

A Brief Timeline of The Church in America



- The posting of the 95 theses by Luther in 1517 was not the beginning of the Reformation but in many ways a culmination of widespread developments that had been building up for generations.
- There was not one Reformation but many. Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Tyndale, the Anabaptists and others were all distinctive centers of dynamic development and spiritual renewal. --The intellectual discipline of the major Reformers was prodigious. These leaders were almost without exception devoted to careful scholarship. Compare this to the kind of leaders we so often exalt today, based more on the attraction of personality and media charisma than the quality of their thought.- - We are familiar with the big name--, in the movement, but all of them had their circle of colleagues and close confidantes with whom they struggled, debated, agonized and prayed. Luther had his Melanchthon, Zwingli his Bullinger, Calvin his Farel, Tyndale his Frith.
- The Major Reformation events often took place in little out of the way places far removed from the centers of influence. Luther's Wittenberg surely was no Rome. Even today it is so small we couldn't find a hotel in town. Calvin's Geneva was not a major international city when he went there. It became one because of what he did there.

1598 Spain seeks to spread Catholicism in modern-day New Mexico

Catholic Spain sends Franciscan friars to modern-day New Mexico to establish missions along the Rio Grande. The original inhabitants of this land, the Pueblos, have their own religious rituals, beliefs and practices that are deeply embedded in their culture and way of life. Some Pueblos incorporate aspects of the Catholic religion into their own faith, while others reject Catholicism entirely.

1607 Anglican settlers arrive in Virginia

In reaction to Spain and Spanish Catholicism's growing influence in the New World, England seeks to establish the English Crown and the English church, known as the Anglican Church, in the New World by sending settlers, who create the colony of Jamestown, Va. Among the missions laid out in King James' charter: "propagating of Christian religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the true Knowledge and Worship of God."

1620 Pilgrims arrive in Massachusetts in search of religious liberty

Convinced that the Church of England is hopelessly corrupt, Protestant reformers known as Pilgrims break with the church, leave England and establish a colony in present-day Plymouth, Mass.

1624 Church of England "established" in Virginia; supported with public funds

In 1624, King James officially charters Virginia as a royal colony. Its inhabitants are required by law to be members of the Anglican Church and to pay taxes to support the church. Other religions, termed "dissenting religions," do not have freedom of worship. By the time of the Revolutionary War, nine colonies have established state religions.

(separation of Church and State)

1628 Dutch Reformed Church organizes in New Netherlands

With a congregation of 50 members, the Dutch Reformed Church is organized with communicants from Holland in present-day New York City. The Dutch Reformed Church remains the established church in the Dutch colony of New Netherlands until the British capture the colony in 1664.

1630 Puritans arrive in Massachusetts seeking religious freedom; do not tolerate dissent

Like the Pilgrims, the English Puritans believe that the Church of England is corrupt. Unlike the Pilgrims, they do not break with the church, but remain a part of it. In Boston, they establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony and strive to create a model Christian commonwealth. While they come to the New World seeking freedom to worship as they choose, the Puritans do not tolerate dissent.



1630 Protestant dissidents settle in Massachusetts

Protestant reformers from England arrive in Massachusetts in two waves. In 1620, the Pilgrims break their ties with the Church of England and settle in present-day Plymouth. In 1630, the Puritans establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony in Boston. Unlike the Pilgrims, they retain their ties to the Church of England, but try to reform it by establishing a model Christian commonwealth under the leadership of John Winthrop.

1632 The Jesuit Relations describe encounters with Native Americans

First published in 1632, the *Jesuit Relations* are yearly reports written by French Catholic missionaries who ministered to the Native American population in what is today the Northeast United States. The *Relations* detail efforts to Christianize the Native population, who are believed to be "pagan savages." The reports, printed until 1673, offer a rare portrait of Native culture and daily life.

1634 Catholics settle in Maryland

In 1632, Lord Baltimore, a wealthy English Catholic, receives a charter from King Charles I to establish a colony in America. Baltimore wants to create a haven for persecuted Catholics; the king sees a practical political advantage in giving them refuge abroad. In 1634, Baltimore's son brings both Catholics and Protestants to present-day Maryland, where he hopes they will live amicably. But conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in England influence their relationship in the New World. When the Protestant monarchs William and Mary ascend to the English throne, Catholicism is once again made illegal in England. In 1692, Maryland becomes a royal colony, and Anglicanism becomes the established religion.

1635 Puritans exile Roger Williams; he founds Providence and guarantees liberty of conscience

Banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony led by John Winthrop, Roger Williams founds Providence in present-day Rhode Island. Williams had quarreled with Puritan authorities over their theology, their decision to remain within the Church of England and their failure to pay Native Americans for their land. Williams' colony of Providence guarantees freedom of conscience and becomes a haven for religious dissidents.

1636 Roger Williams establishes Rhode Island; guarantees liberty of conscience

Banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Roger Williams establishes a colony he names "Providence" in present-day Rhode Island. Williams had quarreled with Puritan authorities over their theology, their decision to remain within the Church of England and their failure to pay Native Americans for their land. Williams' colony of Providence guarantees freedom of conscience and becomes a haven for religious dissidents.

1638 Anne Hutchinson banished from Puritan Massachusetts

Outspoken, opinionated and well versed in the Bible, Hutchinson accuses the ministers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony of teaching false doctrine and asserts that God has spoken to her directly -- a claim considered heresy in Puritan theology. Hutchinson's righteous insistence gets her in trouble with the religious and political authorities, including Governor John Winthrop. Charged with sedition, she is tried, banished and excommunicated.



1650 Waves of immigration create religious diversity

While the Puritans try to maintain control of the religious life of their colony in Massachusetts, waves of immigration are creating a rich tapestry of diversity elsewhere in America. Newcomers from Germany -- Mennonites, Amish, Anabaptists, Dunkers and Moravians -- join the Quakers arriving in Pennsylvania. Anglicans settle in the Southern colonies, and Baptists settle first in Pennsylvania before moving on to the unsettled frontiers of the Anglican colonies. Reformed Church and Jewish immigrants arrive in the Dutch colony of New Netherlands. The waves of immigration that begin in the 1650s continue until the American Revolution.

1663 Puritan translates Bible into the "Indian Language"

To help Christianize the Native peoples living in communities around Massachusetts Bay, Puritan missionary John Eliot translates the Bible into an Algonquian dialect. The "Eliot Bible," as it comes to be known, is the first complete Bible printed in America. The Puritans also publish the first book in America, a book of hymns titled *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated Into English Metre*.

