Second Great Awakening and Second Party System, A Singular Response To Technological Advances: Responses Of Antidisestablishmentarian Ministers To Secular Threats And The Use Of Technology For Communication By American Sociopolitical Institutions, 1800-1850.

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Abstract
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Second Great Awakening and Second Party System, A Singular Response to Technological Advances: Responses of antidisestablishmentarian ministers to secular threats and the use of technology for communication by American sociopolitical institutions, 1800-1850.
(Under the direction of Terry Sullivan, Kevin McGuire, and John Aldrich)

This paper argues the Congregational Church’s diminished market share in after disestablishment in the northeastern United States was not a failure to adapt, but a rational decision to preserve an elite, and heavily invested base of parishioners. I argue the unique advantage of the Congregational Church was not state sponsorship, but instead its monopoly over the dissemination of news due to its unique regional social network of ministers.

I demonstrate through archival research that the Congregational Church did not expend significant resources on recruitment in the face of competing religious denominations that characterize the “Second Great Awakening.” By framing the local Congregational Sunday service as a forum for gaining information necessary for conversation with fellow citizens, parties were a far greater threat to the unique power Congregational ministers leveraged for social control, than the ministers and churches emblematic of the ‘Second Great Awakening.’
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Preface

Three scholars summarize the process by which this piece was produced.

“First thing I remember was asking papa, ‘Why,’” for there were many things I did not know. And Daddy always smiled, and he took my be the hand, saying, “Someday you’ll understand.’ Well I’m here to tell you now each and every mother’s son, someday never comes.”
-John Fogerty

“The production of righteous indignation is allowed to substitute for critical rigor.”
-Skip Gates

“I have never made but one prayer to God, a very short one: ‘O Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.’ And God granted it.”
-Voltaire
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Introduction

Scholars of American political and social history often attempt to organize histories of particular professions and philosophical disciplines by the stated missions of actors, thus creating distinct sectors or organizations—such as religious denominations, political parties, professional guilds, and labor unions— and classifying their actions into independent and separate histories. Such categorizations not only view American political development as a directional progression, but also as the development of numerous and largely disconnected fields. In doing so, scholars segregate different types of behavior—religious, professional, political—as largely unrelated. Any relationship between, for example, political and religious institutions, involves one acting upon the other, rather than each acting in competition with the other.

To further specialize and define these groups, Samuel Huntington, Charles Lindblom, and others treat organizations that attempt to overcome collective action problems—including religious, labor, and political movements—as having a philosophical agenda independent from controlling social or political power, and therefore define those organizations as firms or interest groups. Scholars link these interest groups to each other within
categories as in competition for the same resources, creating isolated markets of goods categorized by type. For example, politics may be a realm dominated by overtly political firms competing for state power, and agents may attempt to interact with or influence these political firms only insofar as it furthers those external firms’ internal goals or functions. In this view, a religious organization will lobby a political party only on political issues with theological overtones.

This treatment creates and amplifies the importance of the ethical or philosophical narratives of these groups by which they bond themselves to their members, while at the same time entrenching an artificial distinction between interest groups that appeal to particular narratives and the functioning of social and political life at large. Each organization’s nominal mission, identified and reinforced through the narrative it creates to define its function and legitimize its continued existence—religion, politics, a particular profession, etc.—is viewed as a vertical industry and efforts by that industry group to cross into alternative types of industries are treated as actions intended to further the particular mission of the organization.

I argue this distinction is both artificial and inaccurate, specifically when addressing the American social and political upheaval of 1800-1850. Historians and political scientists have so cemented the perception of distinct vertical industries as to create two historical events that occurred simultaneously yet are treated as completely independent: the second great
awakening and the second party system. As a consequence of the approach of historians, the importance of explanations for social upheaval and competition between groups across the entire strata of American society is understated, while competition by actors within particular fields is amplified. I argue, by contrast, the second great awakening and second party system neither coincidentally occurred simultaneously, nor that each event is even primarily defined by competition amongst groups of a similar mission or type. Instead, the development of political parties and the developments of religious institutions and participation in New England during the time period—notably the undermining of traditional monopolies over communication, and therefore social and political control, held by ministers of the established churches of particular states—were aided by technological and communication advances that allowed secular institutions to develop and replace the traditional sociopolitical functions of the established church.

Understanding this unified history therefore suggests 1) the primary form of social and political power for the Congregational Church in New England was not state establishment and the coercive penalties to defectors but instead the development of social and communication networks, 2) the primary to the social and political structure of New England after the revolution was not the disestablishment of religion but technological and communication advances that undermined the monopoly over the distribution of information afforded to established religious leaders with
expansive social networks, and 3) the established church of New England—the Congregational Church—recognized rise of secular organizations—particularly political parties—as the primary threat to their authority, rather, than as contemporary analysts of American political development in the field of economics and history argue, competing evangelical groups.

I treat the second great awakening and the second party system as a singular event in the history of American political development, viewing the upheaval of social, political, and economic development from the post-revolutionary to pre-civil war period as driven primarily by a single factor—technology—that allowed any institution to vie for the time and resources of citizens through leveraging a newly available communications infrastructure. I specifically look at the Congregational Church—the most dramatically altered institution, as it was disestablished in New England—and its responses to competitors not only nominally associated with theological issues but secular institutions who attempted to fill the social, political, and economic roles previously monopolized by the Congregationalists through their exploitation of their monopoly over the distribution of information.

As specialized industries catering to social and economic goods formed—and institutions were created to overcome resource inefficiencies and coordinate social action—more sophisticated methods of competition also developed as these institutions identified acquirable goods. Whereas others,
including Charles Sellers, begin by defining the market system that
developed in early America as a system of trade and specialization, I identify
the primary market that evolved as for information—therefore increasing
cross-industry competition rather than isolated markets. The specific cases
of the second great awakening and the second party system—regularly
examined as two separate phenomenon and, resulting with religious groups
acting upon political parties—instead are a single case resulting from the
shock of a democratized communication infrastructure. Rather than viewing
disestablishment as the catalyst for change in the religious landscape, the
primary competition to the Congregationalists was from emerging religious
and secular institutions, caused by those institutions having access to
technology.

The Congregational Church leveraged its monopoly over the flow of
information to control the social, economic, and political functions of a
community. This behavior—a classic case of Lindblom’s theory of institutions
leveraging a monopolized resource to gain power unrelated to their initial
function or mission—demonstrates the power of information as not only direct
knowledge but the ability to control discourse within a community, as
individuals will primarily discuss topics they know others are comfortable
and familiar with. Applying this to the case of the Congregational Church, I
argue the metrics for success traditionally used reaffirm the preexisting
notion the Church’s primary competition was from alternative religious
actors; on the contrary, by demonstrating the goal of the Congregationalists
was not primarily religious market share, I redefine their competitors as both
religious and secular actors—any entity that leveraged emerging
communications technology to undermine the monopoly the
Congregationalists held over the distribution of information. Specifically, I
define the primary competitor to the Congregationalists as the political
party. Despite the lack of success initially by Martin Van Buren and his
Democratic Party in New England, the institutions he built—and which were
later copied by the successors to the unsuccessful Whigs—directly competed
with established the Congregational Church over control of the secular social
and political apparatuses in New England.

Therefore, I examine the Sabbatarian movement as a response by
established religious denominations to secular encroachment upon the
control over the flow of information during the leisure time of New England
citizens. Whereas previously Congregational ministers not only controlled
the distribution of information but also social congregation (by monopolizing
a town’s physical meeting space) the post office posed a challenge as a
physical house for discussion as well as a place to receive information from
abroad. This dramatically increases the threat of the news, particularly news
that was created and distributed by partisan and secular interests.
Chapter 1: Political Science Literature

Samuel Huntington argues American political development is charted by the social structure of American society at any point in time, and the development of parties and the rise of evangelical congregations from 1800-1850 furthers his argument that particular narratives are common to the vast majority of Americans, as each competing organization—from political parties and the Unitarian denomination that largely appealed to secular interest, to conservative evangelical ministers and traditional denominations that controlled political and social affairs in the 17th and 18th centuries—appealed to the same anti-egalitarian narratives to recruit and maintain members.

Yet most historians treat upheavals in each vertical field or industry independently, defining political transformations as the ‘second party system’ and the evolution of religious institutions from 1800-1850 the ‘second great awakening.’ During this period both secular and sacred institutions developed from a radical shock to the traditional power structure of America—the undermining of the nodes of communication by the democratizing influence of technology and communication advances—and the
responses to this shock by all social and political institutions placed all in competition. Rather than exclusively examining religious denominations, political parties, social groups, or any particular kind of organization, as identified by ideology or policy objectives, the landscape of the social structure of America—and the players who defined bounds of the social and political discourse—falls into a single framework of how these institutions reacted to the liberalization of communication resources during early American history. Those groups who responded successfully still exist; those who either failed to fully grasp the magnitude of the shift in communication technology, or failed to adequately adapt and utilize the new tools for communication, were either dramatically weakened or simply went extinct.

This communication revolution caused actors with a stake in gaining social or political power to seek influence through undermining the traditional monopolistic control by established ministers—who, although garnering power from state sponsorship, in fact leveraged their entrenched social network to maintain their social and political standing. Beginning with Adam Smith, whose brilliant insight into the behavior of religious actors as in fact identical to the competitive behavior of economic interests created the field of the economics of religion three hundred years prior to its contemporary study by Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, authors segregated religion and secular institutions as only in competition with others of the same kind, rather than a horizontal view of society in which the kind of
institution mattered far less than the desired membership level and member contribution by any institution.

Contemporarily, I identify the most egregious culprit for such segregation and marginalization of the secular actions of religious actors as popular historians of American political development, in particular Arthur Schlesinger, who marginalizes political and social action by religious actors as either insignificant or attempts to increase membership rather than efforts to compete with the social and political powers they are lobbying. By writing history as the development of separate vertical industries—politics, religion, social groups, voluntary societies, etc.—Schlesinger fails to understand social and political control as a singular aim by all institutions, regardless of the profession of their practitioners. Thus, this essay approaches American political development as the struggle by social institutions to control and influence the lives of citizens, and to compete for citizens to participate within the framework of their particular organization.

These organizations must overcome collective action problems, and create incentives for long-term participation, discourage shirking responsibilities and abandonment, and ward off attempts by alternative institutions—whether they operate in a similar industry or not—to attract participation by members while maximizing membership. ‘Success’ cannot be viewed by a single metric—religious organizations are not successful merely by maximizing membership and political institutions are not successful only
by winning a particular election or garnering the most contributions. When examining the particular case of this thesis—that of the Congregational Church after disestablishment in Connecticut and their adaptation to a changing communication landscape with the introduction of competition from secular institutions and the undermining of their ministers’ traditional monopoly over the flow of information in New England—the motivations of elites and citizens, as well as competing sociopolitical institutions—must be examined and defined within the framework of the organization addressing such collective action and institutional problems while warding off competitors.

Chapter 1.1 Archival case study: The Congregational Church

Using the specific case of the rise of political parties in New England after the advent of mass communication technologies and the disestablishment of the Congregational Church, I argue the second great awakening and second party system are not two separate events—in fact, the social, political, and economic upheaval of the nineteenth century’s first four decades does not consist of numerous institutional revolutions, but a reaction to the technological shock of the transportation and communication revolution. This shock dramatically increased the distribution area of news and decreased the cost of publication, thereby undermining the traditional flow of information, controlled by local elites—in most cases the local minister
whose access to a national social network was unparalleled and therefore who served as a monopolistic node over information that was transferred and distributed in a locality. The focus on each field as a separate vertical, instead of a view of the transportation revolution horizontally affecting all aspects of colonial and antebellum life in New England—fosters a misunderstanding by modern theorists and religious economists of the goals of the traditional New England power brokers—Congregational ministers, and their secular competitors (focusing instead on alternative religious denominations and evangelical ministers, rather than their competitors in the field of communication and information, political parties.) I offer an alternative claim that technological advances in the distribution of information facilitated a national dialogue and a misunderstanding of the goals of the Congregational Church explain its drop in market share, beginning with an examination of mass communication theory and argue the advantage of state sponsorship for the Congregational Church was support for institutions that maintained a monopoly over the flow of information throughout New England.

In his Pulitzer Prize winning work, *What God Hath Wrought*, Daniel Walker Howe acknowledges the disestablishment of religion, and places it in the context of making New England, “more like the rest of the country and helped set the stage for the ‘era of good feelings.” (Howe 2009 p.165) Voluntary religious institutions, Howe argues, were a democratic training
ground for future political leaders, particularly marginalized groups without access to the levers of political power. “Women, African Americans, and newly arrived poor immigrants were all participating in religion, often in leadership roles, before they participated in politics. The churches and other voluntary associations nurtured American democracy.” (Howe 2009, p. 166)

While Howe acknowledges the connection between overcoming the ‘tyranny of distance’—the tyranny of a lack of information—the true barriers controlling the flow of information were, in the case of New England, the ministers of the established churches who not only used coercive power to punish congregants of alternative faiths but also monopolized the spigot of information which flowed to local citizens.

