American Revolution, it was acknowledged by many that America had not been founded under any religious establishment, including general Christianity. According to historian Steven Green, though clergy during the American revolution did say God was on their side during the conflict, they rejected the idea that the new nation was founded under any particular religious principles.<sup>11</sup> For another example, the American Constitution is a remarkably secular document for its time, and if it had been written two decades in either direction, it likely would have contained much more acknowledgment of the Christian God and Christian law than it currently does. Even the jump from the Declaration of Independence mentioning a deist God as the foundation of human rights, to almost no positive mentions of God in the American Constitution is evidence that, at least in major political documents, Christianity was less important to Americans. There is also Thomas Paine's pamphlet "Common Sense" that was widely distributed throughout the colonies and made a primarily secular argument about the need for breaking with Great Britain. One of the times Christianity was referenced heavily is in the Treaty of Paris in 1783, but for one thing, that document was not solely drafted by Americans, and, for another, these mentions probably helped ease international diplomacy and were common among treaties like this. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 contained the same references. This secular founding of the national government is confirmed by some of the founders later. For example, in 1797 John Adams said in the Treaty of Tripoli "As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion, — as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Mussulmen."<sup>12</sup><sup>13</sup> Some Christians were dissatisfied with this, and wanted an acknowledgment of the Christian God in founding documents. Reverend John Mason, for example, said, "And yet, that very Constitution which the singular Goodness of God enables us to establish, does not even recognize his being."<sup>14</sup> Whether it was seen as good or bad in the aftermath of the revolution, the secular nature of the founding was not in doubt.

The general way of looking at this secularization is since religion was less important than it previously was, religious differences did not matter as much. So even though this idea of Protestant religious tolerance started before the SGA in a more secular period, one would think it would reverse itself along with higher rates of religious thought. It did not. Even though religion was more important during the SGA than the time immediately after the American Revolution,

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<sup>11</sup> Steven K. Green, *The Second Disestablishment: Church and State in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 22.

<sup>12</sup>Both Mohammedan and Mussulmen were other names for Muslims.

<sup>13</sup>Treaty of Tripoli. November 4, 1796.

[https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/bar1796t.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1796t.asp).

<sup>14</sup>Green, *The Second Disestablishment*, 85.

there was a new trend of religious freedom for all Protestants, including who one had to support with their money. It is usually assumed that the First Amendment and its guarantee of religious freedom provided a model that states could adhere to. This is true to some degree; however, there is more nuance here. Three states held out long after the revolution: Connecticut, New Hampshire, and the aforementioned Massachusetts were disestablished in 1818, 1819 and 1833 respectively.<sup>15</sup> The final nail in the coffin for their religious establishments came from something else. The same problem exists for those who argue the new national identity helped unify people and disestablish the church. While this helped, it was not enough on its own to get all states to treat all Protestant sects equally. There is an argument that the legal system is sometimes slow and these state establishments were not as bad as some of the others and therefore was less pressing, and that is a fine argument. However, there was a real mindset of evangelical reform rising in the culture at around the same time these three states were being disestablished. This, too, could be a plausible explanation that would influence the disestablishment in these areas.

During the SGA, the reforms were common and driven by new postmillennialism theology. Reform-minded Christians wanted the world to become a more godly place. These reforms took multiple forms and in some cases were made into law by states. Some were based on social issues, like temperance. Charles Finney, a leading evangelist at the time, had very strong words for alcohol and those who drink it, saying, "...while things absolutely harmful and poisonous, such as alcohol and the like, are often obtained only by torturing nature and making use of a kind of infernal sorcery to procure death-dealing abominations."<sup>16</sup> Lyman Beecher in 1827 said, "All denominations of Christians in the nation, may with great ease be united in the effort to exclude and use the commerce in ardent spirits."<sup>17</sup> These quotes demonstrate the nonsectarian nature of the reform movement. Reformers viewed drinking as bad, those who drank alcohol were sinning, and they must reform society to where it is less acceptable to drink.

In the spirit of evangelism, there were also several organizations founded to spread the gospel. The American Bible Society (ABS) was founded in 1816 and wanted to make the King James Bible (KJB) as accessible as possible by making as many copies as they could. Though statistics on their publication are not easily available, an advertisement in the *Scientific American* in 1847 claimed that they had 300 people working on making Bibles daily, and they consumed eight tons of paper per week.<sup>18</sup> The numbers would have been lower during the height of the SGA simply because they were a newer organization, but it seems likely that this society had a relevant impact on the availability of the KJB. Similarly minded evangelical organizations like the American Tract Society (ATS) and the American Sunday School Union (ASSU) were founded in 1825 and 1824 respectively, though the ASSU has roots that predate that. The ATS was focused on the dissemination of important Protestant Christian literature, not just the Bible, while the ASSU encouraged church attendance.