1680 Pueblos revolt against Franciscan friars in present-day New Mexico

By the early 1600s, Franciscan friars report that hundreds of Pueblos are converting to Catholicism, but they notice that many of the "converted" Pueblos continue to practice their own religion. They ban Native ceremonies, burn religious icons, destroy sacred places and demand the colony's soldiers enforce the one true faith. In 1675, 47 Pueblo leaders are imprisoned in Santa Fe for sorcery; three are publicly hanged. Tensions mount and on Aug. 10, 1680, 2,000 Pueblos rise up in what becomes known as the Pueblo Revolt. Hundreds from both sides die in the fighting; more than half of the Catholic priests are murdered. Ten days later, the Spanish flee New Mexico.

1682 William Penn begins "holy experiment" in Pennsylvania

The son of a successful British admiral, William Penn is imprisoned six times for being a Quaker in Anglican England. He receives an immense tract of land west of the Delaware River from King Charles II (in repayment for a debt owed Penn's father) and establishes the "holy experiment" of Pennsylvania. The colony's founding documents include provisions for religious toleration, freedom of the press and statements of equality that include women, but not slaves. Over time Penn's colony attracts Quakers and Anglicans from England; Lutherans, Reformed, Mennonites, Amish and Dunkers from Germany; and Presbyterians from Scotland. Catholics and Jews are granted religious toleration in Pennsylvania but are not given the right to vote, a privilege extended only to Protestants.

1689 Freedom of worship law passed in England, extended to colonies

The English Act of Toleration extends freedom of worship to dissenting religious groups, though with limitations and restrictions. Toleration gives civil authorities the power to decide whether to allow specific groups freedom to worship. Later advocates for religious freedom argue that religious liberty should be defined as a natural right rather than as a right afforded by a civil government.

1701 Slave trade merges Christianity and West African religious traditions

Africans who are enslaved and transported to America in the 17th and 18th centuries bring with them West African religious traditions. Wholly unfamiliar with these rituals and beliefs, many slaveholders suspect the Africans of practicing paganism or Islam. At first, owners and traders have little interest in converting slaves to Christianity -- nor do they encourage them to practice their own religion openly -- but with the founding of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in 1701, Anglican missionaries begin to actively promote the Gospel to slaves. Over time, enslaved Africans meld African worship with Christianity, creating new religious forms that eventually give rise to the black church.

1734-1760s First Great Awakening sweeps the colonies; divides denominations

The first mass movement in American history, the Great Awakening is kindled in Western Massachusetts and catches fire when the Anglican priest George Whitefield draws crowds that number in the thousands to revivals. Ignoring parish boundaries and upsetting social hierarchies, Whitefield and his followers preach freely in fields, farms and town commons, encouraging people to make a direct and immediate connection to the Divine. In one 15-month span, it is estimated that as much as a quarter of the country hears Whitefield's message. The emotion and broad populist tone of the revivals -- which bring together adherents from across the Protestant

spectrum -- stir heated controversy, dividing some denominations, including Congregationalists and Presbyterians. Whitefield's defenders include the minister Jonathan Edwards, known as the "theologian of the heart."



1740 First Great Awakening undermines authority of established churches

The first major mass movement in American history, the Great Awakening changes the way people experience God. Ministers such as George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards encourage individuals to make an immediate, intense and personal connection with the Divine. This emphasis on personal choice threatens to undermine the authority of ministers in established churches.



1750 Only two Huguenot congregations remain in America

By 1700, as many as 2,500 Huguenots, French Protestants, flee their homeland to avoid persecution by the Catholic Church. But in America they quickly lose their cultural and religious autonomy in the expanding American marketplace. By the time of the American Revolution, the last two Huguenot congregations have folded. Other groups, like the Puritans, also begin to lose members in the competitive religious environment.

1754 Pennsylvania Baptists seek to evangelize Virginia

A large number of Baptists move from Pennsylvania to Anglican Virginia, where they join forces with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to challenge the right of any government to compel citizens to adhere to one specific religion.



1770 Congregational, Anglican churches lose market share

For much of the 17th century, 90 percent of American congregations are Anglican or Congregational, but by the time of the Revolution, that percentage has shrunk to 35 percent. Anglican congregations are outnumbered by Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, and their numbers are matched by English and Welsh Baptists. Quakers, German Lutherans and German Reformed congregations are also on the rise.

1776 Declaration of Independence signed

The document formally severing ties with the British government enshrines the American idea that "liberty" and "freedom" are rights given by God. The idea of America as a land uniquely blessed by divine power will echo throughout American history.



1776 Virginia Baptists petition for freedom to worship

Virginia law restricts where non-Anglicans can preach. As the Baptist faith gains popularity, Virginia authorities begin to crack down. Following his arrest for preaching without a license, Baptist Jeremiah Moore preaches to crowds through the bars of his jail cell. In October, he delivers a petition to the Virginia State Assembly -- signed by 10,000 dissidents -- demanding that Baptists be able to freely worship without fear of

prosecution. Thomas Jefferson, then a Virginia state assemblyman, receives the petition and joins forces with the Baptists to propose the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Virginia.



1784 Methodist Church in America established

The Methodist Episcopal Church, an outgrowth of the Anglican Church, arrives in America prior to the Revolutionary War and soon begins attracting converts. Founded by Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, the Methodist Church in America offers a more democratic leadership than the hierarchical Anglican Church and quickly becomes the fastest growing denomination in the American religious marketplace.

1786 Virginia disestablishes, ends state support for Anglican Church

Written by Thomas Jefferson and first submitted in 1779, the Virginia Act for Establishing Religious Freedom proposes ending state support of the Anglican Church. The bill is opposed by many who believe religion is essential to the cultivation of a moral citizenry and that religion will wither away without state support. In 1784, Patrick Henry introduces a bill that would impose a tax to support churches but would allow citizens to designate the church their taxes would support; the following year James Madison writes "Memorial and Remonstrance," a widely circulated pamphlet that makes a strong case against state-supported religion. Henry's bill is defeated; Madison reintroduces Jefferson's bill, and it passes in 1786. The bill is listed on Jefferson's tombstone as one of his three most important accomplishments.