Chapter 1.2: Historical literature

The focus of historians—including Howe—upon the development of a market economy in New England through the development of transportation systems ignores the correlated development of the information transported by the same systems both by traveling merchants and literature. In the case of the development of canals, “Where earlier settlers had been to some extent ‘self sufficient’—eking out a subsistence and making do with products they made themselves or acquired locally—people could now produce for a market, specialize in their occupations, and enjoy the occasional luxury brought in from outside.” The nature of information separates it from other goods
transported via the nation’s new transportation infrastructure, in that information allowed individuals to communicate on diverse topics, as they now were informed—and knew their neighbors were informed—about issues other than those heard at the town minister’s weekly sermon. Whereas the byproduct of a market was an increase in the flow of information, specialized occupations produced guilds and professional organizations that served as competition for established religious groups. Instead of socializing occurring on Sundays and self-sufficient professional (largely agricultural) work occurring during the week, secular organizations competed directly with ministers for the flow of information and social networking activity that produced the added benefit of increasing economic competitiveness for merchants and professionals. “Most postmasters were also storekeepers selling liquor by the drink on the premises. The federal government mandated that post offices open every day, and this overrode whatever state and local laws might require Sunday closings. The post offices thus became a conspicuous exception to general Sabbath observance in small town America. On Sundays many men would flock to the local post office after church to pick up their mail and have a drink.” (Howe 2009, p. 229)

**Chapter 1.3: Institutional literature**

Secular organizations created rules and institutions similar to established churches to serve the needs of their members, including
insurance, education—at least regarding their specific institution—socialization, and rules by which members were forced to abide in order to access and maintain the social capital that resulted from their investment in the group. (Olson 1982; Ostrom 1994; Putnam 1993) The cost of distributing information and reinforcing social networks dropped as dramatically as the price of tangible goods. Whereas the colonists owned a single set of clothes and few items of convenience let alone luxury, by 1825 the cost of a mattress fell from fifty to five dollars and a wall clock from sixty to three dollars. (Sheriff 1996, from Howe 2009) “Although some of the savings was due to mass production, much of it was due to lower transportation costs.” (Howe 2009) Without developments to the nation’s transportation infrastructure markets beyond immediate geographic areas were impossible, and while markets for tangible goods are most obvious and regularly addressed by social scientists, the lack of transportation of information (and the networks created by religious leaders to facilitate and maintain communication) demonstrate the value of news. “In traditional society, the only items worth transporting long distances had been luxury goods, and information about the outside world had been one of the most precious luxuries of all. The transportation and communications revolutions made both goods and information broadly accessible. In doing so, they laid a foundation not only for widespread economic betterment and wider intellectual horizons but also for political democracy; in newspapers and magazines, in post offices, in
nationwide movements to influence public opinion, and in mass political parties.” (Howe 2009) Similar to the savings seen in furnishings, the ability to access and transmit information without going through the single node of the town minister to coordinating over vast distances allowed for two models of collective action. First, a centralized agent could disperse information to satellite sects, and, more importantly, receive information back from those sects quickly to adapt to a changing marketplace. This is the method by which political parties could operate on a national scale. Second, numerous regional institutions could develop and be far more effective through learning from the methods of similar institutions in different locales. These regional institutions could also have agendas and topics for discussion through direct access to information instead of going through the intermediary of a town minister. Both models—the franchise system of political parties and regional collectives largely favored by professional organizations—leveraged the newly acquired ability to undermine the established ministers through accessing information with far less cost created through technological progress.

Chapter 1.4: Political and religious institutions

The clash or consensus of American social groups, distinguished largely in economic terms—a ‘middle class’ defined by, “the predominant role of economic and materialistic interests,”--for Huntington is juxtaposed with a unified American social structure, rallying around common ideals.
While this anti-egalitarian impulse is a common recruitment tactic of secular and religious groups, the centrality of the church to social and political life distinguished and divided men across the economic spectrum. While both secular and religious institutions appealed to the same narrative, their interpretation and definition of anti-egalitarianism differed so significantly that a single ‘American creed’ cannot be considered to exist. Egalitarianism for political parties was nominally defined as a limit upon the coercive power of government and control of social life. For religious denominations, anti-egalitarianism was defined as an opposition to the meddling influence of commercial interests and political cabals (including Van Buren’s Tammany gang) and control of a secular, social establishment. Instead, control over social life by religious groups was seen as a moralizing influence and as a community of piety rather than control by an elite group of clergy.

When religious groups were the dominant social and political group, they behaved both as interest groups and as firms. The contemporary view differentiating parties from interest groups characterizes parties as maintaining themselves through market exchange—like firms—and as producing collective goods, while compensating participants indirectly—like interest groups. (Schlesinger 1984) Such a view legitimizes Anthony Downs’ claim that the goal of political parties is to gain and maintain power, “rather than gain office to pursue policies.” (Schlesinger 1984, Downs 1957) The
communication and information monopoly is the key to understanding how religious elites maintained power, as a substitute for secular competitors entering the market—rather than merely state sponsorship which only offered sponsored religious denominations an advantage over religious competitors and, as shown in contemporary European cases, does not correlate with control over social or political functions. *Disestablishment created a market for religious services, but technology created a market for information and communication goods.*

While each sociopolitical organization competing for the resources of citizens attempted to claim the position as the true and legitimate protector of the ‘American Creed’, the proper structure of such an organization was a point of contention. These structures are not merely a means of fulfilling a commonly understood American creed, but their differences speak to divergent interpretations of the narrative. Specifically, state sponsored denominations viewed religious participation as a moralizing influence, the ideological precursor to mandatory public education and state-enforced temperance movements. Secular institutions—specifically political parties—appealed to anti-egalitarian impulses nominally arguing for a belief in the Christian faith but against the power of an established clergy and instead recognizing secular institutions to fulfill secular goals—such as literacy—instead of moralization through participation in a rigorously structured church of a particular denomination. Differences in interpretation of the role
of government between secular and religious actors is not merely a difference of degree along a two dimensional spectrum measuring the extent to which government should exist in the lives of individuals, but a difference of kind as the role of government in supporting the moral and social development of actors and creating a particular public sphere for social and political action. A difference in views of the organization that should be at the center of social and political life thereby results in a difference in a common American creed, and while Schlesinger and Huntington respectively relegate and ignore this difference to religious groups as responsible for the sphere of religious life, I argue the competition between denominations and political actors as the central forum and actors of social and political life results in two fundamentally different American creeds. Moreover, both authors focus on slavery as the primary difference splitting the nation prior to the civil war and technological advances—while creating an industrial class—as only developing after the civil war. Yet transportation and technological innovations make the cleavage possible prior to 1800, and the competition is most explicit in the Sabbatarian movement, again discounted by Schlesinger and ignored by Huntington.

**Chapter 1.5: Monopolistic firms**

Charles Lindblom argues that in competitive political arenas multiple actors can compete for power, yet when a single group (or, in the case of the
United States, two political parties) gains a crucial institutional advantage, they can leverage that advantage to completely exclude competitors. (Lindblom 1977) In the case of the Van Buren’s Democratic party from 1828-1835, such an advantage existed. Religious groups, who attempted to influence politics through political stances formed within their theological framework, were marginalized both under the ‘Era of Good Feelings’ and the Jacksonian/Van Buren political monopoly, as no effective alternative party existed to be lobbied. Yet stepping back from Lindblom’s characterization of a political oligarchy that could exclude potentially meddlesome groups, a competition amongst political and religious institutions not for control of the political process, state bureaucracy, or implementation of particular policy, but over the distribution of information and the national narrative—the topics that individuals knew other individuals were educated about, and therefore the topics that were discussed by citizens, existed. The result of successful domination of the flow of information was not only a political and bureaucratic success, but an increase in the share of resources citizens invested in the type—whether secular or religious—of discussion and activity.

Adam Smith recognized the benefits of disestablishing religious institutions from state sponsorship in The Wealth of Nations,\(^1\) making the argument that would not be made in earnest until the 1980s by economists of religion, that a religious market would 1) have a moderating effect upon religious violence through a multitude of religious organizations, and 2)

create a clergy responsive to the needs and desires of parishioners instead of lethargy and atrophy due to state sponsorship. *The ‘religious market’ is not in fact merely a market for religion—that is, the ideological and theological doctrine offered to parishioners each Sunday—but the entry by religious sects into the larger market to distribute intangible goods in the form of ideology and the social and political infrastructure through which individuals could formulate their own lives.* Smith argued state sponsorship inspired religious practitioners to encourage violence to maintain their privileged position.

“Each ghostly [religious] practitioner, in order to render himself more precious and sacred in the eyes of his retainers, will inspire them with the most violent abhorrence of all other sects, and continually endeavour, by some novelty, to excite the languid devotion of his audience.” (Smith V.1.196) Smith turned to the American case, recognizing that even the most conservative and pious of American denominations were moderate in their social and political stances due to competition and a plethora of options for parishioners.

If it had been established, though of a very unphilosophical origin, it would probably by this time have been productive of the most philosophical good temper and moderation with regard to every sort of religious principle. It has been established in Pennsylvania, where, though the Quakers happen to be the most numerous, the law in reality favours no one sect more than another, and it is there said to have been productive of this philosophical good temper and moderation. (Smith V.1.196)

Smith’s argument that competitive markets increase efficiency and
responsiveness would have been far more obvious in European religious denominations than emerging economic markets as religious institutions controlled the flow of information and most social and political institutions in Europe—as well as the United States—during his lifetime.

But though this equality of treatment should not be productive of this good temper and moderation in all, or even in the greater part of the religious sects of a particular country, yet provided those sects were sufficiently numerous, and each of them consequently too small to disturb the public tranquillity, the excessive zeal of each for its particular tenets could not well be productive of any very harmful effects, but, on the contrary, of several good ones: and if the government was perfectly decided both to let them all alone, and to oblige them all to let alone one another, there is little danger that they would not of their own accord subdivide themselves fast enough so as soon to become sufficiently numerous. (Smith V.1.198)

The catalysts for the organizational implications from the disestablishment of religion in New England to the entrenchment of the second party system—culminating with the election of Martin Van Buren—and beginning with the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828—are numerous and varied and include a massive influx of immigrants, expansion of the franchise to nearly all white males, increasing tensions between the north and south. Yet the most popular explanations for the second great awakening lie in the notion of the rhetorical flair of its leaders and an expansion of evangelism due to a liberalization of doctrinal requirements for ministers and geographical expansion. These explanations are incorrect and recognize a lack of research and understanding, yet continue to be pervasive as popular understandings
of the period. Smith’s contentions from two centuries prior to Schlesinger are completely ignored, and an investigation of the institutions that gave rise to parties and increased religious consumption—the ability to create a national narrative through technological advancement—is not researched.

Chapter 1.6: Disestablishment and Congregational market share

The loss of market share for the Congregational Church was not primarily due to disestablishment and competition from alternative religious organizations--particularly the ‘fire and brimstone’ revivalists who characterize the Second Great Awakening in popular historical accounts of the early nineteenth century, represented in this essay by Schlesinger’s influential work on early American political development. Instead, the loss in market share is attributable transportation innovations that allowed secular institutions—specifically political parties—to create a national narrative and undermine traditional forums--the Sunday sermon and the physical church building--for communication and the dissemination of information to entire communities. The compliment of technological advances to disestablishment and the advent of new political institutions account for the increase in consumption of religious services and a rise in secular political organizations, rather than a religious ‘spirit’ or an exclusive market for religious services. I demonstrate what is characterized as ‘failure to innovate’ and compete in the religious market after disestablishment was
not in fact a failure by the Congregational Church, but a misinterpretation of the goals of church leaders. The Congregational Church utilized its resources to fend off efforts by its most similar theological opponent—the Unitarians—and the secular allies of the Unitarians, political parties and commercial interests of leading Unitarians. Whereas Schlesinger and popular historians characterize this Second Party System as an outgrowth of tensions and disagreements that shattered the ‘era of good feelings’, it was instead an attempt to gain political power through creating a national dialogue that for the first time allowed enterprising political actors to undermine traditional nodes of communication through the efficient distribution of partisan publications. Adam Smith recognized the desire of political actors to control their constituent’s political allegiances, and Van Buren’s alliance with the Unitarians in New England was meant to undermine the political influence of the Congregationalists. “But it is quite otherwise in countries where there is an established or governing religion. The sovereign can in this case never be secure unless he has the means of influencing in a considerable degree the greater part of the teachers of that religion.” (Smith V.1.205)

The aims of contemporary researchers in the history of religion and American political development rely on the wrong variable to measure the ‘success’ of denominations—and the threats to success that traditional religious denominations, particularly the Congregational Church--after religious disestablishment. Many authors—including Finke and Stark—
treat Congregationalists as, “Firms competing within an unregulated religious economy, [and] seek to understand why the upstart sects won.” [italics mine] (Finke and Stark 1989, p. 27)² Piu-Yan Lam finds that Protestant societies with a pluralistic and open religious marketplace produce greater levels of social action and political involvement by citizens than societies dominated by a single, state sponsored religious institution (Lam 2006), and Trejo demonstrates a strong, positive correlation between a vibrant market of religious services and efforts for social reform and protest organized by clergy on behalf of the underserved in Latin America. (Trejo 2009) While contemporary statistical analysis attempts in the scientific and economic study of religion disproves Schlesinger’s ignorance of the causes of the Second Great Awakening, most such researchers accept Schlesinger’s metric for success and failure of religious organizations—that is, a rise in membership and market share.

In order to analyze and differentiate winning and losing denominations, Starke and Finke, “in marketing terms, analyze 1) their organizational structure (denominational polity); 2) their sales representatives (clergy); 3) their product (religious message); and 4) their marketing (evangelical techniques).” Yet the notion that the goals of denominations may be distinct from the desire to increase membership is ignored from this analysis, and most contemporary investigations into early

American churches. If the product a denomination offered was in fact exclusivity—and association with only a select social, political, and economic class—then a denomination would artificially create a cap on the number of its flock. Further, if a denomination required achievement of academic standards for its clergy, the membership of the congregational would be limited by the number of ministers available. As proof of a ‘failure’ by the Congregational church, Finke and Stark state, “From 1776 to 1850, Congregationalist market share in New England dropped from 63% to 27%, while their total dropped from 20.4% to 4.0% nationwide during the same span. Yet, despite a five-fold decline in market share, total Congregational membership increased from 85,177 to 313,252 during the seventy-four year span.” (Starke Finke 1989 p 31) Yet the conclusion of some failure of effort does not follow from these statistics. Alternative definitions of success—particularly the ability of Congregational ministers to secure their social and political positions in a time of great religious and social upheaval—as well as the ability to increase overall membership despite a loss of market share—certainly do not indicate any failure by the church. Moreover, as Finke and Stark state, traditional Protestant denominations have, “dominated religious discourse through their control of the elite seminaries and their near monopoly on ‘respectful’ media coverage—and they have written nearly all the influential histories of American religion. Nevertheless, by early in the 19th century, these were bodies in decline. Ironically, their decline was
caused by their inability to cope with the consequences of religious freedom.” (Finke Stark 1989, p. 28) Thus, I examine the efforts of the Congregational ministry during both the so-called second great awakening and second party system, to determine their objectives and whether or not they achieved them. I conclude the greatest threats to the Congregational Church were the technological developments which gave rise to secular political parties that detracted from the social control afforded the Congregationalists even after disestablishment through their ability to serve as a hub of the flow of information in otherwise isolated communities.

