

FROM SABBATH TO WEEKEND:
RECREATION, SABBATARIANISM, AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE
WEEKEND

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From the 1630s to the 1930s, the problem of leisure was that there was not much leisure, especially designated days of recreation. In this dissertation I describe reformers' responses and contributions to the recreational landscape, primarily in the northeastern United States.

Puritan attitudes toward recreation have been much misunderstood. Puritans opposed Saints Days and Sunday recreations as part of their larger project to reform or "desacralize" the calendar. Because they preferred recreation that was secular and regular, however, they were the first to advocate for designated days of recreation.

In the New World, Puritan attitudes toward recreation were reinforced by republican virtues through the War for Independence. In the nineteenth century, different groups responded differently to the crises of leisure time and space. Unitarians supported uplifting public initiatives such as Central Park, while Methodists created alternative destinations such as Asbury Park and Ocean Grove. This Victorian "resacralizing" of leisure was not the initiative of conservative Calvinists, but of Arminians and religious liberals. Evangelicals in the Calvinist tradition focused on advocating for the Saturday half-holiday as a means of preserving Sunday for rest and worship.

Sabbatarianism adapted to the Progressive Era in response to entertainment entrepreneurs' exploitation of free time on Sunday. Saturday afternoons, however,

were also filled with the very consumption and pleasure-seeking that Sabbatarians most abhorred. Thus, when Jewish Sabbatarians advocated for a Saturday full-holiday in the 1920s, Protestant Sabbatarians were unsupportive. They understood their advocacy for secular leisure was contributing to a new lifestyle and sensibility focused on fun, pleasure, and consumption.

Sabbatarians in the Puritan tradition succeeded not only in banishing ritual festivities such as May games, but also in securing a weekly day of recreation: The weekend arrived first in 1930s England and America largely because of Sabbatarian advocacy. This success, however, was ambiguous; the singular “weekend” suggests an undifferentiated block of time that no longer distinguishes much between rest and recreation. In the end, Sabbatarians were neither as reactionary and unsuccessful as they are commonly depicted, nor as countercultural and successful as they aspired.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Karl E. Johnson was born on September 6, 1966, and graduated from Rye High School (Rye, NY) in 1984. After bicycling across the United States, he entered Cornell University in 1985. At Cornell he was an active member of the soccer team, the wind ensemble, and the Outdoor Education and Wilderness Reflections programs. While an undergraduate, he taught Physical Education classes in Day Hiking, Backpacking, Bicycle Touring, Basic Mountaineering, and started the first service-oriented Physical Education class at Cornell, Trail Maintenance. He graduated in 1990.

For fifteen years, Johnson worked in outdoor education. From 1990 through 1992, he served as manager of the Ithaca Youth Bureau Outings Program, leading camping and canoeing trips for “at-risk” youth, and directing a Youth Conservation Corps project in the town of Dryden. In 1993, he began working as a consultant, trainer, and expert witness in the outdoor education field, and also began teaching a popular Cornell Adult University class entitled Outdoor Thrills and Skills. In 1996, he became the Dan Tillemans Director of the Cornell Team and Leadership Center, a division of Cornell Outdoor Education, and the following year he designed and oversaw the construction of Cornell’s Hoffman Challenge Course facility on Mt. Pleasant. He is now the proud namesake of two local facilities—a yurt on Mt Pleasant, in recognition of 20 years of service to Cornell Outdoor Education, and the Karl Johnson Privy in Danby State Forest, in recognition of service to the Cayuga Trails Club.

Johnson has received multiple writing awards, including a 1995 Amy Award for writing in religion, and the Pack Natural Resources Management Essay Contest in 1996. In 1999 he was recognized as an Academy of Leisure Sciences Future Scholar.

His publications have appeared in *Journal of Experiential Education*, *Leisure/Loisir*, and in popular publications such as *Books & Culture*, *Taproot*, and the *New York State Conservationist*. In 2000 he received an M.S. in Natural Resources from Cornell, where his thesis focused on the philosophy of recreation and leisure. He has since guest lectured in Cornell University's departments of Education, Natural Resources, and Applied Economics and Management, and in Ithaca College's Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies.

In 2001 Johnson enrolled in a doctoral program through Cornell's Employee Degree Program. In 2005 he became the founding director of Chesterton House, a Center for Christian Studies at Cornell University, an affiliate organization of Cornell United Religious Work.

To Julie

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Skillen has been a model of a careful, disciplined, and productive young scholar; and Greg Hitzhusen balanced our group by keeping one foot in the world of practitioners, always reminding us of the connection between theory and praxis. My thanks to all three for conversation, comments, and feedback. Although we are now scattered, I know that my work bears the mark of our time together.

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Finally, my thanks to Julie and our children—Meg, Elizabeth, Christine, Sarah, and David. I have aspired to complete this project without great cost to either quality or quantity of time spent with my children, and I hope I have mostly succeeded. Being there to share in the joys and frustrations of your learning to read and write, add and subtract, conjugate and translate, has been and remains a great joy, and I wouldn't

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. The Holiday Problem, 1630s-1930s.....	1
2. Recreation and Religion.....	6
3. Overview.....	14
4. Recreation and Re-Creation.....	19
CHAPTER 2: THE <i>BOOK OF SPORTS</i>	20
1. Introduction.....	20
2. The <i>Book of Sports</i>	21
3. Sabbatarianism in Reformation Theology.....	25
4. 1618	35
5. 1633	44
6. Days of Recreation	52
7. Conclusion	60
CHAPTER 3: THE NEW WORLD.....	62
1. Introduction: Maypole at Merrymount.....	62
2. The <i>Book of Sports</i> in the New World.....	64
3. Puritans as Cultural Resource	67
4. Samuel Peters, Blue Laws, and the War for Independence.....	72
5. Lyman Beecher, Sunday Mails, and the New Sabbatarianism	77
6. Explaining Antebellum Sabbatarianism	80
7. Sabbatarianism in a Democratic Republic.....	93
8. Conclusion	98
CHAPTER 4: VICTORIAN RECREATION AND REFORM	102
1. Introduction.....	102
2. Separation: The Middle Class Response	105
3. Reform & Cultural Authority.....	113
4. Integration: The Unitarian Response.....	117
5. Imitation: The Methodist Response.....	127
6. Negotiation: P.T. Barnum’s response.....	132
7. Conclusion	136
CHAPTER 5: THE SATURDAY HALF-HOLIDAY.....	138
1. Introduction.....	138
2. Saturday Half-Holiday In England.....	141
3. Saturday Half-Holiday in the United States.....	146
4. Conclusion	158
CHAPTER 6: THE LEISURE REVOLUTION.....	162
1. Introduction.....	162
2. Commercial Leisure Revolution	165

3. Leisure Entrepreneurs and the Generation of Public Crowds.....	170
4. Sunday Amusements a Direct Threat to Sabbatarianism	177
5. Opposition to Commercial Amusements Widespread	180
6. Commercial Recreation an Indirect Threat to Reform Interests	188
7. Coney Island Cakewalk	194
8. Conclusion	197
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: FROM SABBATH TO WEEKEND	199
1. Introduction.....	199
2. The Five-Day Week	201
3. From Saints Days to Saturdays	209
4. Epilogue: The problem of leisure to the present	215
WORKS CITED	221

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. The Holiday Problem, 1630s-1930s

Before scholars began pondering “the problem of leisure” in the 1930s,¹ the problem was that there was too little rather than too much leisure. This “holiday problem,” complete with a glimpse of change on the horizon, is illustrated by a controversy over Sunday concerts in Central Park in 1884.

The board of New York Central Park first entertained a request to hold Sunday music concerts in the park in 1859. Opposition to Sunday concerts came primarily from Sabbatarians who positioned themselves as preservers of “the Puritan Sunday,” such as the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Dutch Reformed church members who organized themselves into the New York Sabbath Committee.² Advocacy for Sunday concerts came primarily from the working class immigrants who in recent years had brought to the states the “continental Sabbath”—a more festive Sabbath tradition that included drinking, singing, and playing games—and who argued that for those with only one day for recreation, to rule out concerts on Sunday was in effect to rule them

¹ George W. Alger, "Leisure—for what?" *The Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1925, 483; Walter Lippmann, "Free Time and Extra Money," *Woman's Home Companion*, April, 1930, 31; John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren," In *Essays in Persuasion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963), 358-373. Keynes's article originally appeared in 1930.

² The term ‘Sabbatarian’ dates to at least 1599. Patrick Collinson, "The Beginnings of English Sabbatarianism," In *Studies in Church History*, eds. C. W. Dugmore and Charles Duggan, Vol. 1 (London: Thomas Nelson, 1964), 220. Sabbatarianism, in Collinson's serviceable definition, “is defined as something more than a certain ethical and social attitude to the use of Sunday: it implies the doctrinal assertion that the fourth commandment is not an obsolete ceremonial law of the Jews but a perpetual, moral law, binding on Christians; in other words, that the Christian observance of Sunday has its basis not in ecclesiastical tradition but in the decalogue” (207).

out altogether. The issue was a political football that placed the board in a no-win situation, and the motion was tabled.

Twenty-five years later, after management of the park had moved from the park board to elected officials who were more accountable to their constituencies, including immigrants and laborers, the park department moved the weekly concert from Saturday to Sunday afternoon. The Sabbath Committee again issued a circular outlining its opposition to the change. This time, however, the Sabbatarian guardians of the Puritan Sunday offered one new rationale: The change, they said, would interfere with the Sabbath Committee's effort to secure for all workers the Saturday half-holiday that had already become familiar in some industries.

Others were not persuaded. Park commissioner Egbert Viele, for example, when asked if the change to Sunday concerts would in fact interfere with the Saturday half-holiday movement, responded:

That is all nonsense. In the first place the movement, as you call it, never has assumed any alarming proportions. If by chance it does amount to anything it will never reach the men, women, and children who toil in our shops and factories from early Monday morning until late Saturday night. It might benefit a few dry goods clerks and brokers' boys, but they are not the people we are aiming to reach. I think that if our city clergymen had seen the people there last Sunday they would heartily support us.³

This response is hardly surprising. As Viele rightly recognized, the constraints to modern leisure included not only space, which the park was designed to address, but also—and perhaps especially—time. Few foresaw this changing anytime soon. To advocates of Sunday concerts, the half-holiday argument surely seemed a subterfuge.

In the end, however, the Sabbatarians were correct and Viele was wrong: the Saturday holiday was on its way. Three years after this incident New York State passed a half-holiday law; within half a century an unprecedented reduction in work

³ "The Sunday Concert War," *New York Times*, July 15, 1884.

hours culminated not merely in a Saturday half-holiday but in a Saturday full-holiday; and after first arriving in England and the United States, the “weekend”⁴—understood in its modern form of two full, consecutive days off from work—colonized much of the world, making it a central and enduring feature of modernity.⁵

The Saturday holiday provided a happy resolution to a long story. It was a happy resolution in part because it met a common goal of diverse groups. Laborers desired more “free time” from unfulfilling toil, and labor leaders believed a Saturday holiday would reduce unemployment. Jews and Saturday Sabbatarians such as Seventh Day Adventists desired to worship on Saturday. And Protestant Sabbatarians, including those in the New York Sabbath Committee, desired Saturday as a designated day for recreation so that Sunday could be preserved for rest and worship.⁶

The Saturday holiday was also welcome because it followed three centuries characterized by long labor and relatively few holidays. The trend toward longer hours began in seventeenth century England and New England with the emergence of merchant capitalism and its corollary social mobility. Employers did what they could to coerce longer and more regular hours from laborers, and even laborers had more incentive to work longer hours than had peasants for whom compensation was not as tied to time. Reinforcing this trend was the market economy’s ideological counterpart,

⁴ Although there exist references to “week-end” as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these refer to Saturday evening—literally, the “week’s end.” Modern use of the term as a block of time (rather than a moment in time) dates to the 1870s, coinciding with the Saturday half-holiday in Britain. Use of the term did not become common until much later, and generally retained a hyphen until the middle of the twentieth century. *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵ Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1991), Ch. 6.

⁶ That Saturday provided a potential resolution to this tension previously has been noted, primarily in the British context. Wilfred B. Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers: The Struggle to Obtain Better Conditions and a Half-Holiday* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1973), 49ff; Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend*, 123.

the Protestant work ethic. Although not related as cause and effect,⁷ the “spirit of capitalism,” in Weber’s famous formulation, was facilitated by the Reformation doctrine of calling or vocation. For all that has been written on the topic, it remains hard to overstate the extent to which the doctrine of calling, by refashioning work from a necessary evil to a virtue, infused work with a moral meaning that inverted the values of the ancient and medieval periods.

As labor increased, leisure decreased, in part because of increasing demarcation between labor and leisure,⁸ but also due to calendrical reform. In medieval England, labor was seasonal and irregular. Seedtime and harvest were then punctuated by a large number of Saints days, festivals, ales, wakes, and fairs. For reasons of both doctrine and discipline, however, Protestant reformers set out to change this entire rhythm of life. Doctrinally, reformers opposed the idea of sacred zones in time and space. They thus opposed not only altars and cathedrals, but also Saints days and the liturgical calendar. The Puritans of New England built meetinghouses instead of cathedrals, and organized their calendar—and their lives—around the weekly Sabbath rather than liturgical year. In addition to banishing Saints days and the liturgical calendar for their Roman and pagan associations, Puritans were also concerned about rowdiness and licentiousness. The medieval church was a host and patron of ales and wakes, which included not only by sporting events but also much drunkenness and violence. Concerns regarding order and discipline also contributed to newfound opposition to holidays such as Christmas and

⁷ “The work ethic and its economic context were not related as cause and effect, phenomenon and epiphenomenon, but took shape together as values and practice fused and collided, quarreled with and reinforced one another, in an inextricably tangled relationship.” Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xi-xii.

⁸ Keith Thomas, "Work and Leisure in Pre-Industrial Society," *Past and Present*, no. 29 (December, 1964), 50-66; E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, no. 38 (December, 1967), 56-97.

pre-Lenten carnival, which were essentially rituals of inversion or “misrule.” In effect, reformers in general and Puritans in particular “de-festivalized” the calendar, while simultaneously aiming to reform Sunday into a day free from both work and recreation.⁹

At the time of the Great Migration in the 1630s, then, the constraints to leisure in New England were severalfold. Due to a confluence of social, cultural, political, and economic factors, life was defined more by labor than by leisure. To oversimplify only a little, for three centuries from the settlement of New England in the 1630s to the advent of the Saturday full-holiday in the 1930s, the problem of leisure was that there was not much leisure, at least in the sense of holidays, or designated days of recreation and festivity. This “holiday problem” was precisely Commissioner Viele’s concern when he spoke of “the men, women, and children who toil in our shops and factories from early Monday morning until late Saturday night.”

⁹ David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), xii. On carnival, see Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). For a treatment of the same topic in nineteenth-century England, see Douglas A. Reid, "Interpreting the Festival Calendar: Wakes and Fairs as Carnivals," In *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, ed. Robert D. Storch (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 125-153.

2. Recreation and Religion¹⁰

Several interesting questions, and not a few ironies, follow from all of this. If Protestant reformers “sacralized” work by attributing moral and religious significance to secular callings, what did this mean for the fate of leisure? Did they attach a similar moral and religious significance to recreation and leisure? Or was leisure, by nature of its contrast to work, regarded more nearly as a locus of immorality and irreligion?

Regarding Puritans, how could they reject the idea of sacred zones of time and space in theory, and yet believe New England to be a city upon a hill, or the Sabbath to be a holy day? Why did they categorize maypoles and morris dances as unlawful recreations, whereas Anglicans categorized them as lawful recreations? Why did they seek to “prophane” holy days such as Christmas and Easter by working on them, while enforcing the strictest observance of the weekly Sabbath, including abstention from all

¹⁰ Regarding terms such as *play*, *leisure*, *recreation*, and *sport*, I have taken *sport* to refer narrowly to athletic contests, though I make clear that is not what was once meant by the term, and I sometimes refer to *Sunday sport* in the older, broader sense in which the term was used; *recreation* refers more broadly not only to sports but also to other forms of pleasurable physical activity such as walking, riding, and traveling; *leisure* I take to be broader still, encompassing all non-work activity, including not only physical recreation but also reading, socializing, and drinking; and *play* refers to all “autotelic” activities sought for their own sake, regardless of whether the context is work or leisure—i.e., to all expressions of the “play impulse.” These terms are unavoidably used with some imprecision. Often, for example, I use *recreation and leisure* in reference to a very broad set of activities from parlor games and street games to theater going and excursions of various sorts. Perhaps that is as it should be; historians generally do not worry about definitions to the same extent as sociologists because their subjects use the terms imprecisely themselves. Discussions that have influenced my thinking on these terms include Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955); Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: The Experience of Play in Work and Games* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975); Allen Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* (Boston: David R. Godine, 1990).

work? Why was the *Book of Sports* burned in Boston, and why was a Presbyterian pastor from New York still complaining about the document 300 years after it was published? How did a project conceived largely to resist old rituals and superstitions come to embody so many new rituals and superstitions?

Why did nineteenth-century Calvinists in America oppose “the continental Sabbath,” despite Calvinism being a “continental theology”? If nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism was a vestige of Puritanism, why was it most fervent in New York City and other modernizing urban centers? Given that Sabbatarian legislation was used to restrict the recreational practices of immigrant Catholics in the nineteenth century, why did Catholics defend similar legislation vigorously in the twentieth century? Moreover, how is it that Sabbatarianism once opposed Sunday work, travel *and recreation*, but later defended rest *and recreation*? Why did Sabbatarian activity virtually disappear after the 1930s—was its demise inevitable in a liberal democracy committed to the separation of church and state, or was it somehow a victim of its own success?

Above all: Why did the weekend emerge in Protestant England and the U.S.—nations with the strictest Sabbatarian traditions? Was this coincidence or more nearly cause-and-effect?¹¹

This thesis, then, is about recreation and religion. A standard narrative on this topic entails several characteristic tropes. The Puritans, to take the most obvious example, are regarded as uptight busybodies with overdeveloped superegos afraid, in

¹¹ A number of questions beyond the scope of this thesis are also of interest. For example: Is commercial recreation a recovery of older forms of festivity, or a manipulation of the masses? Does it alienate or empower? Should it be celebrated or lamented? Are entertainment entrepreneurs friends or foes of working men and women? Why do neo-Marxist critiques of consumer culture sound so much like Sabbatarian critiques of commercial recreation? And why does the United States today have a very open and commercialized Sunday while other modern nations without Sabbatarian history such as France have a quieter Sunday?

Mencken's famous phrase, "that someone, somewhere, may be happy."¹²

Conservative religious moralists of the nineteenth century are regarded as heirs to the Puritan tradition, and the Sabbatarian cause regarded as a vestigial relic of the Puritan era that was inconsistent with modernity in general and the separation of church and state in particular. Religious liberals, observing the failure of conservatives to repress recreation, then attempted to reform it, appropriating it for various moral and religious purposes. This project of social control also largely failed, as secularizing trends such as commercialization inevitably resulted in more openness to recreation of all kinds. According to this narrative, the seventeenth century thus inaugurated a kind of Dark Ages of recreational repression that lasted into the early twentieth century, when the last vestiges of Puritanism were cast off and the universal play impulse restored to its rightful place. In short, conservatives condemned, liberals accommodated, and entrepreneurs expanded.

The cruder versions of this narrative have been sustained by a narrow focus on legislative history—i.e., "blue laws." A classic and influential example is Foster Rhea Dulles's *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play*, first published in 1940. Dulles's opening chapter on the Puritans, "In Detestation of Idleness," frames the book not just chronologically but also philosophically; almost every chapter begins or ends by explaining the history of recreation as a slow, gradual process of outgrowing the old "puritanic prejudice." Sabbatarianism, in this account, is "inevitably foredoomed," and virtually any and all critical reflection on recreation and leisure is thus rendered as undesirable baggage of the Puritan era, including not only the "nineteenth-century Puritanism" concerned with games and theater, but also discussions regarding the meaning of leisure in the middle of the twentieth century,

¹² H. L. Mencken, "Clinical Notes," *The American Mercury*, January, 1925, 56.

which are said to illustrate “the continuing influence of the Puritan tradition.”¹³ The demise of Sabbatarianism, in Winton Solberg’s similar account, signifies the triumph of democracy over theocracy and thus becomes “a vehicle by which to describe the evolution from coercion to freedom, from state church to pluralism.”¹⁴ Dulles’s tidy conclusion at the time of his second edition (1965) was that “The democracy had come into its recreational heritage,” and “the American people had learned to play.”¹⁵

¹³ Foster Rhea Dulles, *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 101, 208, 167, 390. According to Dulles, such “militant organizations” as the American Sabbath Union and the Lord’s Day Alliance (which were in fact the same organization) supported “Puritan doctrine” (207-208).

¹⁴ David D. Hall, "Symbols and Society in Colonial New England," *Reviews in American History* 6, no. 4 (December, 1978), 466.

¹⁵ Dulles, *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play*, 397. Other influential accounts of the Puritans as killjoys include Jesse F. Steiner, *Americans at Play* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1933); John R. Betts, "Mind and Body in Early American Thought," *Journal of American History* 54 (March, 1968), 796-805. James Rohrer, quoting John R. Bodo and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, writes: historians “have variously interpreted Sabbatarians as anachronistic advocates of a dying puritanism who wished ‘to remold the nation in the likeness of the Massachusetts theocracy of the seventeenth century,’ as evangelical masters who wished to control the behavior of their unruly workers, or as well-intentioned zealots who overreacted to an issue that was, in Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s words, ‘hardly a matter to shake the foundations of the republic.’” James R. Rohrer, "Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 7, no. 1 (Spring, 1987), 54. Rohrer cites several others, including Whitney Cross, Paul Johnson, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who famously quipped that “few people . . . took the question [of Sabbatarianism] very seriously. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1945), 143. Richard John similarly comments that the neglect of Sabbatarianism largely “can be explained by the widespread tendency of historians to disparage the grievance. . . . Given the premises of late twentieth-century historiography, such a perspective is hardly surprising. Like temperance and anti-Masonry, Sabbatarianism has all too easily fallen victim to what E.P. Thompson once called the ‘enormous condescension of posterity.’” Richard R. John, "Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously: The Postal System, the Sabbath, and the Transformation of American Political Culture," *Journal of the Early Republic* 10, no. 4 (1990), 519. For works with a narrower focus on blue laws, see Anson P. Stokes and Leo Pfeffer, *Church and State in the United States* (New York: Harper & Row, 1950); David N. Laband and Deborah Hendry Heinbuch, *Blue Laws: The History, Economics, and Politics of Sunday-Closing Laws* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987); Alan

To be sure, this narrative has enough correspondence to reality to perpetuate it. The Puritan relationship to recreation was always one of ambivalence, and nineteenth-century Sabbatarians did in fact appropriate the mantle of the Puritans. Religious moralists were interested in social control, and at times did attempt to enact and enforce legislation that was inconsistent with the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Moreover, in Reformation thought, the doctrine of calling has no corresponding doctrine of recreation and leisure. Amidst the leisure revolution of the late nineteenth century, Protestant clergy and lay leaders had no obvious, well-developed tradition of thinking theologically about recreation to help them navigate the new realities they faced. Hence the conventional wisdom that the Protestant work ethic has no corresponding Protestant play ethic.

Still, there are several aspects of this narrative that are misleading or simply mistaken. Those who take Puritan opposition to certain forms of recreation, or to recreation at certain times, as entailing a comprehensively ascetic approach to life fail to capture the complexity of colonial belief and behavior. Those who interpret nineteenth- and twentieth-century Sabbatarianism as a relic of the colonial era fail to see that the movement was adaptive to the Republican era and even to the Progressive era. As with all narratives of inevitability, the decline of Sabbatarianism in the nineteenth century begs the question of what warrants explanation, which arguably is not so much the demise of Sabbatarianism but rather its persistence. Those who explain religious reform such as the use of recreation for moral and religious purposes primarily as a matter of social control generally reduce cultural conflict to class

Raucher, "Sunday Business and the Decline of Sunday Closing Laws: A Historical Overview," *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 1 (Winter, 1994), 13-33; Andrew J. King, "Sunday Law in the Nineteenth Century," *Albany Law Review* 64, no. 2 (2000), 675-772.

conflict, failing to see commonalities of interest across classes, as well as conflict within classes. And those who explain the decreased cultural authority of clergy and religious lay leaders too exclusively as a matter of secularization fail to see that religion and secularization are not necessarily engaged in a zero sum game, but rather sometimes move in tandem. Take, for example, the complex relationship of Christianity and commercial culture. Just as commercial culture has accommodated religious sensibilities even while challenging them, so too Christianity has not only challenged but also accommodated and even appropriated techniques and values of commercial culture. In short, conservatives did not always condemn, liberals did not always accommodate, and entrepreneurs did not always expand.

Fortunately, cultural and religious historians have begun taking both recreation and Sabbatarianism more seriously in recent decades.¹⁶ Hans-Peter Wagner, Bruce Daniels, and Nancy Struna have made significant contributions to our understanding of colonial era recreation, challenging the conventional wisdom that Puritans were somehow simply opposed to recreation in belief and behavior.¹⁷ David Hall, perhaps with greater subtlety, observes that what was “scanted” in colonial New England was not recreation but “play” in the sense of topsy-turvy rituals. Although Puritans aspired to banish all ritual, especially rituals of inversion such as Christmas wassailing, April Fools trickery, and pre-Lenten Carnival, ritual also reemerged in New England, most notably in the weekly practice of Sabbath-keeping. Seeing the Sabbath as an inversion

¹⁶ For a review of the literature in the British context, see Peter Bailey, "Leisure, Culture and the Historian: Reviewing the First Generation of Leisure Historiography in Britain," *Leisure Studies* 8, no. 2 (1989), 107-127.

¹⁷ Hans-Peter Wagner, "Puritan Attitudes Towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth-Century New England: With Particular Consideration of Physical Recreation" (University of Saarlandes, 1979); Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Nancy L. Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

of rituals of inversion goes a long way toward understanding why Sabbatarianism—in Hall’s words— “lies near the center of the American moral imagination.”¹⁸

In his study of American holidays, Leigh Eric Schmidt similarly observes that Puritans “desacralized” holy days such as Christmas and various Saints days by replacing any observance of them with scrupulous Sabbath observance. Schmidt also notes, however, some continuities between the ancient practice of feast days and ritual practices in the New World, including multi-day “sacramental occasions” among Presbyterians in the eighteenth century, and camp revival meetings in the nineteenth century. Such rituals, Schmidt suggests, though not rituals of inversion, nevertheless served in part to absorb and diffuse topsy-turvy energy and carnivalesque play. And Christmas, a popular festival in medieval England characterized by wandering bands of rowdy youth demanding drink and charitable gifts, was appropriated and transformed by both the church and commercial culture into a more genteel and domestic holiday of gift-giving centered around children. The boundary between holy day and holiday, he persuasively argues, has never been altogether clean.¹⁹

A number of other historians have added texture to our understanding of recreation and leisure, as well as religious reform of recreation. Daniel Rodgers, in his discussion of “the gospel of play,” observes that nothing symbolized the Protestant

¹⁸ David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 211; Hall, “Symbols and Society in Colonial New England,” 465.

¹⁹ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), Ch. 1; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revival* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). On the disorderliness and subversiveness of camp meetings, see Charles A. Parker, “The Methodist Camp Meeting on the Frontier and the Methodist Religious Resort in the East—before 1900,” *Methodist History* 18, no. 3 (April, 1980), 179-192; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 50-52. Hatch quotes Michael Chevalier to the effect that American camp meetings functioned as “festivals of democracy” (58).

work ethic more than strict Sunday observance.²⁰ Roy Rosenzweig inaugurated more serious study of working-class leisure in the nineteenth century, giving voice to workers and immigrants, and thereby resisting reductivist narratives of social control.²¹ Lawrence Levine, in his study of nineteenth-century Shakespearean plays, has complicated the convenient distinction between high culture and popular culture.²² And Alexis McCrossen has provided a cultural history of Sunday that emphasizes the changing meanings attributed to the day over time.²³

Still, there are both refinements and new contributions waiting to be made with respect to both recreation and Sabbatarianism. Whereas many histories of Sabbatarianism, for example, assume that controversies over Sunday labor were more important than controversies over Sunday recreation, opposition to Sunday labor was widespread, and opposition to Sunday recreation was always more controversial. Whereas some treatments of Sabbatarianism regard Sunday legislation as “symbolic” in the sense of “not real,” the symbolic significance of such legislation and its “realness” were often directly, rather than inversely, related. Perhaps most importantly for present purposes, too many treatments of recreation reform efforts have tended to miss the ways in which clergy and lay religious leaders not only thought critically but also thought creatively about recreation and leisure. All of these themes warrant revisiting.

²⁰ Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920*.

²¹ Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for what we Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See also Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

²² Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

²³ Alexis McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

3. Overview²⁴

The purpose of this dissertation is to revisit the response of religious reformers, primarily Protestant clergy and lay leaders, to the changing recreational landscape in the northeastern United States from the 1630s to the 1930s. I have focused on recreation-related Sabbath controversies in order to keep in view the matter of time and, more specifically, time for recreation.

Most histories of Sabbatarianism focus on conflict because they focus on Sunday. But when it comes to Saturday, there was much more consensus between religious reformers and others. (Perhaps for this reason, it has received much less attention from historians.) Sabbatarians from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries may have been adamantly opposed to Sunday recreation, but in the long transition from Saints days to Saturdays, the fact remains: those opposed to Sunday

²⁴ Regarding periodization following the colonial era, I follow those who see a certain logic to the clustering of fifty-year periods beginning in 1790. I deal with the years 1790 to 1840 in the latter half of chapter 3; 1840 to 1890 in chapters 4 and 5; and 1890 to 1940 in chapter 6 and the conclusion. Sources that have contributed to this choice include John Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s," In *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 73-102; Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Jack Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Kathryn Grover, *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); William A. Gleason, *The Leisure Ethic: Work and Play in American Literature, 1840-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). McCrossen, somewhat similarly but with less specific dates, observes "Religious meanings for Sunday vied for power in the antebellum period; domestic and didactic ones ascended at mid century; and values associated with the consumer culture—pleasure, amusement, fun, diversion, recreation—spread around the start of the twentieth century." McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 2. For similar periodization in the British context, see Brian Harrison and E. J. Hobsbawm, "Work and Leisure in Industrial Society," *Past and Present*, no. 30 (April, 1965), 96-103. For more on Gutman, see Ch. 4, fn 1.

recreation were the earliest and most vocal advocates for designated days of recreation. Sunday, it turns out, holds the hermeneutical key to Saturday.

In Chapter two, I situate the recreational attitudes and practices of the Puritan settlers of New England in the context of the *Book of Sports* controversy. Although Puritans were never opposed to recreation in principle, they opposed Sunday sports as part of their larger program to reform society and, more specifically, the Church of England. By encouraging festivity on Sunday, the *Book of Sports* not only invoked the ancient tradition of church festivals, but also asserted royal prerogative against the Puritans. By the time Charles I reissued the *Book of Sports* in 1633, it had become a Sedition Act of sorts, thereby contributing to the Great Migration and, arguably, the English Civil War. When Puritans gained control of Parliament in the 1640s, they established designated days of recreation on Tuesdays rather than Sundays. This conviction that sport was lawful but belonged properly to secular days of the week rather than the Sabbath traveled to New England with the Puritan settlers.

In Chapter three, I suggest that many colonists continued to associate Sunday sport with Arminian theology, Catholic ecclesiology, and political and religious tyranny through the end of the War for Independence, as evidenced by events from the maypole at Merrymount in 1628 to the Continental Congress's resolution against theater and other "dissipations" in 1798. In the early nineteenth century, Sabbatarians for whom Sunday retained this association continued to oppose Sunday recreation but, unlike the Puritans, made no effort to provide alternative days of recreation. With Saints days largely abolished and work hours increasing, the play impulse had little space in the week for expression. In a great reversal, more and more people thus associated religious tyranny with restrictions on Sunday recreation rather than with Sunday recreation itself. The mythologizing of the *Book of Sports* and the dour Puritan illustrate the point.

In Chapter four, I address the nineteenth-century crisis of leisure space. As urban density made open space scarce and displaced older forms of recreation, workers and their children took their games and festivals to the only public space they had—the streets. They also took to the saloons, theaters, and dime museums provided by leisure entrepreneurs such as P.T. Barnum. Members of the middle class responded to this crisis largely by *separating* themselves into private clubs, taking excursions to resorts, and renovating their homes to include parlors with sofas and pianos. Methodists responded by *imitating* these resorts, creating alternative religious destinations such as the Chautauqua Institution, Ocean Grove, and Asbury Park, while the evangelical YMCA movement provided urban youth with pools and gymnasiums as alternative places to play. Yet another creative response to the crisis of leisure space was the parks movement. Unitarians in particular believed that the path to improving and uplifting immigrants and workers lay in *integrating* them with “the moral and religious part of the community” in public spaces such as Central Park. This “sacralizing” of leisure was not a Calvinist or Puritan project, but an extension of Methodists’ Arminian theology. Although Sabbatarians in the Puritan tradition were opposed to any and all of these activities, so long as they remained on Sunday, they were nevertheless on the verge of formulating a solution of their own.

In Chapter five, I document advocacy of the Saturday half-holiday, which emerges first in England, but later and more rapidly in the United States. Protestant Sabbatarians, who advocated early and often for the half-holiday, rapidly found common ground with liberal Protestants, Catholics, and organized labor. For conservatives in the Puritan tradition, the half-holiday was not an accommodation to modernism, but a realization of their long-held desire to maintain a distinction between holy day and holiday.