1787 U.S. Constitution drafted; no guarantee of religious liberty

The Constitutional Convention submits a draft of the Constitution to the states for ratification. For the first time in Western history, religion and state government are decoupled. God and religion are scarcely mentioned in the document. Wanting to create "a more perfect union," some of the Constitution's framers fear that statements on religion would be divisive. The sixth state to ratify the document, Massachusetts is the first to suggest constitutional amendments guaranteeing individual rights,

including religious liberty. The seven states that follow Massachusetts -- Maryland, South Carolina, New Hampshire, Virginia, New York, North Carolina and Rhode Island -- also recommend amendments.



1789 Compromise over slavery in the Constitution

The delegates to the Constitutional Convention do not consider women, slaves or freed slaves as full and equal citizens of the United States. After debating how the institution of slavery should be addressed in the Constitution, the delegates come to an agreement that maintains the status quo. Both opponents and defenders of slavery believe God favors their cause and find rationales for their views in the Bible. Pro-slavery arguments are simple and powerful: The patriarch Abraham owned slaves. The law of Moses governed slavery. In the New Testament, Jesus did not condemn slavery, although it was widespread in Roman antiquity. And the apostle Paul urged slaves to obey their masters. Abolitionists appeal to the spirit, not the letter, of the Bible, arguing that the moral principles set forth in the Old and New Testaments stand in contradiction to the idea that one person could own another as property.



1790-1840 Second Great Awakening leads to creation of new denominations, sects

Volatile, energetic, competitive and creative, the Second Great Awakening, a series of religious revivals across the new nation, transforms the country's religious landscape. Populist denominations, notably the Methodists and Baptists, race far ahead of the old established churches; utopian communities dot the landscape; millennial expectations fire the imaginations of thousands waiting or working for God's kingdom. The end of established state churches contributes to the upsurge, but the

deeper cause is rooted within the nature of American society itself. Restless, freewheeling and robust, Americans are surging toward the new frontier, asserting their place in society, challenging convention and upending accepted traditions.



1791 Bill of Rights ratified

Ten amendments protecting individual liberties are passed by the First Congress and three-fourths of state legislatures. The First Amendment, guaranteeing religious liberty and other rights, is drafted by James Madison. It reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." The first half becomes known as the Establishment Clause; the second is called the Free Exercise Clause.

1794 African Methodist Episcopal Church forms in Philadelphia

After leading a group of free blacks out of St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Methodist minister Richard Allen, himself a former slave, founds St. Bethel's African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Bethel retains ties to the Methodist Church until 1816, when the AME establishes itself as a distinct denomination. The AME Church becomes one of the largest black churches in the United States during the early 19th century, drawing in free blacks living in major cities across the Northeast. After the Civil War, AME evangelists disperse across the South, exhorting recently freed slaves to embrace Christ and the AME Church. During the early 19th century, the AME Church becomes one of the largest black churches in the United States, finding adherents among free blacks living in major cities across the Northeast. After the Civil War, AME evangelists disperse across the South, exhorting recently freed slaves to embrace Christ. Within the AME Church there are debates over its primary mission -- to build American institutions to support

and uplift black communities or to support recolonization efforts in Africa. By 1880, the AME Church has grown from one dissenting Philadelphia congregation into an influential national church with 400,000 members.



1797 Adams signs Treaty of Tripoli; it says U.S. "not founded on the Christian religion"

Passed to protect U.S. shipping interests from pirates off the Barbary Coast, the Treaty of Peace and Friendship assures the Muslim state of Tripoli that the U.S. will not pursue a religious war. It reads: "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; and, as the said States never entered into any war, or act of hostility against any Mahometan nation, it is declared by the parties, that no pretext arising from religious opinions, shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries." The document is regularly cited in the ongoing debate over whether the Founding Fathers intended the United States to be a Christian nation.

1800 Thomas Jefferson accused of being an atheist

The presidential election of 1800 is one of the most bitter and bruising contests in American history. Attacked for his unorthodox religious views, Thomas Jefferson is accused of being an atheist by clergymen aligned with his Federalist opponents, who spread rumors that he will compel citizens to burn their Bibles. The personal attacks reinforce Jefferson's conviction that church and state must be kept separate.



1801 Jefferson Bible

Done with his official work for the day, Thomas Jefferson sat in the new presidential mansion in Washington in 1803 and opened his Bible— not to pray, but to cut. He scoured the text for Jesus' greatest teachings, sliced out his favorite portions, and

glued them into an empty volume. He called it "The Philosophy of Jesus." That book was lost to history.

In 1819, he started over and created a new version called "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth", commonly referred to now as the Jefferson Bible. This volume was kept largely secret and passed among Jefferson's relatives until 1895, when it was discovered by the librarian at the Smithsonian. In 1904, it was published by Congress. Jefferson cut out miracles and signs or declarations of Jesus' divinity.

1800 Methodism becomes the fastest growing denomination in America

In the years following the Revolutionary War, the denomination explodes, attracting tens of thousands of adherents. Promoting a "boiling hot religion," the Methodists employ circuit riders who travel hundreds of miles, preaching to scattered populations along the frontier. Unlike older, more established denominations, Methodists acknowledge the importance of supernatural phenomena -- signs, dreams, visions and ecstatic experiences. The faith focuses on religious discipline or methods, touching a nerve with a population looking for order in a newly forming society. Methodists also welcome women and blacks and encourage democratic participation. By 1812, one in every 36 Americans is a member of the Methodist Church. By 1850, the Methodist Church becomes the largest denomination in the country.



1800-1840 Social reform becomes a hallmark of evangelical Protestantism

During the 19th century, the Second Great Awakening brings thousands of Americans into the evangelical fold. New converts to rapidly growing denominations such as Methodism are encouraged to change their hearts, their homes and their towns. James Finley, one such convert, advocates rights for Native Americans, temperance, prison reform and abolition. Fired by religious zeal, evangelical Protestants form voluntary associations dedicated to causes such as reforming prisons, running

orphanages, feeding the poor and encouraging education and literacy. At a time when federal and state institutions are relatively weak, these organizations perform many services later taken on by the government.



1801 Cane Ridge revival hosts Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist preachers

The revivals of the Second Great Awakening typically take the form of camp meetings -- extended outdoor meetings that draw people together for days of ecstatic worship. In 1801, the most famous camp meeting occurs at Cane Ridge in Bourbon County, Ky. Preachers from many denominations exhort to a mixed crowd estimated at between 10,000 and 20,000 -- black and white, free and slave, poor and well-to-do. Most come hoping to experience intense, emotional and heartfelt worship; some come just to watch. One young attendee, James Finley, pledges he will not be swept away by the religious fervor, but he undergoes a conversion experience and later becomes a Methodist preacher and social reformer.