The fundamental shift in communication that occurred during the first half of the nineteenth century was the ability of citizens to access information from an impersonal source. Whereas subsequent developments would increase the speed at which information was disseminated, the distribution of printed media to post offices that also served as salons for discussion of that news, allowed citizens without personal ties other geographic areas to both access information through newspapers and know their peers also had access to that information, allowing for discussion about current events.
Chapter 2: Communication infrastructure as the source of early American social and political institutional development

Control of the routes and content of communication determined social control in New England from the nation’s founding. The late 18th and early 19th century lacked a unified national dialogue due to the technological limitations of communication. The approach of religious denominations to new technology not only was determined by the theological, social, and economic aims of the organizations, but the engagement with the new technology that impacted the functioning of the denomination itself. Engaging and utilizing a new technology—and particularly in the case of the ability to create and distribute literature on a national scale—directly effected the actions and behaviors of denominations and their leaders. Determinations regarding the issues to address, the shifts in theology, the limits of dissent within the denomination, and the geographic diversity of the denomination, all were influenced by the engagement with and the ability to utilize a nation-wide communication infrastructure. Thomas Boomershine writes, “The primary task in the education of the Church’s primary leaders is the mastery of the most powerful medium of communication and of the
interpretative systems by which the Word of God can be made present in that medium.” (Boomershine 1989) Certainly control over the flow of information is strongly correlated to social, economic, and political control to this day, but at the turn of the 19th century, personal connections were necessary to access information outside of a citizen’s immediate geographic region.

Chapter 2.1: Mass communication theory

Mass communication theory offers an explanation of the power of control over the flow of information as not merely the commonly assumed ability to deliver a message to each individual efficiently, but rather the ability to determine what each individual knows each other individual knows. This is powerful as it determines the topics about which individuals may converse. While Thomas Jefferson only recognizes the popular assumption, contending individuals may judge arguments for themselves and their neighbor’s views do not influence his own, he fails to conceive of the power of mass communication in determining the bounds of topics for discourse.

“Thomas Jefferson, arguing for religious toleration, held that whether his neighbor believes in no god or in twenty gods, makes no difference to him: “It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.” This argument—that culture does not work because it makes no ‘real’ material difference—relies on the same cultural distinction as a child’s retort. How much can it be believed? Is W.H. Auden right that ‘poetry makes nothing happen?’” (Schudson 154) Even
granting Jefferson’s conclusion—that what a community believes does not influence what an individual believes—the beliefs of neighbors influences the knowledge and media they consume, thereby defining the boundaries of topics individuals may discuss. Yet Jefferson’s own actions indicate a belief in the power of the transmission of ideas and the importance of the control of the nodes of distribution. Under Thomas Jefferson, U.S. Postmaster General Granger, “declined to appoint Republican printers to postmasterships...instructed his deputies in 1804 to encourage subscribers to take ‘newspapers published in their own states and neighborhoods, rather than those which are published at a distance.’ Granger enumerated three advantages in promoting country papers. First, as a Jefferson appointee, his assumption that the rural press would be less partisan, or at least less Federalist, in its influence. Second, he noted, bookstores were usually allied with print shops and promoting the latter would increase the former, extending a ‘knowledge of letters’ in the young republic. Third, and most pragmatically, carrying papers from distant cities cost the post office considerably more than delivering country papers in their neighborhoods. The admonition to promote the country’s papers remained part of postal instructions at least until 1820.”1 (Kielbowicz 43)

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Chapter 2.2: Communication in rural New England

The individuals outside of urban areas most likely to have such a social network were clergy trained at either at Yale or Harvard and sent to minister in an outlying community. While slow to evolve and imprecise, relatively timely information could only be gathered by individuals living outside the immediate domain of an urban area through tapping personal connections, returning to the city, or interacting with others traveling through town. The only individuals in rural areas of New England at the turn of the 19th century and prior who would have such an extensive social network--largely based in an urban area,--who would have the means and time to travel regularly, and who would be guaranteed to meet any visitor to their rural area, would be the clergy. The ‘second great awakening’ is the result of new religious sects and untrained clergy being able to tap into a national dialogue, and provide their flock with a social experience that included the topics of the day through such an effort, by the technological innovations in printing and transportation that for the first time made an expansive personal social network not necessary to gain access to and participate in a national dialogue. For the first time the vast social networks established and entrenched by the clergies of Yale and Harvard could be usurped by common men to access news and communications.

One of the difficulties of mounting a successful, mass opposition to a monopolistic sociopolitical institution is the inability to know what others
know—due to the restrictions upon mass distribution of information—as well as the difficulty in establishing an effective ‘echo chamber’. A monopoly over this echo chamber existed for New England Congregationalists through a combination of state sponsorship and ministers serving as informational gatekeepers due to the technological inability to transport news efficiently (as well as physical forums for discussion of that news). When forums for discussion are absent—either due to the lack of a physical meeting place or coercive punishment for dissent—individuals can neither reinforce messages of dissent (the ‘echo chamber’ is lacking) and thereby cement opposition through repetition, nor create knowledge through discussion and dissent. The creation of a national dialogue through technological advancement, as well as the dismantling of state-sponsored religious institutions (which, although largely lacking coercive punishments for attendance of their particular denomination, did require attendance of some approved church thereby limiting alternative activities on the Sabbath) combined to create an American iteration of the echo chamber. Whereas salons, lyceums, universities, and institutions facilitating debate existed for millennia, the true populist innovation of America was constructing such institutions open to the masses.

The Congregational minister’s sermon effectively transmitted information and cultural values through monopolizing mass communication during religious establishment. “Where the public congregation and the
private readerships reinforced each other, they successful engendered a Protestant worldview.” (Marty p. 102) The echo chamber created by Congregational ministers combined public information with private consumption of religious texts, encouraging both attendance of sermons and individual study. Congregants found utility not only in the theological message and access to common knowledge, but also in the transmission of communal values. Transmission of such values was an individual good—that is, it did not necessarily need the echo chamber of communal discussion to be useful to individuals. Common knowledge, however, provided access to communal discussions, while theology fulfilled the most obvious role of the church.

“When a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker. If the speaker asks the audience to read a handout provided for them, as each reader enters into his or her own private reading world, the unity of the audience is shattered, to be reestablished only when oral speech begins again. Writing and print isolate. There is no collective noun or concept for readers corresponding to; audience...to think of readers as a unified group, we have to fall back on calling them an ‘audience’, as though they were in fact listeners...Still, a textually supported religious tradition can continue to authenticate the primacy of the oral in many ways. In Christianity, for example, the Bible is read aloud at liturgical services. For God is thought of always as ‘speaking to human beings, not as writing to them.” (Ong 1982)

Chapter 2.3: Liberalization of mass communication

Whereas previously only individuals wealthy or privileged enough to possess leisure time engaged in such activities (and coercively controlled the
state apparatus, thereby rendering only their decisions applicable to mass instilment through legislation) the democratic process allowing for mass participation greatly expanded the influence of individuals without such wealth or privilege and rendered their political involvement relevant. “A rhetorically effective object must be relevant to and resonant with the life of the audience...rulers cannot successfully impose culture on people unless the political symbolism they choose connects to underlying native traditions.” (Schudson “How Culture Works” 167) Each of these traditions developed in geographically dispersed communities, as information was not efficiently distributed to each community outpost in a timely manner.

“Information and symbols flowing from one place to another integrated a loosely knit society characterized by Robert Wiebe as a nation of ‘island communities.’ The mails brought the outside world to people in the guise of national political news, market data, reports of social activities, and even entertainment. Although the proximate, tangible institutions of local life probably did the most to directly shape people’s views, public information in the mail maintained linkages with other levels of the nation’s social organization.” (Kielbowicz 7)

Prior to the establishment of a national postal service, relatively infrequent travelers carried news and information and direct communication—which often took weeks or months--between men with social networks that traversed vast geographic territory. Early technology, such as stagecoaches--impossible in the south as roads could not handle the weight of the vehicles--began fledgling service in the northeast in 1785, but only traveled on the main post line to Newburyport, MA. (Kielbowicz 46) The relationship between technology and the flow of information was not linear; in fact,
numerous technological advances entrenched the power of urban centers in their access to news—which thereby increasing the importance and value of news as it became more timely and detailed while still limiting access to that information from individuals living anywhere outside of urban areas. Thus, citizens in rural areas (even townships located very close to urban centers) either had to move to the city or rely further upon the power of individuals within their town to access their professional and social networks to gain and distribute information. Newspapers were often the first discarded by stagecoach postmen when their coaches became immobile due to improperly kept roads. Damaged and undelivered newspapers prompted the United States Postmaster to rely largely upon ships to deliver mail, which only reinforced the advantage coastal towns and urban centers—regarding the supply of news and information—and those living even marginally outside of such areas reliance upon personal social networks to gain access to information largely based in urban areas. (Hecht 64)  

Even in 1806, Massachusetts Federalist Fisher Ames complained from Dedham—a town located close to Boston—as living in an, “area destitute of information. Here we sit in darkness and instead of having the light of the newspapers, the only light men can see to think by, we often have to wait, as they do in Greenland, for the weather and the northern lights.” (Ames 357) Politicians in both the north and south recognized the power of a national

communications system, and its implication for usurping traditional power structures through direct communication with constituents—and the ability to foment democratic action (and a focus upon political issues) in both urban areas and rural communities alike by allowing men to discuss issues in a setting other than church. “The mails thus partly satisfied the appetite for news among subscribers and nonsubscribers alike. Coffeehouses formalized the practice of newspaper sharing...News in the mail, however, was more than a partisan weapon; it played a part in sustaining the republic through a period of fragile national unity. John Calhoun’s vision of a postal system that would allow, ‘a citizen of the West to read the news of Boston still moist from the press’ was substantially realized.” (italics added)(Kielbowicz 49-50, Calhoun 401)

John Lambert, in his Travels Through Lower Canada and the United States, expresses the commotion caused by the arrival of news during the first years of the 19th century—a commotion that clearly irked local clergymen as they witnessed their authority and ability to control the attention of townspeople as the sole purveyor of outside information (as well as the only event in town on Sundays).

“It was entertaining to see the eagerness of the people on our arrival, to get a sight of the last newspaper from Boston. They flocked to the post office and the inn, and formed a variety of groups round those who were fortunate enough to possess themselves a paper. There is scarcely a poor owner of a miserable log hut, who lives on the border of the stage road, but has a newspaper left at his door...Without a knowledge of

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what is being passed in the world, man may be said to be an isolated being; but with a newspaper before him, he mixes with society, hears the opinions of others, and may communicate his sentiments upon men and things to all parts of the world.” (emphasis added) (Lambert, *Travels through Lower Canada and the United States*, 472. Also Kielbowicz 47)\(^4\)

Whereas, “the college suited the older tradition of Puritan rhetoric [and] Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians shared the Renaissance tradition of the learned ministers,” (Miller p, 179) the methods of founders of the party establishment are consistent with Marxist critiques of religion (and, more generally, of symbols and culture) as they criticized the existing religious establishment as elitist and attempted to bring instill populist principles into religious organizations (taking a cue from the evangelical revivals that marked the Second Great Awakening) to undermine existing sociopolitical institutions. Political parties were the vehicles by which they organized the masses and mobilized the electorate to gain political power; alternative social institutions that could be leveraged to aid in this endeavor certainly were co-opted, and those that stood in their way were criticized and attempted to be dismantled. In describing the Marxist critique of culture, Schudson states, “Ideas and symbols or propaganda successfully manipulate

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4 Lambert, John. *Travels Through Lower Canada and the United States*. Richard Phillips: London. (1810) Lambert is critical of the physical conditions in which rural Americans lived, but favorably compares their intellectual condition to men of similar status in Europe. “I am of the opinion that this general circulation of newspapers throughout America tends very much to the instruction of the country people, and divests them of that air of ignorance and rusticity which characterize the greater part of the peasantry in Europe. The knowledge acquired by newspapers may be superficial, but it gives men a general acquaintance with the world. It sets before them the actions of their countrymen, and the government under which they live; it renders them familiar with transactions of foreign nations; and though confined to a small spot themselves, yet at one view they become acquainted with every section of the globe.” (Lambert 472)
people. ‘Ideology’ (or the somewhat more slippery term ‘hegemony’) is viewed as a potent agent of powerful ruling groups, successfully molding the ideas and expectations and presuppositions of the general population and making people deferent and pliable…” (Schudson 155)

The Congregational church still would could have controlled social and political life in New England had its monopoly on the flow of information remained; while individuals could choose their own denomination, connections to society outside of a rural village would have still been largely controlled by the clergy. Thus, the technological revolution gave rise to timely and affordable information throughout New England that truly allowed citizens to no longer rely upon the Congregational church for a connection to social and political life. In fact, while new denominations and preachers attempted to recruit new members from the ranks of former Congregationalists, or parishioners of the Congregational church to whom membership was not extended but attendance was compulsory, a new entity—the political party—utilized the ability to create engage national discourse and the democratic political apparatus of the United States, along with the dismantling of social controls instituted by the Congregational church, to gain political power on a national scale and dissemble political allegiance based solely primarily geography and allegiances to individual political figures. Of course, factors too numerous to list—including immigration, the expansion of the franchise, the urbanization of America,

expanding economic opportunities and a fledgling American middle class—changed the electoral and political landscape of America during the early 19th century. Yet without the ability to transcend geographic communities through a unifying dialogue made possible by technological advances, only those with an expansive personal network would have continued to be able to control the flow of information--(and therefore the domains of social and political life--in America.

As the nodes of information distribution are increased in number and span greater geographic distance, allowing for instant feedback and communal discussion thereby consumers of information into producers, the tangible power of the clergy as a switchback of information distribution lessens and the mere attendance and adherence to religious principles becomes a way for individuals to self-identify and access the benefits of association with those symbols. In more contemporary lingo, the association with and consumption of religious services—as the tangible benefits decrease and association becomes increasingly voluntary, as well as the choice of which religious institution to attend expands, the benefits are encapsulated in association—rather than the tangible goods gained through participation. In contemporary parlance, the symbols created by institutions turn those institutions into brands. With greater choice the cost of creating an alternative institution diminished, and the value of establishing an institution with comparative value also increased.
Neither the disestablishment of religious institutions nor the expansion of the flow of information were sufficient to allow for alternative sociopolitical organizations to flourish, but both were necessary to marginalize religious institutions to control only moral life in New England, frame future political debates in theological terms (rather than claim authority over all social, political, and economic issues), and allow for political parties to rise and fill the power vacuum created after the disestablishment of religious institutions while those denominations fought amongst themselves for members and further relevance in a rapidly changing America.
Chapter 3: The goals and strategies of Congregational Church in New England communal life.