In Chapter six, I review the commercial leisure revolution of the 1890s and its implications for reform efforts. Sabbatarianism was adaptable to the values of Progressive Era reform, as evidenced by opposition to commercial amusements on the part of “progressive” Social Gospelers such as Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong. In addition to the obvious and direct threats that commercial leisure posed to Sabbatarians regarding Sunday recreation, the new leisure also entailed a more subtle transformation of sensibilities that questioned and challenged the entire Victorian code and Protestant work ethic. Liberal efforts to reform amusements for uplifting purposes largely failed, and even confirmed the fear of Wilbur Crafts that sanctioning amusements by way of reforming them inevitably would entail vulgarization. The work of cultural historians on this era strongly suggests that the interaction of social values and recreational practices is a complex and dynamic cultural process. Put differently, we create our recreations, and they in turn re-create us.²⁵

Finally, in chapter 7, I discuss the campaign for the five-day week in the 1920s by Rabbi Bernard Drachman, whose rationale was essentially the same as that of Protestant Sabbatarians before him—to maintain a distinction between a weekly holy day and holiday. Organized labor may have accomplished shorter hours, but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alike it took the interests of religion to translate shorter hours into fewer days.²⁶ In the end, it turns out that the modern weekend arrives first in England and America largely because of Sabbatarian advocacy.

In the course of the argument, I have attempted to situate theology historically while still taking it seriously on its own terms—i.e., to illustrate the deeply socially

²⁵ This basic but important insight is based upon Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

²⁶ David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 237.

embedded nature of theology without reducing belief to a mere function of social location. Sabbatarians, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, really did care about the exegesis of Exodus and Isaiah, about distinctions between moral and civil law, and about the relationship of the Sabbath to the Lord's Day.²⁷ Among those who took such beliefs seriously, they should be treated seriously, and not as mere epiphenomena. Furthermore, I hang my hat with those historians who are cautious about overdrawing the contrast between popular recreation and religion on the one hand, and attempts by those with greater cultural power to repress them on the other. Although not shared equally, power is diffuse. Moreover, those from different classes sometimes share similar interests, and at certain times and places, Sabbatarianism was one of those common causes.

²⁷ As with terms such as *recreation* and *leisure*, there is both ambiguity and overlap among *Sabbath*, *Sunday*, and *Lord's Day*. First, we should note that these terms do not always have the same referent; Jews, Adventists, and Seventh Day Baptists regard Saturday as the Sabbath, and so I generally refer to them as *Saturday Sabbatarians*. Even when these terms do have the same referent, however, they are not necessarily synonymous. *Sabbath* implies a particular way of thinking about the day—or, more precisely, a bounded set of ways of thinking about the day. In most cases, it implies continuity with the Hebrew Scriptures' emphasis on the day as sacred, holy, and consecrated. Although many people use *Sabbath* and *Lord's Day* interchangeably through the period under consideration, *Lord's Day* does not necessarily carry the same set of meanings. Those who believe the Sabbath to be abrogated because it belongs to the ceremonial law only, are more likely to refer to Sunday as the Lord's Day. Arguably, referring to the day as Sunday is more objective and carries less baggage by way of ideology or worldview, though as Sabbatarians liked to point out, that has not historically been the case. Sunday is the day of the Sun, implying precisely the sort of paganism that Sabbatarians wished to resist. Arguably, the only way to refer to Saturday and Sunday without any such baggage is to refer to them, respectively, as the seventh day and the first day, though that is cumbersome. As with other terms, I have used these with some flexibility, often using *Sunday* in the general sense it is now used, but sometimes using *Sabbath* or *Lord's Day* when those terms better capture the meaning signified by the particular context.

4. Recreation and Re-Creation

In the late sixteenth century, a pastor debating the Sabbath question in Dedham, England argued that Christians must in fact observe the Sabbath on Sunday because the first day of the week represents the Resurrection of Christ, which is “the official accomplishment of our re-creation.”²⁸ In 1915, a pastor at the Fourteenth Annual Lord’s Day Conference in Oakland, California, similarly remarked, “The Lord’s Day marked a new era, a recreation of heaven and earth.”²⁹ The curiosity here, illustrated by Central Park Commissioner Viele’s encounter with the New York Sabbath Committee, is that for the three centuries between these pastors’ remarks, those who most firmly associated Sunday with *re-creation*, disassociated Sunday with *recreation*.

²⁸ John H. Primus, "The Dedham Sabbath Debate: More Light on English Sabbatarianism," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), 94.

²⁹ O. P. Gifford, "The Lord's Day Observance as the Great Bond Uniting all Christendom," In *Sunday the World's Rest Day*, ed. Duncan J. McMillan (Garden City: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1916), 588.

CHAPTER 2
THE BOOK OF SPORTS

1. Introduction

In 1633, the same year that John Cotton, Thomas Hooker and seven hundred others emigrated from the Old World to the New,¹ George Herbert penned a poem entitled “Sunday” that attributes to the day a kind of ultimate significance that would become commonplace in the nineteenth century:

Sundaies the pillars are,
On which heav’ns palace arched lies:
The other dayes fill up the spare
And hollow room with vanities.
They are the fruitfull beds and borders
In Gods rich garden: that is bare,
Which parts their ranks and orders.

The Sundaies of mans life,
Thredded together on times string,
Make bracelets to adorn the wife
Of the eternall glorious King.
On Sunday heavens gate stands ope:
Blessings are plentiful and rife,
More plentiful then hope.²

The coinciding of the poem and the pilgrimage was not a coincidence; both were related to the *Book of Sports*, reissued by Charles I the same year.

Puritan attitudes toward recreation and leisure have been debated for centuries. Although historians have labored to correct the worst overstatements of Puritan opposition to recreation and leisure, they have labored largely in vain; the image of the

¹ Nellis M. Crouse, "Causes of the Great Migration 1630—1640," *The New England Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (January, 1932), 3-36; Winton U. Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 77.

² F. E. Hutchinson, ed., *The Works of George Herbert* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 75.

dour Puritan is popular and persistent. Indeed, Puritan concern over recreation is easily ridiculed in part because it is not easily understood. To understand it, we must begin by situating such concern amidst the cultural and religious turmoil preceding the English Civil War. When we do, we see that opposition to Sunday recreation, the primary Puritan distinctive, was part of a larger reaction and resistance to the Church and Crown.

The *Book of Sports*, issued in 1618 and again in 1633, raised the issue not only of Sunday sport but also of royal prerogative. Puritans took offense not only to the Crown's efforts to affirm Sunday sport and traditional festivities as lawful, but also to the requirement to read the declaration from the pulpit. Attitudes toward Sunday sports thus became symbols not only of religious but also of political affiliation. Simply put, the *Book of Sports* became a blunt instrument in a culture war, thereby contributing to the Great Migration to the New World in the 1630s.

Puritan attitudes toward recreation in New England must be understood in this context. Moreover, that Puritans were never opposed to recreation in principle is apparent from their early efforts to establish designated days of recreation.

2. The *Book of Sports*

The first episode of the *Book of Sports* controversy began in 1617, a moment in time perched in between the Anglican settlement of the Chesapeake and the Puritan settlement of New England, when James I stopped in Lancashire County on his return from his Scottish homeland. Lancashire, a rural area, was the site of a great conflict over Sunday recreation. One year earlier, local magistrates had outlawed all Sunday recreation, including not only already unlawful recreations such as bowling and bear- and bull-baiting, but also otherwise lawful recreations such as dancing and "piping."

Both many gentry and many peasants opposed the Lancashire order, and when James arrived he heard from both the gentry at court and the peasants by way of a petition. He also met with bishop Thomas Morton, whom he had appointed, and whose sympathies were with the magistrates. Simply put, James had a dilemma on his hands. On the one hand, he was troubled that the traditional forms of sport and festivity at hand were not only not of the useful sort but at times downright disorderly. He himself witnessed dancing that disrupted a worship service. On the other hand, the magistrates' legislation challenged the Crown's royal prerogative to rule over public behavior. James also needed to maintain the allegiance of the masses of people, and giving them the recreation they desired was an obvious means toward that end. One week after arriving, James issued the *Declaration of Sports for Lancashire*. Drafted by Bishop Morris, the Declaration simultaneously affirmed the importance of Sunday worship and the right of the people to their various lawful recreations after services. By lifting the force of the local restrictions, James endeared himself to the peasantry and further estranged himself from the magistrates.

One year later, James re-issued a revised version of the Declaration for the entire nation.

And as for our good peoples lawful Recreation, our Pleasure likewise is, that after the end of Divine Service our good people be not disturbed, letted, or discouraged from any lawful Recreation, such as Dancing either Men or Women, Archery for Men, Leaping, Vaulting, or any other such harmless Recreation, nor from having of May-Games, Whitson-Ales, and Morris Dances, and the letting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used, so as the same be had in due and convenient Time without impediment or Neglect of Divine Service: And that women shall have leave to carry Rushes to the Church for the Decorating of it, according to their old Custom. But withal, we do here Account still as prohibited, all unlawful Games to be used upon Sundays only, as Bear and Bull-baitings, Interludes, and at all times in the meaner sort of people as by Law prohibited, Bowling.³

³ On the differences between the 1617 Lancashire Declaration and the 1618 Declaration, see James Tait, "The Declaration of Sports for Lancashire (1617)," *The*

The Declaration concluded with an order that it be read in all parish churches.

In 1633, Charles I reissued the Declaration. The content was the same, except for an amendment adding wakes to the list of lawful Sunday recreations. And again the Declaration was to be read from pulpits. Although substantively similar, the 1633 Declaration was far more controversial. It contributed to the migration to the New World, and arguably to the English Civil War.⁴

Just ten years later, the same year that the Westminster divines convened, the Long Parliament passed legislation stating “That the Book for tolerating of Sports on the Lord’s day be burnt by the common Hangman; and that the Sheriff of London assist in executing this order, to whom, all, who have any of them, are to deliver them.”⁵ The following year there followed an ordinance “For the better observance of the Lord’s Day,” which outlawed wakes, church ales, work, traveling, and the crying of wares. And just in case there remains any question about the degree to which sport and recreation were implicated in national politics, Archbishop Laud’s support for the *Book of Sports* was cited as a matter of treason prior to his execution in 1645, and in 1649 Charles’s death warrant similarly cited the *Book of Sports* incident.⁶

English Historical Review 32, no. 128 (October, 1917), 564. “The Kings Majesties Declaration to his Subjects Concerning Lawful Sports to be Used.” The Declaration can be found in the following sources: Robert Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Neill and Company, 1865), 444-447; Wilfred B. Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times* (London: Houghton, 1933), 92-95.

⁴ Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain*, Vol. 3 (London: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1837), 378.

⁵ "April 1644: An Ordinance for the Better Observation of the Lords-Day," In *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660*, Vol. 1, eds. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, (1911), 420-422.

⁶ There is as of yet no definitive work on the *Book of Sports*. See Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of England* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), Vol. 3, 247-252, and Vol. 7, 318-322. Another early work is Lionel Arthur Govett, *The King's Book of Sports* (London: E. Stock, 1890). An important work that is overly sympathetic to the Puritans is Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times*, especially

How shall we understand the Puritans' strict opposition to Sunday recreation during the *Book of Sports* controversy? Explanations generally run in one of two directions, emphasizing either reformed theology or the social, economic, and political context of seventeenth-century England. Weber, for example, attributed Calvinist and Puritan attitudes toward labor and leisure—the “Protestant Ethic”—primarily to the doctrine of predestination and the anxiety entailed in trying to secure confidence in one's salvation.⁷ In what remains one of the more thorough treatments of Puritan

Ch. 7. Dennis Brailsford's treatment is brief but important. Dennis Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 99-108. See also Dennis Brailsford, *British Sport: A Social History* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1992), 35-40. Struna helpfully builds on (and at points challenges) Brailsford: Nancy L. Struna, "The Declaration of Sports Reconsidered," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 14 (December, 1983), 44-68; Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America*, Ch. 1. A technical piece on the distinctions between the 1617 and 1618 Declarations is Tait, "The Declaration of Sports for Lancashire (1617)," 561-568. See also Roger C. Richardson, "Puritanism and the Ecclesiastical Authorities: The Case of the Diocese of Chester," In *Politics, Religion, and the English Civil War*, ed. Brian Manning (London: Edward Arnold, 1973), 3-33; Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, 71-80; James T. Dennison, *The Market Day of the Soul: The Puritan Doctrine of the Sabbath in England, 1532-1700* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), Ch. 2; David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 65-68; Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Ch. 5 and Ch. 7; Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 351-359; Gregory Michael Colon Semenza, "'Unlawful Recreations': Sport, Politics, and Literature in Early Modern England" (Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, 2001). A somewhat contrarian interpretation that challenges the emphasis on political context is Heasim Sul, "The King's Book of Sports: The Nature of Leisure in Early Modern England," 17, no. 4 (December, 2000), 167-179. An obscure essay is Edmund F. Slafter, *The Character and History of the Book of Sports, 1618-1643* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1905).

⁷ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Anthony Giddens (New York: Scribner, 1976), 292. For a sampling of critical treatments of Weber's work, see Hartmut Lehmann and Guenther Roth, eds., *Weber's "Protestant Ethic": Origins, Evidence, Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Gordon Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism: An Essay on Max Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Michael Walzer, *The*

recreation, Brailsford attributes the distinctive “English Sunday,” with its distrust of physical exertion in general and physical recreation in particular, to “the legacy of a wholesale inspection of the purposes and propriety of bodily exercise, a rigorous enquiry from first principles which gives the Puritan movement a peculiar significance in the history of sport and physical education.”⁸ Weber and Brailsford both have been influential in foregrounding the role of Calvinist theology as a proximate cause in the development of the new ideology of labor and leisure. Christopher Hill, by contrast, has argued that the connection between Puritan Sabbatarianism and Reformed theology should not be overdrawn, and ably situates the *Book of Sports* incident in the context of a new economic order. Although the relative significance of ideology and economic context as sources of Puritan attitudes is not easily, both clearly played a role in opposition to Sunday recreation.

3. Sabbatarianism in Reformation Theology

Jews have observed the Sabbath on the last day of the week, Saturday, since the time of Moses, and Christians have worshiped on the first day of the week, Sunday, since the first century. The exact status of the Sabbath in the Christian tradition, however, has not always been clear. Seventh Day Adventists and Seventh Day Baptists believe that Saturday is still the Sabbath and the appropriate day for worship, while many other Christians embrace some version of Sabbath-transfer

Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965).

⁸ Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne*, 123. Later, Brailsford writes: “The Puritans saw their mission to erase all sport and play from men’s lives” (141). See also Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 6; Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 143.

theology, believing that Sunday is now the Christian Sabbath. Other Christians believe that the Sabbath has been fully abrogated, and is no longer binding—that there is no such thing as the “Christian Sabbath.” Among the latter, some believe in a “spiritual Sabbath.” Usually worshipping on Sunday in part for practical reasons, they believe that one day of rest and worship is normative for Christian believers, but that the details of the day are immaterial. Also a matter of great controversy has been whether the Sabbath ideal may include or must exclude recreation.

If one central theological question at hand for the reformers had to do with the means of justification, closely related questions included those pertaining to the continuity or discontinuity of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and also the relationship between Israel and the church. Luther, Calvin, and other reformers were unified in asserting the authority of Scripture over against the papacy, and the doctrine of calling was formulated to affirm the dignity of all legitimate vocations over against the perceived dichotomy between sacred and secular in Roman Catholicism. For both of these reasons, the reformers unanimously opposed the observation of all holy days, including Saints days, Christmas, and Easter. Regarding the Sabbath, two observations are relevant. First, the reformers did not dwell on the topic. Second, like their opposition to holy days in general, the reformers also set out to break with medieval Sabbatarianism, which after all rested on the authority of the church and implied a dichotomy between sacred and secular time. Herein lies one of the great ironies of the Reformation: From teaching that attempted to break from medieval Sabbatarianism came an even stricter form of Sabbatarianism.

Sabbatarians sometimes argued that Sabbath-keeping precluded recreation on the basis of Isaiah 58:13, which speaks of not “finding thine own pleasure” on the Sabbath. This aspect of the controversy turned on the ambiguity of ‘pleasure,’ which can mean either ‘enjoyment’ or ‘will.’ Puritan Sabbatarians interpreted ‘pleasure’ as

‘enjoyment.’ But as anti-Sabbatarians liked to point out, Calvin understood ‘pleasure’ to refer to vicious pleasures, and other reformers took this to refer to bodily labor (i.e., one’s pleasure being contrasted with the will of God, which consisted of the cessation of labor). Moreover, they added, the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible) translates the passage “thou shalt not lift thy foot to work,” and in the Vulgate (the Latin Bible) ‘pleasure’ is *voluntas* not *voluptas*—i.e., will, not enjoyment.⁹

The main question for the reformers, however, was whether the Sabbath commandment constituted moral or ceremonial law, which in turn dictated whether the commandment had been abrogated or was still in effect. Perhaps the most concise way of reviewing the relevant differences among Luther, Calvin, Calvin’s successors, and the English Puritans is to look respectively at the way in which their various views became formalized in the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), and the Westminster Confession (1646). Beginning with Luther’s original assertion that the Sabbath commandment was merely ceremonial and therefore abrogated, we can trace a gradual shift toward later reformers who held the Sabbath to be a non-abrogated aspect of ceremonial law, and eventually, by the time of the Westminster Confession, to the view that the Sabbath was in fact part of the eternal, moral law.

Most Anabaptists, Quakers, and other groups of the radical Reformation were decidedly anti-legalistic and therefore anti-Sabbatarian. These groups, however, did

⁹ Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 398, 206. Bishop Francis White, for example, notes: “the Hebrew word which is translated ‘pleasure’ signifieth will and desire, purpose, and delight, and the Chaldee paraphrast translates it ‘necessities;’ and the Greek and Latin translators, ‘thine own will,’ or ‘thine own wills’” (171-172). The debate would never be settled. In 1884, almost 250 years after Bishop White was writing, Wilbur Crafts still held that “It is a profound saying of Isaiah that in order to ‘make the Sabbath a delight’ we must ‘turn away from pleasure.’” Wilbur F. Crafts, *The Sabbath for Man*, 7th ed. (Baltimore: Authors’ Union, 1894), 21.

not significantly influence the Puritans or the Sabbatarian tradition, although some of their descendents later became Sabbatarians in the New World. Luther, like the radical reformers, was anti-legalistic and anti-Sabbatarian. Like Aquinas, however, he held that the Decalogue contained both moral and ceremonial aspects. Although the moral law element included the need for regular rest, Luther's firm distinction between gospel and law entailed the view that the religious duty of the Sabbath commandment was ceremonial and therefore abrogated. He supported Sunday as a day of worship as a practical matter and a civil institution for the working class, but he was adamantly opposed to introducing any aspect of duty or obligation. "If anywhere the day is made holy for the mere day's sake—if anywhere anyone sets up its observance on a Jewish foundation, then I order you to work on it, to ride on it, to dance on it, to feast on it, to do anything that shall remove this encroachment on Christian liberty." This view is reflected in the Augsburg Confession:

For they that think that the observation of the Lord's Day was appointed by the authority of the Church, instead of the Sabbath, as necessary, are greatly deceived. The Scripture, which teacheth that all the Mosaical ceremonies can be omitted after the Gospel is revealed, has abrogated the Sabbath.

Nevertheless, the Confession continues by supporting Sunday worship as a civil institution: "And yet, because it was requisite to appoint a certain day, that the people might know when they ought to come together, it appears that the Church did for that purpose appoint the Lord's Day."¹⁰

Calvin's views were slightly different. They are also of special interest, in part because they were more influential on the Puritans than those of Luther, but also

¹⁰ Richard J. Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," In *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. D. A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 314-315. Although Luther's catechism is illustrated with a woodcut of a man gathering wood outside a church while others worship, a reference to a passage in the Bible where a man found gathering wood on the Sabbath was stoned (Numbers 15: 32-36), Luther did not select the illustration. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1950), 338-339.

because Calvin's heirs debated his reading of the Sabbath. Like Luther, Calvin considered the obligations associated with Catholic Sabbatarianism as an unholy extension of Jewish ceremonialism. Where Scripture refers to the Sabbath as "a perpetual covenant" (Exodus 31:16), Calvin takes this to mean not eternal in the literal sense, but only perpetual or "eternal" within the limited scope of "the Law"—i.e., the time before Christ. "Whatever was spoken of under the law as eternal, I maintain to have had reference to the new state of things which came to pass at the coming of Christ; and thus the eternity of the Law must not be extended beyond the fulness of time, when the truth of its shadow was manifested, and God's covenant assumed a different form."¹¹ Although he too supported Sunday as a day of rest and worship as a matter of practical convenience, Calvin did not require worship every seventh day or only on Sunday, and considered tendencies to do so as "judaizing" tendencies.

In contrast to Luther, however, Calvin's covenantal theology emphasized continuity rather than discontinuity between the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Just as the Mosaic Law generally foreshadowed the more complete revelation of God's law in the person of Christ, the Mosaic Sabbath foreshadowed and found its fulfillment in the salvation rest that is described in the book of Hebrews as having arrived in Christ. "[T]he Sabbath, although its external observation is not now in use, still remains eternal in its reality, like circumcision." And "there is nothing which more completely confirms its reality and substance than the abolition of its external use."¹² To Calvin, then, the way to do justice to the theme of the Sabbath that runs throughout Scripture was to reformulate it as a spiritual or eternal Sabbath. Christians, though liberated from the formal elements of Sabbath observance of the Mosaic Law, nevertheless were obliged to "rest from sin" every day. Calvin thus maintained the contemporary

¹¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, trans. Charles W. Bingham, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.), 443.

¹² *Ibid.*, 444.

relevance of Sabbath keeping without framing it as moral law. Calvin was also concerned with keeping the Sabbath not only as a discipline that was spiritual in the sense of internal, but also as outward expression—not as a means of salvation, but as an expression of sanctification.

What Calvin's views on the Sabbath entailed for recreation is not altogether clear. Indeed, depending on one's frame of reference, Calvin's views on the Sabbath are either extremely nuanced or simply inconsistent, with apparent differences of emphasis between the *Institutes* and his commentary on Deuteronomy, and even differences among earlier and later editions of the *Institutes*. There is a tradition, especially popular among anti-Sabbatarians, that John Knox found Calvin playing at bowls one Sabbath day, but the anecdote does not appear to have a trustworthy source.¹³ Sabbatarians, by contrast, have a strong claim to his legacy by quoting from the sermons on Deuteronomy:

If we spend the Lord's Day in partying, games and sports is this honoring God? No! Is it not mocking him and misusing his name? Yes! . . .

Now, if the Lord's Day is spent playing games and in other empty pastimes, and in things that are clearly contrary to God, so that men think that the way to keep the Day holy is by offending God in different ways, and if God's holy regulations which he ordained to bring us to himself are broken in this way, then is it any wonder that men act as brute beasts the rest of the week?¹⁴

In any case, Calvin's twofold emphasis—on the Sabbath as spiritual rather than moral, but nonetheless a spirituality that entailed outward enactment—finds expression in the Heidelberg Catechism (for which Ursinus was primarily

¹³ Chris Coldwell, "Calvin in the Hands of the Philistines, Or did Calvin Bowl on the Sabbath?" (1998), <http://www.naphtali.com/pdf/calvinbw.pdf>. On Calvin, see also John Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath: A Comparative Study," In *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. David E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 19-34.

¹⁴ John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, Facsimile ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 1408.

responsible). In response to the question “What is God’s will for you in the fourth commandment?” the Catechism reads:

First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God's people to learn what God's Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin already in this life the eternal Sabbath.¹⁵

Although he emphasized that the Sabbath command was ceremonial and abrogated, still, Calvin’s treatment of the Sabbath theme retained a much stronger thread or thematic continuity between the testaments, resulting in a duty for the Christian to practice spiritual Sabbath-keeping. Note too that in the catechism the emphasis is first on the positive duties required of Sabbath observance, and only secondarily on spiritual rest from sin. This is no longer just about rest, but rest *for worship*. In the century to follow, these seemingly slight distinctions would become amplified and, by the time of the Westminster Confession of Faith, make a tremendous difference.

In Zurich, the reformed theologians Zwingli, Martyr, and especially Bullinger took the logic of Sabbatarianism further still. Whereas Calvin resisted the logic of a weekly day of worship as required, Martyr made a new distinction between aspects of the Sabbath commandment that were ceremonial and abrogated, and those that were ceremonial and yet simultaneously perpetual. Like Calvin, then, Martyr held that there was no designated day for worship, but unlike Calvin, he took a weekly day of rest to be normative. The reason for formulating the weekly day of rest within the ceremonial law was to avoid the Roman tendency of understanding it as belonging to the moral law, thereby resisting bondage to the judaizing tendencies of Mosaic Law

¹⁵ Fred H. Klooster, *Our Only Comfort*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 2001), 977.

and (ostensibly) preserving “Christian liberty.” This slippage away from abrogation, however, is even more explicit in Bullinger:

We know that the sabbath is ceremonial, so far forth as it is joined to sacrifices and other Jewish ceremonies, and so far forth as it is tied to a certain time; but in respect that on the sabbath-day religion and true godliness are exercised and published, that a just and seemly order is kept in the church, and that the love of our neighbor is thereby preserved, therein, I say, it is perpetual, and not ceremonial.¹⁶

Likewise, in the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), Christian liberty is emphasized in principle just as it is eroding in practice:

Hence we see that in the ancient churches there were not only certain set hours in the week appointed for meetings, but that also the Lord's Day itself, ever since the apostles' time, was set aside for them and for a holy rest, a practice now rightly preserved by our Churches for the sake of worship and love. . . . In this connection we do not yield to the Jewish observance and to superstitions. For we do not believe that one day is any holier than another, or think that rest in itself is acceptable to God. Moreover, we celebrate the Lord's Day and not the Sabbath as a free observance.¹⁷

Bullinger's move away from Calvin's spiritual Sabbath and toward Sabbath-keeping as a matter of moral law clearly coincides with his expressed concern about morality—“religion and true godliness.” As with Calvin and other continental reformers, recreation is for Bullinger still on the margins as a matter of disciplinary concern. He makes some reference to the indulgence of “fleshly pleasures,” including dicing, drinking, and dancing, as abuses of the Sabbath.¹⁸ Throughout his work, however, we see an early Protestant effort to explicate in some detail what could and could not be done on the Sabbath, including the exceptions for works of mercy and necessity that would soon become a matter of great debate and controversy. At the turn of the seventeenth century, on the eve of the explosion of interest in the topic in

¹⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger: The First and Second Decades* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1849), 259.

¹⁷ Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," 336.

¹⁸ Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger: The First and Second Decades*, 259, 262.

England, it was only a small step from Bullinger to Zanchius's statement that the Sabbath commandment is simply a matter of moral law, and one that is taught not only by Scripture but also by nature.

If to Calvin the Sabbath was a typological pointer to eternal rest rather than a literal day of rest, to his successors it was both a pointer *and* a literal day of rest. For practical purposes, Bullinger and the Second Helvetic Confession were closer to medieval Sabbatarianism than they were to the anti-Sabbatarianism of Luther. As Bauckham has shown, this is not as surprising as it may at first appear. Although the reformers initially resisted the logic of medieval Sabbatarianism (i.e., Sabbath as moral law) they nevertheless retained many premises of medieval Sabbatarianism, thereby rendering their break with it somewhat superficial even at the outset. In addition to supporting the principle of a weekly day of rest for worship, Luther and Calvin's support for Sunday worship as a practical matter lent a kind of support in practice for Sunday Sabbatarianism. Regarding the Ten Commandments, Luther and Calvin generally agreed that they were a summary of the moral law and the foundation for Christian morality. Finally, Luther and Calvin both connected the Sabbath not only to the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt, but also to the seventh day of Creation in Genesis, thereby laying a foundation for later reformers to reformulate the Sabbath as a "Creation ordinance" binding upon all persons in all times and places.¹⁹

For reasons that remain debatable, Sabbatarian theology found its ecological niche not on the continent, but in the Anglo world. In England and Scotland, there was an explosion of interest and a frenzy of publication on the topic in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In an influential 1595 treatise entitled *The True Doctrine of the Sabbath*, Bownd equated the Ten Commandments with the moral law, and asserted: "Upon the Lord's Day we ought to rest from all honest recreations

¹⁹ Bauckham, "Sabbath and Sunday in the Protestant Tradition," 312-313.

and lawful delights.”²⁰ A similar view, and the most forcefully Sabbatarian among all the major confessions, is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, completed in England in 1646:

As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week: and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.²¹

Here we find all the components of a fully developed Sabbatarian theology—the prescription not only of weekly worship but more specifically Sunday worship, understood as a moral law binding upon all persons in all places, grounded in the doctrine of creation, revealed not only in Scripture but also in nature, entailing not only a duty to rest from work and recreation, but also the positive duty to worship and do good works “the whole time.” With the sole exception of the day for worship, the Westminster position was otherwise indistinguishable from that of seventh-day Sabbatarians, whom the Puritans called “judaizers.” Theologically speaking, the time and distance traveled from sixteenth-century Germany and Switzerland to seventeenth-century England proved to be substantial.

²⁰ Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 149. Bownd's (also Bound) work was suppressed by Archbishop Whitgift in 1599, which resulted in it becoming even more popular, and a revised edition was published in 1606.

²¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Atlanta: Presbyterian Church of America, 1990), 72-73.

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Reformed theology, however, does not completely explain Puritan Sabbatarianism. As illustrated by medieval Sabbatarianism, the many Calvinists on the continent who remained non-Sabbatarians, and by later Sabbatarians with little to no connection to the Reformed tradition, Sabbatarian theology does not directly correspond with Reformed theology. Moreover, as a few historians have noted, Puritan Sabbatarianism entails a certain irony. With respect to most religious rituals, Catholics and Anglicans were more “rigorous” than Puritans.²² Especially in the early years of the Reformation, there is some evidence that Puritan departure from Catholic and Anglican practice sometimes moved toward, rather than away from, festivity and indulgence. The Catholic Thomas More, noting that Puritans abolished not only Saints days but also Lenten fast days, described English Puritans as those who “eat fast and drink fast and lust fast in their lechery.”²³ C.S. Lewis, whose expertise was in sixteenth-century literature, concluded

the quarrel between the Puritans and the Papists was not primarily a quarrel between rigorism and indulgence, and that, in so far as it was, the rigorism was on the Roman side. On many questions, and specially in their view of the marriage bed, the Puritans were the indulgent party. . . . The idea that a Puritan was a repressed and repressive person would have astonished Sir Thomas More and Luther about equally.²⁴

²² Allen French, *Charles I and the Puritan Upheaval: A Study of the Causes* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1955), 268.

²³ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as they really were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 1.

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 116-117. Puritan minister William Fenner suggested that morality and sensual enjoyment were directly correlated: “A good quiet conscience maketh a man taste sweetness in all outward things, in meat, in drink, in sleep, in the company of friends . . . The healthy man onely can take pleasure in recreations, walks, meats, sports, and the like: they yield no comfort to those that are bedrid, or half-dead. But when the conscience is at peace, the soul is all in good health; and so all things are enjoyed with

And even in the seventeenth century, Quaker founder George Fox criticized Puritans for their sports, feasts, games, plays, shows, pastimes, and ornate and costly apparel.²⁵ Whatever the case on the other six days of the week, however, at least by the early seventeenth century many Puritans were very strict Sabbatarians.

According to Christopher Hill, Sabbatarianism was not primarily a function of theology, but rather a “Puritan innovation” that is best explained by the social and economic context of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England. To be sure, the restrictions placed on Sunday recreation by the Lancashire magistrates had plenty of precedent. Even prior to the Reformation, recreation was at times a point of controversy in England. The royal court and the peasantry both had sporting traditions, but of very different sorts. Courtly recreation consisted largely of field sports such as riding, hunting, jousting, tilting, tournaments, and baits. Traditional and “popular” recreation consisted of more boisterous forms of festivity, such as fairs, wakes, and church ales, as well as fertility and other pagan rituals such as maypoles and morris dances. The Crown sometimes placed restrictions on these popular recreations, such as Edward III’s opposition to ball games and cockfighting, and Edward VI’s effort to abolish wakes. Many monarchs banned commoners from poaching, thereby preserving hunting for the gentry, and Henry VIII, while encouraging archery as training for military service, made bowling unlawful for common people.²⁶ Many of these royal enactments were motivated by a desire to

sweetness and comfort.” J. I. Packer, *Among God's Giants: Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1991), 150.

²⁵ G. Fox, *The Journal of George Fox* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 151.

²⁶ On British recreation of this period see the works of Dennis Brailsford and Peter Burke, including Brailsford, *British Sport: A Social History*; Brailsford, *Sport, Time, and Society: The British at Play* (London: Routledge, 1991); Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne*; Burke, "The Invention of Leisure in Early Modern Europe: Reply," *Past and Present*, no. 156 (August, 1997), 192-197; Burke, *Popular Culture*

protect special interests, while others were designed to maintain order or diffuse popular discontent. There are also examples of more specifically Sunday legislation during the reigns of Edward III, Henry VI, and Edward IV.²⁷ The *Bishops' Book* of 1537 condemned those who spent Sundays or other holy days in work or worldly recreations—including dancing, idleness, plays, gluttony, riot, or other vain pastimes.²⁸

During the reign of Elizabeth and into the reign of James, concerns regarding Sunday recreation were widespread and not yet distinctively Puritan. In 1572, for example, Humphrey Roberts offered “An earnest complaint of divers vain, wicked and abused exercises practiced on the Saboth day,” and in 1573 Richard Fletcher, a priest and later a bishop in the Church of England, pronounced “that it is as ill to play at games as shoutinge, bowlinge on Sunday as to lye with your neyghbor’s wiffe on Munday.”²⁹ Further evidence for concern regarding Sabbath observance within the Church of England is found in the *Homily of the Place and Time of Prayer*, which represented a consensus statement of sorts during the Elizabethan era.³⁰ In practice, Elizabeth faced similar dilemmas regarding Sunday recreation as those of James. Although a lover of sport and no Sabbatarian, her sympathies often lay with the reformers over against the peasantry. In the 1570s, Elizabeth sided with reformers in

in *Early Modern Europe*. See also Emma Griffin, *England's Revelry: A History of Popular Sports and Pastimes, 1660-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 295; Alison Sim, *Pleasures & Pastimes in Tudor England* (Phoenix Mill, UK: Sutton, 1999); Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850*.