1801 The first Universalist ministers preach in America

Rejecting the idea that only a small number of individuals are chosen for salvation, Universalists split from Baptist and Congregational denominations. Another movement, Unitarianism, splits from the Puritans in New England, but becomes more popular in the 19th century. Unitarians reject the idea of the Holy Trinity (God as Father, Son and Holy Ghost) in favor of a unitary God and seek to open Christian doctrines to rational inspection and inquiry. The two traditions merge in 1961.

1802 Jefferson invokes "wall of separation" in letter to Baptists

At the time of Jefferson's election, only two states -- Connecticut and Massachusetts -- have an established church. Baptists from Danbury, Conn., send Jefferson a letter of congratulations on his election and express their hope that his views on religious liberty will soon extend to their home state. On Jan. 1, 1802, Baptist minister John Leland personally delivers a giant wheel of cheese to the White House to celebrate

Jefferson's election as a victory for religious freedom. The same day, Jefferson writes a letter of response to the Danbury Baptists in which he invokes the metaphor of a "wall of separation" to describe his views on the ideal church-state relationship.



1810 National organization for American missionaries abroad

The creation of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) signals the beginning of a missionary movement that continues today. The ABCFM draws missionaries from a variety of denominations, but groups take different views over the missions' basic purpose. Some fundamentalist Protestants argue that their ultimate goal is to save individual souls. Others say saving souls isn't enough and insist that missionaries should work to effect institutional changes to provide a moral and just society.

1814 Baptists form national denomination

At the inaugural Triennial Convention, 33 delegates from various Baptist churches meet in Philadelphia to expand missionary operations, using their collective strength and wealth to finance foreign evangelism. The meeting signifies increasing solidarity among Baptist denominations and churches that traditionally had operated autonomously. The Baptists become the second fastest growing denomination after the Methodists.

1815 Presbyterian Church declares slave trade "inconsistent with the Gospel"

By 1815, the major Protestant denominations -- the largest institutions in the nation -- stake out positions on the issue of slavery. The terms of the debate broaden to include constitutional equality as well as religion and morality.

1818 Connecticut disestablishes Congregational Church

Though Connecticut had long allowed "sober dissenting" churches to operate legally in the state and collect tax money, the Congregational Church remains the official state church. Dissenting churches chafe under their authority. Connecticut disestablishes in 1818.

Congregational minister Lyman Beecher adamantly opposes disestablishment, but in a famous about-face he changes his mind, writing: "For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the State of Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God." Beecher comes to believe that the voluntarism encouraged by disestablishment creates a new religious vibrancy in America. When Massachusetts, the last state with an established church, contemplates disestablishment in 1833, Beecher is one of the most outspoken proponents. In 1833, Massachusetts abolishes a law requiring citizens to belong to a church.

1819 Jarena Lee becomes first female AME preacher

At a time when women are not allowed to preach, Jarena Lee, an African American in Philadelphia, challenges gender barriers, saying: "For as unseemly as it may appear nowadays for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible, with God. And why should it be thought impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach? Seeing as the Saviour died for the woman as well as for the man." AME Church founder Richard Allen eventually grants Lee the right to become an itinerant preacher, and she speaks to mixed groups of blacks and whites, men and women. Lee becomes one of a number of prominent agitators to equate the struggle of blacks and the struggle of women, and she fights for both.



1824 American Sunday School Union brings literacy to the frontier

In the early 19th century, local philanthropic groups organized by Protestant churches take on the responsibility for educating children, especially on the frontier, where government infrastructures are not yet developed. Sunday schools teach children to read and write, and the American Sunday School Union develops primers that teach both reading and Christian morals. Another set of widely used and popular schoolbooks are McGuffey Readers, developed by a Presbyterian minister.



1825 American Tract Society formed

First organized in New England, the American Tract Society becomes a national organization and a major publishing house in 1825. By 1830, the society is printing 6 million tracts a year, a bimonthly magazine, a Christian almanac and a series of children's books. Often disseminated by traveling evangelical preachers, the tracts deal with issues such as the dangers of excessive drinking and teach lessons based on a generalized Protestant Christian morality.

1826 Protestant society founded to promote Christianity in the American West

Believing "that the religious and political destiny of our nation is to be decided in the West," several Protestant denominations unite to form the American Home Missionary Society. They hope to transform the West from a wild frontier into a "Garden of the Lord," filled with churches and schools to provide for the West's moral, spiritual and civic health. In an 1835 speech "A Plea for the West," Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher calls for the creation of "permanent, powerful literary and moral institutions, which, like great orbs of attraction and light, shall send forth at once their power and their illumination."



1826 Evangelical Protestants found American Temperance Society

Congregationalist ministers Lyman Beecher and Justin Edwards organize the American Temperance Society to battle what they see as a cultural acceptance of overindulgence in alcoholic drinks. The consumption of alcohol is a serious problem in the 19th century: The average American then drank three times the amount the average American drinks today. Cider is a substitute for water in areas with poor water quality, and a typical workday includes the ringing of two bells, one at 11 a.m. and one at 3 p.m., signaling workers that they could break for a drink. Most alarming to church communities are the moral issues of alcoholism, which include domestic abuse. By the mid-1830s, more than 200,000 people belong to the society, and more than a million will join by the mid-19th century.

1830 America sends Protestant missionaries to China

American missionaries had traveled to Burma and India 20 years earlier, and reports sent back to the United States from these and the Chinese missions provide Americans back home with context to understand Asian religious traditions.

1830 Evangelicals take advantage of advances in print technology

In the first half of the 19th century, advances in print technology and the creation of a unified postal service enable evangelical Christian organizations to regularly reach a wide audience in the expanding nation with pamphlets, tracts and magazines.

Between 1816 and 1820 -- the first four years of its existence -- the American Bible Society prints nearly 100,000 Bibles; by 1830, the society prints as many as 1 million Bibles per year. By 1830, the American Tract Society distributes 6 million Christian tracts annually.



1830-1850 Utopian and millennial sects multiply

Hoping to bring about the Second Coming, visionaries create Christian communities based on different principles. The Shakers believe that sex is the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden and that their communal abstention from intercourse will bring about the millennium. The Oneida Community believes they must live as if they are already in the millennial kingdom; they create a communal structure in which all men are married to all women -- an arrangement they call complex marriage and others call free sex. The Community of True Inspiration, or Amana, roots itself in self-denial and simple piety. Of the roughly 120 social experiments embarked upon in this time period, only a small number achieve temporary successes; most wither away.