After the American Revolution, the First Amendment’s declaration of separation of church and state is commonly thought to have disestablished all state-sponsored religions in the United States. Yet most New England states maintained state support of the Congregational Church into the first half of the 19th century. Whereas the Anglican church lost state sponsorship in southern states immediately following American independence, the Congregationalists supported the American revolutionaries, whereas the Anglicans—later rebranded as the Episcopalian Church and dominant in the southern states—largely supported their the British and their theological brethren in the Church of England. Loyalists—politically marginalized and suspect in the south—clearly could not establish state sponsorship, whereas the state support for the Congregational church was not finally dismantled until 1833 (the final state to do so being Massachusetts.)

The Congregational Church’s drop in market share after its disestablishment was neither a failure to compete in the new religious market place nor primarily due to competing religious institutions.¹ Rather,

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¹ Religious ‘institutions’ are defined as denominations or sects that, for membership, mandate, “rules for individual expression, information transmittal, and social choice.” (Plott 1979) In the case of the
technological advances undermined the Congregational Church’s traditional power—a monopoly over the flow of information in communities—and allowed secular institutions to develop that competed directly with the Congregational Church for control over the distribution of information and discourse in New England. The shift in form and function of traditional religious institutions was not fueled by differentiations in doctrine but the technological advances that allowed for a cohesive national discourse, the power vacuum created by the dismantling of state-sponsored religions, who did not evangelize but rather relied upon an elite membership and required attendance in order to ‘moralize’ the masses, and commercial interests who bank-rolled movements in opposition of traditional denominations. I focus on Connecticut as it was the center of the training of Congregational clergy during the early nineteenth century. Connecticut not only was home to Yale, the primary training ground for Congregational ministers, but also disestablished the Congregational Church in 1818, during the height of what is popularly characterized as the second great awakening and the beginning

Congregational church, three levels of institutions exist. First, rules for leadership are mandated by attendance and graduation from a ‘designated’ university—the ‘designation’ of which is informally enforced by other members of the clergy and the community that hires a Congregational minister. During the time of religious establishment, Harvard and Yale served as the two primary training programs for Congregational ministers. Second, periodical Congregational conventions were organized on state and regional basis, for example annually in Massachusetts and less frequently in Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. These conventions were more frequent amongst the revivalist and evangelical congregations, but also more informal. Informal rules for communication will be explored in this essay, and the rules surrounding that dissemination of information defined the power of the Congregational church prior to mass media publication and efficient distribution. Finally, rules were defined by local sects and ministers and enforced both by the local minister and through social pressures by local congregants. As citizens had greater access to information without filtration by the local minister, and as congregants gained control of the financing of their local sect, power shifted in enforcement and establishment of rules from ministers to the collective congregation.
of the second party system. I argue these events are not unrelated but both came about through technological advances that allowed the distribution of information that created a national dialogue which facilitated foreign, untrained preachers and centrally organized political parties to relate and communicate over vast geographic distance.

Chapter 3.1: Congregational maintenance of sociopolitical control

Even though the Democratic Party was not competitive in Connecticut, the introduction of an influential national political scene, and, in the election of 1824 for the first time a competitive presidential election not featuring the nation’s founders, thereby generating new current news about a common topic throughout the nation, created an alternative narrative about which citizens could debate without accessing information through during their Sunday sermon. Therefore, the Congregational Church spent resources on political activities that differentiated it from the secular interests of the Unitarians and political parties—specifically, Sabbatarianism, a movement that also attempted to stunt the growth of a national narrative and disrupt the Congregational clergy’s monopoly over information distributed on Sunday.

The Congregational establishment ran state elections and was responsible for counting votes, and after disestablishment Congregational control of political positions in Connecticut was maintained.
Congregationalists did not—as commonly believed—lose control over the machinations of government, and even contemporarily, “in 1987 Congregationalists, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians accounted for the religious affiliation of 25% of US Senators and Representatives but could claim the loyalties of only 7% of the population. In contrast, Baptists account for more than 20% of American religious affiliation, but only 10% of those in Congress.” (Finke Stark 1989, p 28) While the communication advantages of state sponsorship established and maintained Congregational power in New England, more obvious and coercive methods also aided immediate control of the church over political and social affairs in the region. Their loss in power was certainly not due to a lack of control over the state’s political affairs, and the church did not expend great resources maintaining such positions. Rather, individual politicians—rather than the church—directly benefited from the lingering effects of establishment even after 1818, and while the church certainly benefitted from having its members in positions of power these advantages were not the primary concern of the Congregational church. In particular, the voting process in Connecticut benefited incumbents who were nearly universally Congregationalists. Rules such as listing candidates on ballots in order of seniority, public voting, lengthy delays in the announcement of results, and corruption regarding the counting of ballots—which was controlled by Congregationalists—excluded the ability of challengers to gain public office. “Proxies for the election were returned in
April, but the result was not announced until the legislature met in May, nor there was any supervision compelling an honest count. Thus it was easy to keep in office Federal candidates, and thus the Senate, or Council, came to reflect public opinion about twenty years behind the popular sentiment.” As individuals were able to cast as many as twelve ballots for the legislature, many men simply cast early ballots—which favored established candidates. By 1801 voting was completely public, and “required a man to stand when voting for the nomination of senators.” (Greene 408)

Chapter 3.2: Defining competition

Assuming the message across denominations is similar—or at least similar enough for individuals in significant numbers to comfortably traverse denominational boundaries—the competition is not between widely disparate faiths but instead is amongst notably similar congregations. The local Baptist church will face far more competition from a Baptist church moving in next door than an Islamic Mosque. Similarly, a church with a similar doctrine yet a more compelling medium would also pose competition for an established church. “In some ways the minister was the message. The Baptist and Methodist preachers looked like ordinary men because they were, and their sermons could convert and convince ordinary people because the message was direct and clear.” (Stark and Finke 1989 p. 38) Moreover, evangelical faiths--primarily referring to Methodist and Baptist
congregations—were able to constantly meet, and manufacture, demand. First, evangelical preachers did not require a degree or external qualification thus any number could set up shop in a given geographic area. If one failed, another could attempt to sell religious services in the same space, utilizing a different delivery or altered message. Moreover, the number of degrees granted limited the expansion of the Congregational Church—and, after a lengthy education, Congregational ministers fully expected to receive an assignment—whereas an enterprising man in a new outpost in any region of the country could establish a church at anytime. Although not having a particularly identifiable central agency, the Congregationalists’ requirement of education and desire to avoid direct competition, which was enforced through a limited number of trained clergy, limited the need for centralization, the primary function of which would have been to standardize doctrinal issues—checked by standardized educational curriculum—and regional assignment. “The Congregationalists were not nearly so ‘congregational’ as either of the upstart sects [Methodists and Baptists]...Congregationalists had opted for a highly educated clergy, which led to a chronic shortage of pastors and maximized the bargaining power of the clergy.” (Finke and Stark 1989, p. 33) Even the Methodists—now marked by a centralized professional clergy, at least compared to the American Baptists, did not have an established central agency. During the first half of the 19th century, “Methodists were about as democratic locally as were the
Baptists. A professional clergy had not yet centralized control of the Methodist organization...These Methodist amateurs did most of the preaching, baptizing, marrying, and burying.” (Finke and Stark, 1989 p. 33)

Despite the lack of a centralized institutional structure, the evangelicals did leverage communications advances to increase membership, whereas the Congregationalists utilized traditional networks of power, shifting the unique goods offered by the Congregational church to exclusive access to interpersonal networking from access to exclusive news or information from abroad.

Chapter 3.3: Unitarian and Congregational split at Harvard and Yale

Coercive control certainly benefitted the Congregational establishment, and the concern of the Congregational clergy clearly supports the argument that institutions of similar theological doctrine were of greater concern to the Congregationalists (and, more generally, any denomination or congregation) than the ‘fire and brimstone’ ministers whose message and medium was significantly different than the theology and forum offered by the Congregationalists. In particular, the Unitarian Church—whose influence emanated from Harvard while the Congregational hub centered on Yale—was a particular target of the Congregationalists in Connecticut.

“In 1805, in the first move to indicate the depth of the developing rift between the clergy of the two persuasions, conservatives led by Connecticut-born and Yale educated Jedidiah Morse, objected to the appointment of Henry Ware, a liberal, to the Hollis Professorship of Divinity at Harvard...A central figure in the split, Morse pulled together various conservative, Yale-educated clergy in the Boston area
into a network of opposition to liberal opinion Morse's allies by and large lived in outlying areas and had few connections to the Boston elite. Beginning with the Ware controversy, Morse was able to mobilize the conservatives into rejecting fellowship with liberals...Despite the fact that no formal denominational split had taken place among liberals and conservatives, it became increasingly clear that an alliance had been forged among liberal religionists, Harvard College, and the elite business and mercantile interests of Boston.” (Sellers 87)

This split began with the formation of Yale Divinity School, a conservative reaction to what church leaders viewed as the increasingly liberal Harvard College.

The conservatives were active proselytizers, supporting missionary societies Bible societies, young men’s associations, and a variety of other organizational efforts in order to convert others to their point of view. The liberals were not only not evangelical, they were for the most part anti-evangelical until well into the 1830s, preaching the right of people to believe as the light of reason informed them, as long as they remained within the general rubric of Christianity and guided in some general way by the wisdom of sacred scripture. The conservatives, in other words, were aggressively expansionist, the liberals more intent on maintaining strong institutional and civic leadership among groups with whom they were already entrenched. (Sellers 87)

Unitarians lambasted the Congregational Church as both elitist and undemocratic, yet largely only allowed elite, wealthy merchants to become members of their own denomination. Their complaints of elitism were based on the stringent moral and behavioral requirements of the Congregationalists. “Like upstart politicians intent on mobilizing a gullible citizenry, the Unitarian leadership believed that these evangelicals were

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developing ‘a kind of irregular government.’ Through their pressure tactics, their attempts to squelch dissent through moral suasion and through statute, and their appeals to the unchristian and intolerant sentiments of the multitudes, theirs were dangerous efforts to subvert the rights of conscience and establish a religious dictatorship.” (Story 32)

Competition increased as religious institutions of a similar orthodoxy within a given geographic region became more numerous, therefore posing a split within the Congregational Church as a greater threat than the introduction of new evangelical faiths of different ideological leanings and social and theological practices. “Competition from nearby congregations of the same denomination can create more pressure than competition from distant denominations. A Lutheran congregation sitting among 50 similar Lutheran congregations in Minneapolis might face far more competition for members than does a lone Lutheran congregation surrounded by Baptists in Alabama. When higher market shares are the result of multiple congregations of the same denomination, they can easily signal more rather than less competitive pressure.” (Brewer 391) This is due to the fact an investment in Congregational life would be more acutely squandered by switching to a church of a very different ideology and practice—a contemporary Methodist becoming a Presbyterian will be able to quickly

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participate in the church and its practices, whereas a man who converted to Christianity at a tent-revival who wishes to become a Congregationalist will find much more of their institutional and theological knowledge inapplicable to their new faith. Hostility toward the Unitarian Church was not limited to Congregationalists. Lyman Beecher, with Charles Finney one of the two leaders most commonly associated with the Second Great Awakening, despised the Unitarian Church as an organ of commercial and secular political interests. “Beecher himself saw Unitarians as men of ‘stratagem and duplicity’ who relied ‘upon wealth and the favor of the great’ to advance their cause.” (Pease 93)

“Men of affairs’ who participated most often in civic and benevolent societies were Unitarian. Jane and William Pease, in an extensive study of occupation and church affiliation, found that the single most important factor associated with Unitarian. Jane and William Pease, in an extensive study of occupation and church affiliation, found that the single most important factor associated with Unitarianism was wealth, the most frequently associated occupation that of merchant. Richard Eddy Sykes, in a study of liberal religionists in Massachusetts as a whole in 1800, found them associated with the people in the highest quartile of wealth, and disproportionately ‘engaged in trade, transport, and the professions,’ with Unitarian parishes through 1870 having, ’22 times the number of lawyers, 20 times the number of bankers, about twice as many merchants, and approximately 28 times the number of manufacturers which we could have expected if their membership had reflected the total working population.” (Pease 93)5

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Chapter 3.4: Church strictness as determinant of institutional strength

Unitarians appear to have been exclusive and insular in character despite their religious rhetoric of inclusiveness and toleration, limiting themselves to members of the appropriate social class. When the poor became a visible presence in Boston, the Unitarians built separate chapels for them, and instituted a paternalistic ‘ministry-to-the-poor.” (Pease 94) Early political leaders recognized the role government played in limiting collective goods, and the Congregationalists convincingly argued the communal benefits of an established church and religious participation—most notably the educational and uniquely moralizing effect religious attendance instilled in men and children (arguments later adopted by Horace Greeley and public education advocates) warranted governmental support. (Olson 1965; Ostrom 2003) “Congregationalists emphasized communities of believers whose beliefs and actions were informed by scriptural truth; Unitarians, on the other hand, emphasized getting along ethically with members of the community who might potentially hold differing beliefs.” (Johnson 88)6 The Unitarian Church fits the critique of collective action as its founders attempted to encourage participation in religious and social activities by the poor, huddled masses while avoiding the personal cost—in terms of the commitment of church attendance, Sabbath prohibitions, and adherence to

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the strict moral and social practices—mandated by the Congregationalists.

The weakness of the Unitarian church, as argued by the Congregationalists and, contemporarily recognized as a problem of shirking individual responsibility and participation--stems from its inability to enforce strict social and moral codes while claiming to achieve the same moralizing effects of stricter religious sects.