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<sup>15</sup> Green, *The Second Disestablishment*, 120.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Finney, "What a Revival of Religion Is" 1835.

<sup>17</sup> Lyman Beecher, "Temperance Sermon" 1827. <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/women-and-the-temperance-movement/sources/1774>

<sup>18</sup> *Scientific American* 2, no. 51: (1847).

There was also a shift in the religious optimism of the secular founding of the United States. People like John Mansons promoted a pessimism in the late eighteenth century that gave way to a sense that America did indeed promote Protestant Christianity as its primary religion.<sup>19</sup> After Thomas Jefferson, a symbol of irreligious America, and the War of 1812, that shift is thought to have begun. Those evangelical societies mentioned earlier-- ABS, ATS, and ASSU --were all symbols of this new Christian America on a societal level. In addition, clergy were more likely than before to suggest democratic principles were tied specifically to Christianity and claimed civil government was a "Divine Ordinance" -- something president Jefferson would have not appreciated.<sup>20</sup> Another example of this shift can be found in the Bible Riots in Philadelphia in 1844. Though specifics about the riots will be covered later, during a Fourth of July celebration preceding them, illustrations of open Bibles in the hands of George Washington were numerous.<sup>21</sup> Washington was certainly not an atheist, but he was not known as one of the more religious founding fathers either. This shift in historical religious identity was not a conscious effort by people at the time, but, even still, this new framework fits in perfectly with the refocusing of Postmillennialism theology.

The idea of reform and a more general Protestant establishment also made its way into the legal system. Certain laws were both based on and upheld the idea they were of a Christian reform mindset. Blasphemy laws were laws that prohibited vigorously insulting Christianity in public. The first recorded case of a high profile blasphemy conviction was in the New York case, *People v. Ruggles*.<sup>22</sup> Ruggles was sentenced to three months in prison for violating a blasphemy law, and, upon rejecting his appeal to overturn the decision, Judge Kent gave some clue about his motives by saying, "Though the Constitution has discarded religious establishments, it does not forbid judicial cognizance of those offenses against religion and morality which have no reference to any such establishment, or to any particular form of government, but are punishable because they strike at the root of moral obligation, and weaken the security of the social ties."<sup>23</sup> New York was not the only state with this type of conviction. In *Updegraph v. Commonwealth* in 1824, another blasphemy law was upheld, and in the official ruling the court: "Christianity, general Christianity, is, and always has been, a part of the common law of Pennsylvania."<sup>24</sup> That is exactly the point of Postmillennialist reform: to make the earth a more righteous place regardless of the Protestant religious belief. Generally speaking, the more local the laws, the more Christian reform-minded they became. Even though the stated goal of this ruling was not because of postmillennialism, the influence of the postmillennial reform movement on Judge Kent's thinking is self-evident.

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<sup>19</sup> Green, *The Second Disestablishment*, 120.

<sup>20</sup> Green, *The Second Disestablishment*, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Katie Oxx. *Critical Moments in American History, The Nativist Movement in America: Religious Conflict in Nineteenth Century America*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 72.

<sup>22</sup> The inciting incident was John Ruggles, who was probably drunk, loudly shouting in a tavern that Jesus Christ was a bastard and his mother was a whore. See footnote 23.

<sup>23</sup> *People v. Ruggles*, 8 Johns. 290 (1811). <https://www.nycourts.gov/history/legal-history-new-york/legal-history-eras-02/history-new-york-legal-eras-people-ruggles.html>.

<sup>24</sup> *Updegraph v. Commonwealth*, 11 Serg & Rawles 394. (1824).

[http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI\\_speechs30.html](http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_speechs30.html).