Slave's worship curtailed

Convinced that he is a prophet, a slave named Nat Turner leads a rebellion in which he and his followers kill dozens of white men, women and children in Southampton County, Va. In the aftermath, slave owners curtail slaves' Christian worship, convinced that Christian teachings encourage disobedience and foment resistance. In the coming years, slave owners, abolitionists and the black church all point to the Bible to justify their conflicting positions on slavery.



1832 The Disciples of Christ is founded

Followers of Presbyterians Alexander Campbell from Kentucky and Barton Stone from Pennsylvania realize they have much in common: belief in the ability of ordinary men and women to make religious decisions for themselves; a frustration with denominational divisions; and a desire to return to the authenticity of the early church. In 1832, the Campbellites and the Stonites informally unite and grow to more than a half million by the end of the century. Despite hopes of unity, this group, too, splits and forms multiple new denominations.

1833 Quakers, free blacks and evangelical Protestants found the American Anti-Slavery Society

Two years later, in the first issue of the anti-slavery publication *The Liberator*, founder William Lloyd Garrison proclaims: "I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. ... I am in earnest -- I will not equivocate -- I will not excuse -- I will not retreat a single inch -- AND I WILL BE HEARD."



1836 Angelina Grimké publishes an "Appeal to the Christian Women of the South"

As women begin to play an increasingly vocal role in the fight to end slavery, Angelina Grimké publishes a tract laying out biblical reasoning to support the need for Christian women, especially in the South, to join the abolitionist cause. Grimké and other reformers aim their appeals at mothers -- slave mothers, poor mothers or mothers of alcohol abusers -- who are seen as responsible for maintaining the nation's moral foundations. The reformers also call upon women to steer their husbands toward morally correct Christian decision making in the public sphere. Nearly a century later, Grimké's niece, the African American playwright Angelina Wald Grimké, will find fame during the Harlem Renaissance for her works against lynching and racial violence.

1840s Brought Many Developments

Archbishop John Hughes leads Catholic challenge to New York public schools



Archbishop John Hughes is born in Ireland, where he witnesses oppression of Catholics by the country's ruling Protestant minority. After emigrating to America, he is ordained in Philadelphia and then moves to New York, where parents have taken many of the city's 12,000 Catholic children out of the public school system. They see the schools as bigoted against Catholics and object to the use of the Protestant King James version of the Bible. Arguing that no religion should be favored above another, Hughes petitions the city council, demanding Catholics be given money to set up their own schools. After losing the vote, he turns to politics, urging Catholics to vote for his slate of candidates in the 1841 state elections. Nearly all of his candidates win, and in 1842 the state passes a bill ending religious instruction in public schools. Four days later, riots break out; bricks are thrown through Hughes' windows, and the doors of his house are kicked in.

Catholic population increases with Irish, German immigrants

In the 18th century, the Catholic population is small and concentrated in Maryland and Pennsylvania. But in the 1830s and 1840s, the numbers swell with waves of immigrants from Germany and Ireland. In 1846, these waves turn into a flood as the Irish potato famine forces hundreds of thousands of Irish to flee their homeland. Suffering from poverty and weakened by malnourishment, the Irish are subject to disease, especially typhus. Most immigrants settle in major urban areas, where their growing presence fans long-smoldering anti-Catholicism.

Slaves embrace Christianity in "hush harbors"

According to documented oral tradition, gatherings in secluded areas called "hush harbors" offer slaves the opportunity to congregate out of their masters' sight and hearing to practice their religion. Susan Rhodes, a former slave, recalls: "We used to steal off to the woods and have church, like the Spirit moved us -- sing and pray to our own liking and soul satisfaction. ... We had them Spirit-filled meetings at night on the bank of the river, and God met us there." Incorporating African dance and music with Protestant Christianity, these faith traditions instill hope and the promise of eternal

salvation. Slave owners discourage this religious practice, preferring their slaves to attend services where themes of obedience and deference are preached.



1842 Free schools founded by evangelical Protestant reformers come under fire

In the early 19th century, before universal education, schools known as "common" or free schools are run by private Protestant societies and funded by public money. The schools teach Protestant values under the guise of "American values." As prominent preacher Henry Ward Beecher observes: "The common schools are the stomachs of the country in which all people that come to us are assimilated within a generation. When a lion eats an ox, the lion does not become an ox, but the ox becomes a lion." But the schools will come under fire -- particularly from Catholics -- as immigration increases religious diversity in the U.S.

1844 Catholics and Protestants clash in Philadelphia Bible riots

The riots are precipitated by a letter from Philadelphia's Catholic bishop, who requests that Catholic children be allowed to read the Douay-Rheims Catholic Bible rather than the Protestants' King James Version. Catholic churches and homes are burned by Protestant nativists, soldiers are called in, and both rioters and soldiers are killed. Following the riots, the bishop ends his efforts to reform the public schools and encourages the establishment of separate Catholic schools.

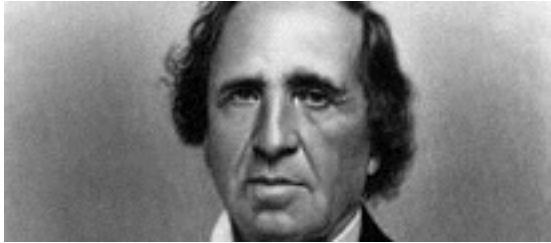
1844 The Seventh-day Adventist Church grows out of millennial predictions

A New York farmer, William Miller, uses numerical codes found in the Bible to calculate the imminent Second Coming of Christ, first dating it to March 21, 1843, then to Oct. 22, 1844. When the millennium fails to arrive, the date becomes known as "the great disappointment," and most of his followers, known as "Millerites," drift away. Some organize into new denominations like the Seventh-day Adventists, who believe the Second Coming is imminent but do not calculate a specific date for the event.

1844 Methodists split over slavery

The split is triggered by a vote at the church's national meeting on the future of Bishop James Osgood Andrew, who had inherited a slave. As long as he remains a slaveholder, many Northern Methodists argue that he must resign as bishop. After

two weeks of impassioned debate, the vote is split along regional lines; 68 Southerners defend Andrew, but 110 Northerners demand his resignation. A year later, Southern Methodists break away and form the Methodist Episcopal Church South.