The challenge which faced both Unitarians and the evangelical orthodox, as the two religious groups that represented the interests and traditions of the propertied classes, was how to bring about the ‘principled consensus’ in the community that legitimized values and beliefs as appropriate bases for society. One did so in a way that embodied values of pluralism and toleration—easy values to espouse, so long as their wealth and position made them the hegemonic group. The other turned to the notion of sanctified communities of individuals who willed their own conversions and who could equally as well will the redemption of a corrupt secular order. The first group triumphed in the short run in Boston. The second articulated a view of social reality that, resonating with that of others in a variety of different geographic and social settings, led to an extraordinary wave of coalition building. It was finally they who came to set the terms of cultural and political debate in much of the Northeast right up until the civil war. 7(Wright 102)

As found by Finke and Stark, the liberalization of a denomination directly results in the erosion of that denomination’s ability to maintain membership and control of theological doctrine. Yet the Unitarians served as a political and social entity, rather than one concerned particularly with theology and religious participation. “Groups begin to those their market positions as soon as, and to the degree that, they become secularized. By ‘secularized’ we mean

to move from otherworldliness to worldliness, to present a more distant and indistinct conception of the supernatural, to relax the moral restrictions on members, and to surrender claims to an exclusive and superior truth. It follows from this definition that as groups secularize they will proselytize less vigorously. It is hard to witness for a faith with nothing special to offer in the religious message.” (Finke Stark 1989, p. 28) Unitarians were, 

Perfectly willing to give a wide berth to doctrinal interpretation so long as there was some agreement on the nature of morals and ethics—that is to say, on the rules governing exchange, power relationships, and society in general in this expanding commercial world—and so long as those rules were their own...The orthodox, in contrast, continued to see social interaction in terms of personal accountability and reliability that could only be guaranteed by a clear and common set of beliefs for which individuals had personal accountability. (Wright 101)

As the Congregational church’s members became increasing active in secular and political activities due to the ability to participate in a national conversation, government interference cemented rifts within the Congregational church, particularly in its control of a geographic region, and further shifted Harvard and Massachusetts toward Unitarianism while Connecticut maintained its Congregational affiliation. “A legal ruling in 1820 known as the Dedham decision recognized the right of the majority in the parish (not just the church members) to church property, thus effectively disenfranchising conservatives in the Boston area, who were usually in the

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8 Wright, Conrad. *Ministers, Churches, and Boston Elites*
minority.” (Ellis 88) The Connecticut establishment made, “Unitarianism a crime according to the Connecticut statutes...The crimes against religion punishable by law were Blasphemy (by whipping, fine, or imprisonment); Atheism, Polytheism, Unitarianism, [and] Apostasy.” (Greene 420) A charge of Unitarianism was regularly leveled by Federalists against their Republican opponents, particularly as Republican strength grew in Connecticut—as the share of Methodists and Baptists grew—largely out of a suspicion of a Presbyterian-Congregational alliance, Jefferson’s support of disestablishment in Virginia, and the use of state funds for Congregational religious causes—particularly at Yale.

Yet the notion that such coercive methods benefitted the Congregational Church’s membership numbers is misguided. The church itself limited membership, through three unique methods. First, Congregational ministers were required to achieve a degree in divinity—originally the only institutions offering such degrees were Harvard, and later Yale. Second, the centralization of the Congregational church and the interest of its ministers dictated their congregations would not geographically compete. Third, even the physical Congregational churches limited members; whereas ministers often thought of as the ‘fire and brimstone’ preachers of the Second Great Awakening could hold their sermons in tents that allowed for massive crowds, Congregational churches—often built during the early

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9 Ellis, George. *Half Century of the Unitarian Controversy*. (1857)

eighteenth century and over a century old by the 1820s—limited the number of parishioners simply by their size.

Chapter 3.5: Training methodology of non-established church leaders

In contrast, Methodist and Baptist ministers were trained by apprenticeship, rather than at centralized universities, and their success was determined by the number of individuals they converted—rather than through mastery of theology and fulfillment of educational requirements. The circuit and apprentice system limited a young minister’s contact with other ministers and undermining coordination efforts both through the nomadic nature of evangelical ‘circuit riders’ and the inability to establish lasting networks through common doctrinal training and years of close contact. “Methodist circuit riders in the early national period got their education in what they liked to call ‘Bush College,’ a seminary as large as the great outdoors with a curriculum as broad as the range of the human character they encountered in their travels. Bush College was an apprenticeship system in which older itinerants recruited and trained younger men into the ministry as they went about their regular tasks on the circuit. It was a face-to-face, word of mouth training where the basic criterion of success was getting people converted.” (Schneider p.141, emphasis added)
Chapter 3.6: Evidence addressing the lack of Congregational recruitment

The Congregationalists did not increase the output of graduates from the Yale Theology School despite a sharp rise in population, suggesting a desire to increase membership was not a particularly serious concern. Despite the fact Connecticut’s state population rose 25 percent from 1830 to 1850 and Yale’s enrollment increased nearly 10 percent during the same span (UVA 1997), the Yale Divinity School’s enrollment fell 24 percent. (Yale University 1964)

11 University of Virginia. “Historical Census Browser”. http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/


13 Of course, myriad reasons could explain the decrease in enrollment of the Divinity School, yet the purpose of the graph is to demonstrate that while greater resources were invested by the college in the education of undergraduates—and attempts were made to increase enrollment of the undergraduate
Congregationalist ministers were concerned with their own financial stability, which trumped the desire to expand their flock.

This shift in the distribution of social power was the result, at least in part, of economic factors. The ministry had remained an office-holding profession offering security of tenure rather than great financial rewards, while law and medicine had gradually emerged during the eighteenth century as fee-for-service occupations which were much more lucrative. By 1800 the tenuous financial position of the clergy was being eroded still further by changes in population distribution and in societal values...For most ministers the single, life-long pastorate of the past had now given way to a three-staged career which began and ended in a financially weak church; only during the prime of his ministry would a clergyman serve in a wealthy city-based congregation.\(^\text{14}\) (Cooper 210)

Further, competition from both new regional sects and national-level denominations confronted established religious organizations—in New England, these were the Congregationalists. These national denominations and secular institutions, to which the Congregationalists were losing market share, resulted in the Congregationalists having competition both from secular institutions—particularly political parties—aimed at diminishing the time and energy citizens contributed to engaging in religious activities, but also alternative religious options. The Congregational response—refusing to dilute the social benefits of membership and keeping membership exclusive,

entry costs high, and membership responsibilities significant—insulated
them from alternative religious options as the return on investment by the
parishioner was kept significant and the loss of investment by leaving the
church outweighed flight to alternative denominations. Conversely,
alternative denominations faced high rates of fluctuation as their strength
was either focused in the charisma of the individual pastor, or the ability by a
central authority to control competition from competing churches of the same
denomination (or particularly similar denominations with low entry costs)
was limited. Therefore, even those denominations with notably high
membership had difficulty leveraging their large number of parishioners into
political clout as the cost of entry for a new church or pastor was not
controlled. The real competitors for the Congregationalists were
organizations with strong centralization, coordination, and resources to
launch national campaign. Specifically, industrialists and politicians opposed
to the attempts of Congregationalists to control the issues on the national
agenda through limiting constant communications and instituting policies
backed by theological authority that were in competition with the aims of
capitalists and politicians--and, in the extreme, the politicians funded by
capitalists.

The evangelical movement seized upon the communications revolution,
exploited it, and even fostered it. Religious publishers took advantage
of advances in the technology of printing to turn out Bibles and tracts
by countless thousands, many of which they distributed free of charge.
The churches also contributed heavily to a new genre of printed
matter, the magazine. Magazines, even more than newspapers, tended
to be published for specialized audiences with similar interests and opinions...Most of the periodicals with national circulations and successful publishing histories before 1840 were religious. (Howe 2009, p. 230)

While the Congregationalists certainly lobbied for continued state sponsorship, the lack of interest in expanding membership and the ability to maintain members of social and political prominence--despite the commercial interests defecting to the Unitarian Church--the Congregationalists in fact benefitted from a tight-knit denominational structure and the uniqueness of the goods they offered—an elite social network, an educated clergy, and higher rates of giving that resulted from more direct responsiveness from a clergy not overwhelmed by members. “Later studies by Zeleski and Zech (1995) and Perl and Olson (2000) find that small market shares are correlated with higher rates of giving. Both cite competitive forces as a cause Zaleski and Zech conclude that ‘churches are responding to the competition by making a greater effort to satisfy the needs of their members. Church members reveal this satisfaction and religiosity by voluntarily donating larger contributions to their church. Perl and Olson suggest that their results support the argument that, ‘as the competition faced by the group increases, so does the religious commitment of its members.”(Brewer 390)

As Chaves and Gorski find, “There is evidence that religious groups evoke more commitment from their people when they are a smaller
proportion of the population.” (Chaves and Gorski 263) Congregational strength actually increased as market share decreased, particularly without closely competing alternatives. Congregationalists possessed two exclusive commodities—access to social capital developed over a century—and therefore individuals who would be less likely to leave the denomination or congregation due to pre-existing investments of time, money, and energy that would be lost if they switched—and trained clergy from Harvard and Yale. Disdain for the commercialism and liberal nature of the Unitarians drew ire from many religious denominations, but their threat proved minimal even after disestablishment. Further, disestablishment allowed the Congregationalists to be critical of the emerging secular political institutions, fitting Adam Smith’s argument that religious institutions not dependent upon the ruling political elite will fervently oppose any attempts by those politicians to encroach upon the theological and social functions of their denomination. The alliance of Van Buren and the Democrat party with Unitarians, a blatant attempt to undermine Congregational power, only exacerbated involvement of Congregationalists in politics.

Should the sovereign have the imprudence to appear either to deride or doubt himself of the most trifling part of their doctrine, or from humanity attempt to protect those who did either the one or the other, the punctilious honour of a clergy who have no sort of dependency upon him is immediately provoked to proscribe him as a profane person, and to employ all the terrors of religion in order to oblige the people to transfer their allegiance to some more orthodox and obedient prince. (Smith V.1.206)

The secular allies of the Unitarians—national political actors—proved far more adept at leveraging advances in transportation infrastructure and media distribution to recruit and engage members who in earlier times would have relied upon religious authorities for information. As early as 1794 intrastate communication existed in Connecticut’s largest cities, with the Hartford Gazette publishing, “verbatim,” the debate in Connecticut’s state legislature regarding sale of the western portion of the state in order to distribute money to citizens who suffered property damage as a result of British troops. (Greene 385) Yet prior to the sale the state granted $40,000 given to Yale College that originally, “had been collected to meet the expenses of the Revolutionary war.” (Greene 379) The source of much contention was the state’s favoritism of Yale, the primary purpose of which was to train clergy of the Congregational Church. The debate published throughout the state largely addressed a concern by the opposition that the funds would further benefit the Congregationalists.

The ability to transport news was the single most important factor in changing the behavior of the Congregational establishment, forcing engagement as a political action committee rather than a hub with a monopoly on the distribution of information. The ability to create a discourse through directly informing each individual citizen was the revolutionary change technology allowed for; whereas the only way for individuals to know what all others in their community knew, and therefore decide upon topics...
with others, was through attending common public events. These events in early American history were nearly exclusively Sunday sermons, and the minister accessed information from disparate geographic locales through a personal social network unavailable to other citizens. Thus, the revolutionary aspect in information transportation was the ability to inform a mass public through informing each citizen individually and directly.
Chapter 4: Transportation revolution as disruptive sociopolitical force

From the time of the nation’s founding until the technological advances in transportation and publishing that facilitated the access of individual citizens to information beyond their immediate geographic and personal network, communities outside of the boundaries of an urban settlement largely remained stagnant in terms of social, political, and economic conditions. As late as 1820 little significant urbanization occurred, and the primary catalyst for religious liberty was pressure from the British. The population of New England living in urban areas (towns with a population exceeding 2,500 residents) raised marginally from 1810 to 1820 (10.1% to 10.5%), (Henretta 193) yet during the first decade of the nineteenth century, a shift in consciousness regarding current topics and a desire by citizens to engage in a discussion regarding national issues expanded.

By 1815 the scale of life had shifted, grown larger and more complex. The centrifugal forces of trade and war, of geographic migration and political participation had shattered the tiny self-contained cosmos of the agricultural village. Here, and especially in the more urbanized areas, men and women had gradually become more conscious of the larger social world in which they lived. …The appearance of yearly county fairs in Massachusetts by 1810 permitted the entire community

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Technology dramatically increased efficiency and decrease cost in terms of publication. “As early as 1836, the intensification of labor under industrial capitalism and its consequent specializations met with the enormous productive potential of steam power.” (Zboray 1993 p. 196) By the mid-nineteenth century New York, Philadelphia, and Boston existed as the only major centers of literary publication, a centralization that began in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Thus, economies of scale aided the development of a national dialogue by providing economic incentives for newspapers to increase their distribution area, and therefore find stories that appealed to a wider geographic audience. Often, “publishers faced a more daunting problem in finding copy for mass printing. They did this sometimes by outright plagiarism of other newspaper,” thus, along with the party presses, incentives for standardization of news stories were also instituted. (Zboray 1993 p 196)

Chapter 4.1: Transportation’s role in creating a national narrative

Technological advances in transportation and media allowed for a national dialogue to evolve. In 1825 John Stevens completed America’s first steam engine, and the Erie Canal (which gave rise to cities including Buffalo, Akron, and Toledo, and cemented New York City’s status as the preeminent
American city) opened. While railroads would allow for a truly national discourse (though by 1839 an over 2,000 mile trip from Pittsburgh to New Orleans was affordable by steamboat) the Erie Canal allowed for transportation and communication throughout the American northeast. While the first signs of the reliability, speed, and comparative affordability of the railroad began in the 1860s, for personal transportation, its use to distribute news between urban areas (and the growth in infrastructure to then disseminate information to rural communities began far earlier. Moreover, the canal system expanded the growth of new cities and the flow of information to those cities. “By 1840, only four states—Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, and Vermont—had no railways running within their borders; of the total of almost 3,000 miles of railroad lines in place, Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts accounted for about half.”2 (Veenendaal 4) Whereas total sociopolitical power rested with the Congregationalists in New England through state sponsorship and control over the flow of information throughout the region prior to 1818, the disestablishment of religion left a power vacuum; where the Congregational church previously provided social services, control over the issues addressed and the moral life of the local citizenry, disestablishment allowed all men to become religious ‘free agents’, choosing a denomination and sect without coercive penalty from the state.