²⁷ Edward Eggleston, *The Beginners of a Nation: A History of the Source and Rise of the Earliest English Settlements in America* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 138.

²⁸ Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War*, 37.

²⁹ Collinson, "The Beginnings of English Sabbatarianism," 208.

³⁰ "An Homily of the Place and Time of Prayer," In *The Two Books of Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859).

Manchester in suppressing popular festivities, including some Sunday sports.³¹ Likewise in Lancashire, civil magistrates had been regulating Sunday recreation since the 1570s without interference from the Crown. Moreover, many of the legislative initiatives in Lancashire were not from Puritans but from gentry or other non-Puritans.³² As further evidence that strict Sabbatarianism had relatively wide support, Parliament passed a number of bills restricting Sunday work and recreation beginning in 1585, well before Puritans were a majority.³³ (With political overtones of resistance to the Crown, such bills were uniformly vetoed by the queen.) And James, in the year he assumed the throne, issued a proclamation stating that because of “great neglect in this Kingdom of keeping the Sabbath-day,” there was to be no “bear-baiting, bull-baiting, interludes, common plays, or other like disordered and unlawful exercises and pastimes” on the “sabbath-day.”³⁴ Finally, evidence for the continuity between Puritan and non-Puritan attitudes toward Sunday recreation can be found in the Chesapeake Bay, where Anglican attitudes and practices were virtually indistinguishable from those that would only later become distinctively Puritan. Simply put, the action of the Lancashire magistrates to restrict Sunday recreation was not particularly innovative or radical.

Still, the Lancashire laws signified a new level of activism among county magistrates—an activism that was occasioned in part by economic developments. At the turn of the seventeenth century, the long, slow process of industrialization was

³¹ Struna, “The Declaration of Sports Reconsidered,” 44-68.

³² Tait, “The Declaration of Sports for Lancashire (1617),” 566.

³³ J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and Her Parliaments*, Vol. 2 (London: J. Cape, 1953-57), 58-60, 394-395. This bill for “the better and more reverent observing of the Sabbath of the Sabbath day” would have outlawed hunting, hawking, bearbaiting, and wakes on Sunday.

³⁴ John Strype, ed., *The Annals of the Reformation*, Vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824), 531. Similar views can be found in James’s earlier publication, *Basilikon Doron*.

already underway, with a movement away from the seasonality and irregularity of an agrarian economy toward the regularity of manufacturing and merchandising. Guilds were on the decline, sometimes resulting in unemployment and increased concerns regarding idleness. At the same time, something resembling a free market for labor was emerging, as was a middle class—especially in urban areas—for whom long hours of work became desirable. In contrast to the peasantry and dependent laborers, for whom long hours of work constituted mere oppression, long hours for entrepreneurs and independent laborers translated into a higher standard of living. Old attitudes toward work among both the gentry and the peasantry thus came into conflict with new attitudes among those looking to improve their lot. Tradition and stability were pitted against progress and change.³⁵

In many cases, economic interests coincided not only with political but also with religious interests. Protestant Sabbatarians, for example, were advocates of time-consciousness and work discipline, and those whose primary interest was in work discipline became increasingly sympathetic toward Sabbatarianism. Saints days and other holy days were irregular, and while well suited to the seasonality of agricultural work, they were in the context of an industrializing economy simply bad for business. The Sabbath, by contrast, was regular, and better suited to the new economy. The weekly Sabbath thus became popular not only among religious reformers, but also among all those with an interest in the regulation of labor, including employers and those whom Hill calls the “industrious sort of people.” “Social Sabbatarianism” was the common cause that unified these otherwise strange bedfellows.³⁶

³⁵ Christopher Hill, “The Uses of Sabbatarianism,” In *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken Books, 1967). See also Jan De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³⁶ Hill, “The Uses of Sabbatarianism,” 149, 153, 151. Cf. Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne*, 36.

This social sorting is key to the symbolic significance of both Sunday sport and Sunday Sabbatarianism, apart from which the whole episode is difficult to understand. Just as the action of the Lancashire magistrates, given its continuity with past restrictions on Sunday recreation, does not seem radical, so too the *Book of Sports*, taken at face value, seems a moderate document.³⁷ After all, the Declaration affirms the importance of Sunday services and of avoiding unlawful recreations—emphases any Puritan would have agreed with. In keeping with the views of Elizabeth and Henry VIII, the Declaration affirmed recreation that was useful to the king—for military training, and for diversion. What then was the significance of the Declaration? If Elizabeth had never seen the need for such a declaration in the half-century of her reign, why did James deem it necessary? And why did Puritans take such offense?

James offered two reasons for reissuing the proclamation. First, he expressed concern for the conversion of “Popish Recusants.” Restricting lawful recreation after services would hinder the conversion of many by “persuading them, that no honest Mirth or Recreation is lawful or tolerable in our *Religion*.” Second, restricting lawful recreations unintentionally promotes unlawful recreations. Instead of strengthening the bodies of the “common and Meaner sort of people” for possible use in war, such restriction “sets up filthy Tiplings and Drunkennels, and breeds a number of discontented and idle Speeches in their Ale-Houses.”³⁸

There were other reasons as well, including political weakness amidst conflicting visions regarding the moral basis of society. James faced an economic crisis, occasioned in part by massive population growth, that included inflation, unemployment, land shortage, and government debt. The economic crisis entailed a

³⁷ Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times*, 95.

³⁸ *The King's Book of Sports*, in Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 444-447.

crisis of social values; while those who embraced “the new world of competition” and benefited from newfound social mobility had less time or sympathy for the old hierarchies, large numbers of poor posed a threat to orderliness through excessive drinking and merrymaking. The proposed solutions to this disorderliness diverged. Anglicans and gentry appealed to tradition and the established hierarchies of lords, monarchs, and bishops. Puritans and the industrious, middling sort turned inward to conscience and self-discipline. Attitudes toward sport and festivity increasingly correlated to these prescribed solutions to social disorder, with Puritans wishing to restrain revelry and the Crown wishing to harness it for social utility.³⁹

The Lancashire incident and declaration might well be forgotten to history if James had not issued a slightly revised version of the declaration the following year. The 1618 Declaration expanded the list of lawful recreations to include “May-Games, Whitson-Ales, and Morris Dances, and the letting up of May-poles and other sports therewith used.”⁴⁰ The revision is significant. What is sometimes lost in discussions of the *Book of Sports* is that the Declaration here uses the word “sport” much more broadly than it is used today, referring not only to athletic games and contests, but also ritual forms of festivity. Puritans were not opposed to sport in the first sense—athletic contests were in fact precisely the kind of recreation Puritans favored for their usefulness—but they were fiercely opposed to the second sort of sport. Maypoles and morris dances had pagan associations. Church ales, annual festivals held on or near the dedication day of a parish church, and which were designed to raise money, were boisterous affairs lubricated by large quantities of ale (sometimes brewed by the parson). Order was not always maintained, as evidenced not only by the presence of spectator-based blood sports such as bear- and bull-baiting, but also by the many

³⁹ David Underdown, “What was the English Revolution?” In *The English Civil War*, ed. Peter Gaunt (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 27-32.

⁴⁰ Tait, “The Declaration of Sports for Lancashire (1617),” 564.

accounts of brawling, children conceived out of wedlock, and occasional deaths by manslaughter or murder.⁴¹ Understood in this light, Puritan opposition to “sport” is simpler to understand.

In part because it had no obvious trigger—no national crisis analogous to the situation in Lancashire—the national edict also had greater political overtones. It was clearly a jab at the king’s Parliamentary opponents, and arguably was a sign of political weakness. Parliament was divided and withholding funds, and James’s popular support was in question. In affirming Sunday recreation, and in affirming church ales and May games in particular, James was siding with the lower class by giving them the traditional pastimes they desired, and which in some cases they had been denied by local magistrates. The affirmation of “traditional” pastimes, however, was not merely a defense of the status quo but in many cases an attempt to revitalize or even invent new traditions. Robert Dover’s Cotswold Games, for example, which started with the support of James, was a new tradition. Likewise, Cavalier poets such as Ben Jonson and Robert Herrick waxed nostalgic about the love and unity and social cohesion fostered by May games and church ales. Although purportedly about the popular pastimes of the people, these events and publications were the initiatives of an urban elite. Whereas Puritans were trying to secure social stability by narrowing the category of “lawful recreations,” James’s ideology of sport was an attempt to accomplish the same end through a different means.⁴²

⁴¹ Thomas G. Barnes, "County Politics and a Puritan Cause Célèbre: Somerset Churchales, 1633 (the Alexander Prize Essay)," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (1959), 103-122. Barnes adds: “The ‘Preciser sort’ viewed churchales with loathing, considering them profane orgies which desecrated the ‘Sabbath’, gave rise to every conceivable sin, drew the people away from the Word (churchales fell during hours when the lecturers were active), and sapped their spiritual vitality, thus opening the way for Popery” (108).

⁴² Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 134-136.

James was concerned not only about securing popular support in the country, but also about warding off the threat posed by non-conformists who were coming to power in both local government and Parliament, especially the House of Commons. To the extent that James was nervous about non-conformists gathering for potentially seditious assemblies in which the government might be criticized, encouraging Sunday recreation rather than a strict Sabbath served his purposes.⁴³ The king's critics thus perceived his policy to constitute a bread-and-circuses approach to public amusement, as evidenced by Lucy Hutchinson's *Memoirs*:

The court of this king [James I] was a nursery of lust and intemperance To keep the people in their deplorable security, till vengeance overtook them, they were entertained with masks, stage plays, and various sorts of ruder sports. They began murder, incest, adultery, drunkenness, swearing, fornication, and all sort of ribaldry, to be no concealed but countenanced vices, because they held such conformity with the court example.⁴⁴

James's Declaration was thus reactionary; in Struna's words, it was an opiate for the masses.⁴⁵

It was also ineffective. Bishops were to enforce the order, "constraining them [Puritans and precise People] to conform themselves, or to leave the County according to the Laws of our Kingdom, and the Canons of our Church, and so to strike equally on both hands, Against the Contemners of our Authority, and Adversaries of our Church."⁴⁶ But that edict encountered much opposition, including from Archbishop

⁴³ Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, 2nd ed. (New York: Schocken, 1967), 196-197.

⁴⁴ *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson*, eds. Lucy Apsley Hutchinson, Julius Hutchinson and Charles Harding Firth (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1906), 64.

⁴⁵ Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America*, Ch. 1; Struna, "The Declaration of Sports Reconsidered," 52-55. Whitaker writes: "The document of course did not indicate any fresh or starting development in the State policy for Sunday observance. It simply reiterated what had been the law of the State and of the Church since the early days of the Reformation." Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times*, 95. Cf. Hill, "The Uses of Sabbatarianism," 194.

⁴⁶ Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 446.

Abbott, suggesting that Sabbatarian sympathies extended well into the Church of England. James, in need of Abbott's support, retracted the mandate to read it from pulpits. That Puritans were "to conform themselves or to leave the county," however, makes it clear that the *Book of Sports* was not just about sports.

The 1618 Declaration was thus a form of symbolic revenge that was not particularly threatening to the king's opponents.⁴⁷ It may in fact have had the opposite of its desired effect. Critics of the king would later claim that the Declaration increased the number of non-conformists.⁴⁸ One clear effect of the episode was an increased association of Puritanism with strict Sabbatarianism.⁴⁹ The primary significance of the Declaration, however, was in what it foreshadowed. In 1618, the *Book of Sports* was less of a turning point than a storm cloud on the horizon.

5. 1633

When Charles reissued the Declaration in 1633, the content was similar but the context was different. Puritan had become more distinct from Anglican, with the

⁴⁷ Hill, "The Uses of Sabbatarianism," 195-196; Struna, "The Declaration of Sports Reconsidered," 55. Cf. Sul, "The King's Book of Sports: The Nature of Leisure in Early Modern England," 167-179. "The Book of Sports . . . was not a political device for the purpose of suppressing Puritans. It reflected the ruler's understanding of leisure as a political subject and that the head of a kingdom must govern carefully" (177).

⁴⁸ John Waddington, *Congregational Church History, from the Reformation to 1662* (London: Ward and Company, 1862), 72.

⁴⁹ In 1618, there was not yet any such thing as Puritanism as a coherent movement; there were Puritan Anglicans within the Church of England and an amalgam of non-conformists outside the church, including Presbyterians, Independents (Congregationalists), Baptists, and Anabaptists, not all of whom were Sabbatarians, but all of whom were at times called "Puritans" by their critics. At the same time, there were many Sabbatarians who could not be called Puritans. Struna, "The Declaration of Sports Reconsidered," 55-56; Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times*, 97.

former more clearly than ever identified as opponents of the Crown. The nation was on the brink of civil war, and cultural, political, and religious battle lines were being drawn. Sunday sport versus Sunday Sabbatarianism was one of those battle lines.

Like the 1618 Declaration, Charles's Declaration had its roots in a skirmish at the county level. In 1632, the judge of Somerset, at the request of the local Justices of the Peace (J.P.s), issued an order against church ales. The order itself was unexceptional—similar orders prohibiting church ales date at least to 1594. The difference, in addition to the charged political climate, was that the judge ordered all clergy in Somerset to read the order from the pulpit annually. This did not go over well with the Bishop of London, William Laud, who considered the order an infringement on the church's jurisdiction. Laud complained to Charles, who ordered the Chief Justice Thomas Richardson to revoke the order, who in turn decided to ignore the king. Months later, after further pressure from Charles, Richardson conformed and revoked the order at an assembly of J.P.s. At the same meeting, he told the J.P.s why he thought the revocation was ill-advised, and invited them to sign a petition to the king that complained of "the disorders of prophanation of the Lords-day, riotous tipling, contempt of authorities, quarrels, murders, etc" that characterized ales and revels.⁵⁰ Needless to say, this was impolitic.

Unfortunately for Chief Justice Richardson, in what was arguably one of the most significant developments in the entire *Book of Sports* controversy, Charles selected William Laud to succeed Abbot as Archbishop of Canterbury following Abbot's death in August of that year. Richardson was defeated in every sense of the word and died 18 months later. As with the incident in Lancashire, the Somerset

⁵⁰ Barnes, "County Politics and a Puritan Cause Célèbre," 116. The status of church ales was so politically charged that it is difficult to make any objective assessment as to their actual level of violence. Barnes and others rely heavily on Prynne's *Canterburies Doome*—not exactly an impartial source.

church ales controversy might also be forgettable, except that it too became a national issue.

Laud sought a means to enforce conformity and expel non-conformists, and the church ales controversy provided just the opportunity. In October, less than two months after becoming Archbishop and even prior to Richardson's formal reprimand, Laud persuaded Charles to reissue the *Book of Sports*. The content was identical, except for a short preface and an amendment concerning church ales or wakes: "of late in some Counties of our Kingdom, we find, that under pretence of taking away Abuses, there hath been a general Forbidding not only of ordinary Meetings, but of the Feasts of the Dedication of the Churches, commonly called Wakes. Our express will and pleasure is, that these Feasts, with others shall be observed."⁵¹ The amendment made the meaning of the Declaration all the more clear: jurisdiction of such matters belonged to Laud, not local magistrates.

Even prior to the Declaration's reissue, the debate over Sabbatarianism was heating up. In 1630, a pamphlet war picked up with the publication of Brerewood's 1630 *A Learned Treatise of the Sabbath*, Byfield's 1631 response, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath Vindicated*, and Brerewood's 1632 rejoinder, *A Second Treatise of the Sabbath*. Following the reissued *Book of Sports*, publications that defended the Declaration included Francis White's *A Treatise of the Sabbath-Day* (1635), and Peter

⁵¹ *The King's Book of Sports*. Although some historians note that the reissue of the *Book of Sports* coincided with the beginning of the Thirty Years War, few if any have attempted to situate the controversy in that broad a context. Ann Hughes observes that the 1618 Declaration had "obvious and sinister connections with the proposed Spanish match for Prince Charles," and that "The reissue of the Book by Charles in 1633 was similarly linked to the passive foreign policy of the 1630s." Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, 132. Solberg notes: "Publication of the Book of Sports, which occurred the same year as the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War and the meeting of the synod at Dort to reformulate Calvinist doctrine, imparted new urgency to the vital questions of the locus of sovereignty in England at a critical time." Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, 74.

Heylyn's *The History of the Sabbath* (1636). On the Sabbatarian side, Henry Burton's *A Divine Tragedie Lately Acted* (1636), in which the author documented cases of those who suffered calamities of various sorts as a result of Sabbath desecration, was one of the more important works.⁵²

At first glance, at least to the twenty-first century reader, the line separating the works of Sabbatarians and anti-Sabbatarians appears fine indeed. White is no less concerned than his opponents, for example, to distinguish between lawful and unlawful recreations. Likewise, the defense of lawful recreations is always qualified as a defense of such *after* services. Recreations, according to White,

are of two sorts: 1. vicious and unlawful; and, 2. such as are honest and lawful, in respect both of their own quality, and of freedom from evil circumstances—such as ‘undue and unseasonable time; undecency in respect of place, persons, habit, or gesture; relation to some vicious end; excessive and immoderate action; disobedience to laws and superior authority, &c.’⁵³

In a similar manner, Sanderson's affirmation of Sunday recreation is qualified throughout with concerns over the usefulness and decorum of the activity: “Walking and discoursing is, with men of liberal education, a pleasant recreation: it is no way delightsome to the ruder sort of people, who scarce account anything a sport which is not loud and boisterous.” Recreations that are most refreshing to the body “and leave the least impression on the mind” are preferable to others, and so “shooting, leaping, and pitching bar, stool-ball, &c. are rather to be chosen than dicing, carding, &c.”⁵⁴

An early eighteenth-century tract defending the *Book of Sports* referred to “those hypocritical wretches justly called Precisians and Puritans,” but also referred to

⁵² Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 171.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 186. Cox adds that Sanderson “would have them be used in moderation, at seasonable hours, in a tolerant and charitable spirit towards others, and only if the users of them be fully persuaded of their lawfulness. Finally they should be ‘so used, as that they may rather make men the fitter for God's service the rest of the day, and for the works of their vocations the rest of the week, than any way hinder or disable them thereunto, by over-wearying the body, or immoderately affecting the mind.’”

bowling as a “wicked, unlawful game” that results in debauched manners.⁵⁵ This is a far cry from the anti-Sabbatarianism of nineteenth-century freethinking radicals. And indeed, such views complicate the notion that critical moral reflection on recreation and its usefulness is somehow a distinctively Puritan cultural deposit.

Nevertheless, the discontinuities and outright disagreements between White and his Sabbatarian interlocutors far outweighed the continuities and agreements. The main issue in the thousands of pages of polemics that were produced during these years had to do not with the distinction between lawful and unlawful recreations in general, but whether lawful recreations were lawful on Sunday. To White, contra the strict Sabbatarians, there was no legitimate distinction between lawful recreations on Sunday and on other days of the week. Whereas unlawful recreations are prohibited at all times, lawful recreations may be “permitted and exercised upon some part of the Christian holy-day” as upon any other day of the week. White’s argument was twofold. First, Moses nowhere prohibited honest recreation on the Sabbath day, and second, even if he did, “this concludeth not against recreation upon some part of the Christian holy-day.” In other words, the fourth commandment is ceremonial and abrogated, not moral and perpetual.⁵⁶ Many of these works were learned theological treatises, with anti-Sabbatarians quoting Scripture no less than Sabbatarians. Theologically, these were essentially the same arguments that would be repeated at length through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. Most pamphlets made little or no reference to current events, as if the authors’ concerns and views emanated directly from consideration of their sacred text. Yet the sheer quantity of publications in the 1630s and 1640s makes it abundantly clear that such concerns had much to do with the events of the day.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁵⁶ White’s position echoed that of Prideaux before him and anticipates those of Heylyn and Sanderson.

Although it is not often explicit in these texts, the fierceness of the debate over Sunday recreation was related to the larger debate over the means of God's grace. Whereas the Roman Catholic Church emphasized ritual in general and sacraments in particular, Protestant reformers emphasized the proclamation of the gospel and the hearing of God's word as the means of salvation. In response to the democratic implications of the Protestant emphasis on individual conscience over church office, which, by the 1630s, was downright subversive, Laud began enforcing ceremonial conformity, including the Church's right to demarcate sacred time and space. Sunday recreations as allowed by the *Book of Sports*, though not exactly the same as traditional parish festivals with all their ritual, continued the tradition of emphasizing the centrality of the church, along with its sacraments and festivals, relative to the threatening alternative emphasis on preaching and hearing the word of God. Although the *Book of Sports* did not exactly equate sport and sacrament, to the Puritan mind it may as well have. Puritan opposition to Sunday sport was thus part and parcel of opposition to Arminian theology; it was an attempt to desacralize sport—in essence, to separate church and sport.⁵⁷ Herein lies one of the deep ironies of Puritan Sabbatarianism: in opposing Anglo-Catholic Arminian rigor, ritual, and superstition, many Puritans attributed a sacredness to the seventh day that was itself no less rigorous, ritualistic, or superstitious.

The intensity of Puritan sentiment regarding Sunday in the 1630s, however, must also be understood in light of the sometimes brutal enforcement of the *Book of Sports*. Whereas James lacked the support of the Archbishop for the reading of the Declaration from the pulpit, Charles obviously did not. Laud soon embarked on an ambitious campaign to impose uniformity of practice in the Church, including the wearing of vestments and reading from the Prayer Book, but the *Book of Sports* was

⁵⁷ Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, 109.

his first means of doing so. Ministers unsympathetic to the Declaration had few choices—they either conformed or were forced into more overt opposition. At least one minister is said to have had his clerk read the Declaration while he himself covered his ears. Others read the Declaration, followed by the fourth commandment, with the implication that the latter had more authority than the former.⁵⁸ Clergymen unwilling to read the *Book of Sports* from the pulpit, however, were censured, suspended, and/or deprived of their living. Examples of such punishments are numerous. John Workman, a lecturer in Gloucester, was suspended, excommunicated, and imprisoned in 1633. Opposing the *Book of Sports* was one of his many offenses.⁵⁹ Jose Glover of Sutton was suspended in 1634 for refusing to read the Book and is believed to have died en route to the New World a few years later.⁶⁰ According to Ann Hughes, “many Puritans, especially amongst the clergy, referred to the issue of the 1633 Book of Sports as a horrible and ungodly move which fatally weakened their adherence to royal government, and justified their support for Parliament.”⁶¹

Perhaps the most notable examples of those punished for opposition to the *Book of Sports*, and to “Laudian innovations” in general, are William Prynne and Henry Burton. Prynne published a thousand-page book opposing the theater in 1632, and later called the *Book of Sports* the “book against Sunday.”⁶² Burton and Prynne together are credited with publishing *A Divine Tragedy Lately Acted* in 1636, which

⁵⁸ French, *Charles I and the Puritan Upheaval: A Study of the Causes*, 271.

⁵⁹ Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, 89.

⁶⁰ Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Founding of Harvard College* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 379-80; William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1912), 224-225. Another example includes Simon Ashe, who was ejected from Staffordshire. Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society, and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 73.

⁶¹ Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, 132.

⁶² “What could Beelzubub, had he been the Archbishop, have done more than in publishing the book against Sunday?” Hill, “The Uses of Sabbatarianism,” 193.

documented supposed atrocities suffered by Sabbath breakers during the two years since the *Book of Sports* had been published. The following year, Burton and Prynne, along with John Bastwick, were charged with sedition and had their ears cut off. To be sure, the *Book of Sports* was not the only issue. No less certainly, however, the declaration had become a Sedition Act of sorts—a litmus test of allegiance to the Crown.

According to some, then, the *Book of Sports* was a cause not only of the Great Migration but also of the English Civil War.⁶³ That may be overstated; if it helped precipitate the war, it was also a consequence of factors that were already leading to war. The *Book of Sports* controversy was also part of the context in which the Westminster Confession of Faith was forged. Although the Confession makes no explicit reference to the social, cultural, and political context in which it was written, clearly the British context explains a great deal about Puritan Sabbatarianism. Relative to the debate over the Sabbath on the continent, Sabbatarianism proved more controversial in Britain not because the debate shifted from doctrine to discipline; that was a symptom, not a cause. It was a more volatile issue because it became a test of allegiance—in Hill’s words, “a shibboleth to distinguish friends from foes.”⁶⁴ Likewise, the 1633 Declaration caused greater controversy than the 1618 Declaration not because the latter was “symbolic” and the former “real,”⁶⁵ but precisely because the symbolic significance of the Declaration had increased rather than decreased.

⁶³ In 1663, for example, the moderate Puritan Thomas Dugard, who had conformed the year before, was accused by some parishioners as preaching ““that the book of liberty, which was set forth by the late king was the cause of all the war and bloodshed in this nation, which if this king should tolerate the like, which God forbid he should, then we might very well say, farewell England.”” Hughes, *Politics, Society, and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660*, 328. See also Fuller, *The Church History of Britain*, 378.

⁶⁴ Hill, "The Uses of Sabbatarianism," 200. See also Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War*, Ch. 7.

⁶⁵ Struna, "The Declaration of Sports Reconsidered," 56, 59.

Recreation had become a blunt instrument in a culture war—i.e., a “war” over symbols and significations.⁶⁶ Hill is thus surely correct that Sabbatarianism was about more than Sabbath theology.

Still, Hill’s conclusion that Sabbatarianism was largely a Puritan innovation is overstated, and his analysis ignores serious theological debate on matters such as moral and ceremonial law.⁶⁷ Whereas Hill reemphasized the economic basis for religious discipline, and Weber emphasized the religious basis for economic discipline, Solberg, situated somewhere between the Marxists and Weberians, appears closer to the mark: “Not Calvinism alone, then, but Calvinism interacting with basic economic and social forces accounts for the rise of the Puritan Sabbath.”⁶⁸ Indeed, strict Sabbatarianism was both cause and consequence of the *Book of Sports* controversy.

6. Days of Recreation

In all of the discussions about the *Book of Sports*, one aspect of the document and of the larger controversy regarding Sunday recreation has received very little attention. In what must be one of the earliest statements of the modern problem of leisure, James I homed in on the matter of time: “For when shall the common people have leave to exercise, if not upon the Sundayes & holydaies, seeing they must apply

⁶⁶ Thinking of Sabbatarianism in symbolic terms also helps explain in part why it proved so enduring over time and space; though not a *tabula rasa* devoid of meaning, the Sabbath is nevertheless in part a form filled with changing content.

⁶⁷ “The reasons for the peculiar British Sunday are to be sought . . . in the peculiar economic and political development of England.” Hill, “The Uses of Sabbatarianism,” 208.

⁶⁸ Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, 27. Later, and with less balance, Solberg writes: “Persons inclined to Puritanism were fundamentally hostile to sportive play, and theological conviction was the wellspring (though not the sole source) of their attitude” (49).

their labour, & win their living in all working daies?”⁶⁹ This formulation of the problem assumes a certain scarcity of time. It assumes, that is, something resembling a busy, six-day workweek with little to no other block of time for recreation. This sentiment—that Sunday is the only opportunity most people have for recreation—would become the refrain of anti-Sabbatarians for the next three hundred years.

For a variety of reasons, hours spent at work had been increasing through the Elizabethan era.⁷⁰ The primary reason for this was almost certainly the above-mentioned economic developments, including an emerging middle class. Related reasons include the Reformation doctrine of calling, and the larger movement of calendrical reform by church and state of which Sabbatarianism was a part. In a countertrend to the proliferation of holy days during the late Middle Ages, holy days had been decreasing and “worky days” increasing for almost a century. This was largely, but not exclusively, motivated by an opposition to holy days as unbiblical among those with reformed theological convictions. Even Henry VIII complained about the number of holy days and the idleness they entailed, and he therefore abrogated some of them in 1536. And in 1563, Elizabeth signed Parliament’s Statute of Artificers, requiring laborers to work up to fifteen hours per day.⁷¹ With the

⁶⁹ Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 445.

⁷⁰ Whitaker writes: “It should never be forgotten, although very often it seems to be ignored by those who refer to the matter of Sunday amusements in Elizabeth’s reign, that many, probably the majority of people, had little or no time for sport or amusement except upon the Sunday. There was no mid-week half-holiday for shop assistants; no Saturday afternoon for the craftsman. Some sport such people might secure in the summer evenings, but probably not much. Attendance at a play would be very unlikely, because plays were always performed in the day-time then. The State had taken away many of the old holy days which, in the Middle Ages, had been in part days for recreation. So that the average Elizabethan workman was really working more days than his ancestors.” Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times*, 58.

⁷¹ The restrictions initiated by Henry VIII and Elizabeth are discussed in a variety of places. See G. W. Prothero, ed., *Select Statutes and Other Constitutional Documents*,

decrease of Saints and holy days making the workweek more regular, and the industrializing process, augmented by legislation, similarly making the workday more regular, Sunday was the most obvious time left to play.

These developments were perhaps necessary but not sufficient conditions for the crisis over Sunday recreation that was to follow. In addition to industrialization and calendrical reform, however, reformers were also articulating a somewhat new purpose for the Sabbath. Bullinger, for example, stated that the bodily rest commanded by the Sabbath was “so that we should have the leisure to attend unto our spiritual business. For that cause is the outward rest commanded, that the spiritual work should not be hindered by bodily business.” This is no longer Sabbath as cessation from labor, nor even Sabbath for worship, but Sabbath for spiritual growth—i.e., for instruction and education, including catechization. Likewise, the Injunction of 1547, issued by Thomas Cranmer and other members of the young Edward VI’s council of regency just months after Henry VIII died, stated that keeping the Sabbath holy entailed “hearing the Word of God read and taught, in private and public prayers, [good works] . . . and godly conversation.”⁷² This ideal of Sabbath for religious instruction is the version of the Sabbath that became widespread among Anglican and non-conforming Protestants alike in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

At first, this approach to Sabbath practice was not necessarily inconsistent with Sunday recreation. Bullinger, even while advocating for the Sabbath as a day of

3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 47-48; Anthony Sparrow, ed., *A Collection of Articles* (London: Pawlet, 1684), 167. See also Brailsford, *Sport and Society: Elizabeth to Anne*; Struna, "The Declaration of Sports Reconsidered," 44-68. Struna writes: “Among the practical effects of these enactments were reduction in opportunities for sport which, in the past, had existed in a day’s natural rhythms and meeting places” (49).

⁷² Quotes from Hill, "The Uses of Sabbatarianism," 171.

“spiritual work,” did not define spiritual work as to exclude recreation; nor did he limit holy days to Sabbath days. “All holy days,” Bullinger wrote,

were made for the health, profit, and recreation of mankind: for holy days are no burden, but the easing of our burdens. Profane works, I confess, are profitable, but ease is also necessary: for without rest, labour cannot continue. The Lord’s will therefore is, to give man a time of recreation, and biddeth his servants to be merry on the holy days in holiness and modesty; so that their ease may be an honest recreation, and not reproachful sensuality.⁷³

Bullinger’s spiritual descendants would agree with him that “The Lord’s will . . . is to give man a time of recreation,” but not that “[the Lord] biddeth his servants to be merry on the holy days.”

The important change—defining Sabbath so as to exclude recreation—appears just before the beginning of the seventeenth century. In his 1583 book *The Anatomy of Abuses*, Philip Stubbs held that “we must not spend the seventh day in such vain exercises as please ourselves,” and named football and theater as “devilish pastimes.” Richard Greenham likewise opposed Sunday recreation in his 1591 *Treatise of the Sabbath*.⁷⁴ To Bownd, the most influential of these authors, recreation more clearly belongs not to rest but to work. Bownd affirms recreation in principle by way of analogy to work. Recreation, like labor, is not for the Sabbath; like vocational callings, however, “we do not conclude that they [our ordinary recreations] should altogether be left, but advise men rather to take them at some other time.”⁷⁵ A reconceptualized Sabbath thus combined with economic changes and calendrical reform to create something resembling a perfect storm of reduced recreational opportunities.

⁷³ Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger: The Third Decade*, trans. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1850), 160-161.

⁷⁴ Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 140, 141.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

In Bownd, however, just as the Sabbath is being defined to exclude recreation, we also find the suggestion “to take them [recreations] at some other time.” As if acknowledging the time-bind created by the new emphasis in Sabbath doctrine and discipline, Bownd continued,

we do exhort them that be in government to give some time to their children and servants, for their honest recreation, upon other days, that they be not driven to take it upon this, seeing they can no more want it altogether than their ordinary food. And as we have seen that they are bound to give them some time to work for themselves, unless they will, by their over-much straitness, compel them to it upon the day of rest; so must they spare also some few hours for their refreshing now and then; seeing they can no more want the one than the other.⁷⁶

Here we see an innovation that increasingly distinguishes non-conformists. As Puritans diverged from Anglicans, Puritans held that recreation belonged to labor rather than to rest or worship, and thus to “secular” days of the week. The “Anglican view,” as expressed by James in the *Book of Sports*, was rather that recreation belonged properly to holy days, including Sundays.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Ibid., 150.