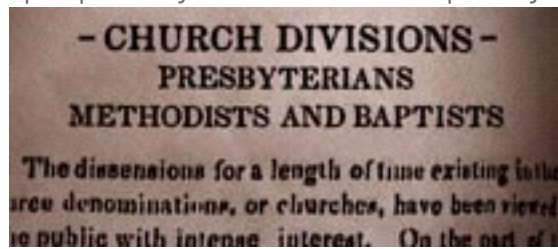
1844 Joseph Smith killed by angry mob

Soon after publishing *The Book of Mormon* in 1830, Joseph Smith leaves his home in Palmyra, N.Y., with several dozen followers. Persecuted by neighbors, the Mormons found and abandon three religious communities in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois. In 1839, Joseph Smith buys 18,000 acres in Illinois and builds a settlement he names Nauvoo. By 1844, the city's population has swelled to 12,000, rivaling the size of Chicago, and Smith consolidates his power, running the city, the courts and a militia. But after a newspaper exposes his secret practice of polygamy and criticizes the way the city is being run, Smith is imprisoned on charges of treason. Though the governor of Illinois promises protection, the jail is rushed by a mob of 200 non-Mormon men, who kill Smith.

1844-1857 Three Protestant denominations split over slavery

The schisms in the three largest denominations are seen as a harbinger for a divided nation. A Southerner in New England writes: "The Methodist Church will be divided into two great parties, with mutual jealousies and antagonistic measures. The Presbyterians are in danger of the same evil. And if the Baptists, unmindful of their duty to Christ and their country, shall bite and devour one another, and array themselves into two great parties, the Northern and the Southern, what conservative principles, what salt of the earth will be left to restrain and modulate the madness of political strife and ambition save from ruin our Republic?" The Methodist Church splits

in 1844 after the Methodist Conference is unable to reconcile differences between Northern and Southern members. The Baptists split in 1845, and the Presbyterians split partially in 1837 and completely in 1857.



1845 Baptists split over slavery

Following the Methodists' split, the Baptists, the second largest denomination in America, also split. Southerners break away to form the Southern Baptist Convention, which is today the largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

1845 "The church and the slave prison stand next to each other" -- Frederick Douglass

A freed slave, Frederick Douglass converts to Methodism when he hears the Bible's powerful message of freedom. He becomes a staunch abolitionist and condemns American Christianity for accepting slavery and ignoring the teachings of Jesus Christ. In his *Narrative*, written in 1845, he challenges American Christians to question churches that defend slavery as a biblical institution.



The Holiness movement stresses spiritual growth

Phoebe Palmer becomes the foremost proponent of the Holiness movement, which stresses the importance of spiritual growth over doctrine. Although she is never formally licensed to preach, Palmer becomes famous for the meetings held in her home. She lectures widely in the United States, Canada and Great Britain, and is a proficient writer, publishing a monthly magazine, *Guide to Holiness*, and authoring a steady stream of articles and 10 books, including *The Way of Holiness*. During the mid-19th century, Palmer encourages hundreds of thousands of men and women to pursue spiritual growth; today Holiness theology remains influential among Methodists and Pentecostals.

1857 Presbyterians split over slavery

In 1837, the Presbyterian Church splits over theological differences into two denominations, which become known as the "Old School" and the "New School." In 1857, the New School splits again over the issue of slavery; the Old School follows suit in 1861, creating four distinct Presbyterian denominations. The Northern and Southern branches of the Old and New Schools will reunite many years after the Civil War.

1858 Revivalism sweeps Northeastern cities

As three major denominations split over slavery, revivalism sweeps cities in the Northeast. In Boston and New York, businessmen organize noonday prayer meetings. Evangelist Charles G. Finney observes: "It became almost universal throughout the Northern states. A divine influence seemed to pervade the whole land. Slavery seemed to shut it out from the South." The Great Revival further exposes the rift between those who believe the purpose of a revival is to save souls through conversion and those who believe that a revival must save society as well, especially regarding slavery, through moral reform.

1859 John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry

On Oct. 16, ardent abolitionist John Brown leads a raid on the federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Va. He hopes to capture weapons and ignite a slave uprising, but his raid fails, and Brown is captured. Brown maintains that Jesus Christ will return to the United States, and the hoped-for slave uprising will help to fulfill God's plan for America. Awaiting execution, Brown compares himself to the apostle Paul: "He knew that if they killed them, he would greatly advance the cause of Christ." Brown's willingness to die for his beliefs helps fuel the abolitionist cause.

Civil War begins

As North and South lurch toward war, each side turns to the Bible to support its cause. The war begins on April 12.



"God has decided this question in favor of the slaves"

Before the war, Abraham Lincoln is not particularly religious. Struggling to make sense of the conflict and of the untimely death of his 11-year-old son, Willie, however,

he begins to re-examine his relationship with God. He becomes convinced that if Southern troops are driven from Northern soil, God has sent a signal in favor of emancipation. In September, the battle of Antietam gives him this sign. Meeting with his Cabinet, Lincoln announces, "God has decided this question in favor of the slaves." On New Year's Day 1863, he signs the Emancipation Proclamation into law.



1865 The 13th Amendment abolishing slavery adopted after Lincoln's death

After committing himself to a vision of the United States that neither condones nor sanctions slavery, Lincoln begins to address the challenge of reintegrating the Southern states into the Union politically and socially. He lobbies for the passage of three major constitutional amendments -- the Reconstruction Amendments -- that outlaw slavery, assure civil equality and guarantee voting rights to all Americans regardless of color. The amendments are passed after Lincoln's assassination. Reconstruction governments and policies are shaped and put into place within a few years of the Civil War's end, but it will be more than 100 years until African Americans are integrated into American society.

1874 Reformers organize the Woman's Christian Temperance Union

The WCTU is a broad-based, nondenominational movement that galvanizes evangelical Protestant women around an issue that is wreaking havoc in so many families: excessive alcohol consumption. Under the leadership of Frances Willard, the WCTU becomes the largest American women's organization, with chapters in every state, major city and thousands of local communities. While suffrage remains a divisive issue, the cause of temperance unites women across class and race.

1880 African Methodist Episcopal Church swells to 800,000 members

Less than 100 years after its founding, the AME Church has grown from one dissenting Philadelphia congregation into an influential national black church.

1880 Agnosticism takes root in America

In the late 19th century, religion remains a dominant force, but for a small group of Americans, scientific progress, Darwinian theories and new technologies begin to edge out religion as the leading authority on "truth." A small minority of people known as "free thinkers" abandon their belief in God. The foremost proponent of this

worldview is Robert Ingersoll, a lawyer and popular lecturer known as the "Great Agnostic." Ingersoll becomes the doubter Americans love to hate and is excoriated by newspaper editors and church leaders across the country.