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Politicians with federal ambitions quickly realized the political advantage a national infrastructure offered. John Cahoun encouraged a national transportation system to, “bind the Republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals...The mail and the press...are the nerves of the body politic. By them, the slightest impression made on the most remote parts, is communicated to the whole system.”³ (Calhoun 401) Such a transportation infrastructure was not for individual travel, but to create a bound nation through timely and efficient communication. “The U.S. government soon realized the potential for railroads to carry the mail. The first mail carry of record was in 1834. Four years later, in 1838, Congress declared all railroads ‘postal routes’”⁴ (Daniels 18) While notable urbanization did not occur until the 1820s, with the percentage of New England citizens living in urban areas from 1820-1830 and 1830-1840 growing to 14.0% and 19.4%, respectively, Calhoun and Jefferson’s goal of creating a national transportation infrastructure was the primary way to create a national dialogue, and federal politicians to communicate with the majority of Americans. (Henretta 193)⁵

A network of turnpikes and railroads meant that even those places in New England that were once remote were becoming intimately linked with the market economy of the burgeoning urban centers and the


sources of information that issued from it. An explosion of the newspapers and periodicals occurred, bringing with it yet another network with Boston as its nexus. Boston’s commercial economy grew in scope and complexity. Even work rhythms and patterns changed, as employees began to lose the intimate (though not always pleasant) interpersonal relationships with employers, and as apprentices and journeymen became instead the workers of a new order—waged or salaried employees with fixed responsibilities. (Channing 92)⁶

While “[John Quincy] Adams, [Henry] Clay, and [John C.] Calhoun all supported federal money on transportation,” not all federal politicians rubber stamped internal improvement bills. (Howe 2009 p.211) Both James Madison and James Monroe vetoed numerous Congressional bills providing federal funding for interstate transportation, usually only allowing passage of internal improvement bills when they could justify them as necessary for national security in the wake of the War of 1812. Turnpikes provided unreliable transportation, with stage coaches traveling at a maximum of eight miles per hour on most roads, and even the most advanced turnpike from New York to Philadelphia ensuring transportation at only eleven miles per hour. Towns located on canals—and later rivers that could accommodate steam boats—had a significant advantage over those only served by turnpikes.

With the encouragement of a national transportation infrastructure, lobbied both by national politicians and merchants, came an increase in the flow of information both in the form of formal newspapers and literature as well as more obviously the ability of individuals to communicate with traders

from foreign locales. The mere ability for citizens of a rural town to form social and business relations with those outside of their immediate geographic area placed businessmen on par with ministers, whose social network formed during their theological training heretofore provided a significant informational advantage that could be leveraged into an elite social and political position. Politicians and residents of rural areas viewed political support for internal improvements a necessity, in contrast to the British model which relied upon private corporations to finance transportation development, because of the dispersed nature of the United States’ population, rapid westward expansion, and the need for fast and reliable transportation between urban city centers in New England and outlying agricultural and rural villages.

Unlike in Britain, where trade routes were long established and both canals and railways would see an immediate return on investment as tolls could be collected by creating a route through existing settlements, government funding and assurances by the government of the profitability of private investment—as well as encouragement of citizens purchasing stock in private corporations as a patriotic act akin to purchasing war bonds—was necessary. (Goodrich 1960)

The shift from a ‘communal spirit’ to a focus upon individual interest was brought about by the possibility of individual development beyond the local township—no longer did citizens have to abandon ties to family, friends,
and occupation to live in urban areas, but could instead travel and communicate with respectable speed to their original communities. “As Bruce Daniels argues, economic growth and increasing diversity served as important factors in ‘replacing a spirit of community with one of individual aspirations.”’ (Cooper 281)

Chapter 4.2: Employment specialization

Professionalization and specialization also eroded the power of all religious denominations—both previous established churches and new fire and brimstone evangelical revivalists. “Lawyers, physicians, professors, and merchants were all classes, and acted not as individuals but as though they were clergymen and each profession was a church.” (italics added) (Henretta, 193) Professional associations duplicated the social networking functions of a local church, and these associations were aided by being able to tap into a network of professionals across large geographic areas. Infrastructure advances that allowed for conferences and gatherings of professionals created new forums for the distribution of information—entirely new ‘echo chambers’ in which citizens could discuss topics gleaned from national publications. Traditional institutions simply could not compete with voluntary associations that allowed individuals to pursue professional interests. “Attempts to overcome the effects of economic development and of unconscious social drift

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through the creation of new ‘horizontal associations’ reflected the fact that
the traditional ‘vertical institutions’ of the family, the church, and the
community were unable to comprehend the new complexity of social life and
individual experience...” (Cooper 220)

Chapter 4.3: Religious revivals and secular competition

Religious revivals—made possible by disestablishment, communications advances, and a transportation infrastructure that facilitated circuit riders to efficiently move between locales--only increased the speed and efficiency of the transfer of information in New England. Revivals brought strangers together for a common purpose, diminishing the wariness of outsiders previously sprouted to benefit insular communities. “This loss of a corporate impulse was reflected in a number of novel practices and attitudes shared by Separates and other New Lights. For example, many churchgoers were now willing to cross-town lines and identify with speakers from outside the local community. Translocal revivals inevitably brought strangers together, and the basis for religious experience was necessarily more subjective and individualistic than it had been in the seventeenth century, when members of the same community shared carefully structured forms of worship and church discipline. As a consequence of the Great Awakening, churchgoers were also less inclined to regard theology as the exclusive province of the ministry. (Cooper 281)
Traditional denominational authorities—who previously dominated all aspects of New England life—initially worked to replace the European sociopolitical tradition and establish a political and civic culture that checked federal power. (French 1968) In response to the growing power of government in the United States, churches and clergymen acted to protect their own social role and promoted democratic and civil participation as a check against unbridled governmental power. “In the American context, the alliance of civic humanism and evangelicalism articulated a political theology based upon the language of citizenship, participation in the political community and, perhaps most important, justified a tradition of public opposition based upon the ideal values of the community.” (Gauvreau 1994, 222) The dismantling of this infrastructure originally caused distress even amongst ministers of denominations other than the Congregationalists. The prevailing notion—that mandatory church attendance or participation served as a moralizing influence, even participation in competing denominational services—soon gave way to a realization by evangelical clergymen that competition could spur not only innovation but increased consumption of religious services by laymen. Concerning disestablishment, Lyman Beecher stated, “It was as dark a day as ever I saw. The injury done to the cause of Christ, as we then supposed, was irreparable. For several days I suffered what no tongue can tell for the best thing that ever happened to the State of

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Connecticut. It cut the churches loose from dependence on state support. It threw them wholly on their own resources and on God”\(^9\) (Beecher 252, in Howe p. 164.)\(^10\)

Church leaders were only able to achieve political success when they abandoned efforts to control the distribution of information in their communities—standing in the way of the progress of technology and the flow of communication—and both adopt the techniques of 19\(^{th}\) century mass political parties who distributed moral capital and responded strategically to the policy concerns, rather than attempting to hold onto their function as autonomous agencies which ran every aspect of life in 18\(^{th}\) century New England communities. Unlike Beecher, who attempted to organize evangelicals under a central organization, Charles Granderson Finney’s contribution to the evangelical cause centered upon innovative marketing methods still used by independent preachers and which posed a direct threat to established, local congregations.

“Upon arriving in town, [Finney] would hold prolonged revival meetings and continue them for several days. Sometimes he singled out individuals, praying for them by name to encourage their conversion. Persons who seemed promising candidates might be seated in front of the church on what was called, “the anxious bench,”\(^11\) especially if they were prominent citizens whose conversion would encourage others…He always preached extemporaneously, never from


\(^11\) In my own travels to particularly successful contemporary, “mega-churches” during the July of 2006 the ‘anxious bench’ was customary, with ushers charged with identifying new congregants and seating them in a ‘reserved’ section directly behind the organization’s minister and prominent congregational attendees.
a prepared script...America enjoyed a free marketplace in religion, and through is Lectures on Revivals of Religion (published in 1835) Finney instructed preachers on how to market their message. In years to come, both political and commercial applications would be found for his principles.” (Howe 2007, p.172)

Disestablishment forced all denominations to be more responsive to parishioner preferences. A market for religious services did not necessarily increase the flight of Congregational parishioners, as they would lose the social capital accumulated from their financial and resource investment in the denomination, but did force ministers to create new avenues for acquiring funds and relying solely upon parishioner donations. “The nature of religious services was changed by making preachers dependent financially on church participation. This motivated the preacher to target his services to those active or potentially active in the church.” (Olds 281)

Congregational clergymen did not expand membership as such a move would ‘water down’ the goods offered by membership—including a tight-knit community of influential parishioners, a lowering of theological knowledge to increase membership, and a less personal relationship with the minister for individual members. Yet amongst those who merely attended services through community pressure due to the church’s moralizing mission, participation in alternative evangelical faiths was in fact aided by previous efforts of the Congregational church. By successfully instilling the notion that religious participation served as a moralizing influence, yet not expanding their recruitment efforts, traditional religious denominations
served to only fuel the growth of new congregations, both by independent, fire and brimstone preachers, and by evangelizing denominations—most specifically the Methodists and Baptists.

The secular institutions posing the greatest threat to the established Congregational Church were political parties, in the particular form of the permanent institution able of leveraging its resources to distribute partisan information and efficiently organize citizens through association with secular narratives and partisan issues rather than under a theological framework. The constitutional structure of the American political system proved conducive to permanent political parties, and these institutions needed to undermine the existing sociopolitical infrastructure, dominated by established churches.
Chapter 5: The development of political parties as alternative organizers of social action

The concurrence of the so-called ‘second great awakening’ and ‘second party system’ is not coincidental. Combined with the power vacuum left by the disestablishment of state-sponsored religion in many states, the rise of political parties—and marginalization of religious denominations concerning matters of state—can be attributed to the specific democratic institutions inherent to the American electoral system. The American political structure encouraged the development of a two-party system once a national dialogue could be established, and therefore undermine mere regional alliances, despite the founder’s disdain for such institutions.

“Parties had appeared not because men wanted them—indeed, the Founding Fathers were almost unanimous in condemning their presence—but because there was no other way in which the people at large could be mobilized for effective political action...The traditional cultural brokers—ministers, lawyers, merchants, planters, farmers of wealth and education—who had served as connecting links between the separate communities had now been joined by politicians, men whose specific function it was to mediate disputes through the mechanism of the political process. (Henretta 221)

Aldrich’s contention that unstable majorities gave rise to political parties fits with the fact that institutions that previously dominated social and political
life in New England—established churches—gave way to a plethora of religious organizations that competed to attract members and meet the needs of those members, creating a vacuum for social and political stability that was filled by political parties. The creation a national party decreased the costs of each community relying upon competition amongst religious sects to control the social and political functions of the region’s citizens. A liberalization of suffrage increased the percentage of Americans who voted in elections by 1828, but this increase was also due to a greater delineation of the differences between candidates through the creation of parties and brands by which the candidates could be identified.1 “Turnout among adult white males jumped from 26.5 percent in the presidential elections of 1825 to 56.3 percent in those of 1828.”2 Schlesinger continues his logic that a ‘democratic spirit’, described as a, “mighty democratic uprising”3 (Schlesinger 1947, p.36) More rigorous traditional explanations for an increase in voter turnout argue such was due to, “heightened interest in presidential politics, greater competitiveness of the two parties in many states, and increased structuring of the parties in this period.” (Aldrich 1995) The cause, however, of each of these explanations is due to the ability to transfer information

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1 Probability of Voting \( \hat{P} \) is due to the probability the vote is effective times the differentiation between the candidates, plus the difference between the candidates plus the intensity of the voter’s preference for a given candidate minus the cost of voting \( R = PB + B + D - C \) Thus, a greater perceived differentiation between candidates—rather than the expansion of the opportunity to vote is a logical justification for increased percentage of voters. (Aldrich 1995, p.102) McCormick and Aldrich argue an increase in presidential suffrage—rather than general suffrage—increased from 1824 to 1828, as individuals voted to select electors in all but two states in 1828 as compared to 25% of states (6 of 24) in 1824.


efficiently through technological advances and the usurping of the previous monopoly held over communication and the dispersal of media by the established, state sponsored denominations. Further, greater political action by religious groups—an outgrowth of their need to serve as political action committees to contend with secular political institutions—increased political action and expanded the echo chamber of secular issues even into religious communities.

**Chapter 5.1: Political parties leverage culture**

Other interpretations of culture—most notably the ‘tool kit’ model—would intimate that cultural symbols and institutions would allow individuals to align themselves with symbols that are rich in meaning—or brands—and that align with pre-existing beliefs. In the case of political parties, both of these views are possible. Van Buren, Tammany, and early political parties pitted the evangelical, second great awakening churches against older religious institutions that controlled social, political, and economic functions, echoing and reinforcing the latent criticism of the emerging lower and middle class that such ancient institutions were elitist.

Martin Van Buren, the founder of the Democratic Party and the organizer of the New York-Virginia alliance that particularly benefitted Andrew Jackson—and subsequently his own Presidential aspirations—linked the elitism of

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4 “In short, Van Buren combined an appeal to win the 1828 election with a commitment to forging a truly national political party, reviving Jeffersonian Republicanism by linking, ‘planters in the South with plan Republicans in the North’ (Remini 1963, p.6)” (Aldrich 1995 p. 108)
traditional religious institutions to his critique of the European monarchs against which Americans revolted. “That Revolution, which shattered, “past all surgery,” the blasphemous and absurd dogma of the divine right of kings; which replaced the slavish doctrine of passive obedience and non-resistance...The great principle first formally avowed by Rousseau, ‘that the right to exercise sovereignty belongs inalienably to the people.” 5(Van Buren 13)

Political parties, Van Buren argues, are a check upon monarchical institutions in the United States—a response to a single national ‘unity’ that results in centralized, federal power superseding the power of each individual state.”

Parties—and Van Buren and his Tammany gang6—worked to dismantle the control of older denominations by leveraging the rhetoric of new churches, as well as mirroring the recruitment tactics of the fire-and-

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5 In one example, Martin Van Buren reads the history of caucus nominations—private matters reserved for elites rather than by popular support of the party’s members—as the reason for the downfall of William Crawford, the predicted victor in the election of 1824—not Van Buren’s own collusion with Jackson or Adams’ bargain with Calhoun.