⁷⁷ The view that “recreation belongs not to rest but to labour” is commonly attributed to Francis White, the Anglican Bishop of Ely, often with the implication that Anglican and Puritan views regarding Sunday recreation were substantively continuous. Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes Towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth-Century New England: With Particular Consideration of Physical Recreation*, 100; Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America*, 30; McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 10. The attribution, however, is erroneous. It appears to be based on a misreading of Christopher Hill, who cites White without attributing the quotation to him. Hill, “The Uses of Sabbatarianism,” 197. In the original, it is clear that this is not White’s view, but the view of others whom he is criticizing. White’s response is rather that there exists no express prohibition of honest recreation in the Mosaic Law, and that one of the main purposes of the Sabbath has always been “to refresh and recreate people after toile and hard labour.” Francis White, *A Treatise of the Sabbath-Day* (London: Richard Badger, 1635), 233-237. The significance of this is that Puritan and Anglican views on the matter were, by the mid-1630s, highly discontinuous. White’s publication was in fact commissioned by Charles, dedicated to William Laud, subtitled “A Defence of the Orthodoxal Doctrine of the Church of England against Sabbatarian novelty,” and intended “to justify the reissuing of the Book of Sports.” See Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of*

Other non-conformists also explicitly endorsed recreation during the secular days of the week. In response to the objection that banning Sunday recreation in effect banned recreation altogether, others took up Bownd's line of reasoning: "But if men will allow their servants recreation, let them allow part of their owne time, and be liberall in that which is their owne, and not in that which God hath given them so such warrant to bestow on their servants."⁷⁸ William Perkins advocated a similar view, as did the Puritan-led Long Parliament.⁷⁹ In 1647, after burning the *Book of Sports*, Parliament passed an ordinance that abolished all holy days and festivals other than the weekly Sabbath, including Christmas, Easter, and Whitsuntide. The same ordinance established "That all scholars, apprentices, and other servants" were to have "such convenient reasonable recreation and relaxation from their constant and ordinary labours on every second Tuesday in the month throughout the year, as formerly they used to have on such aforesaid festivals, commonly called Holy Days." An additional ordinance passed later the same month established that shops were to close and masters not to detain apprentices or servants "on the said day of recreation, unless market-days, fair-days, or other extraordinary occasion."⁸⁰

Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War, 200-201. In short, White's *Treatise* was at the heart of the culture war. See also Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 166-173.

⁷⁸ John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, 17th ed. (London: I.D., 1628), 140.

⁷⁹ Perkins, *Workes*, 2, 109-111. See also Derek Birley, *Sport and the Making of Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993). Birley also quotes Robert Burton, who supported the Declaration: "If one half-day in a week were allowed to our household servants for their merry-making by their hard masters . . . they would labour harder for the rest of their time" (80).

⁸⁰ These ordinances were passed on 8 June and 28 June 1647, respectively. There are different versions of the texts in circulation. For excerpts and discussions see Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 235; Hill, "The Uses of Sabbatarianism," 164, 197-198; Percy A. Scholes, *The Puritans and Music in England and New England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 110-111; Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, 158; Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes Towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth-Century New England: With*

Of course, everyday life is never transformed as quickly as impatient reformers would wish. The rhythms of the pre-industrial economy gave way only gradually. Nevertheless, it appears to be at the same moment in time as the Puritan reforms that the concept and practice of the “half-holiday”—the latter half of either a holy day or a working day that is designated for recreational purposes—appears to emerge. One of the very earliest references is by John Donne, in his last Christmas sermon of 1629. Compared to the abundant joy of eternity, Donne said, perhaps anticipating his passing three months later, the nine hundred years of Methuselah is but “a poore halfe holyday.”⁸¹ In his 1631 work *The Doctrine of the Sabbath Vindicated*, Richard Byfield, who refused to read the *Book of Sports*, wrote that the fourth commandment “concerneth the Sabbath and not halfe holidiaies, and other feasts.”⁸² And in 1639, a satirical account of the persistent irregularity of the workweek read as follows:

You know that Munday is Sundayes brother;
Tuesday is such another;
Wednesday you must go to Church and pray;
Thursday is half-holiday;
On Friday it is too late to begin to spin;
The Saturday is half-holiday agen.⁸³

Another account, without using the term half-holiday, traces the ceasing of labor early on Saturday to ancient practices pre-dating the Reformation. Alongside ancient festivals such as Christmas and Easter, the author writes, “we find a great Deference paid to *Saturday afternoon*, above the other worky Days of the Week: Then the

Particular Consideration of Physical Recreation, 149-150; Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times*, 156-157.

⁸¹ Quote is from John A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). According to the OED, the earliest known use of the term half-holiday dates to 1552.

⁸² Richard Byfield, *The Doctrine of the Sabbath Vindicated* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1631), 140.

⁸³ *Divers Crab-Tree Lectures* (1639), as quoted in Clive Thompson, “The Play's the Thing,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 28, 2004, 72.

Labours of the Plough ceast, and Refreshment and Ease are over all the Village.” This custom is attributed to Sabbath observance laws dating back to 958 in England and 1203 in Scotland, when the Sabbath was understood to begin on Saturday at “noontide” (i.e., three o’clock in the afternoon).⁸⁴

The evidence regarding similar days of recreation in the New World is ambiguous but not non-existent. The colony of Rhode Island, to take the most obvious example, advised its towns to appoint days of recreation in 1654:

whereas, there have been severall complaints exhibited to this Assembly against ye incivilitie of persons exercised upon ye first day of ye weeke which is offense to divers among us. And whereas it is judged that ye occasion thereof ariseth because there is no day appointed for recreation. It is therefore referred to ye consideration and determination of each Towne to allow what dayes they shall agree upon for their men servants and maid servants and children to recreate themselves, to prevent ye incivilities which are amongst us exercised on that day.⁸⁵

Perhaps it is telling that such an act is found only in Rhode Island, populated as it was with Baptists and others unsympathetic to the Puritanism of Massachusetts Bay.

Indeed, Solberg considers such an act “unthinkable in Puritan New England.”⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Struna finds evidence of football games and bull-baiting in

Massachusetts toward the end of the century, and concludes they most likely were held on Tuesdays.⁸⁷ In any case, the practice of recreating regularly on Tuesdays does not appear to have been widespread. Although recreation was greatly curtailed on the Sabbath, even at this early date the demand for it appears to have fallen at the end of the week. The Massachusetts magistrates who outlawed playing, drinking, traveling,

⁸⁴ Henry Bourne, *Antiquitates Vulgares; Or, the Antiquities of the Common People* (Newcastle: J. White, 1725), 115ff.

⁸⁵ Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes Towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth-Century New England: With Particular Consideration of Physical Recreation*, 21. See also Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, 193; Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 236.

⁸⁶ Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, 193.

⁸⁷ Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America*, 87.

and sporting “during the Day light of the Lord’s day” (1653) were not amused when others obeyed the letter but not the spirit of the law by being overly festive on Saturday night. Five years later the ordinance was revised to protect an expanded window of time, including “Satter-day night” and “the Lords day-night, after the sun is set.”⁸⁸

7. Conclusion

The relationship between recreation and religion got off to a rocky start in the New World largely because recreation became implicated in a culture war in the Old World. Although conventional wisdom suggests that the Puritans’ oppositional attitudes toward recreation gave way to more modern and expressive attitudes, the Puritans almost certainly influenced recreation in America in more than the ways that are usually acknowledged. They were not merely reactionaries; they were also innovators.

Puritan “innovations” with respect to recreation included a narrowing of the definition of lawful recreations, and opposition to Sunday recreation. In the first instance, Puritans detested traditional rituals and festivals such as maypoles and morris dances, along with ales and wakes. Such festivities occasionally came to the New World with immigrants, but as visitors to America commonly noted, the hallmark of American culture was from the beginning commerce and industry, not festivity. Carnavalesque and Dionysian forms of recreation were conspicuously absent. Although ancient forms of festivity declined in all modernizing nations, nowhere was the process of abandoning them more rapid than in America. Competitive athletics, by

⁸⁸ Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes Towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth-Century New England: With Particular Consideration of Physical Recreation*, 166.

contrast, which was precisely the sort of sport that religious moralists favored, survived and thrived in the New World. The obsession with competitive athletics in England and America is thus part of the legacy of Puritanism and an extension of its logic—i.e., a narrowing of the play impulse to agonistic forms of play.⁸⁹ In this sense, Puritan attitudes toward recreation have been retained rather than left behind.

In the second instance—opposition to Sunday recreation—Puritans desired recreation that was secular and regular. Simply put, what they desired was Saturday. It took a long time—almost 300 years—but the Saturday holiday clearly embodies the Puritan logic of designated days of recreation. The nineteenth-century religious moralists who campaigned alongside laborers for Saturday as a holiday were in this regard fully in the Puritan tradition. Cromwell could be said to have paved the way. Whereas his predecessors had enjoyed long summer vacations, Cromwell rather retired to Hampton Court from Saturday to Monday. He is thus said to have “invented . . . that modified form of enjoyment to which hard-worked citizens have, in our day, given the name of the ‘week-end.’”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ From time to time, various persons and parties attempted to revive Old World festivities in the New World, but to little avail. See, e.g., Jennette Emeline Carpenter Lincoln, *The Festival Book: May-Day Pastime and the May-Pole* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1913). Mardi Gras, which is not widely celebrated in America, is the exception that proves the rule.

⁹⁰ Samuel R. Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1901), 288.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEW WORLD

1. Introduction: Maypole at Merrymount

Recreation in New England was determined by the Old World context, first in reaction to it, and later in reaction to the reaction. That Puritan and other colonists alike brought pre-formed attitudes toward recreation with them from the Old World to the New is evidenced by the conflict between the colonists of Plymouth and nearby Merrymount. In 1627 and again in 1628, Thomas Morton and his fellow settlers of Merrymount—the very name made a statement—constructed an 80-foot high maypole, and reenacted Old World May game festivities. To Morton, the maypole and its associated festivities were innocent, traditional recreations during which they “brewed a barrell of excellent beare and provided a case of bottles, to be spent, with other good cheare, for all commers of that day.”¹ To the settlers of nearby Plymouth, however, these events were perceived through a very different frame of reference. William Bradford’s account denounces the “drinking and dancing aboute it many days together, inviting the Indean women, for their consorts, dancing and frisking together, (like so many fairies, or furies rather) and worse practises.” Bradford was upset not only by the “riotous prodigallitie and profuse excess,” but also by the pagan and royalist implications of maypoles. The Merrymount Maypole had deer antlers on it, and the poems and songs invoked numerous ancient Gods and Goddesses—“As if,” in Bradford’s words, “they had anew revived & celebrated the feasts of ye Roman Goddes Flora, or ye beasly practieses of ye madd Bacchinalians.” To Bradford,

¹ Thomas Morton, *The New English Canaan of Thomas Morton* (Boston: The Prince Society, 1833), 276.

Morton was a “lord of misrule” who maintained “a schoole of Athisme [atheism].” When the Plymouth colonists took Merrymount by force the following year, they cut the maypole down, arrested Morton, and banned him from the colony.²

The conflict between Morton and Bradford, and between Merrymount and Plymouth colonies more generally, is largely explained by the Old World context. Maypoles had become a symbol of royalist sympathies. Indeed, Morton was an Anglican who would later receive the support of Charles in his lawsuit against the Massachusetts Bay Company.³ Bradford, by contrast, was a Separatist who had fled England during the reign of James. The conflict was thus not merely over “beare” and “good cheare,” but over nothing less than competing visions of what the New World ought to be—a land and a people characterized by the old-time Anglo-Catholic culture of hierarchy and merriment, or by the still-emerging Protestant culture of economic and religious discipline.

The most obvious significance of the incident at Merrymount is that the traditional festivities of Merry England never got a foothold in colonial New England. Indeed, they never would. Because of the aversion to the English Church and Crown through the early national period, republican values generally reinforced Puritan preferences even after Puritanism had waned. The Puritans’ banishment of Sunday recreations and traditional festivals, however, eventually had unforeseen consequences. Following the War for Independence, Sunday recreation no longer had royalist associations. With no provision for designated days of recreation, religious

² Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation 1620-1647*, 48-51. “Lord of Misrule” or “King of Fools” is a reference to a role played in the medieval Feast of Fools, as mentioned in Ch. 5.

³ Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion*. “People on both sides in the civil war often engaged in symbolic behaviour, used recognizable cultural codes to assert their identities, to provoke or ridicule their enemies. For Royalists the maypole was a natural symbol” (177).

tyranny would soon become associated with restrictions on Sunday recreation—i.e., with the Puritan tradition—rather than with Sunday recreation itself.

2. *The Book of Sports in the New World*

The incident at Merrymount reveals a divergence of attitudes between Puritan and Anglican following the publication of the *Book of Sports* in 1618. In 1607, for example, the Sunday recreation laws of the Anglican settlement Jamestown were virtually indistinguishable from those later found in Puritan New England.⁴ In the 1620s, however, attitudes toward recreation in the Anglican settlement of Merrymount were very different. By this time, recreational preference mapped more neatly onto politics than in earlier years, and Anglican attitudes were defined in contrast to Puritan ones.⁵

Following Merrymount, Puritan and Anglican attitudes diverged even further. Puritans were particularly distressed by Charles's dissolution of Parliament in 1629, which was the one place they had some power to express resistance to the Crown at the national level. During the decade prior to Parliament's reconvening in 1640, approximately 20,000 persons, mostly Puritans, emigrated to New England. To the Puritan settler, maypole-type festivities and Sunday recreation had the worst possible

⁴ William A. Clebsch, *From Sacred to Profane America: The Role of Religion in American History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 242. "In the seventeenth century hardly any distinction can be drawn between New England and Virginia laws regarding the Sabbath" (157). This is not to say that Jamestown was characterized by Puritan attitudes toward work, which it was not. Edmund S. Morgan, "The Labor Problem at Jamestown, 1607-18," *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (1971), 595-611.

⁵ Because the northeastern United States led the way with respect to industrialization and immigration, but also with respect to new forms of recreation and their corollary Sabbath controversies, as well as the Saturday half-holiday and five-day week, the discussion here and later is largely limited in scope to New York and New England.

associations, including Arminian theology, Catholic ecclesiology, and political and religious tyranny. By the 1630s, to say that Puritans were opposed to ritualistic folk recreations and Sunday recreation was very nearly a tautology; such opposition was in part what made one a Puritan. The Great Migration of the 1630s was thus occasioned by the cultural, political, and religious unrest of which the *Book of Sports* controversy was a part.⁶ Indeed, the *Book of Sports* controversy and the negative associations many had with Sunday sports would be remembered for generations, and the ripple effects of the controversy would last for centuries.

Interestingly, the *Book of Sports* continued to be a source of energy for religious moralists in America not only through the colonial era, but also through the nineteenth and even into the twentieth century. In 1862, for example, Presbyterian pastors N.L. Rice and William Adams both referred to the *Book of Sports* in articles advocating for strict Sabbath observance. “[C]onscientious ministers were suspended from the functions of their office, for refusing to read in their churches the King’s proclamation in favor of the profanation of the Sabbath,” Rice complained.⁷ “When King James issued his ‘Book of Sports,’ and commanded the people to visit bear-gardens on the Sabbath-day,” Adams wrote, defending Puritan seriousness as a necessary correction, “it was a matter of course that the brave men, who were called to oppose that desecration, should on their way to conventicle give an unusual length and gravity to their countenances, and occasionally an intentional twang to their songs, for

⁶ Emigration from Holland was also occasioned in part by the failure “to reform the neglect of observation of the Lord’s Day as a Sabbath.” Nathaniel Morton, *New England’s Memorial*, 6th ed. (Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1855), 11.

⁷ N. L. Rice, “The Origin and History of the Sabbath,” In *The Christian Sabbath: Its History, Authority, Duties, Benefits, and Civil Relations* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1863), 69.

the very purpose of making a defiant protest.”⁸ Later in the century, Wilbur Crafts quoted the Scottish writer Hugh Miller to similar effect:

The old despotic Stuarts were tolerable adepts in the art of kingcraft, and knew well what they were doing when they backed with their authority the Book of Sports. The merry, unthinking serfs, who, early in the reign of Charles the First, danced on Sabbath round the Maypole, were afterward the ready tools of despotism, and fought that England might be enslaved. The Ironsides, who, in the cause of religious freedom, bore them down, were staunch Sabbatarians.

“Why should not Christians in these days,” Crafts adds, “as in the age of martyrs, be faithful unto death in keeping the Lord’s-day? Hundreds of English ministers forfeited their livings, and many even their lives, rather than read in their pulpits ‘The Book of Sports,’ by which James I. and Charles I. authorized games on the Sabbath afternoons.” The amusements permitted by the “lawless law” contributed to the “increasing demoralization of the people.”⁹ At the Fourteenth International Lord’s Day Congress held in 1915, the *Book of Sports* was mentioned more than once. “[T]he student of history cannot ignore the fact,” one clergyman said, “that England’s book of sports, which officially opens the sacred day to games and sports and frivolities, indicates the low water mark in English history.” He went so far as to blame the terrible loss of life in the Great War on the Continental Sunday and “the moral curse of Sabbathlessness.”¹⁰

⁸ William Adams, "The Benefits of the Sabbath," In *The Christian Sabbath: Its History, Authority, Duties, Benefits, and Civil Relations*, 214.

⁹ Crafts, *The Sabbath for Man*, 195, 427, 558. The same year Crafts published the first edition of this work, a British scholar criticized Sabbatarians by arguing that the “great reformers” John Calvin and John Knox “‘symbolized’ rather with the ‘Book of Sports’ than with the Westminster Confession or the Pilgrim Fathers and their famous ‘Blue Laws,’ in Massachusetts.” Henry Hayman, "Sabbath Observance and Sunday Recreation," *The Modern Review* 5, no. 17 (January, 1884), 238.

¹⁰ M. D. Kneeland, "Sunday Sports and Amusements," In *Sunday the World's Rest Day*, ed. Duncan James McMillan (Garden City: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1916), 338-339.

The *Book of Sports* was thus mythologized—i.e., the artifact was appropriated by a variety of people in different times and places for their present purposes.¹¹ Usually, that purpose was to demonize Sunday recreation by means of associating it with the enemies of religious liberty. Ironically, the Puritans themselves were mythologized in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and often to precisely the same effect.

3. Puritans as Cultural Resource

The fate of the Puritans has been a bit of a roller coaster. If throughout the eighteenth century it appeared that the Puritan legacy was waning, the early nineteenth century would reverse that trend. If one were to select a date on which the revival of the Puritan tradition began, one could do worse than to select December 22nd, 1820. The occasion was the bicentennial of the Pilgrim’s arrival at Plymouth, and one of the celebrated talks that day was Daniel Webster’s “The First Settlement of New England.”

The reasons for the revival and mythologizing of the Puritan tradition in the early nineteenth century were severalfold. As America became more diverse, and the young republic was working out the principles of liberal democracy in practice, the Puritans became a source of inspiration. Presbyterian and Congregational Calvinists, disconcerted by their loss of cultural power and the liberalizing of Harvard among other trends, were interested in reviving the Puritan tradition on doctrinal grounds. Interestingly, the Puritans were appropriated not only by Calvinists, but also by Unitarians, albeit for different reasons. Unitarians were interested in the Puritans not

¹¹ On the concept of history as mythology, see Warren I. Susman, *Culture as History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); P. A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

for doctrinal reasons, but for reasons related to their civic and cultural leadership. Even Transcendentalists, whose heterodoxy did not outweigh their weakness for romanticizing the past, found in the Puritans a useful model of self-examination, self-improvement, and social action. Emerson's legacy to theological liberalism was in part the conflation of the older, Puritan understanding of Providence with a newer, romantic understanding of Progress.

Somewhat paradoxically, then, the "Puritan tradition" was revived just as nineteenth-century Calvinists, the Puritans' true theological heirs, were actually losing cultural authority. The use of history for mythic purposes, however, requires such distance from the object being mythologized. Historical distance between actual Puritans and the Puritan tradition was thus a necessary condition, not a coincidence, of employing the tradition—what Michael Kammen calls "America's oldest tradition"—for present purposes.¹² Indeed, the Puritan tradition that emerged in the early nineteenth century entailed not only a shift from piety to moralism, but also a decoupling of Puritanism from Calvinism.¹³ These changes were central to the development of American civil religion and nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism.

Through the antebellum years, the Puritans in general were commonly evoked as model citizens who reconciled religion and republicanism, and the Puritan Sabbath in particular was depicted by many as a source of order and stability, repose and refinement. Other writers looking to provide a historical justification for maintaining some semblance of Sabbath-keeping such as Harriet Beecher Stowe likewise penned sentimental and nostalgic accounts of the Puritan Sabbath that equated 'Puritan' with

¹² Michael G. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 64.

¹³ Jan C. Dawson, *The Unusable Past: America's Puritan Tradition, 1830 to 1930* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), Ch. 1.

‘traditional.’¹⁴ By the 1890s, American intellectuals “seemed to have put a seal of approval on almost every aspect of Puritanism,” and “every aspect of what was taken to be historic Puritanism was called upon as part of the bulwark of the prevailing order.”¹⁵

But if the Puritan tradition was meant to unify and forge consensus, even the illusion that it could do so was temporary; the tradition was invoked as a resource for social and political order precisely because such order was breaking down. The Puritans had always had their critics; even before the Civil War, for example, Theodore Parker judged Puritanism “unjoyous” and unworthy of appropriating as a tradition.¹⁶ To critics such as Parker and others who gathered in Boston for the anti-Sabbath convention in Boston in 1848,¹⁷ moral reform efforts such as temperance and Sabbatarianism always raised the specter of a lingering Puritanism in the form of a theocratic approach to governance that was fundamentally illiberal and at odds with the founding principles of the republic—especially the separation of church and state. Interestingly, critics no less than defenders of the Puritan tradition “constructed a sturdy bridge between colonial and antebellum piety.”¹⁸

No matter how implausible it may have been, the notion that the increasingly diverse republic could unify around the Puritan tradition was common prior to the Civil War. The war, however, was a crisis of biblical proportions not only for the republic in general but also for the Puritan mantle in particular. With both sides

¹⁴ McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 34-37.

¹⁵ Susman, *Culture as History*, 42, 43.

¹⁶ Dawson, *The Unusable Past: America's Puritan Tradition, 1830 to 1930*, 9.

¹⁷ Henry M. Parkhurst, ed., *Proceedings of the Anti-Sabbath Convention* (Boston: Andrews & Prentiss, 1848).

¹⁸ Dawson, *The Unusable Past: America's Puritan Tradition, 1830 to 1930*, 12.

believing God to be on their side, the war was in part a theological crisis that complicated notions of Providence.¹⁹

In the decades following the war, the Puritans became less useful to those who wished to appropriate the tradition for positive reasons, and more useful to those who wished to do so for negative reasons. Freethinkers, religious liberals, and advocates for the strict separation between church and state found the Puritans a useful proxy for religious moralists in their own time. Once credited with establishing democracy and religious freedom in the New World, the Puritans came to be associated not only with witch trials but also with Victorian prudery and, in the twentieth century, Prohibition, fundamentalism, and McCarthyism. Puritans thus figure prominently in the proceedings and publications not only of the anti-Sabbath Convention, but also the American Secular Union and Free-Thought Federation (1867), the National Liberal League (1876), and the Anti-Blue Law League of America (1921). Although religiosity remained high through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, and some Sabbatarians continued to advocate for the “Puritan Sabbath,”²⁰ in the long run up to the culture wars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the earlier image of the devout Puritan gradually gave way to an image of the Puritan as killjoy.

The image of the Puritan as killjoy in art and literature similarly got its start in the antebellum era, gained traction in the 1890s, and peaked amidst renewed moral reform efforts in the 1920s. Nathaniel Hawthorne first published “The Maypole of Merry Mount,” an early instance of the Puritan as killjoy, in 1850—the same year as the *Scarlet Letter*.²¹ Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s sculpture *The Puritan* (1887) was an

¹⁹ Ibid. See also Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 199.

²⁰ E.g., Alice Morse Earle, *The Sabbath in Puritan New England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 335.

²¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, “The Maypole of Merry Mount,” In *Twice-Told Tales* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1876), 62-75. See also John P.

effort to embody dogma in a human figure, and was so well received that numerous copies were made for resale both in the United States and France. The cover of the first issue of *Anti-Blue Law Magazine* (1921) featured a sullen and sunken-cheeked Pilgrim and Puritan with the quotation “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”²² Similar sentiments regarding Puritans as enemies of both joy and democracy are prevalent in the writings of Brooks Adams, Van Wyck Brooks, John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, Vernon Parrington, and many others.²³ Mencken’s quip—that Puritanism is “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy”—is typical not only in sentiment but in timing.²⁴ Penned by Mencken in 1925, the timing suggests that moral reform efforts effectively contributed to perpetuating the trope of Puritan as killjoy by fueling a backlash.²⁵

Since the middle of the twentieth century, the Puritans’ fate has turned again, as a generation of historians has sought to correct misstatements and overstatements, and found new resources in the Puritan tradition. Regarding recreation, social historians have established that colonial and Puritan recreation included reading, socializing, singing, dancing, courting, archery, shooting, hunting, fishing, fowling, hawking, football, vaulting, wrestling, running, martial competitions, nine-pins, bowling, tennis, horse-racing, gambling, billiards, backgammon, card games such as whist and other games of chance, eating, and a lot of drinking at most every social occasion—including but not limited to weddings, funerals, militia training days, and even ministers’ ordinations.²⁶ In the words of Mary Beth Norton,

McWilliams, Jr., "Fictions of Merry Mount," *American Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Spring, 1977), 3-30.

²² Pictured in McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 11.

²³ Susman, *Culture as History*.

²⁴ Mencken, "Clinical Notes," 59.

²⁵ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition*, 387-392.

²⁶ Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial America*; Struna, *People of Prowess: Sport, Leisure, and Labor in Early Anglo-America*; Nancy L.

There's now a complete consensus that the popular image of the Puritans is almost totally inaccurate. The Puritans were typical people of their time in that they enjoyed the pleasures of the 17th century. They liked to drink. They liked to sit and talk. They liked to eat well when they had the food to eat. They enjoyed sex. They also liked to play games, like an early version of shuffleboard.²⁷

Despite such developments among academic historians, the image of the dour Puritan persists in the popular imagination.

Ironically, then, the mythologizing of the *Book of Sports* and of the Puritan tradition meant that by the middle of the nineteenth century, Sunday recreation had opposite meanings for different groups. For Calvinists and others who identified with the Puritan tradition Sunday recreation was still identified with the oppressive, anti-democratic enemy of England. For freethinkers and religious advocates of strict separationism, by contrast, intolerance toward Sunday recreation was associated with the oppressive, anti-democratic rule of Puritans. For some, Sunday recreation signified religious persecution; for others, its absence signified religious persecution.

4. Samuel Peters, Blue Laws, and the War for Independence

The narrative arc of the myth of the dour Puritan from the founding of the republic to the 1920s can be traced by the reception of Samuel Peters's account of the blue laws of New Haven. Peters was a clergyman of Puritan extraction who joined the Church of England in 1760. As a result of his loyalist zeal, he "was driven from his

Struna, "Puritans and Sport: The Irretrievable Tide of Change," *Journal of Sport History* 4, no. 1 (1977), 1-21; Wagner, *Puritan Attitudes Towards Recreation in Early Seventeenth-Century New England: With Particular Consideration of Physical Recreation*. I have discussed colonial recreation and Sabbatarianism at greater length—especially the myth of the dour Puritan—in Karl E. Johnson, "Problematizing Puritan Play," *Leisure/Loisir* 33, no. 1 (2009), 31-54.

²⁷ Mark O'Keefe, "The Puritans Weren't so Puritanical, Scholars Say," November 14, 2002, LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexis.com>.

country, his property and family in 1774,” and thereby “obliged to take refuge in England, whither his ancestors had, for the same reason, fled in 1664.” Peters’s revenge came in the form of his anonymously published *General History of Connecticut* (1781), which included a long list of blue laws—a term he is sometimes credited as having coined. The list, which depicted the colonists as absurdly repressive, included many fabrications.²⁸

Peters’s book was eventually influential, but not at first. Published in London, it did not find much of an audience in the colonies, where it was understood as a polemic against the War for Independence. And although Puritanism was no longer ascendant at the time of the founding, republican attitudes toward work and leisure largely reinforced earlier religious views. In 1774, the Continental Congress issued a proclamation that sounds decidedly Puritan: “We will . . . discountenance and discourage every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibitions of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments.”²⁹ In 1778, Congress similarly passed a resolution encouraging states to suppress “theatrical entertainments, horse racing, gaming, and such other diversions as are productive of idleness and dissipation.”³⁰

²⁸ Samuel Peters, *A General History of Connecticut: From its First Settlement Under George Fenwick, Esq. to its Latest Period of Amity with Great Britain* (New Haven: D. Clark and Company, 1829), 20-21. Even Peters himself admitted that these “laws” had “never suffered to be printed” (67). Historians have speculated that the book entailed either efforts at humor or, in the case of Scholes, evidence of Peters’s insanity. Sheldon S. Cohen, “Samuel Peters: Connecticut’s Eccentric Historian,” *The New England Galaxy* 4 (Spring, 1972). Also printed in Kenneth Cameron, ed., *The Works of Samuel Peters of Hebron, Connecticut* (Hartford: Transcendental Books, 1967). Peters is also discussed briefly in R. J. Higgs, *God in the Stadium: Sports and Religion in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 7-8.

²⁹ *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, Vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 78.

³⁰ *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Vol. 13, 1001, as quoted in John Thomas Jable, “Sport, Amusements, and Pennsylvania Blue Laws, 1682-1973” (Ph.D., The Pennsylvania State University, 1974) 48.

These statutes were motivated not primarily by religion, but by the widespread perception that English culture was the enemy of freedom.

In the years leading up to the War for Independence, theater in particular was associated with England, and the discretionary income necessary to attend theater—a cultural signifier of leisure—associated with aristocracy rather than democracy. When in 1766 the Sons of Liberty, who had opposed the Stamp Act of the previous year, rioted and destroyed New York’s Chapel Street Theatre, they attacked it “as a British institution and symbol of the oppression of the Stamp Act.”³¹ British troops occupying Philadelphia, the seat of the Continental Congress, not only opened their own playhouse, but also took part in gambling, cockfighting, and various balls and parties perceived by colonists as ostentatious.³² That opposition to the theater was a means of defining American society and culture against Britain is also apparent from the immediate context of Congress’s statement regarding “expensive diversions and entertainments.” The statement begins, “We will, in our several stations, encourage frugality, economy, and industry, and promote agriculture, arts and the manufactures of this country, especially that of wool,” and concludes with directives regarding dress, such as the discontinuation of “the giving of gloves and scarves at funerals.”³³ The purpose of this document was thus twofold—to stop trade with Britain, and to encourage virtues such as frugality that were understood as conducive to democracy and democratic reform.

³¹ Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 28.

³² J. T. Jable, "Pennsylvania's Early Blue Laws: A Quaker Experiment in the Suppression of Sport and Amusements, 1682-1740," *Journal of the Sport History* 1 (Spring, 1974), 46-47.

³³ *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 78. The preface to this “association” states “we are of opinion, that a non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation agreement, faithfully adhered to, will prove the most speedy, effectual, and peaceable measure” of redressing grievances (76).

That opposition to “extravagance and dissipation” was as much a republican virtue as it was a religious one is further illustrated by the fact that, following the war, most states adopted laws regarding Sunday work, travel, and recreation like those of the colonies. Isaac Kramnick has suggested that “work-ethic Protestantism” was, along with republicanism and liberalism, one of the “distinguishable idioms” that characterized the early national period.³⁴ And one of Max Weber’s prime examples of the Protestant ethic was Benjamin Franklin, who was not anyone’s idea of a Puritan in the religious sense of the term.³⁵ Ironically, then, the work ethic, and corollary attitudes regarding extravagance and dissipation, including opposition to theater, came closest to consensus during the years between the First and Second Great Awakenings—i.e., when religious observance was at a historic low. Although the 160 year period from the incident at Merrymount to the eve of the new republic saw great change in many respects, including population growth, economic development, religious revivalism, and intellectual developments such as the emergence of experimental science and Lockean social contract theory, one important fact remained the same: in 1788, as in 1628, the primary concern regarding work and recreation was avoiding the excesses associated with the Anglo-Catholic Church and Crown.

All this would soon change, as would the reception to Peters’s book. In the early years of the republic, concern over Old World excesses gave way to concern over maintaining order in the new democratic republic. Precisely because of disestablishment, what emerged was a new, voluntaristic, and uniquely democratic form of religion and religious association. As the War for Independence receded in

³⁴ Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 450. See also Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 24, no. 1 (January, 1967), 4-43.