1880s - 1890s Liberal and Conservative Protestants divide over the inerrancy of Scripture

The theories of Charles Darwin and biblical criticism challenge traditional understanding of the Bible. In German universities, scholars interpret biblical texts as the product of the times place and culture in which they were composed. Intoxicated by these new teachings, a young Presbyterian minister from New York, Charles Briggs, becomes persuaded that the Bible is divinely inspired but contains errors. Appointed to a chair at Union Theological Seminary in New York, Briggs delivers an inaugural lecture that incenses more conservative Protestants. They argue that the Bible is inerrant; that is, the "original autograph" of the Bible is free from error. In the Presbyterian Church, Briggs' opponents charge him with heresy. He is eventually convicted, loses his job and later became an Episcopal priest. Briggs' trial is one of a series of upheavals in American denominations -- Episcopalians and Methodists also convict ministers of heresy -- but the trials increase interest in the new ideas.

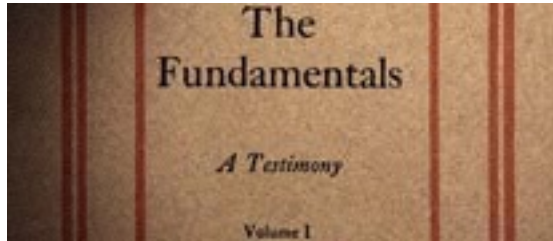
1907 The Social Gospel movement emerges

In the late 19th century, immigrants flock to U.S. soil, lured by hopes of economic success. But many end up in urban slums, where they toil in sweatshops and suffer from poverty, disease and overcrowding. Christians respond to these social ills in two ways: Some follow revivalist Dwight Moody, who preaches a message of personal sin and redemption. But others join the Social Gospel movement, determined to put their religious beliefs into practice and right society's wrongs. Its foremost proponent is Walter Rauschenbusch, a seventh-generation minister of a tiny church on the edge of New York City's Hell's Kitchen. In 1907, he publishes *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. "God is acting, and Christ is here now," he proclaims. But, he says, it is up to men and women to act on Christ's message and realize the kingdom of God on earth.



1915 Conservative Protestants publish a series of pamphlets, *The Fundamentals*

Funded by a wealthy oil tycoon, British and American scholars and preachers publish a series of pamphlets that set forth the core beliefs, or "fundamentals," of conservative Protestants who resist the influence of modernity, including biblical criticism. These beliefs include the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Jesus and his bodily resurrection. Three million copies of the pamphlets are distributed. Fundamentalists later take their name from the title of these pamphlets.



1920s Christian evangelists dominate early commercial radio programming

The new medium of radio changes the way Americans experience religion. Popular evangelists Billy Sunday, a fundamentalist, and "Sister Aimee" McPherson, a Pentecostal, use radio to reach larger audiences. In the 1930s, a Catholic priest, Father Charles Coughlin, uses his weekly radio program to criticize Franklin Roosevelt and promote virulent anti-Semitism. He becomes an embarrassment to the church and is eventually silenced.

1930s Great Depression transforms religious landscape

The Great Depression's effect on the religious and cultural landscape of America is profound. In a time of national despair, fundamentalist, Pentecostal and Holiness traditions experience an awakening. The Assemblies of God church, for example, sees its membership almost triple. At the same time, large mainstream denominations lose their financial base and their members. With a renewed sense of the need for reform in the face of large-scale poverty, the Social Gospel experiences a revival. The National Council of Methodist Youth goes so far as to endorse socialism, circulating a pledge: "I surrender my life to Christ. I renounce the Capitalist system."

1942 The National Association of Evangelicals founded

The NAE seeks to unify the voices of evangelical Americans; one of the first issues to galvanize the group is access to radio. The Federal Council of Churches recommends that national radio stations allot free airtime to "recognized" faith communities; because evangelical churches are largely unorganized, they are not considered "recognized" churches. The NAE fights the distinction and persuades the networks to change their policies.

1945 Postwar America undergoes religious resurgence; nonbelievers viewed as anti-American

In the postwar era, Americans flock to church in record numbers, swelling the growth of traditional denominations -- Methodists, Baptists, Disciples of Christ, Lutherans and Presbyterians. Church building booms; Bible sales skyrocket. Amid the prosperity, the United States and the Soviet Union face off in the Cold War, a spiritual struggle that pits Christian America against "godless communism." In 1952, President-elect Dwight Eisenhower famously says, "Our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is." This statement is taken as an admission that the nonreligious, be they atheist or socialist, are fundamentally anti-American. Because of the anti-communist views espoused by the church, Catholics gain greater acceptance in American society.

1949 Billy Graham leads Los Angeles revival



Taking the stage in a series of revivals in Los Angeles, Billy Graham becomes one of the leaders of a new evangelicalism that departs from the strictures of fundamentalism and embraces new media, technology and institution building, bringing evangelicalism to national prominence. Fundamentalists criticize Graham for his willingness to work with liberal Protestants and politicians. The depth of this split is evident years later as Billy Graham schedules breakfast meetings with U.S. presidents, while fundamentalist leader Jerry Falwell preaches that political involvement is a sin.

1950s Evangelicals and fundamentalists split over response to "godless communism"

As new evangelicals begin to shape a response to the threat of non-belief -- namely "godless communism" -- in the post-World War II world, fissures between evangelicals and fundamentalists begin to show. Evangelicals argue that in the face of non-belief, Christians must engage and participate in the outside culture in order to set the world right. Fundamentalists insist on remaining separate from popular culture and take a stridently adversarial position against the larger, secular society. Fuller Theological Seminary becomes a center for evangelicals, while schools like Bob Jones University remain solidly fundamentalist.

1952 Radio evangelists successfully move to television

Pentecostal minister Rex Humbard becomes the first evangelist to host a weekly television show, *Cathedral of Tomorrow*. Widely broadcast, the program ushers in a new era in evangelism. Healing evangelists, such as Oral Roberts, soon follow Humbard to television and reach millions of viewers. These charismatic televangelists help move Pentecostalism into the mainstream.