Legal and social reform also included Sabbath laws. Laws limiting commerce and work on Sunday had been around for as long as the American colonies; however, the legal affirmation in the new nation can be traced back to 1816 *Pearce v Atwood*, a case in the Massachusetts Supreme Court, which affirmed the sacredness of keeping the Sabbath and strengthened the law.<sup>25</sup> A similar affirmation happened the following year in Pennsylvania, upholding the right to fine a Jew for working on Sunday, in *Commonwealth v. Wolf*.<sup>26</sup> Sabbath laws in the colonial period were certainly present, but enforcement varied widely and the intensity for keeping it had eroded over the centuries, particularly during the American revolution for reasons already mentioned.<sup>27</sup> Now was the time to try and reinforce Sunday closure for business and even some government agencies. For example, Beecher and his newly founded organization, The General Union for Promoting the Observance of the Christian Sabbath, tried to repeal a law passed in 1810 that forced postmasters to work on Sundays.<sup>28</sup> In Rochester, New York, a town recently commercialized due to the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, evangelicals advocated for economic boycotts to try and get business to enforce the Christian Sabbath. The mastermind of these boycotts was a businessman himself, Josiah Bissell.<sup>29</sup> Even capitalism was not immune to what historian Robert Abzug referred to as “religious virtuosos.”

Protestants during the SGA were driven together by reform and culture, but this new tolerance did not extend to Catholics or other non-Protestant Christians. If trying to achieve the millennium brought Protestants together, it also drove a further wedge into the already troubled historical relationship with Catholics. Catholic immigration was relatively small until the middle of the 1840s.<sup>30</sup> Before then, there was evidence of tremendous anti-Catholic sentiment enhanced by nativism, and Protestant reform efforts. In 1834 for example, the Charlestown Convent of Massachusetts was burned after years of rumors and suspicion surrounding it. The convent was founded in 1820, the beginning of the highpoint of the SGA, and, even before its attack, it had experienced various forms of violence.<sup>31</sup> A shot dog, a burned stable, vandalized nearby Catholic homes, and the torching of Catholic business were all just some of the terrible experiences in the years before the burning.<sup>32</sup> Days before the main attack, one of the nuns ran away from the convent but was followed and persuaded to come back. The years of rumors and speculation about the treatment of women in the convent were seemingly confirmed to the locals. This event whipped the townsmen into a frenzy, and they proceeded to sack the convent. The damage was immense. Mother Superior at the time said that nothing was saved, even important banknotes and records. According to Katie Oxx, a key driver of the public distrust was the belief that the convent was

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<sup>25</sup> Green, *The Second Disestablishment*, 184.

<sup>26</sup> Green, *The Second Disestablishment*, 185.

<sup>27</sup> Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 112.

<sup>28</sup> Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 115.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Hambrick-Stowe. “Charles G. Finney and Evangelical Anti-Catholicism” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 14, no 4 (1996): 39.

<sup>31</sup> Oxx, *Critical Moments in American History*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Oxx, *Critical Moments in American History*, 32.

subverting traditional roles and the natural order of things. Women were not supposed to be forever unmarried and in a closed-off subgroup. That was unnatural to Protestant Americans at the time, and that led to suspicion and distrust. Catholic practices were not acceptable to Protestants in America, so even though Protestants themselves had grown closer together, their religious tolerance was still limited.

Suspicion of Catholics in the U.S. was not limited to this one incident, however: it was broader than that. Lyman Beecher in particular was extremely critical of Catholics in America. In a book he wrote in 1835, *A Plea for the West*, he questioned whether or not Catholics were compatible with a republican form of government and likened them to a trojan horse.<sup>33</sup> Even the name of the book has a ring of nativist sentiment. The thinking goes that Catholics are always one hundred percent loyal to the Pope in Rome and could not be trusted to be loyal to any other country. Barring Jesuits, this is not how most Catholics lived. Given the previous evidence, it seems like the strongest prejudice against Catholics would have been located in the Northeast where the SGA was at its strongest. It might be the case since the number of Catholics would have been greater in numbers in the Northeast; southerners did not have as many opportunities to express their prejudices against Catholics.

By the 1840s, the nativist movement against Catholics had ramped up even further. In New York, Archbishop John Hughes and Father John Power both sought funds for their congregation's education because of the tremendous Protestant bias in the current education system.<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that it was not that postmillennialism was the primary cause of nativism, but rather it was part of an overall Protestant mindset that influenced the way they viewed their relationship with Catholicism. Racism and nativism are distinct forces that influence history, but they are often influenced by other types of culture, including religious culture.