³⁵ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Ch. 2.

time, and moral reform efforts were asserted against internal rather than external threats, Peters's negative portrayal of the Puritans found a new audience. Beginning in the early nineteenth century, but especially after the Civil War, American writers began joining with those English writers fond of citing Peters's account of blue laws. Hammond Trumbull attempted to put the fiction to rest in 1876 with *The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut and New Haven: And the False Blue-Laws Invented by the Rev. Samuel Peters*.³⁶ His effort was to little avail. Just fourteen years later, in his massive *Economic and Social History of New England*, William Weeden restated that the blue laws of Connecticut prohibited kissing a child on the Sabbath, and that "No one could read Common Prayer, keep Christmas or saints' days; make minced pies, dance, play cards, or play on any instrument of music, except the drum, trumpet, and jews-harp."³⁷ This despite the fact that Trumbull had lamented on the very first page of his book that "There are hundreds who still believe—and thousands who profess to believe—that to kiss one's child on the Sabbath-day, to make minced pies, and to play on any instrument of music except the drum, trumpet, and jews'-harp, were made criminal offences by the ancient laws of New Haven."³⁸ A century after the passing of the

³⁶ J. Hammond Trumbull, *The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut and New Haven and the False Blue-Laws Invented by the Rev. Samuel Peters* (Hartford: American Publishing Company, 1876). See also J. Hammond Trumbull, *The Rev. Samuel Peters, His Defenders and Apologists* (Hartford: n.p., 1877), 26.

³⁷ William B. Weeden, *Economic and Social History of New England, 1620-1789*, Vol. 1 (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891), 223.

³⁸ Trumbull, *The True-Blue Laws of Connecticut and New Haven and the False Blue-Laws Invented by the Rev. Samuel Peters*, v. One clergyman, who regarded "the so-called Blue Laws of Connecticut . . . an absurd fiction," expressed astonishment that Englishmen circa 1870 believed Peters's account: "What would you think of an American, writing about England, and quoting 'Jack in the Bean Stalk' as an authentic historical work?" (45).

Puritan era, the narrative of the Puritan as a legislation-happy killjoy found its ecological niche on American soil.³⁹

5. Lyman Beecher, Sunday Mails, and the New Sabbatarianism

There was probably never as much consensus regarding Sunday work and recreation as there was regarding the distinction between lawful and unlawful recreations. Nevertheless, when it came to Sabbath keeping, the situation looked much worse to religious moralists four decades later than they remembered at the founding. In an 1829 address entitled “The Pre-eminent Importance of the Christian Sabbath,” Lyman Beecher simultaneously sounded the cry of declension and infused the Sabbath with a new meaning:

Give up the Sabbath—blot out that orb of day—suspend its blessed attractions—and the reign of chaos and old night would return. The waves of our unquiet sea, high as our mountains, would roll and dash, from west to east, and east to west, from south to north, and north to south, shipwrecking the hopes of patriots and the world.

Who, then, is the patriot that would thrust out our ship from her peaceful moorings, in a starless night, upon such an ocean of storms, without rudder, or anchor, or compass, or chart? The elements around us may remain, and our giant rivers and mountains. Our miserable descendants, also, may multiply, and vegetate, and rot in moral darkness and putrefaction. But the American character, and our glorious institutions, will go down, into the same grave that entombs the Sabbath; and our epitaph will stand forth a warning to the world—THUS ENDETH THE NATION THAT DESPISED THE LORD, AND GLORIED IN WISDOM, WEALTH, AND POWER.⁴⁰

³⁹ Blue Laws, as with Puritanism more generally, continued to be a topic of great interest into the era of Prohibition. Gustavus Myers, *Ye Olden Blue Laws* (New York: The Century Co., 1921).

⁴⁰ Lyman Beecher, "Pre-Eminent Importance of the Christian Sabbath," *The National Preacher* 3 (1829), 155-160. In 1815, the Presbyterian General Assembly said of the Sabbath, “Were this grand pillar of the Christian fabric removed, the whole building would fall to the ground.” *Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: From A.D. 1812 to A.D. 1816 Inclusive*, Vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Jane Aitken, 1817), 256. Elijah Whitney wrote, “The

As with his theology more generally, Beecher's views on the Sabbath provide a bridge of sorts between eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Having studied under Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards, Beecher's connection to the Puritan past was very real. On the other hand, he was proactively articulating and adapting Puritan theology in a new socio-political context. Earlier Sabbatarians worried about the moral effects of Sabbath desecration on individuals and communities, but not on geopolitical nation-states. That the Sabbath was necessary for the preservation of free institutions was a new emphasis.

The proximate cause of Beecher's concern—the occasion for the theme of declension—was the Sabbatarians' setback regarding Sunday mails.⁴¹ The first phase of this controversy began when The Post Office Act of 1810 required postmasters to open their office on any day that mail arrived, thereby providing “on demand” service. Sabbatarians in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, as well as other cities, states, and territories petitioned Congress to repeal the legislation. Of the 300 petitions that

Sabbath . . . is the bulwark of our free institutions—the citadel of our Christian privileges—the rock on which rests the moral sense of the nation. If this be abandoned, immorality, licentiousness and infidelity will sweep over the land in an irresistible and overwhelming flood of moral desolation.” Harmon Kingsbury, *The Sabbath* (New York: Jonathan Leavitt, 1841). There are many additional examples of such rhetoric. See, e.g., Mark Hopkins, *The Sabbath and Free Institutions* (New York: Edward O. Jenkins, 1863).

⁴¹ The details of the Sunday mails controversy are well documented. Roy Z. Chamlee Jr., “The Sabbath Crusade: 1810-1920” (Ph.D., George Washington University, 1968); Rohrer, “Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America,” 53-74; Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness* (New York: Norton, 1996); McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 22-26; Wayne E. Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). Many of the relevant primary source materials, including the House and Senate reports on both mail controversies, have been collected in William Addison Blakeley, ed., *American State Papers Bearing on Sunday Legislation*, Revised ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Religious Liberty Association, 1911).

arrived by 1817, most were initiated by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, some came from denominational general assemblies, and others from societies and organizations with more general moral reform agendas, such as the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Good Morals, founded in 1812. The petition drive was wholly ineffective. Even sympathetic congressmen such as John Rhea, chair of the House Committee on Post Office and Post Roads, judged that repeal would be “inexpedient”—the War of 1812 rendered any hindrance to speedy communication a military disadvantage. Interestingly, the postal law does not appear to have been challenged or defended on the basis of religious liberty during the 1810s.⁴² In an early indication that Sabbatarians would have difficulty maintaining consensus even among those who shared their Christian convictions, however, the law was defended in Congress on explicitly theological grounds: Massachusetts Congressman Elijah Hunt Mills opposed repeal because the law, he said, was consistent with “the requirements of the *moral law*.”⁴³

After lying dormant for almost a decade, the controversy over Sunday mails was rekindled in 1826 following a second Post Office Act. In 1828, Lyman Beecher and others founded the General Union for the Promotion of the Christian Sabbath, the first national organization of its kind, and Beecher’s address to the General Union was widely distributed. As Beecher’s lofty rhetoric suggests, opposition to Sunday mails was not merely a practical matter concerning the transportation and delivery of envelopes and packages, but also a symbolic matter pertaining to whether America would be a “Christian nation.” Such rhetoric in turn provided fodder for critics of the petition drive, who began accusing Sabbatarians of being theocrats attempting to impose their religion on others. The controversy peaked in 1829 with the Senate

⁴² Rohrer, “Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America,” 58.

⁴³ I.e., the Ten Commandments. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*, 179.

Report on Sunday mails, an acclaimed document that articulated the Jeffersonian view of church-state separation, and identified Sabbatarianism as a threat to religious liberty. Beecher's rhetoric notwithstanding, the petition drive failed again.

6. Explaining Antebellum Sabbatarianism

Of course, the postal acts do not entirely explain the seemingly sudden interest in and organization of the Sabbatarian cause—what Chamlee has called the “Sabbath crusade.”⁴⁴ Nor does it explain the new rhetoric regarding the Sabbath as a necessary condition of free institutions and national prosperity. Beyond Sunday mails as a proximate cause, several explanations of nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism have been suggested.

Arguably, Beecher was worried about secularization. To be sure, Beecher and other moralists were concerned with the eroding away of the influences of religion. Nevertheless, even in the early nineteenth century, what decreased was not the religious fervor with which Sabbatarianism was associated, but the freethinking rationalism with which various founders of the republic were associated.⁴⁵ The secularization thesis—the idea that modernity begets secularism—is now contested,⁴⁶ and Sabbatarianism is one of the most effective illustrations of its insufficiency.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Chamlee, *The Sabbath Crusade: 1810-1920*.

⁴⁵ Kramnick and Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness*.

⁴⁶ Peter L. Berger, ed., *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999); Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2002); Christian Smith, ed., *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Rodney Stark criticizes the secularization thesis in several of his works, most concisely in Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.," *Sociology of Religion* 60, no. 3 (1999), 249-273.

Perhaps the most common explanation of nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism is social control. There are several variants of this thesis, most of which reduce reform interests to class interests. According to the social control thesis, reform efforts constitute an elitist, conservative, and repressive program on the part of the upper classes to control the behavior of the lower classes.⁴⁸ Reformers are thus generally perceived as serving—consciously or unconsciously—the interests of capital. The social control thesis, however, is as problematic as the secularization thesis. Such explanations tend to interpret reformers' motivation too narrowly, emphasize reformers' motivation (i.e., self-interest) at the expense of the effect of their actions, collapse the distance between coercive and non-coercive modes of influence, and give too much credit to the “controllers” while failing to ascribe agency to the “controlled.” As recent critiques of the social control thesis have argued, reformers in a democratic republic are mostly limited to non-coercive means of reform, are often unsuccessful at effecting change, and, perhaps most importantly, often contribute to change they did

⁴⁷ Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, "O be some Other Name," *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 2 (April, 2003), 316-318.

⁴⁸ An early articulation of the social control thesis is Clifford S. Griffin, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44 (December, 1957), 423-444. Works that draw a close connection between religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening and reform as social control include John R. Bodo, *The Protestant Clergy and Public Issues, 1812-1848* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millenium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978). Works that deal more specifically with the reform of recreation (e.g. parks and playgrounds) as social control include Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); Cary Goodman, *Choosing Sides: Playground and Street Life on the Lower East Side* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979); Dorceta E. Taylor, "Central Park as A Model for Social Control: Urban Parks, Social Class and Leisure Behavior in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Leisure Research* 31, no. 4 (1999), 420-477.

not intend.⁴⁹ Moreover, not all differences are reducible to class differences; as was sometimes the case with Sabbatarianism, the lower classes occasionally find common ground with the powerful.

The Sabbath crusade of the early nineteenth century is perhaps better understood as a reaction to modernizing trends such as industrialization. Beecher's expressed concern about "WISDOM, WEALTH, AND POWER," was sincere; many religious moralists considered affluence a threat to faithfulness.⁵⁰ Whereas some historians have attributed the 1826 controversy to the postal act of 1825, Richard John points out that this later postal act simply left the earlier one unchanged. The real trigger of the controversy was rather new developments in transportation such as the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, as illustrated by the Presbyterian General Assembly's boycott of companies providing Sunday transportation in 1826.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Critiques of the social control thesis include Lois W. Banner, "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Journal of American History* 60 (June, 1973), 23-41; William A. Muraskin, "The Social Control Theory in American History: A Critique," *Journal of Social History* 9, no. 4 (Summer, 1976), 559-569; Gareth Stedman Jones, "Class Expression Versus Social Control? A Critique of Recent Trends in the Social History of 'Leisure'," *History Workshop* 4 (Autumn, 1977), 163-170; Lawrence Frederick Kohl, "The Concept of Social Control and the History of Jacksonian America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1985), 21-34. Critiques of the association between religious revival and social control include Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, Revised ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 252-254; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 222-223. Works dealing with issues of recreation and leisure that take cultural transmission to be a two-way process rather than a "trickle-down" process include Roy Rosenzweig, "Middle-Class Parks and Working-Class Play: The Struggle Over Recreational Space in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1870—1910," *Radical History Review* 21 (Fall, 1979), 31-48; Stephen Hardy and Alan G. Ingham, "Games, Structures, and Agency: Historians on the American Play Movement," *Journal of Social History* 17, no. 2 (Winter, 1983), 285-301; Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

⁵⁰ *God and Mammon: Protestants, Money, and the Market, 1790-1860*, ed. Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁵¹ John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*, 180.

Moreover, Sabbatarian concern about industry expressed itself in treating laborers not only as objects of reform, but also as partners in opposing the strictly commercial interests of management, a fact glossed over by those who interpret Sabbatarianism too exclusively as a matter of social control.

Such protest notwithstanding, Sabbatarianism's relationship to the emerging industrial economy is best described as ambiguous. Despite concerns regarding greed and luxury, Sabbath observance was less often promoted in the language of sacrifice than in the language of benefits. "So far as national prosperity depends on mental and muscular vigor in man, and the unwasted powers in animal life," Beecher argued, "six days produce a greater amount of income than seven."⁵² In this sense, writes Richard John, strict Sabbath observance was "perfectly compatible with the energetic pursuit of commerce the rest of the week. Indeed, to the extent that Sabbath observance soothed the conscience of guilt-ridden merchants, it may even have helped to give market transactions an aura of legitimacy."⁵³ And McCrossen is correct to point out the connection between Sabbatarianism and industrial capitalism:

Each accelerated the ongoing differentiation of time, seen in the popularity of watches, the rise of hourly wage labor, and the use of the clock to regulate labor in both the North and the South. Attention to Sunday also demarcated the time for work from that for rest. Setting it aside for worship, rest, and play was as much a part of the new orientation toward time as 'punching in and out' would be toward the end of the century. As the mechanical clock, time zones, and standardized time came to regulate all aspects of American life, the importance of Sunday was heightened.

Sabbatarianism may have been primarily a Protestant affair, but the line between protest and accommodation was not always clear.

⁵² Beecher, "Pre-Eminent Importance of the Christian Sabbath," 156. See also Fred Somkin, *Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 50-51.

⁵³ John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*, 174.

Nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism was thus concentrated in the urban northeast not only because immigrant and working class neighborhoods were the new “frontier” of Sabbath desecration, but also because Sabbatarianism, like industrialism, promoted a regulation and demarcation of time. Somewhat ironically, it was easier to be a Sabbatarian in the city than in the country. In the city, for example, one did not need mail in order to get news. In rural areas, by contrast, mail was the means for obtaining up-to-date business and political information, which helps explain why Sabbatarians failed to secure much support for their campaign in such areas. It also helps explain the apparent paradox that this seemingly anti-commercial movement was increasingly concentrated around centers of commerce such as New York City. For all its protest and seeming nostalgia, then, antebellum Sabbatarianism also “accommodated impulses toward modernization.”⁵⁴

If industrialism helps in part to explain Sabbatarianism, so too do other aspects of modernization such as urbanization and immigration. The early decades of the nineteenth century were a time of rapid growth, change, and a radical “reshaping of everyday life.”⁵⁵ Between 1780 and 1820, the number of states nearly doubled and the population more than tripled.⁵⁶ The industrial revolution increased urban density,

⁵⁴ McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 25. This correction to Sabbatarianism’s superficial anti-commercialism should not be overstated. Although Marx called Sabbatarianism “a conspiracy of the Church with monopoly capital,” Brian Harrison helpfully reminds us that Sabbatarianism (in England) was a cultural conflict that complicated rather than reinforced class conflict. “To whatever extent sabbatarianism may unconsciously have served the interests of early capitalism, the conscious outlook of the nineteenth-century L.D.O.S. [Lord’s Day Observance Society] was one of pronounced hostility to modern industrialism.” Brian Harrison, “Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Past and Present*, no. 38 (December 7, 1967), 120-121.

⁵⁵ Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840*.

⁵⁶ Richard D. Brown, “Modernization: A Victorian Climax,” in Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976). “Population growth was a fundamental element in transforming America. Between

resulted in a sharper distinction between the middle and working classes, and encouraged new waves of immigration, primarily of Germans and Irish Catholics. The assembly line method of manufacturing, adopted more rapidly than anywhere else, displaced artisanship and craftsmanship. Urbanization, combined with new transportation technologies, resulted in increased mobility and, consequently, social dislocation. Carriages, steamboats, and railcars, using a new system of roads, canals, and railroads, transported young people to the city to live and work, and, before long, away from the city on Sunday excursions. The transportation revolution was closely linked to the revolution in communication technologies, including the inexpensive printing of tracts and newspapers and, of course, the new national postal system.⁵⁷

Amidst all this change, there was also much disenchantment and anxiety. The disenchantment was a social concern—the mechanization and rationalization of city life in general and life at work in particular were experienced by many as dehumanizing tendencies. This sentiment found famous expression among romantics and transcendentalists, such as Thoreau’s famous quip about the masses of men living lives of quiet desperation. The anxiety of the era was more nearly a cultural concern—a concern about values and virtuous citizenry, about order, structure, stability, and continuity with the past. Modernizing trends may have been economically motivated, but roads, canals, the postal service, and the bulk mail rates all suggested a political or ideological commitment to progress and expansion as well. In that sense, the economic expansionism of the assembly line and the publishing industry was not unconnected to the political expansionism of the Louisiana Purchase or the War of 1812. These modernizing social trends were wrapped up in modern

1780 and 1820 the total population of the United States more than tripled (343%), growing from 2.8 million to 9.6 million” (34).

⁵⁷ David D. Hall, "The Victorian Connection," In *Victorian America*, ed. Daniel Walker Howe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 91.

cultural values consistent with, if not derived from, the capital economy—progress, productivity, efficiency, and an orientation to the future.⁵⁸

Reformers were also concerned about violence. Urban areas were plagued by mob riots, tavern brawls, and violent protests.⁵⁹ Moreover, the republic was still relatively new, and very much an experiment. The experiment of liberty in France, a decidedly more secular project, had turned bloody. The question for many Americans then was whether and how religion (Protestantism) could be reconciled with republicanism. The image of American energy, activity, and democracy during these years, as employed by writers such as Bryant, Cooper, and Poe, was that of the comet. “[D]emocracy,” as Fred Somkin summarized this sentiment, “was a flaming comet, whose chance of avoiding incineration lay in the development of an internal gyroscope for self-regulating order.” Could incineration be avoided? Could liberty be embraced without devolving into licentiousness and moral anarchy? Thus understood, the problem of freedom was “the problem of the internalization of order.”⁶⁰ So began an era of widespread moral reform, including not only Sabbatarianism, but also temperance, abolition, and women’s suffrage.

⁵⁸ Sociologist Peter Berger, for example, identifies “futurity” as a hallmark of modernity. Peter L. Berger, *Facing Up to Modernity: Excursions in Society, Politics, and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 73ff.

⁵⁹ Wyatt-Brown, for example, writes “Pious conservatives had good reason to worry about ‘mobocracy,’ for the Jacksonian era was more lawless than any previous period in American history.” Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Prelude to Abolitionism: Sabbatarian Politics and the Rise of the Second Party System,” *The Journal of American History* 58, no. 2 (September, 1971), 316. Jack Larkin: “The United States did not become a peaceful country, although many of its communities became tamer. In American cities, there was more mob violence in the later 1830s than there had been since the years just before the Revolution.” Larkin, *The Reshaping of Everyday Life, 1790-1840*, 301.

⁶⁰ Somkin, *Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815-1860*, 53.

The reform impulse generally, and Sabbatarianism specifically, had more than a mere undercurrent of nativism. The problem, of course, was not just the fact of immigration, but also the fact that so many immigrants were Catholic. Between 1790 and 1830, the number of Catholics increased from 30,000 to 600,000.⁶¹ Protestant clergy fueled popular anti-Catholic sentiment by worrying publicly about “Popery” and the threat of “Romanism.” They worried not only about the threat Catholicism posed to Protestantism, but also about the threat they believed Catholicism posed to republicanism. “Catholic Europe is throwing swarm on swarm upon our shores,” Beecher wrote, observing that 150,000 Catholics immigrated in 1832 alone.⁶² Beecher, who also worried that Catholics would not assimilate to (Protestant) America, was in fact the “most prominent among the ministers bent upon exposing papal designs.”⁶³ Between 1830 and 1860, immigration of Irish and German Catholics increased, and anti-Catholicism became more formalized in the Know-Nothing Party. Caught up in the moment, Protestant churches were almost uniformly anti-Catholic.⁶⁴ Even Philip Schaff, a German Protestant with more moderate sensibilities than Beecher, but nevertheless writing in 1855—the height of Know-Nothing activity—expressed concern about Catholicism, and the different Sabbath traditions arriving from the Continent. That the Sabbath “should be profaned and degraded to a day of worldly amusement and dissipation, as it is on the European continent, especially in such a city as Paris, is to any American, but particularly to the Puritanic

⁶¹ Robert T. Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 51.

⁶² Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West* (Cincinnati: Truman and Smith, 1835), 116.

⁶³ Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1963), 70.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* “By the middle of the 1840’s the American churches were able to present a virtually united front against Catholicism. Swept away by the pleas of organized nativists, they had accepted the challenge to make America the scene of a new Reformation in which Popery would be driven from the land and the work of Luther and Calvin brought to a successful end” (181).

New Englander, a real abomination and one of the chief sources of infidelity and moral corruption.”⁶⁵ Similar sentiments are found among Protestant Sabbatarians through the nineteenth century. In 1884, Wilbur Crafts devoted over sixty pages of *The Sabbath for Man* to concerns related to the continental Sabbath, contrasting it with the ideal of the “Anglo-American Sabbath.”⁶⁶ “Most foreigners,” wrote Josiah Strong in 1891, “bring with them continental ideas of the Sabbath, and the result is sadly manifest in all our cities, where it is being transformed from a holy day into a holiday.”⁶⁷ Throughout the entire nineteenth century, concerns about preserving the Puritan or “Anglo-American” Sabbath were inextricably linked to concerns related to Catholic immigration.

Sabbatarianism is thus also helpfully understood in part as a cultural phenomenon. “Perhaps,” David Hall has written, “[Sabbatarianism] should really be understood as symbolic language, a complex set of references which can be variously employed by social groups.” In this view, Sabbatarianism can refer to work/idleness (“a shorthand reference for the work ethic”), mercy/judgment (“a vehicle for distinguishing between social vice and social morality”), orthodoxy/heterodoxy (“a stone in the citadel of orthodoxy”), duty/play (“a vehicle for uneasiness about the boundaries and structure of the self”), and mercy/judgment (a proxy of sorts for “notions of providence, a covenanted people, declension, the millennium, and personal salvation”).⁶⁸ Closely related to this is the view of Sabbath observance as ritual—as a “marker of time and a setting for memory,”⁶⁹ a “ritual renewal of community life,”⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Philip Schaff, *America: A Sketch of its Political, Social, and Religious Character* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1961), 116.

⁶⁶ Crafts, *The Sabbath for Man*.

⁶⁷ Josiah Strong, *Our Country* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1963), 55.

⁶⁸ Hall, “Symbols and Society in Colonial New England,” 466-467.

⁶⁹ Alexis McCrossen, “Sunday: Marker of Time, Setting for Memory,” *Time & Society* 14, no. 1 (2005), 25.

or a “liminal moment” of sacred time in which “symbol and myth converge.”⁷¹ From the perspective of cultural history, even Sabbath legislation is largely symbolic. This view has the advantage of accommodating the dynamic meanings attributed to Sabbatarian language and assertions over time.⁷²

Other related explanations of nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism emphasize the role of politics and economics. Wyatt-Brown, for example, argues that the second round of the Sunday mail petitions was largely a politically motivated challenge to the Democratic Party. Although the correspondence of class to cultural values was complex and should not be overdrawn, the Sabbatarian conflict nevertheless contributed to the process of polarization that became the two-party system.⁷³ Ezra Stiles Ely’s attempt to start “a Christian party” in 1827 made it especially easy for Jacksonians to depict evangelicals and Sabbatarians as upper-class snobs engaged in class warfare.⁷⁴ As in England two centuries earlier, the effect of this association of

⁷⁰ Clebsch, *From Sacred to Profane America: The Role of Religion in American History*, 157-158.

⁷¹ David D. Hall, "Religion and Society: Problems and Reconsiderations," In *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, eds. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1984), 336-337.

⁷² Hall, for example, suggests the latter two categories—duty/play and mercy/judgment—are more purely Puritan than the others. Hall, "Symbols and Society in Colonial New England," 468.

⁷³ Of course, some among the wealthy were Jacksonians, and some among the less well-to-do were National Republicans. Sabbatarians thus had both support and opposition in places that a strictly economic analysis would not anticipate. As Wyatt-Brown noted, “Boston Brahmins, New York patricians, Jeffersonian slaveholders, Philadelphia land magnates, high-living Kentucky skeptics, rationalist, non-religious businessmen, and old religious conservatives everywhere distrusted the evangelical movement for quite diverse reasons.” Moreover, Sabbatarianism was founded on the same religious impulse as abolitionism, which was “a greater expression of egalitarian idealism than Jackson ever dreamed of.” Wyatt-Brown, "Prelude to Abolitionism: Sabbatarian Politics and the Rise of the Second Party System," 332.

⁷⁴ Even this is more complicated than it at first appears, given that 1) Beecher and other “moderates” involved in the founding of the General Union the following year attempted to distance themselves from Ely (suggesting a fracturing of strategies

Sabbatarianism with a particular class increased the sorting of those for and against Sabbatarianism according to criteria that were not primarily theological. First, some who otherwise may not have cared about Sabbatarianism *per se* now had common cause with Sabbatarians on other fronts. More significantly, the movement's class and party affiliations put off Democrats who otherwise may have been sympathetic to Sabbatarianism. Indeed, reform efforts on the part of educated easterners fueled anti-clericalism and lower class resentment even among poor, church-going Baptists and Methodists. The short-term effect of the association of Sabbatarianism with the National Republican party was thus a fracturing of evangelicalism—the very opposite of what was intended. Rohrer similarly argues that the anti-Sabbatarianism occasioned by the Sunday mail controversy was part of a larger reaction to the divisiveness of the Second Great Awakening and its associated reform initiatives, which “undermined community order, setting neighbor against neighbor, spouse against spouse, and employers against their workers.”⁷⁵ Politics also played a role at a more local level. The Pennsylvania church that disciplined Hugh Wylie, triggering the first Sunday mails controversy, was simultaneously dealing with anti-Sabbatarians raising controversial views on infant baptism. And for some Sabbatarians, the more general campaign for moral reform included opposition to Madison's War of 1812. Sabbatarianism was thus inextricably linked to a number of other concerns—including, in this case, “Sectarian squabbling, political opportunism, and antiwar sentiment.”⁷⁶

Especially over time, but even in earlier years, some persons and groups supported Sunday closing of businesses for reasons that were not at all religious. As

among Sabbatarians), and that 2) Ely himself proposed none other than Jackson as a prospective leader of the party.

⁷⁵ Rohrer, "Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America," 72.

⁷⁶ John, "Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously," 527.

Alan Raucher has shown, these included not only laborers interested in a day of rest, but family-run stores and small retailers who did not have the same capacity as larger retailers to remain open seven days per week.⁷⁷ This rationale led many Catholic and even Jewish businessmen to support Sunday closings. There was also the matter of public image. In the twentieth century, some large retailers demonstrated self-serving sensitivity by opening on Sunday in the West but closing in the East.⁷⁸ It is worth noting that these economic rationales pertained to restrictions regarding Sunday work but not Sunday recreation.

All of these explanations run the risk of reductionism, most obviously by failing to take religion seriously as religion. To be sure, nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism was no less socially situated than seventeenth-century Sabbatarianism, and if anything the emphasis on fine theological distinctions between moral and ceremonial law had moved from the foreground to the background. Still, Sabbatarianism was at root a theological conviction. Richard Johnson argues that nineteenth-century Sabbatarians were up against not only external threats but also internal and distinctly theological challenges.⁷⁹ He helpfully documents the challenges posed to Sabbatarianism not just by Transcendentalists and other liberals, but also by Unitarians, Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists, Disciples of Christ, and even those among the “Anglo-American mainstream”—Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians. Johnson’s work adds a layer of theological insight to scholarship on Sabbatarianism, but his premise that “People

⁷⁷ Raucher, "Sunday Business and the Decline of Sunday Closing Laws," 22, 23. See also John S. Gilkeson Jr., "The Rise and Decline of the 'Puritan Sunday' in Providence, Rhode Island, 1810-1926," *New England Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (March, 1986).

⁷⁸ Raucher, "Sunday Business and the Decline of Sunday Closing Laws," 26.

⁷⁹ Richard Olin Johnson, "Free from the Rigor of the Law: Theological Challenges to the Anglo-American Sabbath in Nineteenth-Century America" (Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union, 2001).

change their religious practice because they change their convictions” is too simple. He says that “the perceived consensus about the Sabbath among American Protestants was largely illusory,” and true enough, there was a wide diversity of theological convictions about the Sabbath.⁸⁰ But the assumption here seems to be that what warrants explanation is Sabbatarianism’s decline rather than its persistence. This account fails to explain how Sabbatarianism often appealed even to non-believers. Moreover, if even believers did not agree on the theological rationale of Sabbath observance, that makes the staying power of the concept and the institution more, not less, striking. In short, reading Sabbatarianism too exclusively as a matter of religious devotion also risks reductionism.

Although Sabbatarians were sometimes criticized for clinging to outdated beliefs, the Sabbath crusade that Beecher inaugurated was inextricably linked to the social, cultural, economic, and political realities of the early national era. Motivations behind Sabbatarian agitation were complex, and included the desire to keep the faith and stem the tide of secularization; to retain or regain a degree of cultural authority amidst threats from politicians, commerce and entertainment; to improve individual morals, especially those of immigrants and workers; and to bring order to a rapidly changing and at times disorderly society. All of these factors suggest that antebellum Sabbatarianism was in part a reaction to modernization and modernism. But Sabbatarianism was not merely reactive. It was also innovative and adaptable. Beecher’s connection between the Sabbath and free institutions grew out of the earlier association of Sabbath desecration and despotism, but it was also a way of contextualizing faith in a democratic republic. In short, he was attempting to reconcile republicanism with religion.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 356, 361.

7. *Sabbatarianism in a Democratic Republic*

Sabbatarians were criticized not only for holding onto old-fashioned beliefs, but also for trying to impose them on others. Indeed, the rhetoric of Beecher and others is nothing if not triumphalist. Not coincidentally, however, the triumphalist rhetoric coincided with the embrace of highly democratic methods of promoting the Sabbath as the law of the land.

The decades following the founding of the republic were a time of radical growth and diversification in the religious landscape. In 1776, Presbyterians and Congregationalists were the largest denominations, each representing about twenty percent of the American population. The termination of state support for churches and the general atmosphere of disestablishment, however, favored the more entrepreneurial and revivalistic denominations, including Baptists and especially Methodists, which by the end of the Second Great Awakening accounted for over half the population.⁸¹ Confessional or “high church” Christianity, with an emphasis on creeds, sacraments, and systematic theology, was yielding to evangelical or “low church” Christianity, with a more democratic approach to faith that emphasized laity rather than clergy, experience rather than tradition, and spontaneity rather than formality. Evangelicalism was a populist movement, and evangelicals’ appropriation of the cause made Sabbatarianism a populist—no longer just a Presbyterian—movement.

This populism was reflected in the goals and structure of antebellum reform organizations in general, and the General Union in particular. For example, whereas the first petition drive was largely the work of Presbyterians and Congregationalists, whose reformed theology was shared in common with the Puritans, the second drive

⁸¹ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

was the work of a much more diverse coalition of evangelicals. The leadership of the General Union, for example, included members of nine denominations, including Lutherans, Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians.⁸² It included not only Presbyterians like Lyman Beecher but also Unitarians such as William Ellery Channing. Moreover, like the American Temperance Society and other such reform organizations, the General Union was managed not primarily by clergy working through general assemblies, but by lay business leaders working through new organizations they were founding. The founder of the General Union, to take the most obvious example, was Josiah Bissell, a Rochester businessman and Presbyterian elder who founded the Pioneer Line, a Sabbath-keeping stagecoach.⁸³

The significance of this transition can hardly be overstated. These new organizations were highly effective; relative to earlier reform efforts, they were better funded and better organized, not to mention more entrepreneurial and adaptable. To be sure, Sabbatarians still aimed at changing the law, but their strategy, even if only out of necessity, changed. Although Sabbatarians may have feared the centrifugal tendencies of democracy, the General Union strategy, following the tried-and-true techniques of the American Tract Society, was highly democratic. The increasing cultural pluralism, separation of church and state, and the diffusion of cultural authority meant that religious leaders now had to take a more bottom-up approach to social change. Whereas churches and general assemblies had directly petitioned Congress during the first phase of the Sunday mails controversy, this time the General Union and the Presbyterian General Assembly did not petition Congress directly. By distributing petitions widely to as many people as possible, without regard for the status or office of the petitioners, Sabbatarian reformers employed a strategy of

⁸² Rohrer, "Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America," 65.

⁸³ John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*, 180-185.

effecting large-scale change through the voluntaristic changing of hearts and minds. Although this was not anti-clericalism, the individualism undergirding the effort constituted a decentralization or diffusion of authority from the clergy to the people. In this sense, “Sabbatarian activists inverted the priorities of the previous petition effort.” Moreover, Sabbatarians were pioneering in their use of new transportation and communications technology, including the press and the postal system, for their political goals. The distribution of 100,000 copies of Lyman Beecher’s address to the General Union was just one indication of the movement’s embrace of modernizing trends and technologies.⁸⁴

These changes also largely account for Beecher’s otherwise inexplicable discourse connecting Sabbath observance and national destiny. Given the negative associations many American Christians had with the established Church of England, disestablishment—especially at the national level—was welcomed. Evangelical and other Christian believers did not as a result discard their notion of America as a “Christian nation” and source of “Christian civilization,” but rather reinvented it for a new context.⁸⁵ In the absence of state supported churches, however, what would sustain this Christian civilization? The answer, according to Mark Noll, was “careful, exacting government of the self, only by the voluntary, freely chosen, self-regulating government of society.”⁸⁶

One of Beecher’s signal contributions to the nineteenth century was precisely this idea of God’s moral government. John Winthrop famously spoke of the New World settlement as a “City upon a Hill,” but it took Beecher to reframe that vision in essentially republican language. “Our doctrine,” he wrote, distinguishing himself and his colleague N.W. Taylor from Jonathan Edwards, was that “*God governs mind by*

⁸⁴ Ibid., 184-185.