Rev. Billy Graham desegregates Chattanooga, Tenn., revival

Barnstorming the country during the 1950s, [Billy Graham](#) preaches a straightforward message of sin and salvation. In Chattanooga, Tenn., Graham breaks the color barrier when he disregards the ropes that separated white and blacks attending the meeting. "When God looks at you, He doesn't look on the outward appearance; the Bible says He looks upon the heart," Graham says. Years later, President Bill Clinton describes one of Billy Graham's revivals as a turning point in the history of the American South: "So here we were with neighborhood after neighborhood after neighborhood in my state on the verge of violence, and yet tens of thousands of black and white Christians were there together in a football stadium. And when he issued the call at the end of this message, thousands came down holding hands, arm in arm crying. It was the beginning of the end of the Old South in my home state. I will never forget it."



1955 U.S. redefined as Judeo-Christian nation

College professor Will Herberg publishes the influential book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*. Herberg posits a "triple melting pot" in which Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism form the branches of a shared national faith opposed to "godless communism."

1956 "In God We Trust" becomes national motto

Though the phrase "In God We Trust" had appeared earlier in the nation's history, including on coins minted in the 19th century, the phrase officially becomes the national motto during the Cold War, when the nation confronts the threat of "godless communism." World War II veteran Congressman Charles Bennett (D-Fla.) introduces

the bill, stating: "At the base of our freedom is our faith in God and the desire of Americans to live by His will and His guidance. As long as this country trusts in God, it will prevail."



1960 Charismatic movement edges into mainline Protestantism

Dennis J. Bennett, an Episcopal rector, receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit and begins to speak in tongues. He chooses to remain within the Episcopal Church and takes over a struggling parish in Seattle, turning it into a thriving Episcopal charismatic outpost. The charismatic movement takes root in other Protestant denominations, including the American Lutheran Church, the American Baptist Church, the United Methodist Church and the United Presbyterian Church (USA). By 1967, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal begins in the Roman Catholic Church.

1960s-1970s Neopaganism attracts growing following

Introduced to the United States in the 1950s, Neopaganism includes a variety of traditions that share a rejection of institutional religion and a reverence for nature. Neopagans often believe in the mind's ability to influence life events and in the interconnected nature of life. Neopaganism's popularity in the 1960s and 1970s corresponds with movements for ecological and social justice, as well as trends toward more individual and private spirituality. Usually polytheistic, Neopagan traditions emphasize the diversity of individual experience and reject the idea of one truth for all people. As Wiccan priestess and journalist Margot Adler writes, "The spiritual world needs diversity to thrive. ... Your own spiritual path is not necessarily mine."

1961 Civil rights movement launches the Freedom Rides

In the summer of 1961, black and white civil rights workers embark on Freedom Rides, riding buses across state lines, breaking Southern states' segregation laws. They are repeatedly met with violence. John Lewis, now a congressman, recalls: "Without religion -- without the example of Christ, who sacrificed for others -- as the

foundation of the movement, it would have been impossible for us to endure the setbacks, and to hope, and to go on. ... It was religion that got us on the buses for the Freedom Rides."



Supreme Court rules school prayer unconstitutional

The decisive battle over school prayer begins in a Long Island suburb after the state recommends an official nondenominational prayer for schoolchildren to recite: "Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon thee, and beg thy blessings upon us, our teachers, and our country." Five families sue the school district, and the case is appealed to the Supreme Court, which rules that the prayer violates the Establishment Clause. Writing for the majority, Justice Hugo Black argues, "It is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried on by government." According to legal scholar Sarah Barringer Gordon, "The school prayer decision was, in its day, the most unpopular decision the Supreme Court had ever made."



Supreme Court says Bible reading, reciting Lord's Prayer in schools unconstitutional

Students in Pennsylvania public schools are required to read the Bible and recite the Lord's Prayer daily, although they can be excused from the practice with a note from their parents. In *Abington School District v. Schempp*, the Supreme Court rules the practices violate both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. In the ruling, the court establishes a new and important test of the Establishment Clause: A law must have a "secular legislative purpose and a primary effect" that neither

advances nor inhibits religion. The ruling provokes widespread public outrage; outspoken atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair, is involved in a case consolidated with *Abington* and becomes "the most hated woman in America."



1963 "Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

On Aug. 28, civil rights supporters march on the Mall in Washington, D.C. In a speech that resonates with the language and rhythms of the Bible, Martin Luther King Jr. invokes the call of the Hebrew prophets and the pledge of the Founding Fathers to honor the principles of equality and social justice: "When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"



*Taken from "God in America" - a PBS web resource

A Brief Overview of World Missions in America

A violent rainstorm descended upon the prayer meeting of five Williams College students in a grove of trees near the Hoosack River one summer afternoon in 1806. They moved to a nearby haystack. There they continued in prayer and committed themselves "to send the Gospel to the Pagans of Asia, and to the disciples of Mohammed." By 1810 they had inspired the Congregationalists of Massachusetts and Connecticut to organize the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions, America's first foreign missionary society.

Representing Presbyterian and Dutch-Reformed as well as Congregational Christians, the American Board became the leading missionary society in the United States. Inspired by William Carey and patterned after British missionary societies, the American Board sent its first group of five missionaries to Asia in 1812; key organizers Adoniram Judson and Luther Rice were among this first group.

The American Board soon had sent missionaries to every part of the globe: India in 1813; Cherokee Indians in 1817; Hawaii, Palestine, and Turkey in 1819; China in 1830; Africa in 1833. In its first fifty years, the American Board sent out over 1250 missionaries. Most were from the smaller towns and farm villages of New England. Few were affluent, but many were trained in colleges where the evangelical revival burned brightly - - colleges such as Middlebury, Amherst, and Williams. There they received a classical education which included Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. When they reached the mission field they were able to translate the [Bible](#) from the original Greek and Hebrew into difficult and often previously unwritten languages. They built educational systems in their lands of ministry and were often called upon to advise foreign governments.

Their missionary reports to their home office in Boston were printed in the *Missionary Herald*, the magazine of the American Board established in 1821. For many Christians in America, the *Missionary Herald* was their window on the world. Descriptions of native customs, history, economic activities, and geographical features were included along with accounts of the influence of the Gospel on these far off lands. In a day before TV, radio, or rapid communications, such missionary reports became prime information for many Americans about foreign lands.

The American Board saw to it that schools and hospitals were established in all the mission fields. Native leaders were trained to continue the work of the ministry.

In 1961 the American Board merged to form the United Church Board for World Missions. After 150 years, the American Board had sent out nearly 5000 missionaries to 34 different fields. They had established over a thousand schools and colleges and spread the Gospel throughout the world-and it all began with five young men praying in a haystack!