Philadelphia experienced among the worst examples of anti-Catholic discrimination with the two Bible Riots in 1844. The same Bible societies so crucial for helping religion become influential actually caused tensions that helped lead to riots in Philadelphia. The increase in Catholic immigrants was especially present in the city of Philadelphia, leading to tension. Pennsylvania is also unique in that the state historically was one of the states with the least amount of conflict amongst the sects, even before the revolution, though they did have religious requirements to hold public office. So the nativism produced as a byproduct of the SGA would not be expected to be as bad here. As stated previously, it would be naive to suggest that it was simply religion that drove this nativism in this case, as there was also a healthy amount of racism against the Irish involved, but no doubt that evangelical reform made nativism worse. In the buildup to the conflicts in 1834, Pennsylvania passed the Free School Act, which required the use of the KJB in schools as a textbook. There was also a follow-up from the school board saying that all Bibles in school must be free of notes or comments.<sup>35</sup> Catholic agitators were enraged by this and fought

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<sup>33</sup> Lyman Beecher. *A Plea for the West*.

[https://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/fdscontent/uscompanion/us/static/companion.websites/9780199751358/instructor/chapter\\_5/lymanbeecher.pdf](https://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/fdscontent/uscompanion/us/static/companion.websites/9780199751358/instructor/chapter_5/lymanbeecher.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Oxx, *Critical Moments in American History*, 56-57.

<sup>35</sup> Oxx, *Critical Moments in American History*, 57-58.

for their holy books to be used for their children. In 1843, the school board did let them use non-KJB, but held the rule that they must be free of notes or comments. This solved nothing. It is also noteworthy that there was an economic depression in 1837 that further agitated the working class and brought out the worst side of people.<sup>36</sup> As with all historical events, nuance is key. It is thought that, likely due to anti-Catholic stereotypes, some Protestants in the area mistakenly thought that Catholics were trying to take the Bible out of school altogether. Prominent Catholic leaders were seeking removal of some texts that actively criticized the Pope, but they too thought that Bible use was crucial in schools. There was enough unrest and mistrust that built up over the following year in Protestant communities to warrant protest against Catholic changes.

The first violent outburst was May 1844, with a nativist protest turning into a riot after some chaos and the death of eighteen-year-old George Shiffler.<sup>37</sup> Massive rioting and a good deal of arson followed for a few days, and eventually the governor was forced to declare martial law to prevent further damage. May eighth is considered the most destructive day of the riot and caused the Pope to issue a harsh condemnation of the Bible societies that caused the riots. Regarding those societies, Pope Gregory XVI stated in a speech, "They are concerned primarily that the reader becomes accustomed to judging for himself the meaning of the books of Scripture, to scorning divine tradition preserved by the Catholic Church in the teaching of the Fathers, and to repudiating the very authority of the Church."<sup>38</sup> Both St. Michael's Church, and St. Augustine's Church were set aflame on May eighth. By May eleventh the riots had calmed down, but nativist sentiment would spark back up again in a few months. In case the nativist sentiment of the crowd was in doubt, the second riot happened around the Fourth of July. Nativist sentiment was on full display that day, and Catholics in the city were rightfully nervous, and, with the proper permission, they started acquiring arms.<sup>39</sup> Someone noticed and tipped off the crowd, and they demanded to be given the weapons. A crowd appeared outside the church with the stockpile, and the makeshift militia fired shots to try and disperse the crowd. On July 6, the church was assaulted with battering rams, and a tense standoff ensued, though the governor eventually amassed enough troops to disperse the crowd and restore order.<sup>40</sup>

The SGA marked a remarkable coming together for Protestants because of a common eschatological goal, which helped expand their idea of religious tolerance. Conversely, this new common goal actively hindered the assimilation of other religious groups, such as Catholics, and in some cases led to violence against them. With the spreading of Postmillennialism, America became a place where non-sectarian Protestant reform was considered progress, and this brought sects that had conflict in the past, together. As this process took place, a nativist sentiment against other religious groups grew. Everyone has an internal idea about which groups are to be trusted and which groups are suspect, and this was an expansion of that in the minds of most Protestants.

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<sup>36</sup> Amanda Beyer-Purvis, "The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1844: Contest Over the Rights of Citizens." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 83, no. 3 (2016): 366-93.

<sup>37</sup> Oxx, *Critical Moments in American History*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> Pope Gregory XVI, "Inter Praecipuas." May 8, 1844.

<sup>39</sup> Oxx, *Critical Moments in American History*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> Oxx, *Critical Moments in American History*, 73.

In the mid-1830s and 1840s, a unified Protestant establishment had developed in the culture and the law that actively fought against full equality for Catholics. This establishment was brought about by reform movements in the SGA, and it probably worsened the tension. The SGA, while it does not initially seem like a major event of American history, in reality helped shape the country for decades and gave rise to reform movements that continued after the Civil War.

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