⁸⁵ Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, Ch. 2.

⁸⁶ Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, 291.

*motive and not by force.*⁸⁷ In other words, the means of establishing Christian civilization were to be voluntary, but the goal was the same.⁸⁸ In 1835 Beecher argued, “the conflict which is to decide the destiny of the West, will be a conflict of institutions for the education of her sons, for purposes of superstition, or evangelical light; of despotism, or liberty.” And the Sabbath, in his view, was a primary means or “instrumentality” to the end of liberty. “The Sabbath, and the preaching of the gospel, are Heaven’s consecrated instrumentality for the efficacious administration of the government of mind in a happy social state. By these only does the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his beams; and ignorance, and vice, and superstition encamp around evangelical institutions, to run in whenever their light and power is extinct.”⁸⁹ Beecher’s concept of moral government was, in George Marsden’s words, “essentially a republican restatement of the Puritan theory of the national covenant.”⁹⁰

Although articulated most clearly by Beecher, this vision of America as a Christian republic was widespread, especially among evangelicals. The Presbyterian General Assembly, for example, passed a resolution during the first Sunday mails controversy that read in part as follows:

The grand experiment by which God has been demonstrating the destructive nature of infidelity with regard to society, must force open the eyes even of the blind, to see the fatal tendency of sin, especially in republics, which are founded on the principle, that the law is the supreme power. . . . If, therefore, the main spring of moral instruction and moral feeling is found in a due sanctification of the Sabbath, to destroy its influence, to them so irksome, will be the first effort of the sons of Belial. The spirit of infidelity, which united

⁸⁷ Ibid., 291.

⁸⁸ Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 49. See also William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent 1630-1883*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 1267.

⁸⁹ Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 12, 40.

⁹⁰ Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, 291.

itself with the French Revolution, intuitively pursued this course. Her first and most fatal blow was directed against this sacred institution.

Elected officials who will not accept “truths so plain” must be regarded as “destitute” and “willing to plunge themselves, their friends, and families into all the horrors of anarchy, and unrestrained licentiousness.”⁹¹ Interestingly, this logic soon was taken up not only by Presbyterians and Congregationalists, churches in the Calvinist tradition that were on the decline and which sometimes benefited from state support, but also by Methodists and Baptists, denominations that were benefiting from and thriving in the new atmosphere of disestablishment. In 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a resolution regarding the duty of preachers to emphasize “the divine obligation all are under” regarding the Sabbath day. “[W]ere this precept blotted from the Decalogue,” the resolution read, “and men left without the restraints which it imposes, religion (and of course morality) would cease to exert their saving and hallowed influence.”⁹² Even Baptists, who in many other respects were advocates of religious liberty and church-state separation, were of one mind with Beecher on Sunday mails. In response to the second postal act, a delegation of New England Baptists resolved: “We consider the transport of mail and delivery of letters . . . on the Sabbath-day to be a national sin.”⁹³ Decades later, Wilbur Crafts offered what may be the most concise articulation of this view of Sabbath in relation to the democratic republic: “With the Sabbath our Christianity and our country stand or fall. A republic

⁹¹ *Extracts from the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America: From A.D. 1812 to A.D. 1816 Inclusive*, 257. Concerns regarding the French Revolution and the “French Sunday” or “Parisian Sunday” appear to have been even more acute among British Sabbatarians. W. R. B. Arthy, *Sabbath Observance and Sabbath Amusement, as Regulated by the Laws of the Old Testament* (London: n.p., 1855).

⁹² *Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. 2 (New York: Carlton and Philips, 1855), 130.

⁹³ *Christian Watchman*, June 26, 1828, 90, as quoted in McLoughlin, *New England Dissent 1630-1883*, 1266.

cannot endure without morality, nor morality without religion, nor religion without the Sabbath, nor the Sabbath without law.”⁹⁴

This new view of God’s moral government, according to Mark Noll, consisted largely of the appropriation of Whig discourse that was so prevalent at the time. “God’s rule of the world was not only—or even primarily—immediate through a direct covenantal relationship; rather, it was mediated by principles of personal duty, virtue as the promoter of social order, vice as the assurance of disorder, and checks and balances on power—in other words, the panoply of republican reasoning.”⁹⁵ The new significance attributed to the Sabbath was thus directly related to disestablishment; in the absence of an established church, the Sabbath had to bear even more weight as a sign and symbol of America as a Christian nation.

8. Conclusion

The controversy over Sunday mails, the largest Sabbatarian controversy of the early national period, illustrates trends that became typical of the Sabbatarian movement for decades to come: the crusade was part and parcel of the modernizing culture, including new developments in industry, labor, and technology; immigration, urbanization, and increasing cultural pluralism; democratization, disestablishment, and entrepreneurial religiosity.

Religious reformers may have been reacting to modernization, but they also contributed to it. The maypole at Merrymount illustrates the point. Contrary to

⁹⁴ Wilbur F. Crafts, "The Manifold Worth of the Sabbath," *Our Day* 8 (July, 1891), 23. It is worth noting that this is essentially the same rationale according to which most evangelical Protestants supported the establishment of common schools, a point discussed further on page 223.

⁹⁵ Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, 291.

Dulles's influential account, it was *not* "from these beginnings [i.e., Merrymount's May games] that American recreation grew to the varied and full activities we know to-day." According to Dulles, the early colonists had "the same instinctive drive for play that is the common heritage of all mankind"—a drive that the Puritans never successfully suppressed.⁹⁶ But the play impulse necessarily finds its expression in cultural forms, and those that the Puritans judged unlawful on any day of the week—including those affirmed in the *Book of Sports*, such as maypoles, morris dances, and church ales—are precisely the forms of recreation that never took hold in the New World. To be sure, economic and other factors played a role in the failure of many traditional recreations to cross the Atlantic. With respect to the banishing of such festivities, however, the Puritans and their religious descendants were anything but failures.

Several ironies follow from the changes religious reformers initiated. First, Sabbatarian opposition to Sunday labor protected Sunday as a day of leisure just as reformers' embrace of the work ethic and opposition to the liturgical calendar rendered recreation less possible on "secular" days of the week. Especially as rural patterns of leisure were displaced among those migrating to the city, there developed a "recreation gap." In contrast to the Puritan Parliament of the 1640s, which had advocated for special days of recreation, religious reformers in the New World attempted to fill this gap with rest, worship, and moral instruction, but without advocating for an alternative day for recreation. Whereas with the liturgical calendar recreation and religion once were integrated, now they were competitors.⁹⁷

Sunday mail, for example, was controversial not only because it entailed labor for the few, but also because it entailed recreation for the many. Given that the post

⁹⁶ Dulles, *A History of Recreation: America Learns to Play*, 3-4.

⁹⁷ Harrison refers to the "recreational gap created by the decline of the old leisure patterns." Harrison, "Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth-Century England," 124.

office was the only such institution open on Sunday, at least in some cities it became a popular gathering place for men, not unlike a saloon. This was not yet entertainment stripped of pretense, but accounts of crowds flocking to the post office immediately after services—and sometimes during services—suggest that receiving news and mail on Sundays entailed entertainment nonetheless. The cult of the new was an emerging feature of modernity, and in a clear foreshadow of concerns over Sunday newspapers and amusements, clergy worried about the displacement of focus from the timeless to the temporal.⁹⁸ The trains and carriages carrying Sunday mail also often carried passengers. Hence Beecher worried not only about those tempted to work on Sunday, but also about those “tempted to travel in steam-boats and stages, by the national example; and all who, when the flood gates are thus open, pour out for business or pleasure, on foot, on horseback, in chaises, coaches, wagons and canal-boats.”⁹⁹ Although Sunday travel was not altogether new, Sabbatarians were especially concerned about the emerging practice of Sunday or “Sabbatical excursions.”¹⁰⁰ Sabbatarians, then, by means of contributing to the concentration of demand for recreation on Sunday and reinforcing the values and the new time-orientation of industrialism, were participants in and even agents of the modernizing process that led to the commercialization of Sunday leisure.

Second, consensus regarding attitudes toward Sunday recreation and also the theater appears to have been inversely related to actual religious practice. In the latter decades of the eighteenth century, when the Continental Congress was passing resolutions privileging frugality over extravagance and banning theatrical

⁹⁸ John, "Taking Sabbatarianism Seriously," 529.

⁹⁹ Beecher, "Pre-Eminent Importance of the Christian Sabbath," 15.

¹⁰⁰ Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 51. Already in 1809, one clergyman complained that “[Sunday] is more and more given over to outdoor recreation.” Gilkeson, "The Rise and Decline of the 'Puritan Sunday'," 78.

performances, religious observance was very low.¹⁰¹ During the early decades of the nineteenth century, as religiosity increased dramatically and Sabbatarian reformers asserted themselves in a more concerted fashion, attitudes toward recreation became more liberal. While causality is not easily determined, much of this change is surely explained by the severance of ties to England. Through the colonial era, the *Book of Sports* lived on in the imagination, and was effectively used by Puritans to associate certain recreations with tyranny and persecution. Although reformers attempted to use the *Book of Sports* to the same effect through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, they did so to much less effect. What happened was in fact very nearly the opposite. Beginning in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and culminating in the years 1890 to 1920, it was Puritan moralists, not Tudor monarchs, who became the symbols of religious persecution. The result of this inversion was that the middle decades of the nineteenth century—America’s “Christian century” if ever there was one—was the century during which recreation would be most controversial.

¹⁰¹ “Probably less than 10 per cent of the population of the United States were church members in 1800.” Handy, *A Christian America: Protestant Hopes and Historical Realities*, 24.

CHAPTER 4
VICTORIAN RECREATION AND REFORM

1. Introduction

The recreation wars of the middle of the nineteenth century were largely related to the loss of open space, which in turn was related to industrialization. During the half century starting in 1840, America became the most modern and industrialized nation in the world.¹ Large numbers of native-born Americans and immigrants, including Irish immigrants fleeing the potato blight and later German and Chinese immigrants, sought jobs in the factories going up in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and other urban areas. Factory owners' attempts to regulate work met resistance from immigrants and native workers alike. The clock, the machine, the whistle, the work ethic, and piece-rate work would all contribute to the transformation of workers' customs and values, but not before a long period of overlap and conflict with settled "pre-modern habits," including drinking, singing, gambling and playing games, reading the newspaper aloud, taking extended breaks, and coming and going without permission. Worker resistance, reinforced by distinctively American rhetoric and regard for freedom and independence, expressed itself in tardiness, absenteeism, and turnover, as well as the organization of trade unions and the Knights of Labor (1869).

¹ According to Gutman, who refers more precisely to the years 1843 through 1893, "This half-century saw the United States (not small pockets within it) industrialize as steam and machinery radically transformed the premodern American economic structure. That so much attention has been given to the Civil War as a crucial divide in the nation's history (and it was, of course, for certain purposes) too frequently has meant neglect by historians of common patterns of behavior that give coherence to this period." Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*, 32. Later he reiterates that there is "a coherence to the decades between 1843 and 1893 that even the trauma of the Civil War does not disturb" (50).

Industrialists, however, were not only concerned with workers' time and behavior at work. They and other custodians of culture—including politicians, clergy, and various social reformers—concerned themselves also with workers' time and behavior in the hours after work.

The landscape of leisure in America's burgeoning cities was changing almost as dramatically as that of labor, most obviously in the loss of open space and the forms of play associated with rural life. Just as the new time-discipline at work segregated leisure from work, there were fewer places to play after work. The very existence of "leisure time," the scarcity of places to play, and the crowded nature of tenements and boarding houses thus conspired to create an interest in and appetite for going out. Children took to the streets and adults, more often than not, took to the new establishments provided by leisure entrepreneurs. As early as the 1830s, before there were public parks and playgrounds, New York City boasted not only saloons and commercial beer gardens but also a number of dime museums and theaters, including the Bowery and Chatham theaters, which largely served immigrants and workers. These establishments were a mere shadow of things to come—indeed, by 1840 New York was on the eve of "an amusement explosion."²

To be sure, the rate of change should not be overstated. As with labor, new leisure habits overlapped with old. Immigrants and native-born Americans alike cherished their non-work time and traditions, which were not yet primarily commercial in nature. Native traditions often blended civic and celebratory functions, including Fourth of July ceremonies and "communicative events" such as "orations, lectures, sermons, riots, demonstrations, balloon ascensions, commercial promotions, charitable balls, market days, building dedications, concerts, and political meetings."³

² Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973), 37.

³ Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 14.

Even riots and strikes that were obviously purposive also could be enjoyable, amply lubricated with kegs of beer.⁴ Nor was change part of some unidirectional process of modernization. Immigrants, for example, brought Old World traditions such as festivals, fairs, weddings, wakes, parades, games, sports, and Saints days. In many instances, these practices were at once new to the American context and old in the sense of belonging to a pre-modern rhythm of work and leisure that conformed neither to the time discipline of factories nor to the quiet Sunday of strict Sabbatarianism. Still, of all the changes in the landscape of leisure during the nineteenth century, commercialization was the most transformative—and the most controversial—among them.

Enter recreational reform efforts. Conservatives and liberals alike worried about getting children off the streets and workers out of the saloons. But commercial recreation was no solution, for they worried also that the democratization of culture would mean vulgarization. While many members of the middle class segregated themselves into new residential and recreation spaces, Methodists and Unitarians in particular responded to the crisis of leisure space by creating alternative places to play. Although these reformers were seeking to manage the behaviors of others after hours, they should not be imagined to have more cultural power than they did. Workers and the rising middle class also had power, increasingly exercised through their discretionary time and money. Just as entrepreneurs could only succeed to the extent that they could sell their products and services to the public, so too reformers were only successful to the extent that they could “sell” their ideas to the same public. Reformers were often successful, but only insofar as they took a page from the entrepreneurs’ play book; neither reformers nor entrepreneurs could ignore what the

⁴ Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*.

people wanted. In any case, the competing interests of entrepreneurs, reformers, and laborers arguably made leisure more controversial during the middle decades of the nineteenth century than ever before—or since.

2. Separation: The Middle Class Response

There is no reason to believe that reformers were the only ones who cared about public order and social improvement. Indeed, workers' interests and reformers' interests often coincided. Recent research has shown, for example, that parks and playgrounds were not just the initiative of reformers, but rather that workers were the earliest agitators and supporters of such spaces.⁵ As urban areas struggled with riots, mob violence, and disorder, many immigrants and workers, no less than the middle class, sought the restoration of order through a variety of voluntary means, including an ethical code that emphasized respectability and decorum. Only the upper and middle classes, however, had the means of separating themselves from those who did not conform to orderly expectations. Separation—at work, at home, and at play—served as a means of achieving social distinction and establishing social identity.⁶

Through the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, middling merchants and lower-class laborers lived, worked, and worshiped in close proximity. At the same time that work was increasingly separated from home, many established families relocated, separating themselves spatially both from their place of employment as well

⁵ Rosenzweig, "Middle-Class Parks and Working-Class Play," 31-48; Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), Ch. 5. See also Hardy and Ingham, "Games, Structures, and Agency," 285-301.

⁶ Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 144.

as from those of a lower social station. As a result, “stable, socially diverse neighborhoods [began] the long decline into slums.”⁷ This separation as a response to an unstable social mix is evident not only in residential patterns but also in the sphere of leisure. Theater provides the clearest example.

Theaters in the early nineteenth century, like neighborhoods, were diverse socially, economically, and ethnically. Many theaters had multiple tiers, with the well to do sitting in the boxes; blacks, prostitutes and other marginalized persons segregated into the gallery; and most others in the pit—each section with its own separate entrance and exit. Theater audiences at this time tended to be responsive and even participatory, expressing their approval and disapproval not only verbally, but also at times by throwing vegetables and other items at stage performers. Put differently, the boundary between performers and audience was fluid rather than firm. Performers could not ignore their audience, but had to negotiate their way through performances, working to keep the audience’s respect and attention at the risk of being drowned out or shouted down. Over time, the social mixing of audiences proved too volatile to sustain. When wealthy New Yorkers built the Astor Place Opera House in 1847, they did so in part to separate themselves from the rowdier element of the Five Points neighborhood served by the Bowery. When management arranged for the distinguished British actor William Charles Macready to perform *Macbeth* just two years later, the symbolic significance of the social distinctions became violent. Thousands of native and immigrant workers surrounded the theater in support of their American star Edwin Forrest. The National Guard, already on alert, was called in, and before the evening was over dozens of people were dead and hundreds injured.

⁷ Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 4.

Controversy over entertainment thus occasioned the first armed police force in America.⁸

The effect of the Astor Place riot was to further the trend that the theater's existence already signified—the segmentation of theaters and their audiences into different categories of taste and respectability. Those concerned with the proper use of leisure time, which included the majority of middle class Americans as well as some others, had to choose how to respond to the unacceptable rowdiness that increasingly characterized urban leisure, and the first response was to withdraw—to establish venues that were distinct in geographic location as well as clientele. As those with resources relocated uptown, so too did theaters serving the respectable classes, which migrated up Broadway toward Times Square. Theater managers also increased the distance between performer and audience, encouraging the audience to be quieter, more receptive and less participatory. That respectability had as much to do with the crowd as the performance is evidenced by the critics, who commonly commented on audience members' dress, taste, and good behavior. Thus emerged the phenomenon of the “legitimate theater” for the upper class, as differentiated from minstrel shows and melodramas serving the middle class, and variety shows and concert saloons at the lower-cost, less respectable end of the spectrum.

This segmentation—what Lawrence Levine has called the emergence of cultural hierarchy—was not limited to theaters and other commercial entertainments but was also apparent in many other leisure pursuits as well. Eateries, like theaters,

⁸ Peter G. Buckley, "To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860" (Ph.D., SUNY Stony Brook, 1984); Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*; Karen E. Ahlquist, *Democracy at the Opera: Music, Theater, and Culture in New York City, 1815-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 248.

became segregated by class.⁹ Men in particular organized themselves into a variety of clubs—athletic clubs, hunting clubs, and later country clubs. The emergence of clubs coincided with an anti-urbanism that turned attention away from cities and civilization toward nature in both its pastoral and primitive versions. Wealthy individuals and families began taking vacations to newly built resorts, such as Saratoga Springs and the Mohonk Mountain House, accessible by newly constructed train lines. In 1858, Emerson and nine of his Boston-area scholar friends vacationed at Follensby Pond in the Adirondacks, a notable example of wealthy urbanites fleeing the confines of city and civilization in order to get back to nature. Such outings were further popularized through literature such as John “Rob Roy” MacGregor’s *A Thousand Miles in the Rob Roy Canoe* (1866), Rev. William Henry Harrison “Adirondack” Murray’s *Adventures in the Wilderness* (1869), and George Washington “Nessmuk” Sears’ *Woodcraft* (1884). Miller’s book in particular inspired a wave of tourism in the Adirondacks, resulting in the building of both resorts and great camps.¹⁰ Clubs, resorts, and wilderness park-based outings all contributed to cultural segmentation. And just as concert saloons served those excluded from the legitimate theater, day trips to Coney

⁹ Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*, 144-146.

¹⁰ On athletic clubs, see P. J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 11-14; Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, 139-146; Donna R. Braden, *Leisure and Entertainment in America* (Dearborn: Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village, 1988), Ch. 5; Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age of Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sports*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2004). On resorts, see C. S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jon Sterngass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, & Coney Island* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). On “Adirondack” Murray, see David Strauss, "Toward a Consumer Culture: 'Adirondack Murray' and the Wilderness Vacation," *American Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (Summer, 1987), 270-286.

Island emerged as the excursion of choice among working men and women in the 1860s and 1870s.

This process of cultural differentiation was a problem not only for the poor, working class, but also for the respectable, middle class, and especially for women. Although excursions, restaurants, clubs, resorts, and the legitimate theater served in part to maintain class distinctions through exclusion, the distinction was not necessarily class *per se* but rather respectability. Variety shows and concert saloons that made their money from alcohol and prostitution were exclusively male but not exclusively working class. They were frequented by a combination of workers and “sports,” or “slumming” middle class men. The prices were too high for many workers, the performances were in English, which excluded many immigrants, and even working men who cared to keep their respectability in tact had to stay away. To overgeneralize only a bit, mid-century leisure pursuits were either expensive or disreputable. As David Nasaw has summarized the situation, “for the vast majority of the urban population, working and middling classes alike, there were no affordable and ‘decent’ places to ‘go out’ at night.”¹¹

Nasaw’s comment that there was no place to go, though he is referring specifically to commercial places of entertainment, points to the mid-century crisis regarding urban space. Cities were crowded and parks not yet common. Forms of recreation more naturally pursued in the open space of rural environs were no longer available to city dwellers. For many urban workers without the means of access to clubs and resorts, the only space left for play, recreation, and festivity was the street. Prior to the development of parks and playgrounds, adults and children alike made streets their playgrounds. Ethnic neighborhoods in particular held festivals and

¹¹ David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 18.

parades, while children invented and adapted games to their urban environment.¹² But for middling folks aspiring to respectability, the streets were not an attractive place to play, and so they indeed had no place to go—except for home.

As increasing numbers of clerks and businessmen entered the lower middle class, they not only relocated their homes in an early wave of suburban flight enabled by their ability to commute by rail or ferry, but they also bought newer and larger homes. Not only new houses but also the older stock of residences were transformed by the removal of work from home. Children, who were now more likely to be in school than employed in the family shop, increasingly had their own beds and even dedicated playrooms. Men who now worked in offices or stores could remodel home workshops into parlors—“chapels . . . of the new middle-class domestic religion.” Parlors and sitting rooms, which served both to entertain guests and to communicate middle class status, were commonly furnished with carpets, wallpaper, comfortable sofas, bookcases, pictures, ornaments, and especially pianos. Combined with gas lighting, steam heating, and indoor plumbing, the new middle class home was far more spacious and comfortable than in 1800.¹³

A byproduct of the separation of work from home was thus the transformation of the (middle class) home into a place of leisure. Women, who had far fewer opportunities for public amusement and recreation than men, engaged in many activities that were a blend of labor and leisure, such as the production of “hearth crafts” or “handicrafts.” Beginning in 1850, manufactured toys for children such as

¹² David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Some of these children’s games are collected in Stewart Culin, “Street Games of Boys in Brooklyn, New York,” *Journal of American Folklore* 4 (July-September, 1891), 221-237.

¹³ Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*, 146-163, quote from 151; Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004).

mechanical locomotives and wax dolls increasingly replaced homemade “playthings” such as sticks, string, and rag dolls.¹⁴ Perhaps the most notable development in domestic leisure during this time was parlor games—group games that were “pure leisure” in the sense of being unconnected from productivity, and which facilitated respectable interaction between men and women in a safe and supervised setting. Many of these games were collected and published in books of games that, like manufactured children’s toys, were often imported from England. The games in these books include word games (e.g., Dictionary, Proverbs), logic games (e.g., Murder, Twenty Questions), blindfold games (e.g., Blind man’s Bluff, Speaking Buff), and also some kissing games. Many games, such as charades, were physical without being strenuous and competitive but without a cumulative score. Other games involved music and use of the ever-present piano. The published collections of these games instructed “ladies and gentlemen” in the ways of “harmless fun” and kissing “Spanish style.” The spirit in which these games should be pursued, one collection noted,

is to extract as much harmless fun from them as possible, avoiding everything rough and unseemly, or in which a mind exceptionally sensitive can find a cause of offence. With those which are simply boisterous in character, or have any element calculated to cause a feeling of annoyance or pain, we have nothing to do. But at the same time, all who enter on games of this kind should be prepared to give as well as to receive amusement.¹⁵

In their concern for manners and good company, such collections were of a piece with other advice manuals of the era.

This transformation of the home was a function not only of modernizing trends, but also of an ethos. Indeed, amidst the dizzying pace of change and concerns

¹⁴ Grover, *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*.

¹⁵ *Cassell's Household Guide to Every Department of Practical Life: Being a Complete Encyclopedia of Domestic and Social Economy*, Revised ed. (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd, n.d.); *Parlor Games: Traditional Indoor Games to Amuse and Delight* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1992). See especially page 6 of *Parlor Games*, entitled “Concerning the Greed for Glory.”

regarding riots, mobs, and disorder in urban areas, the home—and homemaking—took on new meaning and significance. In the emerging Victorian ideology, the home became a refuge and sanctuary. The private world of cleanliness and moral order was contrasted with the public world of selfishness, with women and men associated with each of these worlds respectively. Middle class women (“ladies”) were keepers not only of the home but also of its moral code, which aspired to steer a middle course between the twin errors of lower-class rowdiness and upper-class artificiality. Working at home—fulfilling the domestic duties of cooking, cleaning, and childrearing—was valued as highly as not having to work outside the home.

The contrast between the moral home and the immoral world of commerce was of course a convenient fiction. Indeed, the ideal itself was promoted through the new commercial medium of popular magazines, which included titles such as *The Home Circle*, *The Home Companion*, *The Home Friend*, *Family Friend*, *Family Treasure*, *Family Paper*, and most notably, beginning in 1883, *Ladies’ Home Journal*.¹⁶ Moreover, actually renovating a home into a comfortable and spacious place of refuge was entirely unrealistic and beyond the means of most if not all those residing in tenements and boardinghouses. The Victorian ethic of decorum was inextricably linked to the artifacts of décor, many of which were only accessible to the middle class. Simply put, consumption was a means to respectability. But the association of virtue with value was not merely a ruse of retailers. As Stuart Blumin notes, middle class women may have been constrained by the “canon of domesticity,” but they also contributed to its formation. Women, he notes, were not only wives, mothers, and household managers but also consumers. They were generally responsible not only for purchasing and preparing food, but also for interior decorating and entertaining.

¹⁶ Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England*, 4.

“Events on the other side of the retail sales counter, and in the ‘separate sphere’ of domestic womanhood, were influential, perhaps even crucial, in generating new social identities. To this extent, middle-class formation was woman’s work.”¹⁷

Middle-class neighborhoods and standards of decor, the legitimate theater and expensive eateries, and great camps and resorts in the Adirondacks all served to separate and differentiate, largely along class lines. What such segmentation did not accomplish was reform; although workers did appropriate some middle class habits and values, middle class withdrawal from entire neighborhoods and places of entertainment did nothing to refine them. Working class neighborhoods increasingly took on the character of “exertive” or “expressive” leisure, and popular commercial entertainments such as variety shows, honky-tonks, beer gardens, and traveling circuses were left to those who continued to challenge public orderliness and refined sensibilities. Unfortunately for large numbers of working class men and women who lived in tenements or boardinghouses, there was little opportunity to engage in respectable recreations either at home or in public. Cultural segmentation was a response to problems, but never a solution. Even as this process of segmentation was underway, many middle class Americans began taking an interest not only in preserving their own respectability but improving that of others.

3. Reform & Cultural Authority

Although concern for respectability was widespread, only a small percentage of the population, generally upper middle class clergy, politicians, businessmen and, increasingly, middle class women, had the leisure to concern themselves with the

¹⁷ Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*, 179-191, quote from 191.

improvement of others. Faced with urban crowding, exploitative labor practices, poverty, violence, issues of health and hygiene, a scarcity of places to play, and concerns regarding incorporating immigrants into the American way of life—not to mention more specifically spiritual and religious concerns—reformers had their work cut out for them.

As several historians have noted, what is striking about the prescriptive literature of mid-century is that it seems to become increasingly, not decreasingly, strict.¹⁸ One reason for this development is that reformers faced not only a social crisis—a crisis of dirty streets and illiterate immigrants—but also a cultural crisis. Especially in the colonial era, but even until the disestablishment of state churches as late as the 1830s, Protestant leaders exercised cultural influence disproportionate to their numbers. Although America was more diverse during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries than is sometimes believed, the culture—the ethos communicated by way of law and custom—was largely determined by middle class Protestants with cultural power. By mid-century, however, they no longer had all of the same mechanisms of influence. Nevertheless, many Protestants remained relatively optimistic about their ability to influence culture. Just as evangelical faith and its institutions thrived following the formal disestablishment of state churches earlier in the century, so too many Protestants believed that morality would thrive without the crutch of legislation. Mid-century emphasis on the necessity of exercising restraint and human willpower in the face of temptation—the familiar ascetic Victorian moral code of self-control, self-denial, and self-restraint—must be understood in this context.

¹⁸ R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). “What in fact is historically curious is that norms, the published ones anyway, seem more restrictive in the last years of the antebellum period than they had been in the supposedly stricter religious times of a hundred years earlier” (93).

The restrictive moral code of mid-century prescriptive literature does not necessarily imply declension, but is rather explained by the fact that the voluntary principal that previously applied to churches now also applied to individuals.

The crisis of cultural authority, however, was not merely a function of disestablishment and voluntarism. Larger intellectual trends also played a role. In addition to making non-belief an increasingly legitimate option, Enlightenment rationalism and its corollary skepticism also posed direct challenges to the epistemological framework of revealed religion. As Roger Lundin has described it,

Throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, Christian belief had been forced onto the defensive on a number of fronts. Rationalism, skepticism, and mechanistic science had cast doubt upon miracles and the personhood of God; the Enlightenment quest for universal moral principles and mental powers had called into question the particularity of Christian claims to the truth; and the historical study of manuscripts provided arguments that undercut the biblical record and its revelatory claims.¹⁹

Such challenges required strategic adaptation, the most common of which was to ground truth claims, especially those regarding morality, in nature rather than in Scripture. Natural theology, broadly construed, characterized a wide range of both orthodox and heterodox thinking. Protestant clergy, theologians, and lay leaders responded to these challenges with the argument from design, the universal moral sense, and the appropriation from Common Sense philosophy of self-evident truths.²⁰ Transcendentalists searched for an alternative to scientific ways of knowing that would not result in skepticism, and when Emerson penned his essay *Nature* in 1836, he was turning to nature “as an enduring source of spiritual tonic and moral power.”²¹

¹⁹ Roger Lundin, *From Nature to Experience: The American Search for Cultural Authority* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 3.

²⁰ On Protestant appropriation of Common Sense philosophy, see Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*, Ch. 6.

²¹ Lundin, *From Nature to Experience: The American Search for Cultural Authority*, 2. See also Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

The philosophers' camp at Follensby Pond was thus aptly named; it was not merely an excursion or even an escape, but an experiment in epistemology. The same could be said for the landscape paintings of Thomas Cole, Frederick Church, and other members of the Hudson River School. At the other end of the spectrum of heterodoxy, Spiritualists sought scientific validation of spiritual experience, including communication with the dead.²²

As an illustration of the breadth of moral concern and Victorian ethics, many exemplars of Victorian views and sensibilities—Charles Elliot, Frederick Law Olmsted, and Andrew Dickson White—were not particularly religious persons. In most cases, these individuals were post-Protestant; not only were they descended from Protestant stock, but they were pursuing a Protestant cultural project without the Protestantism. As Daniel Walker Howe put it, “evangelical Protestantism was a spiritual grandparent, rather than a parent, to the Victorian outlook.”²³ The point is that Victorian era concern for morality and spiritual significance was widespread—much more so than theological orthodoxy.

As a result, mid-century reform efforts were more diverse than earlier reform efforts and were no longer limited to evangelicalism or even churchgoing Protestantism. To be sure, religious observance remained high, the earlier tract and mission societies remained active, and Sabbatarian activity would soon be revived. As concerns regarding urban crowding and violence increased, however, a larger number of more focused and, in some cases, more secular reform initiatives and organizations were founded. Robert Hartley's New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (1843) stressed Victorian virtues such as hard work and abstinence from alcohol as a means of avoiding and escaping poverty. Following the advocacy of

²² James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 163-167.

²³ Howe, *Victorian America*, 9.

Quaker activist Dorothea Dix, several states created asylums for the mentally ill. Charles Loring Brace left the pastorate because he believed he could serve orphans and children on the street more effectively by founding the New York Children's Aid Society (1853), which was essentially the beginning of foster care.²⁴ Andrew Jackson Downing and Frederick Law Olmsted, among others, expressed their ideas for uplifting alternatives to unrewarding toil through landscape design. The boundaries between specifically religious reform and moral reform more generally were vague and overlapping. In particular, the social convictions of liberal Protestants and less religiously observant middle class Americans were at times almost imperceptible. Nowhere is this more apparent than in attitudes toward recreation.

4. Integration: The Unitarian Response

Among mid-century moralists, evangelicals held the most oppositional views toward leisure. To be sure, evangelicals were not as opposed to recreation and leisure in general as is sometimes imagined, and it is possible that they may have taken a more affirmative view still if not for the other associations that came with German and especially Irish immigrant practice, most notably drinking. Like the Puritans before them, their opposition was never to recreation *per se*. They maintained the distinction between lawful and unlawful recreations, as well as two qualifications to otherwise lawful recreations. First, they were opposed to activities characterized by drinking, gambling, or sexual immorality. Combined with their concerns regarding idolatry and distrust of the human propensity for pleasure seeking, evangelicals thus adopted a posture of condemnation toward most forms of commercial amusement and leisure. The very idea of serving human appetites, corrupted as they are by sin, was anathema

²⁴ Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, Ch. 6.

to evangelical ethics. Second, evangelicals maintained the distinction that otherwise lawful forms of recreation were not lawful on the Sabbath. Both of these qualifications to otherwise lawful recreations were increasingly difficult to maintain, but especially opposition to Sunday recreation. To be sure, Sabbatarians, despite the failure of the mails campaign, had many state and local laws working in their favor, and laws restricting Sunday labor helped curb the growth of commercial recreation. Moreover, the mails campaign had energized Sabbatarians, many of whom continued to gather and form new organizations through the 1840s, such as the American and Foreign Sabbath Union (1843). Nevertheless, Sabbatarians were up against not only entrepreneurs willing to test the limits of the enforcement of Sunday laws, but also changes in popular sentiment regarding the range of appropriate Sunday pastimes. Sunday street fairs and ball games, for example, were not as easily restricted as Sunday theater. To make matters worse, evangelical ideals of Sabbath rest were increasingly challenged not only by entrepreneurs and workers, but also by members of the Protestant elite who shared their concerns regarding commercial recreation, but who were willing to redefine rest so as to include amusement and recreation.