“Mr. Crawford was the only candidate who, it was believed, could be benefited by adhering to [the caucus system] and the friends of all the others sustained the policy of the administration. Those of Jackson, Adams, Clay, and Calhoun, united in an address to the people condemning the practice of caucus nominations, and announcing their determination to disregard them. Already weakened through the adverse influence of the administration, the agency which had so long preserved the unity of the Republican party did not retain sufficient strength to resist the combined assault that was made upon it, and was overthrown. Mr. Crawford and his friends adhered to it to the last, and fell with it.” (Van Buren 5)

6 In his autobiography, Van Buren discusses his honorable friends at Tammany and their alliance with Chief Justice Taney, demonstrating the extent of the political influence of the New York political gang. “Having been a second time invited by my old political friends of Tammany Hall, before the Presidential election of 1856, to submit my views upon the then state of the question, I gave them in a letter which presented the whole subject in a form and was written in a spirit which many thought well calculated to make favorable impressions on well-intentioned and sober-minded men. The able, judgelike, and I may add, statesmanlike, views taken by Chief Justice Taney and by Justice Daniel, of that branch of the subject, have satisfied me that the [Dred Scott] judgment of the court upon it was right.” (Van Buren 356)
brimstone preachers of the second great awakening. Van Buren recognized the organizational and social control mechanisms inherent to religious groups, and couched numerous arguments in theological terms--most notably for the purposes of this paper, anti-Sabbatarianism. Indeed, religious elites demonstrated little ability to counter the effectiveness of political parties, and instead focused their efforts on influencing issues on the public agenda rather than either forming their own political parties--as the Christian Democrats of Europe would soon do⁷--or effectively supporting a particular candidate over another. Even in Connecticut, a state commonly thought to be sympathetic to John Adams and later the Whig Party, supported effective political parties and whose election results quickly mirrored the national returns after Jackson failed to even register in the state in the election of 1824.

⁷ The rise of the Christian Democrats in Europe resulted from conflict between Catholic elites and liberal elites. (Trejo; Kalyvas 1996) Christian Democrat parties were successful in Europe because the electoral system rewarded minority parties, with parliamentary systems allowing minority parties to protect their interests and effectively function as political interest committees through bargaining their seats away for political prizes. After the firm entrenchment of two dominant political parties in the United States, a political party based solely upon religious identity would have failed unless it could properly threaten an existing party by drawing enough votes to swing an election. Moreover, any religious group would have to deliver over fifty percent of any individual state in which it was dominant to a particular federal candidate to entice that candidate to change their platform in exchange for the electoral votes of the state the religious party dominates.
While politicians could attempt to use religious denominations to their advantage, the threat posed by any alternative, large-scale institution was still too significant to support the Marxist notion of true social control by political parties and a socioeconomic elite over the masses through religious organization. Indeed, Van Buren’s New York-Virginia alliance which formed the backbone of the original Democratic Party would fall susceptible to the abolitionists forty years after the election of Jackson.

The First Amendment ensured a rise of local competition for religious groups, each of which took a different approach in their attempts to remain in

--- Jackson/Van Buren Connecticut

--- Jackson/Van Buren National

existence in the face of a rapidly expanding and changing theological and political landscape.

“Primarily, institutional not personal rivalry was the cause of clerical resentment of politics. Political organizations were competing with the churches for a national constituency. To the distress of the clergy, the politicians were winning. William Cooper Howells recalled that before Jackson poisoned ‘the practical politics of the country,” people talked much more about ‘freedom of the will’ and ‘predestination’ than the latest news from Washington. The encroachment of political excitement was felt even within the affairs of religion itself. Elias Cornelius, a benevolent society functionary, complained, ‘Political jealousy kindles up a thousand bad passions in different parts of the United States, and these transfer themselves to the religious movements of the church,” leading to heresies and schisms.’ (Wyatt-Brown 322)

Chapter 5.2: Technology as centralizing force

Rather than decentralizing information, that is, allowing a greater amount of input from a larger range of sources and therefore opening debate and discourse to a wider variety of sources, technological innovations centralize debate by increasing the ability of a national narrative. Individuals, rather than liberalizing discourse through an increased ability to comment upon and proliferate their own opinions, cluster around topics they know others are informed about and which others may comment upon. Whereas future technological advances lowered the cost of entry for publishers, the railroad allowed a limited number of powerful individuals and entities create a unified national dialogue around a select number of topics. While these publications were primarily extensions of partisan entities--political parties, corporations, and religious denominations--their result was
twofold. First, because of their partisan nature, party papers largely attacked competing publications and factions. In order to have a debate, certain standards must be implicitly or explicitly agreed upon; while the engaging parties certainly did not abide by conventions of civility, they at least clustered around specific topics. By creating ‘talking points’, individuals of diverse backgrounds could engage in debates and discussions without extensive study of the issues. Second, partisan publications clustered issues, effectively forming parties through juxtaposing positions on a plethora of issues around a single ideological focus--liberal, conservative, denominational, etc.

Future communications innovations were developments of degree, but the transportation revolution and creation of national transportation infrastructure was the fundamental shift, the creation of a national narrative and the breakdown of all ties being primarily geographic. ‘Jacksonian Democracy’ was the result of Martin Van Buren’s alliance and development of the Democratic Party, creating the first truly national political machine. Such a national alliance would not have been possible without an efficient national transportation infrastructure, allowing not only for a national dialogue but also coordination of a national political party—centralization through not only disseminating information and instructions from the centralized agent to franchisees and local leaders, but the reporting of information back to the centralized agent. The ability to set up mechanisms
for local party leaders and members to report back to the central headquarters—thereby stemming off potential problems and reinforcing successful methods—as well as allowing for local angles on national issues—dramatically increased the efficiency of institutions and gave political parties an important advantage over otherwise decentralized sociopolitical institutions that dominated local life—churches.9

For political parties and consumers of news, the first amendment’s most important innovation, and its largest threat to traditional clergy, was the freedom of association. The geographic scope of the United States instilled an incentive for politicians to subsidize the flow of communications both to undermine traditional forms of power, through the development of a national dialogue, and maintain their own institutions—both political parties and alliances that traversed geographic boundaries—through reliable and timely communication. The Constitution undermined state-sponsored religious institutions not simply by separating church from state, as the state-sponsorship of a particular denomination was neither explicit nor notably clear to federal and state authorities during the first few decades of the nation, but by enshrining the freedom of association. Freedom of association allowed alternative denominations to flourish—alongside civic groups and political parties that competed with the clergy for the time, money, and energy of citizens—and creating electoral incentives for national-

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level politicians to first forge alliances based on ideological, rather than geographic ties. Elected officials had an incentive to subsidize communications technology to create a national dialogue that was based on news--and particularly political news--rather than allowing each township’s social leader--the clergymen with the broadest and deepest social network--to control the flow and dissemination of information within a geographic area. Thus, while common explanations for the US having more post office and newspapers per capita than any other nation in the world by 1820 (Brown, 117) evolve around the early Americans having the right to freedom of speech, state support of commercial enterprises that were often hostile to individual causes--due to the partisan nature of every early American publication--by no means logically followed from such an enshrined right. “Intimately tied with the fear of partisanship was clerical jealousy of the politician. Helplessly observing that churchgoers no longer heeded their secular opinions, recognizing that ministerial salaries were not keeping pace with other professional occupations, and noting those ever-so-slight signs of a slipping social status, clergymen might well have resented the prestige of lawyer-politicians whom the people elected without clerical advice.” (Wyatt-Brown 321)10

10 Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Abolitionism: Its meaning for Contemporary American Reform” Midwest Quarterly Autumn 166 45-48
Chapter 5.3: Political party organization

Political parties fashioned themselves after religious organizations, and their recruitment techniques mirrored evangelical revivals common in the United States during the early 19th century that became known as the Great Awakening. Electioneers copied techniques of religious revivalists, including, “torchlight parades, the pitching of a tent on the edge of town, and emotional calls to ‘step right up’ and make a commitment. (The techniques were later adapted by Phineas T. Barnum to the circus, with the ‘barker’ playing the role of the evangelist.)” (Howe 1985 372) Such techniques became commonplace with the Whig Party and the common-man campaigns of Andrew Jackson, yet efforts to foster a communal atmosphere certainly began with the earliest party-bosses in their attempts to build their parties and recruit members. (Heale 1982) During the 1820s and 1830s, a “mass electorate had internalized party loyalty on so vast and intense a scale that a new context for political activity was constituted.” (Formisano 1971 3) Political activity during and after Jackson’s election in 1828 were dominated by parties and their ability to recruit and maintain nonpolitical groups, particularly the recruitment of religious organizations that dominated early 19th century life. The method by which the Jacksonians—and later all political actors—attempted to maximize their political influence was through leveraging mass communication. “Newspapers played an essential role in making representative government meaningful and in fostering among the
citizens a sense of American nationality beyond the face-to-face politics of neighborhoods.” (emphasis added) (Howe 2009, p. 228) Party organs, which regularly ran a deficit, received funding from wealthy patrons—including political cabals such as the Tammany Gang—and lucrative government printing contracts if the party they served was in power. (Weisberger 1961)

Indeed, political parties became national entities by formulating a broad mission statement and localizing the actual political experience, particularly with the help of church endorsement that allowed parties to monopolize voters in a given geographic area. This strategy was copied directly from the Methodist recruitment and nationalization efforts of the late 18th century, creating a broad national message and allowing local congregations to recruit and maintain parishioner support. The decentralized nature of Methodist congregations necessitated an extensive communication system to ensure each congregation maintained a connection with one another, and no one congregation would break off and form its own religion. The informal yet entrenched communication structure established to facilitate a unified Methodist faith also bound political parties and was the model—intentionally or not—upon which parties developed throughout the 19th century. (Mathews 1968) Despite a preference for nonparty and antiparty candidates, political parties were able to flourish—particularly in national elections—and advances in communications would strengthen the abilities of both churches and parties to communicate thus threatening the
autonomy and power of local church and political official. (Voss-Hubbard 1999)

Perhaps counter to popular conceptions of the likely side of the Jacksonian on issues related to postage and national news, their allegiance with small town and rural communities actually created an incentive for the Democrats to champion low postal rates and increased networks of communication. They were forced to balance the needs of their constituents—that is, the desire of small town publishers to limit the influence and entry of large urban papers—and the desire to create a national dialogue (and the ability to communicate with local, rural leaders) through efficient, timely, and inexpensive means. While the Jacksonians hesitated to eliminate newspaper postage because, “they feared [doing so] would extend the reach of city papers with alien values,” (Kielbowicz 58) they also needed to disseminate their own message (and, as discussed later, receive news and confirmation of compliance to central strategies, messages, and values back from rural politicians). The balance for Democrats, therefore, was to ensure citizens in rural villages and remote townships engaged in a dialogue on a select number of national issues, but were also biased in the direction of Democratic and Jacksonian policies through the maintenance of dominant local publications. Without dismantling traditional structures of power in rural communities, Jacksonians would not have been able to maximize their power, influence, and control over these areas and their electors.
Rather than ‘democratize’ power in the United States—that is, attempt to empower individual citizens to affect government policies and limit the ‘vertical’ power structure that had taken root, the creation of a national dialogue did not expand the number of citizens able to provide input upon issues, but rather limited debate in the country through limiting the number of nodes of sociopolitical power. Whereas previously each township—largely isolated from urban areas and with a limited number of individuals (often one) with access to news and information outside Of course, the power structures the Jacksonians and the Whigs were forced to undermine were different. In the south and west—traditional strongholds of Democratic power—Jackson could gain support through personal recognition, and, later, establish a strong and lasting political party through identification both with Jackson and a particular ideology, free from competition with existing entities that claimed similar ideological stances.

Thus Jackson’s competition with existing power structures was limited. Van Buren derived his power from traditional supporters of Jackson as well as the Tammany Hall ring—a group whose association with the press was primarily hostile. Both the Democrat’s southern and western supporters produced partisan publications—as well as the newspapers and broadsheets funded by the Tammany gang—rather than their aim being to undermine traditional power structures through the conveyance of timely information, it was as propaganda, the timeliness and reliability of which was less than that
of newspapers aimed a drawing attention away from the pastor’s Sunday sermon.

In New York City, an odd array of Tammany men, newspapermen, tavern-owners, ward-heelers, labor leaders, middle-class proprietors, and some wealthy figures...allied themselves against the Sabbath Union. These same figures were to be responsible for several anti-abolitionist riots of a later date...The anticlerical masses were highly suspicious of any signs of elitism...Among the very poor and depressed, suspicion of evangelical elitism had a basis of fact. Thousands of less privileged citizens were made desperate enough by the vast economic dislocations of the era to believe the Jacksonian attacks upon the ‘wise and good.’ They blamed all sorts of corporations, especially banks, but also other institutions for their plight. According to some radical labor leaders, churchmen were seeking to buttress the defenses of property. (Wyatt-Brown p.333)

Party bosses and the political elites attacked any institution threatening political hegemony, and for the Democrats alternative social, economic, and political institutions were just as threatening as alternative political parties. Indeed, the Whigs controlled few aspects of the United States political infrastructure during the Jacksonian era and in fact can largely be described as a collection of political interest groups rather than a centralized party that the interest groups attempted to influence. “In political terms, though, the religious community was clearly as vulnerable as Nicholas Biddle’s bank. The outcry of Jackson’s supporters, which included men from all classes of society, was too great for the politicians to ignore. They quickly sensed that the evangelicals had not yet come to dominate any class of society, any major areas of the country, or any single denomination in such a way that they posed an electoral threat.” (Wyatt-Brown 333)
Chapter 5.4: Clergy responses to political parties

The initial reaction of churchmen to democratic institutions was one of caution—“If, as church leaders expected, most Americans became practicing Christians, democracy, as an abstract theory at least, offered no serious problems...By selective voting, irrespective of party labels, Christians could compel civil officials to enforce the laws against Sabbath violation, duels, swearing, drunkenness, and vagrancy.” (Wyatt-Brown 321)\(^{11}\) The lack of foresight—or the inability to control the unyielding progress of technological innovation—left traditional Christian institutions unable to tempter or oppose the use of the first amendment by political parties, assisting in the party’s capture of democratic political institutions. The attack by the Jacksonians upon religious institutions that they needed to overthrow in order to gain control of the functions of the state was by charging elitism—religious institutions, by their nature, were anti-democratic. “The Anti-Federal party by their pertinacious, nay morbid perseverance in a wrong course, exposed themselves to the same penalty which was at a later period inflicted upon their old opponents—as a party they were overthrown and ruined.” (Van Buren 380) Moreover, successful and lasting churches were conservative in their orthodoxy and required a great deal from members, thereby threatening the attention men would pay to political issues and would threaten the authority of political parties over their social lives.

\(^{11}\) Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Abolitionism: Its meaning for Contemporary American Reform” Midwest Quarterly Autumn 166 45-48
Chapter 5.5: Van Buren’s historical narrative

Moreover, these churches appealed to their own historical roots and traditions to justify participation by members. Just as political elites copied the methods of evangelical revivalists, so did the early party leaders attempt to appeal to the nation’s historical leaders as the ideological founders of their parties. Van Buren links the history of the Democratic party to the federalist/anti-Federalist debate, arguing political factions have always existed in American political life and the ‘era of good feelings’ was a monarchical period that undermined the democratic institutions of the United States. He presents the rise of the Democratic party as an outgrowth of previous political factions, rather than a new entity in American political life. By presenting this state as natural, Van Buren ignores the reason for the rise of parties at all in the United States, and particularly the rise of his political party.