When debates regarding the “amusement question” picked up in the late 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, the most innovative voices of the era were Unitarian clergy such as William Ellery Channing, Frederic Sawyer, Henry Whitney Bellows, Edward Everett Hale, and Thomas Wentworth Higginson, along with other liberal Protestants such as Henry Ward Beecher and Horace Bushnell.²⁵ Religious liberals began distancing

²⁵ William Ellery Channing, "Ministry for the Poor," In *The Works of William E. Channing*, Revised ed. (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1888), 73-87. If Channing's work, a talk first given in 1835, was a forerunner to this literature, the first significant work among “amusement reformers” was Frederic W. Sawyer, *A Plea for Amusements* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1847). Ten years later, Bellows delivered a controversial set of sermons on the theater, published as Henry W. Bellows, *The Relation of Public Amusements to Public Morality: Especially of the Theatre to the Highest Interests of Humanity* (New York: C.S Francis & Co., 1857).

themselves from their more conservative counterparts by identifying the latter with the Puritans and then slamming Puritan attitudes as a kind of proxy for all that was wrong with present-day attitudes toward recreation. “Every question of religion demands an answer,” wrote Hale, “which shall show whether the Puritans were right in thinking God insulted when his children are amused.”²⁶ Such criticisms were not altogether fair—not fair, that is, to the Puritans. Arguably, conservative religious moralists of the nineteenth century were more “puritanical” than the Puritans, especially given that the Puritans did not reside in a liberal democracy. In any case, religious liberals self-consciously distanced themselves from their own Puritan forebears, which, in the case of Henry Ward Beecher, meant distancing himself not only from his father but also even from his former self.²⁷ A hallmark of liberal Protestantism in the years to come was a recalibrated moral calculus regarding recreation and leisure pursuits, in which more activities were evaluated positively.

The same year, Hale delivered his lengthy address on the same topic at the Boston YMCA. Edward E. Hale, "Public Amusement for Poor and Rich," In *The Works of Edward Everett Hale*, Vol. 8 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900), 321-354. In keeping with the times, Higginson published several articles in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1858. As if to drive the polemical point home even from his grave, Bellows's obituary made it clear that "his religious creed was not of a kind that forbade rational enjoyment." "Death of Dr. H.W. Bellows," *New York Times*, January 31, 1882. See also "Holidays," *North American Review* 84 (April, 1857), 334-363; "Public Amusements and Public Morality," *Christian Examiner* 63 (July, 1857), 47-65. This literature is discussed in Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, 49-53; Robert Lewis, "'Rational Recreation': Reforming Leisure in Antebellum America," In *Religious and Secular Reform in America: Ideas, Beliefs, and Social Change*, eds. David K. Adams and Cornelis A. van Minnen (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 121-132. On Transcendentalists and theater, see Lucile Gafford, "Transcendentalist Attitudes Toward Drama and the Theatre," *The New England Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (September, 1940), 442-466.

²⁶ Hale, "Public Amusement for Poor and Rich," 327.

²⁷ In the ten-year period from 1844 to 1854, "Beecher's mood shifted away from unqualified celebration of labor toward a growing appreciation of the arts of repose and a hesitant reevaluation of the place of work itself in the business of living." Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920*, 94.

The contrast between evangelical Protestants and liberal Protestants, however, should not be overdrawn. Liberals, no less than evangelicals, believed that the pursuit of pleasure was at least potentially problematic, and that recreational pursuits should in fact serve a purpose. Channing, for example, disapproved of blood sports and also public drama. Nevertheless, the process of recategorizing leisure pursuits had begun. Moving away from criticism of form, liberals increasingly evaluated leisure pursuits according to pragmatic criteria, such as the environment in which they took place, resulting in more and more activities landing on the positive side of the ledger.

To Unitarians and other liberal Protestants, evangelical condemnation of amusements was repressive and ineffective. The appetite for amusement was itself a legitimate appetite to be properly used rather than abused. As early as the 1830s, Channing spoke of society's obligation to provide the poor with a "means of escape" from "the monotony of life."²⁸ His protégé Theodore Parker built on this theme, approving of philanthropists who provided poor city children with "a day of sunshine, fresh air, and frolic in the fields."²⁹ Commenting on the movement for the ten-hour day, Hale wondered, "what men, women and children are to do with the hours of rest."³⁰

The actual effect of simply condemning amusements without providing alternatives was abandonment of the working man to the wiles of leisure entrepreneurs. "A religion," Channing wrote in 1837, "giving dark views of God, and infusing superstitious fear of innocent enjoyment, instead of aiding sober habits, will, by making men abject and sad, impair their force, and prepare them for intemperance

²⁸ Channing, "Ministry for the Poor," 77.

²⁹ Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, 50.

³⁰ Hale, "Public Amusement for Poor and Rich," 326.

as a refuge from depression or despair.”³¹ In a similar spirit, Bellows claimed in 1845 that Puritan asceticism “makes our places of amusement low, divides the thoughtful and the careless, the grave and the gay, the old and the young, in their pleasures.”³² Hale was similarly not content to appeal to individual abstention and law enforcement to curb unruly amusements. Hale saw the problem of leisure not just in individual but also structural and environmental terms—i.e., a function not only of sin but also of urban crowding and the unrewarding nature of factory toil. “[W]hen we choose to bring people into crowded towns; to substitute pavement for the meadows, and mains six feet under ground for the trout’s brook, we must substitute something for the relaxation and amusement which we have taken away.”³³

Perhaps the fundamental difference undergirding liberal Protestants’ views of leisure was their optimism or faith in people to develop good taste and exercise “rational” judgment on a voluntary basis. To evangelicals, as with Puritans, all persons were vulnerable to the temptations entailed in “worldly pleasures.” The path to social improvement laid in individual regeneration—i.e., in the qualitative, transformative change promoted by revivals—and in the ascetic virtues associated with the work ethic. In contrast to physical recreation, which was useful for refreshment, amusements generally were considered “dissipations.” Commercial amusements in particular should be banned or restricted rather than reformed and improved. Unitarians, by contrast, having moved from belief in doctrines such as Original Sin and the Atonement to belief in the universal moral sense, emphasized instruction and improvement—i.e., quantitative, developmental change. Although Unitarians embraced the virtues associated with the work ethic, the premises of liberal

³¹ William Ellery Channing, "Address on Temperance," In *The Works of William E. Channing*, Revised ed. (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1888), 113.

³² Lewis, "Rational Recreation," 128.

³³ Hale, "Public Amusement for Poor and Rich," 321.

theology held fewer cautions regarding human desire and pleasure. They were therefore more open to criticizing industrial labor, and to affirming the appetite for amusement. As industrialism occasioned disillusionment with the work ethic, Unitarians turned from the gospel of work to the “gospel of play,” infusing play with almost salvific hopes. According to Channing, for example, “physical vigor is not only valuable for its own sake, but it favors temperance, by removing those indescribable feelings of sinking, disquiet, and depression.”³⁴ Although the first half of the statement—that such activity is valuable “for its own sake”—would have been more radical if it stood alone, the Unitarian innovation was to turn to recreation and leisure as a positive source of moral virtue. “Rational recreation” thus developed not among moralists in the Puritan tradition, but precisely among those looking for an alternative to revivalism and the work ethic as a means of social change and moral improvement.

The Unitarians’ affirmation of pleasure and amusement was not, however, an affirmation of commercial leisure. Unitarians, more likely to be Whigs than Jacksonian Democrats, were as anxious as anyone about the democratization of culture. Although Sawyer, Bellows, and Hale relished criticizing colonial and contemporary Puritans alike, their attitude toward the theater, which occasioned most of the discussions regarding amusements more generally, was not unlike Puritan attitudes toward recreation in general—i.e., they affirmed it in theory, but worried about it in practice. Sawyer, for example, agreed that the theater was “a school of vice” and that “no one should patronize [theatres] while they are arranged and conducted as they are.”³⁵ The problem, according to Sawyer, was a combination of the free market and the withdrawal of the respectable element of society:

³⁴ Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915*, 49.

³⁵ Sawyer, *A Plea for Amusements*, 237, 241.

When the religious portion of the community cast it off entirely, and it had, and could have, no hope of any patronage from that quarter, it naturally and inevitably chose its entertainment to suit its patrons. With no Christian sentiment from pit to gallery to cater for, what could be expected, but that the viands would be chosen for the palate of its auditors? Theaters are the creatures of the public, the same as are our lyceums and other places of public entertainment.³⁶

Hale concurred:

[T]hose whose business it is to undertake this provision, from selfish motives, do one of two things: They provide what are called the respectable or what are called the disreputable amusements. That is, they either provide for those classes who can do very well without, because they pay the best; or They provide what is vicious and depraved, because, to vulgar tastes and low, vice is more popular than virtue. . . .

If we leave provision for [public amusements] merely to the selfishness of man; to that wretched un-christian principle of the “let-alone,” which hopes the supply will, of itself, always meet demand,—we run the risk that men will provide for the lower appetites and not the higher; will debase the taste and feeling of society, instead of striving to elevate it always and making it more pure.³⁷

Cultural segmentation, in Hale’s view, including its worst abuses, was the result of leaving amusement in the hands of entrepreneurs. The legitimate theater and home-based amusement and entertainment were alike “no adequate answer” to the amusement question, for neither accomplished reform. What was needed was neither condemnation of amusement nor commercial amusement, but *public* amusement.³⁸

Although Unitarians held the democratic belief that God gave all persons the ability to appreciate fine music and theater, they also held the elitist view that appreciation for fine entertainments was an acquired taste. The answer to this dilemma was to provide alternative amusements with greater involvement and

³⁶ Ibid., 237.

³⁷ Hale, "Public Amusement for Poor and Rich," 333-34, 351. Criticizing the self-segregation of upper and upper middle class theater more specifically, he added: “if some particular ‘upper ten thousand’ create it for themselves, careless of that lowest ten thousand, which needs relaxation a hundred times as much as you do,—again your motive is of the devil, and the results are accordingly” (336).

³⁸ Ibid., 325.

supervision by the right kind of people. Unitarians were cultural conservatives, and like Whigs more generally, they too “looked to the family, the church, the school, voluntary associations, and the state to impose their values on others.”³⁹ Initiatives of humanitarian improvement and reform in which Unitarians were prominent included libraries, museums, public schools and (later) universities.⁴⁰ According to Sawyer, this principle of supervision extended also to entertainment. Theaters, he held, should be “patronized, conducted, governed, and controlled, by the moral and religious part of the community, and designed for, and brought within, the means of the humblest classes.”⁴¹ “[I]t is the duty of Christian men,” Hale wrote, “to take charge, from high motive, of this essential part of the public training, certain to be wrongly cared for when it is left too low. Where the best men, from the best motive, undertake the management of the people’s entertainment, the questions and doubts of to-day will one by one disappear.” Christian men, he believed, must “take hold of the drama and consecrate it to their aims.” As to who actually constituted this “moral and religious part of the community,” Hale identified churches, lyceums, temperance societies, and above all the civil government. “[I]t seems to me the business of *the public*, in some of its many organizations, to attend, not only to the restricting of bad public amusements, but to the providing of good ones.” Of course, Hale almost certainly had a constrained view of “the public,” and though he wrote from Boston, one wonders what he thought of Tammany Hall’s Mayor Fernando Wood, whose superintendency of city hall was not much more orderly than the Astor Place Theater. In any case, Hale and his fellow Unitarians were in the market for someone to take the lead in the

³⁹ Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *The American Whigs: An Anthology*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973), 5.

⁴⁰ For the logic or rationale of these initiatives, see William B. Ashley, "The Promotion of Museums," *Proceedings of the American Association of Museums* 7 (1913), 36-46.

⁴¹ Sawyer, *A Plea for Amusements*, 247.

project of cultural uplift. “When the man shall appear who shall solve this problem for us, when he shall teach us how to amuse this people of ours innocently, I say, he will be the greatest benefactor of New England. He is the man whom most she needs.”⁴² Given the Unitarian strategy of privileging good behavior over right doctrine, it is little surprise that the man who best fit this description—Frederick Law Olmsted—was not himself a churchgoing man.

Olmsted, a man of great influence and energy, was instrumental in the landscape design of almost all major urban parks of the era, including not only New York’s Central Park, but also Brooklyn’s Prospect Park and Boston’s Emerald Necklace. When New York City acquired 840 acres for Central Park in 1856, Olmsted and his colleague Calvert Vaux entered and won the design competition. The competition was highly political. Whereas some submissions provided for the popular tastes of the working class, including amusements not unlike other commercial pleasure gardens, Olmsted and Vaux’s design appealed much more to middle class, reformist sensibilities. Implicit in the design were the same sorts of concerns that Unitarian theorists of amusement and leisure had already articulated—the unhealthy aspect of urban crowding, the enervating nature of modern labor, the turn to nature as a source of renewal, the uplift of workers and immigrants by proximity to the refined and genteel element of the population, and a skepticism toward commercial provision for popular tastes. Central Park was neither an Adirondack great camp nor Coney Island. “It is one great purpose of the Park,” Olmsted opined,

to supply to the hundreds of thousands of tired workers, who have no opportunity to spend their summers in the country, a specimen of God’s handiwork that shall be to them, inexpensively, what a month or two in the

⁴² Hale, "Public Amusement for Poor and Rich," 351, 337, 334, 326.

White Mountains or the Adirondacks is, at great cost, to those in easier circumstances.⁴³

Simply put, Central Park was designed to bring the middle class culture of pursuing refreshment and refinement in nature within the day-tripping range of workers.

Olmsted was popular with Unitarians in part because he was a practitioner—he was actually doing something by way of providing an alternative to commercial amusements. What makes Olmsted a fascinating subject of study, however, is that he was also a theorist, and his philosophy is made more explicit in his later writings, such as his 1865 report on Yosemite Park and his 1887 report on Niagara Park. In both of these reports, he expressed concern for the unreflective nature of the working man’s labor, and the unique power of natural scenery in invoke “the contemplative faculty,” in which “the attention is aroused and the mind occupied without purpose, without a continuation of the common process of relating the present action, thought or perception to some future end.”⁴⁴ Like the Unitarians then, Olmsted was critical of modern labor, concerned about improving working men and women, and interested in leisure as an alternative source of morality and improvement. In addition, he was optimistic about the leveling up of taste; he combined a democratic faith that all persons could learn to respond to scenery in appropriate ways, with an elitist conviction that developing such refined taste would require cultivation and training. When Olmsted submitted his resignation as Superintendent of the Park in 1861, Bellows published an article in the *Atlantic Monthly* arguing that Olmsted “is precisely the man for the place,—and that is precisely the place for the man. Among final causes, it would be difficult not to assign the Central Park as the reason of his

⁴³ Witold Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Scribner, 1999), 177. The literature on Olmsted is extensive. On Olmsted and moral reform, see especially Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 236-239.

⁴⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, Vol. 5 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 504.

existence.”⁴⁵ That Olmsted and his park were popular among Unitarians should come as no surprise. In providing an uplifting alternative to commercial amusements, he was essentially enacting the Unitarian’s integrationist theology of culture. When Bellows observed that rude men became orderly upon entering the park, he was witnessing a confirmation of his belief that “Christianity is the leaven of the world, inedible in the lump and useless in separation, but mixed with the substance of practical life, lending wholesomeness, gusto and nutritiveness to what would otherwise be crude, heavy and hurtful.”⁴⁶ As a publicly supervised, uplifting alternative to commercial amusements, Central Park was consistent with, if not an expression of, liberal Protestant theology.⁴⁷

5. Imitation: The Methodist Response

Condemnation and integration were not the only responses to the problem of urban amusements. Another possibility was for Christians to establish their own distinct leisure-oriented organizations and destinations. The Chautauqua Institution, for example, co-founded by Methodist minister John Heyl Vincent in 1874, offered educational retreats for Sunday school teachers interspersed with entertainment. The emphasis was on arts and literature but also included concerts and theatrical performances. The advantage of a resort like Chautauqua was its separation from the

⁴⁵ "Cities and Parks," *The Atlantic Monthly* 7, no. 42 (April, 1861), 422. On Bellows’s authorship, see Rybczynski, *A Clearing in the Distance: Frederick Law Olmsted and America in the Nineteenth Century*, 195.

⁴⁶ Bellows, *The Relation of Public Amusements to Public Morality: Especially of the Theatre to the Highest Interests of Humanity*, 31.

⁴⁷ “To Olmsted, the offspring of a prominent Congregationalist family, Central Park and landscape architecture generally were expressions of natural theology and a better way to remind people of God’s presence in American cities than the fancy architecture of churches.” Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, 103.

world of commerce and commercial amusement. As a result, it achieved more easily what the legitimate theater was designed to achieve—a moral environment. Although founded on the site of a former camp meeting, Chautauqua was decidedly non-revivalistic. Especially over time, Chautauqua came to embody not so much religion with culture as a religion of culture, or what some have called the “sacralization of culture.”⁴⁸

If Chautauqua was one way of reinventing the camp meeting, the twin cities of Ocean Grove and Asbury Park on the New Jersey shore also offered alternative environments to commercial urban leisure. Ocean Grove was a “Christian resort” committed to keeping religion central. Referred to as “God’s square mile,” it resembled an old-time camp meeting made orderly.⁴⁹ Although meetings were central to the Ocean Grove experience, so too was leisure. Reverends William B. Osborn, E. H. Stokes, and the other Methodists who founded Ocean Grove in 1869 were considerably more conservative than the Methodists who founded Chautauqua, as evidenced by the list of proscribed amusements, which included not only drinking and gambling but also dancing and theater going. The Methodists of Ocean Grove were also strict Sabbatarians (the candy machines were emptied on Saturday nights). Although the boundaries were drawn more tightly at Ocean Grove than at Asbury Park, a similar process of legitimation was at work. Boating and seabathing, for example, which were morally suspect elsewhere, were here “put in their right relationships, and sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” Rev. Stokes, president of the Ocean Grove Association, echoed liberal Protestant concerns regarding labor

⁴⁸ Alan Trachtenberg, “‘We Study the Word and Works of God’: Chautauqua and the Sacralization of Culture in America,” *The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village Herald* 13, no. 2 (1984), 3-11.

⁴⁹ Troy Messenger, *Holy Leisure: Recreation and Religion in God's Square Mile* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

and overwork. Expounding on the organization's theory regarding the relationship of recreation and religion, he added:

We knew that all recreation, or so called pleasure, divorced from religion, would degenerate into absolute sin, and instead of being rest, would become exhausting labor. . . . Religion and recreation should go hand in hand. Separate them, and religion grows morose, and recreation will soon become sinful. Blended both are beautiful.⁵⁰

Ocean Grove, no less than Chautauqua, was in the business of sacralizing leisure.

Asbury Park, another Methodist initiative founded next door to Ocean Grove one year later, struck the balance between religion and leisure a bit differently. If Ocean Grove was a religious organization accommodating leisure interests, Asbury Park was a commercial venture with a religious culture. To be sure, there were many similarities between the two destinations. Asbury Park, for example, like Ocean Grove, sought to promote leisure pursuits that were morally uplifting and physically rejuvenating. Both destinations endorsed sports, temperance, and (initially) a quiet Sabbath. Even from the start, however, Asbury Park was more accommodating to pursuits such as dancing, card playing, and theater going. Ironically, as one scholar has noted,

leisure activities banned at the Grove but accepted at Asbury Park were justified according to a formula endorsed by the [Ocean Grove Association]. The association legitimated seabathing and 'kindred means of happiness' by separating them from 'modes of evil.' Asbury Park promoters merely extended the list of appropriate pleasures taken in a moral atmosphere.

Asbury Park, according to one piece of promotional literature, "is essentially a secular community" that "exclude[s] objectionable residents and demoralizing institutions."

In that sense it was designed to be like "any other carefully and ably-governed Christian community."⁵¹ Given that Asbury Park was primarily a commercial venture,

⁵⁰ Glenn Uminowicz, "Recreation in Christian America: Ocean Grove and Asbury Park, New Jersey, 1869-1914," In *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1992), 22, 23.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 27, 26-7.

it is no surprise that it proved more adaptive and accommodating over time than Ocean Grove. Toward the end of the century, for example, Asbury Park substantially liberalized the number of activities permitted on the Sabbath.

Although Methodists led the way in coming up with alternative leisure environments, other evangelicals also got in the game, most notably with the YMCA movement. Originally consisting of reading rooms, a model brought to America from England in the 1850s, the YMCA movement became best known after the Civil War for its pools and gymnasiums. Although the diverse and decentralized nature of the movement makes generalizations difficult, the movement nevertheless suggests a privileging of secular over religious concerns even among some evangelicals. As religious reformers in particular became concerned with the effeminacy of the Victorian home and church, they articulated a newfound faith in the connection between physical and moral vitality. Although the organization did not create this belief, the YMCA was well positioned to receive the endorsement of those preaching and promoting “muscular Christianity.” Although the YMCA, unlike Asbury Park, was a non-profit institution, it was like Asbury not only in its privileging of behavior over theology, but also in its need to provide its clientele with what they wanted. That the YMCA was functionally a secular organization is evidenced not only by its founding trustees, most of whom were merchants and not all of whom were religious, but also by the fact that over time the organization catered to the recreational tastes and preferences of a predominantly middle-class clientele.⁵²

That Methodists were among the pioneers of rational recreation is not a coincidence. Although the Victorian code of discipline and restraint is often taken to be an inheritance of Calvinism, at least in the case of recreation, the opposite is more

⁵² There is as yet no definitive work on the YMCA. For a helpful treatment, see Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, 112-120.

nearly the case. Unitarians and liberal Congregationalists who dared to suggest that theater and other such amusements could be redeemed—i.e., those arguing *against* too strict an asceticism—were the ones obliged to constantly qualify their endorsements with ethical codes. As for Methodists, the influence of Arminian theology and the holiness movement and belief in the possibility of Christian perfection caused many Methodists to be more optimistic about reform efforts of various sorts than their Calvinist counterparts. In their optimism and faith in the power of the human will and rationality, Unitarians, Methodists, Quakers, and secular middle class reformers like Olmsted were all quintessential Victorians.⁵³

Liberal or progressive faith in human rationality is illustrated nicely by the concept of sportsmanship. In field sports such as hunting or fishing, where there are no referees except one's own conscience, "gentlemen" distinguished themselves by exercising restraint. They sought only "game" animals, and those only by certain means, such that the animal pursued was given a fair chance. Ethical behavior in the field was believed to transfer, or at least be part and parcel with, ethical behavior more generally. As Teddy Roosevelt's uncle Robert Barnwell Roosevelt put it in his 1865 book *Superior Fishing*, being a gentleman-sportsman entailed the virtues soon associated with Boy Scouts:

A genuine sportsman must possess a combination of virtues which will fill him so full that no room can be left for sin to squeeze in. He must be an early riser—to be which is the beginning of all virtue—ambitious, temperate, prudent, patient of toil, fatigue, and disappointment; courageous, watchful, intent upon his business; always ready, confident, cool; kind to his dog, civil to the girls, and courteous to his brother sportsmen.

⁵³ Arguably, neither is it a coincidence that the Methodist model of setting up separate communities followed very shortly on the heels of the communal living movement that started and peaked in the 1840s. Most of these communities sought a better balance of labor and leisure, and some of them, such as John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida Community (1848-1881), were founded on variations of Christian perfectionism.

Sportsmanship applied the voluntary principle to ethical behavior. Like so many other developments in the area of leisure, the concept of sportsmanship served less to reform behavior than to reinforce preexisting social distinctions. The working classes resisted such restrictions.⁵⁴

6. Negotiation: P.T. Barnum's response

Although Unitarian and Methodist initiatives had some impact and influence, they were not particularly successful at winning the hearts and minds of immigrants and workers. In some cases, such as Asbury Park, the logic of the market resulted in accommodation toward the recreational preferences of the paying public. In other cases, such as the YMCA, institutions ended up serving primarily the middle class rather than the working class at which they originally aimed. In the more complicated case of Central Park, the park's restrictions and standards meant that during the early years it was enjoyed primarily by the middle class, but then in later years those with a preference for more active, expressive, or boisterous forms of recreation eventually prevailed in securing some concessions for their preferences. Although leisure-oriented reform initiatives introduced some workers into the ethos of the middle class, resistance to the prescriptive norms of such initiatives was also commonplace. As a result, most of these reform initiatives were not as different in their effect from the legitimate theater or the Victorian home as reformers had hoped.

Perhaps the primary influence of these efforts at recreational reform was indirect and unintentional, laying less in the institutions they created than in the standards and the ethos to which commercial amusements increasingly conformed in

⁵⁴ Colleen J. Sheehy, "American Angling: The Rise of Urbanism and the Romance of the Rod and Reel," In *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 84, 91.

order to achieve legitimacy. The process of accommodation, after all, was not unidirectional. Not only did reformers have to modernize their methods and even get into the business of recreation, but entrepreneurs and impresarios, if they were to attract the large crowds they desired, had to provide entertainments that large numbers of persons were willing to attend. In the nineteenth-century city, where concerns regarding order and decorum reigned supreme, respectability soon became a means to profitability.

The most notable exception to the generalization that mid-century amusements were either affordable or respectable but not both was the museum, and the most notable museum was P.T. Barnum's American Museum on Broadway. Purchased by Barnum in 1841, the museum became within a decade "the most popular institution of its kind in the country."⁵⁵ Unlike British museums, which were publicly operated and which aimed to educate, Barnum's "museum" was a collection of oddities that aimed to amuse and to generate profit. Barnum's genius lay precisely in holding together a diverse clientele that was segregated in most other parts of life, including their labor, leisure, and places of residence. His secret to success, which would be copied by virtually all entertainment impresarios later in the century, was combining affordability with respectability. Admission was 25 cents for adults and half-price for children, a fee that, though it excluded some workers, easily accommodated the rising middle class. Although the content of the shows was not particularly uplifting, neither were they vulgar, at least in the coarsest sense of the word. More importantly, respectability was conveyed in various external ways—eye-catching architecture, courteous tour guides, and a veneer of scientific expertise. Rowdies and prostitutes had no place in the museum. Barnum himself was an abstainer from liquor, and his museum provided temperance melodramas. For these reasons, middle class men and,

⁵⁵ Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*, 33.

more importantly, middle class women who otherwise would not patronize less respectable dime museums or commercial entertainments, came out in droves to see the American Museum. Thus began the long American tradition of “family entertainment.”⁵⁶

Barnum’s museum and his general method posed a dilemma for reformers. On the one hand, Barnum was for much of his life no friend of conservative clergy or elite reformers. Even as a child, when asked in Sunday school about “the one thing needful,” he responded that it was “to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, follow in his footsteps, love God and obey his commandments.” But, he added, for clergy, it was also “a fat salary, with multitudes of sinners seeking salvation and paying large pews-rents.”⁵⁷ That proved a useful formulation; throughout his life, when clergy criticized his various antics, he would point to the continuities between his business and theirs, calling them hypocrites. Half a century after the Sunday school incident, for example, Barnum proposed that the city of Bridgeport, where he had recently served as mayor, raise money for landscaping a cemetery by means of a lottery. When clergy took issue with this as a violation of the law, Barnum pointed out that the law also prohibited dating and receiving checks on Sunday—a practice these same clergy supported. Moreover, he added, Sunday services violated laws restricting theatrical exhibitions. In calling his clerical critics hypocrites, he had a point. Especially since the disestablishment of state churches, religion was in the marketplace. From the appropriation of theatrical style in the preaching of Whitefield and Finney to the appropriation of Gothic Architecture by Protestant churches, the boundaries between

⁵⁶ Ibid., Ch. 2; Bluford Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), Ch. 3.

⁵⁷ Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*, 210.

religious services and entertainment were less clear than ever.⁵⁸ For decades to come, Barnum's accusation of hypocrisy would be echoed wherever religious reformers sought to restrict commercial entertainment. At the 1926 congressional hearings on Sunday observance, for example, one speaker claimed, "there is no institution so devoted to commercialism as the church."⁵⁹

On the other hand, Barnum was a genius at assessing and providing what people wanted, and over time that included not only titillation but also respectability. As early as the 1840s, but especially with his 1854 autobiography *The Life of P.T. Barnum*, he began reinventing himself by incorporating critics' comments into his very persona. While retaining his allegiance to workers and their recreational preferences, he increasingly appropriated the language of clergy and reformers, speaking of the need for "innocent and rational amusements." Barnum the Jacksonian Democrat began exuding Whig sensibilities and later became a Republican officeholder. Barnum the Victorian moralist gave lectures invoking Benjamin Franklin and various Franklinesque aphorisms about working hard, living simply, avoiding debt, and being charitable. The popularity of Barnum's museum and other amusements is closely related to the paradox that, as Bluford Adams has pointed out, "Although he symbolized much of what the metropolitan gentry" such as Olmsted, Bellows, and Brace "despised about U.S. culture, Barnum viewed himself as their collaborator." In 1875 he described his goal as bringing "rational, moral and instructive entertainment, combined with the attractions of wonder and the whole-souled stimulus of innocent mirth, within the reach of the masses and the possibilities of the slenderest purse, and to make them subservient to Christianity and

⁵⁸ Consider also the entertainment value of much religious literature. Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, 53.

⁵⁹ McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 103.

enlightenment, and auxiliaries of our public schools.”⁶⁰ After decades of framing his entertainments in this manner, he finally convinced some clergy and highbrow critics, securing the friendship and support of Beecher, Edwin H. Chapin, William Cullen Bryan, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Barnum’s transformation may have been sincere, but more importantly, it was good for business. Sincerity notwithstanding, Barnum was playing a game—he was navigating and negotiating the boundaries of respectability, sometimes challenging them, sometimes accommodating them. In one sense, the façade of respectability surrounding Barnum’s museum and later his circus was superficial. In another sense, however, it was a very real concession to the limits of what was possible in the midst of Victorian America. Barnum was an innovator, but he was a responsive innovator.

7. Conclusion

By the 1840s, religious reformers and leisure entrepreneurs alike responded to the crisis of leisure space by creating alternative places to play. Both groups also made concessions to public preference. The main difference was that entrepreneurs such as Barnum, motivated more by money than by mission, had the pulse of the public and were more responsive to its appetites. In this sense Barnum rather than Olmsted fulfilled Hale’s prophecy regarding the need for a man to “teach us how to amuse this people of ours innocently.” Indeed, Barnum was ahead of his time. The wave of the future was commercial—not municipal or ecclesiastical—recreation. By the 1890s, almost all entertainment entrepreneurs were copying Barnum’s formula of affordability with respectability as a means to profitability.

⁶⁰ Adams, *E Pluribus Barnum: The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture*, 22, 31, 32-33.

Concern regarding the commercialization of leisure was widespread, but given that Sunday was most people's day of leisure, this trend concerned nobody more than Sabbatarians. The crisis of leisure space was thus connected to the crisis of leisure time. And Sabbatarians soon formulated their own solution to the crisis of leisure time: a Saturday half-holiday.

CHAPTER 5
THE SATURDAY HALF-HOLIDAY

1. Introduction

“One of the striking features of our social economy,” Frederick Sawyer wrote in *A Plea for Amusements* (1847), “is the very limited number of our holidays. I question whether another country can be found that has so few.” Sawyer attributed this largely to the legacy of the Puritans, who “came here strongly prejudiced against holidays of all kinds,” and who “severed themselves, at a blow, from all the delightful, social, and touching festivities of May-day, harvest-home, and merrie Christmas.”¹ Although the exact extent of festivals in nineteenth-century America is not easily determined, and there were almost certainly more local and ethnic festivals than is sometimes acknowledged, Sawyer’s observation that there were not many official holidays or festivals is uncontested. The only widely observed national holidays were Election Day and Independence Day.

Other observers of the American scene, including working men and foreign visitors such as Tocqueville and Frances Trollope, confirm Sawyer’s observation about the scarceness of festivity. What comes through in writers like Trollope, however, is not merely an observation on the quantity of holidays, but also a commentary on their quality. To Sawyer, Independence Day provided a source of hope, for whereas formerly holidays “were made subservient to vice and intemperance,” now, “By means of temperance picnics and temperance celebrations, that cause seldom fails to experience favoring gales on that day of glorious memory.”²

¹ Sawyer, *A Plea for Amusements*, 293, 297-298.

² *Ibid.*, 299.

By contrast, what Trollope noticed against the backdrop of her English heritage was the absence of festivity in spirit—“no fetes, no fairs, no merry-makings, no music in the streets, no ‘Punch,’ no puppet shows.”³

Trollope had a point. In Europe, festivals had a long history that included a particular form of topsy-turvy merry-making that was almost completely absent in America. The character Mr. Punch, best known from the Punch and Judy puppet shows in England, but also appearing in other forms in many European countries, is an anarchic figure who challenges the order imposed by Church and Crown. In a similar manner, the medieval Feast of Fools, like the ancient Roman celebration of Saturnalia before it, inverted everyday power structures. The essence of these festivals was the mocking of rules and the imitation of rulers. During the Feast of Fools, for example, “no custom of convention was immune to ridicule and even the highest personages of the realm could expect to be lampooned.”⁴ The usual explanation for the absence of such festivity in the New World is a combination of Puritan ideology and unabashed money-grubbing. To these should be added, however, democracy. There can be no King of Fools where there is no Crown, no mock pope where there is no papacy. Resistance to power and authority inevitably looked different in America, and was expressed relative not to Crown or even to Church, but to the institution that was experienced as most constraining—paid employment.