The two great parties of this country, with occasional changes in their names only, have, for the principal part of a century, occupied antagonistic positions upon all important political questions. They have maintained an unbroken succession, and have, throughout, been composed respectively of men agreeing in their party passions and preferences, and entertaining, with rare exceptions, similar general views on the subjects of government and its administration...Neither the influences of marriage connections, nor of sectarian prejudices, nor any of the strong motives which often determine the ordinary actions of men, have, with limited exceptions, been sufficient to override the bias of party organization and sympathy, devotion to which has, on both sides, as a rule, been a master passion of their members.12 (Van Buren 7)

At every point in American history, Van Buren inserts the Democratic party—or links the successful and popular initiatives of Washington and Jefferson to a primitive iteration of the Democratic party. Attempting to lay claim to the ‘national creed’ and root the Democratic Party in American history mirrors Huntington’s theory of the evolution of political institutions, and the success of Van Buren helped entrench an anti-elitist narrative in the American political establishment. Van Buren attributed the stunting of Federalist expansion to deny states rights and increase the power of the executive to the rise of the Democratic Party in the election of 1800, and lauds the Democrats for quashing the attempt of the judiciary to fill the power vacuum that was left by the fall of the Federalists. He links Jefferson and the ‘old Republicans’ as defending the nation against Hamilton’s expansion of the Treasury and the issuance of public debt, and intimates the roots of the Democratic party can be discerned as early as this dispute in 1792. Immediately after discussing the opposition of ‘old Republicans’—to whom Van Buren links his contemporary Democratic party—to the issuance of public debt, he links the current opposition of the Democrats to the expansion of federal power through increased internal improvements. “The promotion of internal improvements by the General Government was an assumption of power by Congress against which, from its first inception till its substantial overthrow, the Democratic party interposed a steady, persevering, and inflexible
resistance...For preservation from such prodigality and debt, and from the corruptions that would have followed in their train, we are plainly and undeniably indebted to the successful enforcement of the principles of the Democratic Party.” (421) Indeed, Van Buren refers to a, “Democratic spirit” that was present and, “overshadow[ed] the money power in the country,” on which can be traced to the initial settlers of the Union. “For the signal success of its beneficent and glorious mission the country is indebted to the virtue and intelligence of the men of whom this great party has from time to time been composed...and its founder, Thomas Jefferson, who stands, in my estimation, as a faithful republican, pure patriot, and wise and accomplished statesman.” (Van Buren 424)

In explaining the fall of alternative political factions, Van Buren focuses upon their inability--or refusal--to adapt to changing electoral conditions and the Anti-Federalists’, who Van Buren associates with the Whigs and therefore the established religious leaders who previously controlled the sociopolitical infrastructure of New England life.

Fault was the exclusiveness of their preference. They could not and did not deny that a general government of some sort was indispensable, and they should therefore have stood ready to confer upon it such powers as were necessary to enable it to sustain itself and to qualify it for the successful performance of the duties to be assigned to it. This they would not do. They, on the contrary, allowed their local prejudices and their suspicious, in some instances well founded but unwisely indulged, to lead them to persistent refusals to concede to the Federal head means which a sufficient experience had show to be absolutely necessary to good government. (Van Buren 379)
The Congregationalists not only identified secular political institutions as the primary threat to their continued social and political preeminence, but also recognized their leveraging of new communication infrastructure as the method by which the power of the Congregational Church would be undermined. As such, the primary political movement prior to abolitionism in America was Sabbatarianism, organized by established churches to combat the encroachment of secular interests upon the last area of American life monopolized by the church, the Sunday sermon.
Chapter 6: Sabbatarianism as Congregational response to institutional threats

As early as the first great awakening, successful religious figures recognized the advantage of coverage in secular publications and leveraged stances on secular issues to gain media coverage. “There was a reason why religion was not primary in the news, and that was because it was not popular or useful in the marketplace. In utilizing secular news, [prominent first great awakening minister George] Whitefield¹ was at once presenting religion as a popular commodity that could compete not so much against other churches as against the goods and services of this world…” (Stout 1993)

Denominations and sects took stances on political issues to offer their congregants a brand with which to identify themselves—by referring to oneself as a Methodist, individuals could self identify not only with a set of theological beliefs but also political and social stances. Moreover, by providing congregants with a vehicle for social action and a forum to easily mobilize for a social or political cause, churches increased the amount of time and resources congregants spent involved in contributing to the church—even

¹ George Whitefield, perhaps the most successful evangelist of the first great awakening and active during the 1730s and 1740s.
if efforts were directed at secular causes. Social capital was created and networks strengthened through participation in the social network of the church, as well as the ability to market the religious community as a vehicle for social participation, thereby competing with parties as an alternative forum for sociopolitical action.

The paramount issue in which secular forces and the Congregationalists clashed was the sanctity of the Sabbath. Whereas other denominations attempted to increase influence through democratic means—that is, expanding their flock and controlling a majority of Americans on a national scale—Congregationalists increased their missionary activities and formed voluntary societies to influence national policy, but most significantly—and fervently—engaged in the Sabbatarian movement. By 1850 the telegraph undermined any efforts by the Sabbatarians to limit the flow of information and monopolize social life on Sundays, as the near-immediate dissemination of information completed the construction of a constant, real-time, national discourse, yet during the first few decades of the nineteenth century the clergy’s attempt to limit the flow of information at least on Sunday was a serious effort that, if successful, would have preserved the social importance of the church, at least for the single day of rest for the community’s members, a time when discussion with neighbors was most probable. The Sabbatarians developed two strategies to influence political actors. The ‘mainstream’ evangelical revivalists, such as Lyman Beecher,
behaved similarly to the Congregationalists to develop petitions and influence existing political institutions, whereas ministers whose recruiting tactics were marked by fire-and-brimstone rhetoric, engaged in behavior that directly confronted the secular establishment.

Sabbatarians were united in the petition enterprise, but from the start two divergent strategies emerged. Although [Lyman] Beecher sometimes spoke in extravagant terms of Christianizing every aspect of secular life, he favored the use of quiet persuasion, conversations with leading men, and firm tugs at the levers of power. Lewis Tappan and Bissell, believing that Sabbatarians had to fight the agencies of darkness with every weapon available...Christians were urged to withhold their trade from offending firms; articles appeared in religious journals to question if New York churches should heat their buildings from utilities operation no Sunday and to propose the abolition of milk deliveries on Sunday mornings in Boston. Like the teetotalers, the Sabbatarian zealots reasoned that little indulgences led to greater crimes; and therefore, they demanded the pledge of total abstinence. (Wyatt-Brown 330)

Prior to the railroads and canals that created a national transportation infrastructure, communication primarily existed by interpersonal communication by travelers and, by the end of the 18th century, the most efficient and timely method was by boat--ships along the eastern seaboard and later via steamboat on the nation’s interior canals. While on its face limiting the Sabbath mails would seem to be a threat to New England businessmen, the alliance between many New England merchants and the clergy to limit the Sabbath mails was not only founded in a theological basis but conveniently extended the advantage of those living on the Eastern Seaboard against their southern and western competitors. In fact, not only did news have to travel 33 hours to reach Philadelphia from New York,
transporting the news to Pittsburgh was both impossible until 1788 and subsequently took two weeks to make the trip. Moreover, “Once news reached the Pittsburgh Gazette, there was no local post office to deliver the paper. The Gazette’s editor prevailed on his friends to carry papers outside the city, and subscribers living along western Pennsylvania’s waterways looked to riverboats for their copies.” (Kielbowicz 25)

Chapter 6.1: Petitioning efforts as religious response

The shift by both new evangelical revivalists and traditional denominations, including the Congregationalists, from monopolizing the sociopolitical life in New England to working as political action committees began with petition efforts lobbying for the sanctity of the Sabbath. Sabbatarians—though unsuccessful prior to 1850—developed methods later utilized by the abolitionists and worked to influence political parties.

The process of collecting funds, disseminating petitions and tracts, arranging rallies and concerts of prayer, training and supplying volunteers, and writing potential supporters engaged the evangelical leaders in work that hardly differed from that of the politicians whom they sought to impress...Nothing demonstrated this change in religious action more clearly than the petition effort, a method of agitation that later proved useful to the abolitionists. The chief object was to overwhelm congressional delegates with the demonstrated outrage of thousands of voters. the Sabbatarians were the first to exploit it on a grand scale. The effort was a total failure, but it gave experience in political lobbying. (Wyatt-Brown 329)

The reaction by politicians and industrialists to the Sabbatarian movement demonstrates the threat it posed to both industry and the traditional clergy,
and serves as an excellent proxy for the struggle to control the issues and forums in which men debated (and therefore the issues upon which they focused).

It is ironic that so restrictive a cause as Sabbatarianism should lead so many pious dissenters to a deepened sense of the meaning of democracy and equal rights, but it was so...the religious abolitionists were not seeking to destroy government, but to expand its functions in behalf of those outside existing legal arrangements. In doing so, they fought a raucous, unformed, and novel institution, the American party system, which the Sabbatarian venture had already shown to be an obstacle to that much more venerable and stable institution, the church. (Wyatt-Brown, 340)

Technological innovation—specifically, effective and timely distribution mechanisms for national publications—was the primary determinant of religious denominations transitioning into political action committees, and preceded the most significant church-state conflict prior to abolition.

Chapter 6.2: Congressional support of information distribution

The postal act of 1792 attempted to allay the concerns of small-town publishers while maximizing the flow of information in the United States. Specifically, small town publishers worried a single rate for printed material would leave them at a disadvantage as publication costs in small communities was higher than in major metropolitan areas. Congress determined rates for material traveling up to 100 miles would be one cent, whereas mail traveling over 100 miles would be 1.5 cents. “Letter postage, in contrast, was divided into nine zones, ranging from a minimum of 6 cents per
sheet for delivery up to 30 miles to a maximum of 25 cents power sheet for any distance beyond 450 miles.” (Kielbowicz 34)

Sectionalism, a component of the cultural differences, seeped into postal debates. But even more pronounced was the tension between urban and rural interests. Through adjustments in postal policy, rural legislators sought to protect small-circulation newspapers of country districts that increasingly faced competition from metropolitan dailies and weeklies. This not only insulated the business of an important class of constituents—publishers—but also was seen as preserving the values of country life from an encroaching urban culture. (Kielbowicz 3)²

While claiming to protect rural culture, the fact publications tapped into a larger national narrative--and individuals had access to multiple publications that addressed multiple topics--caused secular interests to compete with religious services during the leisure time of citizens. The blatant competition—especially on the Sabbath—enraged the clergy and served as a tangible manifestation of the secularization of society. Their authority—previously near absolute with regard to the communication of news from outside the town—was undermined by meeting locations alternative to the church and documents serving as competition to the Bible as required reading to engage in social, political, and economic discussions with neighbors. At the extremes, citizens went so far as to simply stand up and leave religious services when a postal delivery arrived on Sundays.

[On] ’post day’ half the village assembled to be present at the distribution of the mail, which in good and bad weather alike, took

place at the inn. The package for the whole village was generally made up of a roll of newspapers a week old and a few bundles of drugs for the doctor. It was a great day whereon, in addition to the usual post, a half-dozen letters were given out. Then, as the townsmen press around the inn door to make arrangement for borrowing the ‘newsprint’ or to hear the contents of it read aloud by the minister or landlord, the postman was carried home.” (Smith 186, from Kielbowicz 26)

The Sabbatarian movement posed a grave economic threat to both the west and to industrialists attempting to form a cohesive national economy. Newspapermen were threatened by limiting attention to political issues, and newspapers of the time were instruments of either corporations, political parties, or religious groups (the latter of which would benefit from monopolizing one day each week). While the elites in each of these fields dominated the anti-Sabbatarian movement, they did so by criticizing the religious authorities pushing the movement as in fact elitism, pushing the line that the Sabbatarian movement was intended to moralize the poor, huddled masses. Thus, while Tammany, corporations, and newspapermen profited immensely from the labor of the masses, they effectively limited competition from traditional religious groups competing for the time (and money) of the poor. The anti-commercialism streak of the traditional religious elites only exacerbated the threat posed by those denominations, fueling the effort of the anti-Sabbatarians.

Chapter 7: Conclusions regarding the role of transportation and communication infrastructure in the development of early American social and political institutions

This paper traced the formation of political parties and the transformation of American religious life to the revolutionary technological innovations in transportation and communication that occurred at the turn of the 19th century. By identifying the source of power of the Congregational Church as its ability to leverage its monopoly over the distribution of information—and the primary disruption of this institution’s power as technological development that gave rise to competing secular institutions, I revise the goals of the Congregational Church as primarily placing it in competition with political and secular institutions rather than new evangelical sects. My contributions are two fold. First, I attempt to redefine the goals of the Congregational Church, as desiring to control not the largest possible share of religious congregants but instead leverage an existing base of support and a monopoly over the flow of information in New England to shape secular life in New England. Second, I attempt to merge the second great awakening and second party system in order for future scholars to view
the events of the first half of the nineteenth century not through the lens of the development of multiple isolated and specialized markets, but as both secular and religious institutions competing for the same set of resources through a shock to the established social infrastructure via technology undermining a monopoly over information which the Congregational Church had, for over a century, leveraged to control discourse and social functioning in New England. It was this shock—not the disestablishment of religion—that truly threatened the church and caused an upheaval in the social and political power structure of New England.

**Chapter 7.1: Future research**

Two elusive, and perhaps non-existent datasets serve as the launching point for this project’s future research. First, as I hypothesize in this essay, Congregational clergy were able to create and support a social network through informal ties created through mandatory training that served also functioned as a networking tool. This social network allowed for clergy coordination and stifled competition, as Congregational clergy claimed geographical territory and did not create competing congregations within a region. Evidence supports this hypothesis in Connecticut, yet correlating the rise in the number of congregations founded in a given region with the rise in population and the creation of alternative evangelical sects in that region will demonstrate that Congregational clergy did not recruit and compete to the
same extent of other sects, and the goal of the Congregational elites was not in fact to maximize membership but instead to maintain existing members, effectively shift funding from a reliance upon state support to member donations, and maintain membership as a symbol of high status and a privilege for the social, political, and economic elite.
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