With the advent of wage-labor, shop owners and their employees had to negotiate terms of engagement with one another. Employers wanted regularity and employees wanted shorter hours. In both England and America, where merchant

³ Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*, 95.

⁴ Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 3. A philosophical work on festivity is Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1965).

capitalism and later industrial capitalism were most advanced, resistance to the power of employers expressed itself not primarily through the symbolic rituals of traditional festivals or puppet shows, but through the pursuit—by a variety of means—of shorter hours. When the Early Closing Association was founded (in London) in 1842, the five-day week as we know it was still a century away. Nevertheless, the seeds of the five-day week are found in the shorter hours movement. Agitation for shorter hours on the part of organized labor was only the most obvious ingredient in the movement's success. Increased productivity, which allowed workers to work less without employers producing or earning less, also proved essential. The drive for shorter hours was of course not only a negative desire for less labor, but also a positive desire for more leisure.

Sawyer sensed that people wanted not just free time but, at least periodically, large chunks of free time. The American people, he believed, were “ripe” for a movement of holidays. He advocated for the observance of New Years Day, May Day, Christmas, and, in the final paragraph of his book, a half-holiday on Saturday:

I am persuaded that, if those who are now engaged in the very praiseworthy effort of promoting a more holy observance of the Sabbath, will but turn their attention to two things in our industrial economy, and remedy those evils, the more holy observance of the Sabbath will follow as a matter of course. The first is to discountenance all evening labor, and the second is to establish Saturday afternoon as a *quasi* holiday period, when neither clerks, apprentices, journeymen, nor any other class of persons, are expected to be at their business posts. Under our present system, most of the clerks in our counting-rooms, and apprentices and journeymen in other occupations, are kept to their task from sun to sun, week in and week out; and lucky are they if they escape at that. Complaint is made that there is too much riding out and rambling on the Sabbath, particularly in large places; and it is well known that, in most cases, it is those persons that do it. Is it a matter of astonishment that they do it? I confess that, as much as I prize the institution of the Sabbath, and believe in the wisdom of observing it as a day sacred to rest, as well as to holy devotion, I should be more astonished, if, under such circumstances, those over-tasked clerks and apprentices should fail to desecrate it. No! If a holy observance of the Sabbath is to be brought about, we must begin at the root of the evil, and give all classes time, during secular hours, for recreation and amusement, so

that, when the Sabbath comes, it shall find us prepared, both in body and in mind, to welcome it as a delightful season of rest, both from the toils of business, and the excitements of amusements. I will venture to say, that, in that point of view, if the whole community could be brought to suspend their business on Saturday afternoon, (as almost all our public institutions do,) it would do more towards promoting a proper observance of the Sabbath, than thousands of societies, organized for that purpose, wielding millions of money, and sustaining a countless number of lecturers in the field.⁵

Regardless of whether the half-holiday would in fact promote better Sabbath observance, Sawyer was ahead of his time not only in advocating for a half-holiday, which would not become common practice for almost half a century, but also in employing the argument from Sabbath observance as a means toward securing the half-holiday. Indeed, a centerpiece of the long negotiation between workers and employers on both sides of the Atlantic in the nineteenth century was the Saturday half-holiday—a movement that occasioned much common interest and collaboration between workers and Sabbatarians.

2. Saturday Half-Holiday In England

In England, the displacement of the desire for sociability at work by the demands of the clock was a slow process. During the early and mid nineteenth century, shopworkers often labored twelve or more hours per day, six days per week, a reality that contributed to the founding of the Early Closing Association. Especially among better-paid workers, the regularity of labor that was encouraged both by machines and the work ethic met resistance in the forms of absenteeism, lack of punctuality, and drinking and playing games at work. In the middle of the nineteenth century, increased productivity and higher wages, combined with a general preference among workers for leisure over surplus wages, posed a particular problem for

⁵ Sawyer, *A Plea for Amusements*, 299, 318-320.

employers. Workers with money to spare following “reckoning time” on Saturday evening often did not return to work until Tuesday or later. For at least some of the better-paid workers, Monday became a day for drinking and socializing, games and amusements, and excursions to parks and other destinations. “Saint Monday” thus became an institutionalized form of resistance to the regularization of labor, in effect creating an early version of the five-day workweek.⁶

Advocacy of the Saturday half-holiday began amidst this combination of compulsory long hours for some and unruly resistance to long hours among others. Having begun in Scotland and northern England, the half-holiday was promoted not only by the Early Closing Association of London, but also by similar associations in many other cities. Support for the movement was widespread and although some shop owners opposed the idea, many eventually supported it. For obvious reasons of self-interest, employers were opposed to the practice of Saint Monday, but as the tradition itself testified, employers did not have complete control over labor. Doing away with Saint Monday would require some compromise—something given in return that was sufficiently satisfactory to workers. Relative to Saint Monday, the Saturday half-holiday was approved by employers, allowed employers to insist on greater regularity at work, and was also conducive to temperance and “lawful recreation.”⁷

Support for the movement also came from clergy and religious moralists. Reserving Saturday afternoon for recreation, they believed, would preserve Sunday for

⁶ Douglas A. Reid, "The Decline of Saint Monday, 1766-1876," *Past and Present*, no. 71 (1976); Douglas A. Reid, "Weddings, Weekdays, Work and Leisure in Urban England 1791-1911: The Decline of Saint Monday Revisited," *Past and Present*, no. 153 (November, 1996), 135-163. Cf. Gary S. Cross, *A Quest for Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 84.

⁷ Reid, "The Decline of Saint Monday, 1766-1876," 87.

rest and worship.⁸ Women especially were regarded to benefit from more time for Sabbath preparation, as well as for domestic duties more generally. As early as 1845, *Evangelical Magazine* supported early closing of shops so that shop assistants would benefit from “sufficient leisure for self-improvement.” Although the Early Closing Association was a secular organization, many clergy were involved, and religious considerations were prominent. In an 1855 resolution, the association identified the most important effect of the Saturday half-holiday as “a better observance of the Lord’s day.” Shortly afterwards, a medical doctor speaking at the YMCA stated that “Early closing is the key to the family altar, and the Saturday half-holiday is the key to the Sabbath. The Saturday afternoon is the time for recreation; that is the time for steamboat trips and cheap railway trains, and for opening Crystal Palaces and British Museums. That is the time for throwing open, too, the public gardens, with their military bands.”⁹ In his 1856 book *The Half-Holiday Question*, John Lilwall, the longtime secretary of the association, reasoned similarly:

⁸ Robert Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Neill and Company, 1865), 408.

⁹ Quoted in Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers: The Struggle to Obtain Better Conditions and a Half-Holiday*, 50, 51. On the Saturday half-holiday in England, see also: John Dennis, *The Pioneer of Progress, Or the Early Closing Movement in Relation to the Saturday Half-Holiday and the Early Payment of Wages* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1860); “Early Closing,” In *Meliora* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1863), 116-129; John Fitzgerald, *The Duty of Procuring More Rest for the Labouring Classes; the Earlier Closing of Shops, and the Saturday Half-Holiday* (n.p.: Dalton, 1856); Albert Larking, *History of the Early Closing Association and how the Saturday Half-Holiday was Won* (London: Unwin Brothers, 1912); Saturday Half-Holiday Committee, Early Closing Association, *Saturday Half Holidays, and the Earlier Payment of Wages: Speeches Delivered at the Exeter-Hall Meeting, April 24, 1856* (E. Stanford: Kent & Co., 1856); John Robert Taylor, *Government, Legal, and General Saturday Half-Holiday, and the Closing of the Courts of Law and Equity Entirely on that Day: Report of the Great Public Meeting Held in the Guildhall of the City of London on the 15th August, 1855* (n.p.: V. & R. Stevens and G.S. Norton, 1857). An early source from Scotland is James Belford, *The Saturday Half-Holiday, in its Bearing on the due Observance of the Sabbath* (Glasgow: Hutcheson Campbell,

Debar them during the week from seeing the blue sky and inhaling Heaven's sweet breezes, and vain will be the attempt to secure their uniform, if even occasional, attendance at the House of Prayer—so long, in fact, will it be hopeless to expect that they will refrain from taking their amusement on the Lord's Day, and devote its sacred hours to those calmer and holier enjoyments and pursuits for which it was in mercy consecrated and set aside.¹⁰

Moral considerations, however, were likely even more widespread than strictly religious considerations. The association's Half-Holiday Committee published *The Saturday Half-Holiday Guide* (1868), and *Saturday Afternoon Rambles Round London* (1871), guidebooks with suggestions on how to improve oneself and spend one's Saturday afternoon most constructively, for example, by visiting museums, going on excursions, and observing nature.¹¹

Support for the half-holiday movement was of course not unanimous. Resistance came not only from businessmen, but also from those who believed that workers were not prepared to use their leisure well. Indeed, a commitment to the virtues of work among Protestants qualified their critique of labor conditions. Nevertheless, most clergy regarded overwork more of a threat than increased leisure. One clergyman involved with the Early Closing Association argued that more leisure would not corrupt workers' morals, while another went even further—increased leisure was a right, he argued, regardless of the use to which that leisure was put. As Whitaker summarized the role of Sabbatarians in the shorter hours movement,

1867). For a discussion of the half-holiday in France as well as Britain, see Cross, *A Quest for Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840-1940*, Ch. 4.

¹⁰ John Lilwall, *The Half-Holiday Question* (London: Kent and Co., 1856). In Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers: The Struggle to Obtain Better Conditions and a Half-Holiday*, 54.

¹¹ Henry Walker, *The Saturday Half-Holiday Guide* (n.p.: Kent and Co., 1868); Henry Walker, *Saturday Afternoon Rambles Round London* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871). In addition to a summer edition of *The Saturday Half-Holiday Guide*, similar guides appeared in other cities. See e.g., *The Excursionists' Hand-Book and Saturday Half-Holiday Guide to Places within Easy Distance of Montreal by Rail and River* (n.p.: n.p., 1886). *Rambles* is reviewed in "Rambles Round London," *Nature*, June 29, 1871, 157.

“advocates of the claims of Sunday as a day apart were in the forefront of the movement for greater opportunities for recreation on the week-day.”¹²

In the end, employers and workers essentially negotiated the exchange of Saint Monday for a half-holiday on Saturday.¹³ On the surface, the difference between time off on Saturday or Monday may seem insignificant. Although the Saturday half-holiday movement was associated with the shorter hours movement, in many cases the change entailed neither an increase nor a decrease but only a rearrangement in the hours worked.¹⁴ Qualitatively, however, the difference was substantial. Saint Monday was rowdy. It was characterized largely by cockfights and bar games. Perhaps most of all, it was unapproved by employers. The Saturday half-holiday, by contrast, came with employer approval and the expressed concern that workers use their leisure well. Saturday and Monday thus had diverging symbolic meanings as days of recreation. Whereas Saint Monday was a “festival,” a disorderly day of popular recreation during which the less powerful contingent of society exercised a degree of licensed transgression, Saturday afternoon was a “holiday,” an orderly day of rational recreation that came complete with advice if not supervision.¹⁵ For this reason, workers who previously enjoyed Saint Monday may have regarded the half-holiday as an ambiguous victory. As Douglas Reid put it, “Saint Monday posed a cultural problem which went to the heart of the ruling order.”¹⁶ The Saturday half-holiday was in part a solution to that cultural problem.

¹² Whitaker, *Victorian and Edwardian Shopworkers: The Struggle to Obtain Better Conditions and a Half-Holiday*, 46, 44.

¹³ In many industries, this was voluntary. Legislative progress, however, was slow. Seventy years passed from the founding of the Early Closing Association to the Shops Act of 1911, which finally secured the half-holiday for shopworkers. *Ibid.*, Ch. 8.

¹⁴ Reid, "The Decline of Saint Monday, 1766-1876."

¹⁵ This distinction between popular and rational recreation might also be roughly reformulated as the distinction between play and recreation.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

3. *Saturday Half-Holiday in the United States*

Although St. Monday was never as regular a practice in America as in England, the tradition did have a following in the New World. The practice was not ancient, but belonged squarely to the system of wage labor, thereby upsetting both employers and proto-Victorian moralists such as Benjamin Franklin. “Saint *Monday*,” Franklin lamented in 1768, “is as duly kept by our working people as *Sunday*; the only difference is that instead of employing their time cheaply at church they are wasting it expensively at the ale house.”¹⁷ Moreover, the transition from a predominantly agricultural and artisan economy to the factory system did not take place overnight. Because immigrants were continually arriving, the process of conformity to the discipline of American factories, as with the process of Americanization more generally, lasted well into the industrializing decades of the late nineteenth century.¹⁸ A century after Franklin made his remark, manufacturers complained that cigar makers worked “probably only two to three hours a day,” and that for potters, “Monday was given up to debauchery.” Coopers welcomed the brewery wagon on Saturday morning, drank and recreated for two days, and then took “blue Monday” to recover and sharpen their tools, thereby keeping “a four-day work week and a three-day weekend [that] angered manufacturers anxious to ship goods as much as it worried Sabbatarians and temperance reformers.” In a similar manner, African-Americans incorporated into the industrial economy following emancipation brought with them pre-industrial—i.e., irregular—work habits, sometimes including taking “blue

¹⁷ Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*, 5.

¹⁸ For an overview of this transition, and several expressions of resistance, see Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920*, 160-168.

Monday.”¹⁹ In the New World as in the Old, absenteeism was concentrated on Monday.

Although pre-industrial work habits persisted on both sides of the Atlantic, the work ethic reigned supreme in the New World to an extent it did not in the Old. Moreover, there was not the same history and tradition of folk games, Saints days, and festivals. As many European observers noted, nineteenth-century Americans worked hard and long. Not surprisingly, then, when news of the practice of the Saturday half-holiday crossed the Atlantic, the idea appealed all the more strongly to American workers. Indeed, the half-holiday started later but progressed much more rapidly in the United States than in England.

The Saturday half-holiday was first observed by some large firms in New York City in the middle 1870s, but it was a decade later, in June of 1885, that the movement gained traction. Although advocates for earlier closing regularly referred to the unrewarding toil of factory work, they also urged that all places of employment shut down at 1:00p.m., including clerical offices and places of manufacture, as well as dry goods stores and places of entertainment. As they had hoped, in both the retail district downtown and on Broadway further uptown “store curtains were down, shutters were up, doors were locked, and in every other window could be seen a placard announcing: ‘This store closes at noon.’ ‘We make Saturday afternoon a half holiday,’ or some motto of like significance.” As a result, the streetcars and ferries taking workers home were full at mid-day like never before. As the *New York Times* noted, agitation for the Saturday half-holiday was causing it to spread to Brooklyn, Jersey City, and elsewhere. It “threatens to become general throughout the country.”²⁰

¹⁹ Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History*, 37-38, 59.

²⁰ "Progress of a Good Work," *New York Times*, June 15, 1885.

The half-holiday eventually would conquer the country, but not before becoming more established still in New York City. On May 6, 1887, one year after the Haymarket riot and the same year that New York State began recognizing Labor Day, New York State established Saturday afternoon as a legally recognized half-holiday.²¹ As in England, the act was supported by labor and reform associations, but opposed by many financiers and employers. Under pressure from the latter, the state senate, which had previously approved the bill unanimously, sent the governor a bill less than a year later proposing to repeal the legislation, and to limit the half-holiday to summers only. Labor unions protested, calling the Saturday half-holiday law “the greatest boon ever bestowed on workingmen.”²² Samuel Gompers, president of the recently organized American Federation of Labor, also protested. In a letter to Governor David Hill, Gompers offered several defenses of the bill, including the observation that “The tendency of the times is to give to Sunday its old puritanical character, to make it a day of rest and religious observance. Surely, then, a half holiday on Saturday devoted to amusement, exercise, and recreation should be afforded the working people.”²³

Four days after Gompers penned his letter, Governor Hill vetoed the repeal, thereby preserving the original half-holiday legislation. Strictly speaking, Hill pointed out, the law affected only banks and public offices. “There is otherwise no compulsion anywhere. The law may be regarded as simply declaratory of the public desire that the people should observe the day, but it provides no penalties for its

²¹ *Laws of the State of New York, 1887* (Albany: Banks & Brothers, 1887), 364-365.

²² George A. Stevens, "Public Holidays for Working People," In *New York Typographical Union no. 6: Study of a Modern Trade Union and its Predecessors*, ed. New York State Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Vol. 2 (Albany: J.B. Lyon, 1912), 524.

²³ Stuart B. Kaufman, ed., *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, Vol. 2 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 109.

violation.”²⁴ Opposition to the law notwithstanding, Hill said, “the tendencies of the age favor more opportunities for recreation, and it is wise to recognize the fact.”

Public schools, he noted, originally convened all day Saturday, switched to half-days, and eventually to a full-holiday each Saturday. Hill further supported his action by appealing to the logic of both labor and reform interests, including the argument from Sabbath observance. Labor-saving machinery, he observed, rendered long hours at work less necessary than in earlier years. Moreover,

Recreation is desirable as well as rest and religious worship. If Sunday is the only day upon which recreation is possible to a large portion of our population, it will of necessity be used by them for that purpose. Our American Sunday will be better observed by setting apart the whole or a portion of every Saturday for the recreation and amusement which is now being crowded into Sunday.²⁵

The first Saturday holiday legislation in America was thus grounded in part on “civil Sabbatarianism.”

Although the New York law was “declaratory of public desire” rather than compulsory, the public desire was great indeed, as evidenced by the spread of the practice throughout the state and the country. Five years after the New York State law passed, Congress passed a similar half-holiday law pertaining to the District of Columbia.²⁶ Within fifteen years, the movement spread to Chicago and Los Angeles, where one merchant marveled that “if I should happen to get into New York on Saturday and wanted to make a purchase of \$10,000 worth of goods in the afternoon, it would be impossible.”²⁷ Indeed, the Saturday half-holiday would spread not only

²⁴ *Public Papers of David B. Hill, Governor, 1888* (Albany: BiblioBazaar, 2008), 67.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

²⁶ *An Act Making Saturday a Half Holiday for Banking and Trust Company Purposes in the District of Columbia*, (1892): “An Act Making Saturday a half holiday” (December 22, 1892) United States Statutes at Large, 27 (1892), 405-406.

²⁷ *The Saturday Half-Holiday* (Chicago: Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago, 1918), <http://galenet.galegroup.com/>; "Half-Holiday Movement is being Agitated,"

geographically, but within decades would spread to encompass all of Saturday. Hill's passing reference to the possibility of a Saturday full-holiday proved prophetic.

Continued opposition came from business interests and those concerned about the appropriate uses of this newfound leisure. Although not yet referred to as "the problem of leisure," the concern that leisure be used well—for wholesome rest and recreation—was widespread. At a Chamber of Commerce meeting in the summer of 1885, one speaker worried that new opportunities for recreation promote morality rather than debauchery.²⁸ At an evening forum entitled "The Sunday Question and the Saturday Half Holiday," hosted the following winter by the Baptist Social Union in New York, even a supporter of the movement acknowledged that the dissipation occasioned by idleness was a strong argument against the experiment. A clergyman argued that working men already received fair compensation for their labor, and a Wall Street broker added that "Six days shalt thou labor" is a positive command that must be obeyed.

Nevertheless, such objections were the exception; support for the movement was widespread,²⁹ and the controversy it occasioned was relatively short-lived. In addition to working men and women, who were the most obvious beneficiaries, many merchants were supportive on the condition that their competitors followed suit. Somewhat remarkably, enough were willing to close their shops to make the idea work even prior to the half-holiday law. There are at least two possible explanations for this. First, although the movement coincided with organized labor's campaign for the eight-hour day, the half-holiday came about primarily through a redistribution rather than a reduction of hours. Second, the half-holiday came about not primarily

Los Angeles Evening Express, June 21, 1900, <http://www.ulwaf.com/LA-1900s/00.06.html>.

²⁸ "Early Closing on Saturday," *New York Times*, June 7, 1885.

²⁹ Cf. "The Half-Holiday Movement," *New York Times*, June 5, 1881.

through legislation or direct action (i.e., strikes or collective bargaining), but rather through a voluntary process of renegotiating hours. Perhaps it is for the same reasons that the Saturday half-holiday movement has received little attention from labor historians.

In another similarity with England, the movement enjoyed support from a majority of clergy and religious moralists, including Sabbatarians. As early as 1848, Justin Edwards, temperance crusader and secretary of the American and Foreign Sabbath Union, endorsed the concept. "Why not take Saturday afternoon," he wrote, addressing the problem of Sabbath recreations, "or some portions of the six days, for going into the country, and give to God his day?"³⁰ By the 1880s, in sermons with titles such as "Rest, Recreation, and the Sabbath," "Holy Days and Holidays," and "The Saturday Half-Holiday as a Preparation for the Sabbath," clergy of diverse denominations began articulating why their respective flocks ought to support the movement.³¹ Some of the rationales were essentially secular in nature, such as a concern for workers' health. At first, the half-holiday was a summer phenomenon, providing relief during the hottest months of the year. Not only did factory workers deserve more of a break from their strenuous and unrewarding toil, but large numbers of working men and women in a variety of professions, clergy increasingly emphasized, were overworked and under-compensated. Women especially were believed to suffer from "neurasthenia," a disorder of the central nervous system caused by the new fast-paced but physically sedentary work environment, and which William

³⁰ Justin Edwards, *The Proper Mode of Keeping the Sabbath: Being the Fourth Number of the Sabbath Manual* (New York: American Tract Society, 1848), 91.

³¹ "Advocating a Half Holiday," *New York Times*, June 22, 1885; "The Happy Mean for Sunday," *New York Times*, January 25, 1886; "Religious Notices," *New York Times*, May 28, 1887. See also William V. W. Davis, *Plea for a Saturday Half-Holiday in the Interests of Labor and Capital: A Way to Rescue the Christian Sabbath* (n.p.: L.P. Goddard, 1890).

James referred to as “Americanitis.” According to the federal government’s standards for the Employment of Women, “The Saturday half-holiday should be considered an absolute essential for women under all conditions.”³² Clergy thus followed the conventional wisdom of the day that workers’ material needs were real, including not only more money but also more time for rest and recreation.

Such “secular” concerns were not unrelated to concerns that were more obviously “moral” or religious in nature. The *Christian Advocate* editorialized that the Saturday half-holiday “can do no harm and must do good,” for “the plausible temptation to spend the Sabbath in the open air is removed.”³³ When a group of working men who referred to themselves as the Half Holiday Committee published a circular, Henry Macdowall of St. Agnes’s Roman Catholic Church distributed it at the beginning of services and urged all employers to follow the lead of those who were extending the half-holiday to their employees.³⁴ “This Saturday half-holiday,” said Lindsay Parker of St. George’s Episcopal Church, “will do more to reclaim the class we most desire to reach than all the tracts and sermons with which we could bombard them for a year.” Another Episcopal priest supported the movement, he said, because the modern factory was nothing short of the worst and most tyrannical form of slavery the world had ever known.³⁵

By no means, however, was the Saturday half-holiday primarily a Catholic cause. James Chambers of Calvary Baptist Church argued that incessant labor and overtaxing the mind caused “moral malaria,” and that providing for people’s secular

³² *The Saturday Half-Holiday*, 3.

³³ Quoted in “Anecdote and Incident,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1885.

³⁴ “A Duty of Employers,” *New York Times*, December 14, 1885. Such concerns on the part of Roman Catholics predated and anticipated Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum*, which addressed the plight of the working classes and was a boon the labor movement worldwide.

³⁵ “Progress of a Good Work.”

rest on Saturday would facilitate better spiritual occupation on Sunday.³⁶ L.A. Crandall of Twenty-third Baptist Church described the movement as “thoroughly Christian” because of the way employer and employee cooperated. “There is no boycotting, no employe struts before his employer and says: ‘I want this or I’ll break your head or smash your business.’” He also supported the movement because “it will aid the churches, for where people now go to the parks and seashore on Sunday, they will be able to visit such places on Saturdays and hear the Word of God on the Sabbath.” A.C. Moorhouse of Seventh-Street Methodist similarly suggested that if excursions to Coney Island could be contained to Saturday, it would result in a better observance of the Lord’s Day.³⁷ Many of these sermons included practical advice to help make the Saturday half-holiday work. Employers were encouraged to compensate their employees earlier than the usual Saturday evening, and women were implored to complete their shopping before Saturday noon. In no way was Saturday afternoon to be used for buying and selling.

Although liberal and conservative religious leaders differed on the spectrum of activities appropriate for Sunday, they were agreed on the merits of the Saturday half-holiday. If some Protestants had previously promoted an unqualified affirmation of work, this was beginning to change. Recognizing that exhaustion was no friend of Sunday morning worship, clergy members increasingly perceived long-hour jobs as a kind of threat to faith that must be held in check by a combination of shorter hours at work and time reserved for rest and recreation. By providing an outlet for workers’ legitimate recreational needs, the Saturday half-holiday thus contributed to better preparation and observance of the Sabbath. The movement, said Henry Ward Beecher, “is one of the most desirable and benign movements lately inaugurated, and

³⁶ "Advocating a Half Holiday."

³⁷ "Saturday Half Holidays," *New York Times*, December 7, 1885.

receives my cordial support. . . . They should have half of Saturday for recreation, which is a kind of rest, and for preparation for the Sabbath.”³⁸

Sabbatarian organizations such as the New York Sabbath Committee and the American Sabbath Union employed the same rationale. The New York Sabbath Committee claimed that the earliest mention of the Saturday half-holiday movement in the United States had been made by their Secretary W.W. Atterbury in 1880.³⁹ While that was not quite correct—in addition to Frederick Sawyer’s and Justin Edwards’s favorable mention of the idea in the 1840s, the Young Ladies Christian Association advocated for the Saturday half-holiday as early as 1874⁴⁰—it was nevertheless true that the Sabbath Committee and other clergy and lay religious leaders were among the earliest supporters of the movement. As a Sabbath Committee publication put it in 1881,

The importance of healthful recreation, and the free opening of museums, art galleries, etc., for the working classes, no one can deny. But this end is reached by the Saturday half-holiday, and by the shorter hours of daily labor, becoming so common in this country; while Sunday is saved to the higher uses and enjoyments of home and the worship of God.⁴¹

At the end of the decade, the monthly publication of the American Sabbath Union similarly opined that

Many who enjoy release from toil plead with plausibility that they need and must have recreation, and Sabbath is the only day which affords the requisite opportunity. Their notions of ‘recreation’ are often contravening to the laws of health; but the plea finds ground in the severe confinement of the week, often carried late into Saturday night.

³⁸ "Progress of a Good Work." Curiously, though Beecher and others regularly referred to the necessity of preparing for the Sabbath, rarely if ever was this rationale grounded in biblical precedent, where the day prior to the Sabbath is referred to as Preparation Day.

³⁹ "Saturday Half-Holiday," *The Bulletin of the New York Sabbath Committee*, January, 1923, 6-7.

⁴⁰ "A Saturday Half-Holiday," *New York Times*, August 11, 1874.

⁴¹ *Sunday in the United States* (New York: New York Sabbath Committee, 1881), 17.

In a land of vast, varied, virgin resources—a land of plenty in a sense unknown to other lands—a Saturday half-holiday can well be afforded. There are impregnable reasons for assuming that nothing would be lost in the aggregate products of industry by this beneficent arrangement. Let Christian employers lead off and Christian and temperance employers prudently demand such a modification of the labor system, and it will ere long be granted. Then let the civil Sabbath be respected for its proper uses and guarded against demoralizing abuses.⁴²

Sabbatarians thus continued to embrace the Puritan idea that otherwise lawful recreations were not lawful on Sunday. The difference was that the old Puritan idea of designated days of recreation had become more plausible.

Clergy support for the Saturday half-holiday further is attested by a statewide survey conducted by the General Association of Congregational Churches in Massachusetts in 1902. The survey asked clergy about Sunday concerts, Sunday golf, the opening of libraries and museums, and—tellingly—whether they believed the enforcement of Sunday laws should be insisted upon. The ninth and final question asked, “Would a general observance of the Saturday half-holiday help in any way to solve the Sunday problem and increase church attendance?” The response was strongly affirmative, with 104 clergy answering ‘Yes,’ and 55 ‘No.’⁴³

Among some respondents, skepticism about the benefit of the half-holiday was grounded in a conviction that sin is more personal than structural. “I do not think half-holidays help much,” one clergyman wrote, “church going depends upon disposition and the will.” “It would doubtless help,” wrote another, “but the greatest difficulty is with the individual, rather than his environment.” Others invoked experience as their reason for supporting the idea. “After two and one-half years experience among the mill operatives of my city who are slaves to the factory whistle, I am convinced that

⁴² "Saturday Half Holiday," *American Sabbath Union, Monthly Document no. 7*, June, 1889, 4.

⁴³ *The General Association of the Congregational Churches of Massachusetts, Minutes of the One Hundredth Annual Meeting* (Boston: Mills and Knight, 1902), 78.

this is the best solution offered.” “Experience in England proves that the half-holiday does help,” contributed another. The committee offered this conclusion:

The adoption of the Saturday half-holiday is well worth a thorough trial. We believe it would prove a great help in solving the problem of Sunday observance. With a half-holiday for recreation and a general good time we believe men would come up to the Sabbath in better physical condition for devoting themselves to a proper use of the day. It would remove in most cases all grounds for excuse from church attendance on the plea of being physically unable, too tired, etc. It is claimed by many that such a holiday would offer the opportunity for general lawlessness and drunkenness. We do not believe this claim can be substantiated. As a matter of fact, the class of men most needing the holiday, mechanics and all manual laborers, and among whom would be found those who would be the most inclined to abuse the privilege, have not as yet been given the holiday to any extent. Judgment should therefore be withheld.⁴⁴

Similar support for the Saturday half-holiday would come in subsequent years from other denominational assembly meetings, most notably Presbyterians.⁴⁵

Although Christians of diverse denominations supported the movement with striking unity, their support was not always welcome. When in 1883 the Central Labor Union entertained a resolution to approve the Short Hour League’s appeal to clergy to collaborate in the campaign for the half-holiday, a socialist delegate opposed it on the basis that the church did not have the interests of working men in mind. He criticized Beecher and the Pope alike, and the resolution was tabled.⁴⁶ Likewise, in a response to the religious rationale for the half-holiday—that it might stem the secularizing of the Sabbath—the *New York Times* commented that the movement “should not be diverted to any such end,” and that the closing of libraries and museums on Sundays is “an unchristian barbarism.” “The Saturday half-holiday

⁴⁴ Ibid., 84-85.

⁴⁵ E.g., *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1910), 58.

⁴⁶ “Half-Holiday for Working Men,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1883.

would in no way change the uses to which Sunday ought to be put, nor those to which it would be put. The two movements should not conflict with each other”⁴⁷

Seventh-day Sabbatarians were similarly unsympathetic to the idea of the Saturday half-holiday as a means of preserving Sunday as a day of rest and worship, albeit for different reasons. According to *The Outlook and Sabbath Quarterly*, a Seventh-day Baptist periodical, the idea that “the bribe of an extra holiday” would secure a quiet Sunday “has nothing but novelty to recommend it.” The reason people treated Sunday as a holiday rather than a holy day was because it was in fact a holiday, and the proper biblical Sabbath, which was still waiting to be restored, was the day “now misnamed ‘Saturday.’” Consequently, “the sooner the effort to save Sunday from holidayism is given up, the better for all concerned.”⁴⁸ As a minority group with a deep commitment to religious liberty, seventh-day Sabbatarians were not as bothered as most Sabbatarians by the idea of others treating their holy day as a holiday. As *The Outlook and Sabbath Quarterly* observed in 1887, the half-holiday law made Saturday worship more, not less, plausible:

The Lord works in mysterious ways, and those who enacted the law had little thought that he is using them as instruments to restore his long neglected Sabbath. When the other half of Saturday is made a half-holiday, like Sunday, there will be no reason why the one day may not be used as a day of worship as well as the other. There will then need be no sacrifices made in loss of time or employment by those who choose to observe Saturday as a day of worship any more than by those who observe Sunday as such a day. May the Lord hasten the time when the other half of Saturday shall be made by law a legal half-holiday, and thus facilitate the observance of the Sabbath of the Lord.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ "Early Closing on Saturday."

⁴⁸ "The 'Saturday Half-Holiday' Cure," *The Outlook, and Sabbath Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (October, 1884), 62.

⁴⁹ "Saturday Half-Holiday," *The Outlook, and Sabbath Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (July, 1887), 411.

While the uses of Sunday remained controversial, and the rationales for the Saturday half-holiday were contested, the Saturday half-holiday itself was relatively uncontroversial. Socialists, secularists, and Sabbatarians (seventh-day and otherwise) alike were agreed in their support for the movement.

4. Conclusion

The Saturday half-holiday occupies an important, albeit somewhat ambiguous place in the shorter hours movement. Arguably, the Saturday half-holiday did not result in shorter hours; shorter hours—and a rearrangement of hours—rather resulted in the half-holiday. Still, cause and consequence notwithstanding, the Saturday half-holiday was a qualitatively significant victory in the quest for discretionary time. After all, the same reduction of hours could have been spread over six days, leaving no equivalent of a weekly holiday or weekend. The half-holiday was popular, however, not only because it represented shorter hours, but also because it represented time set apart for recreation and leisure. By anticipating the two-day weekend, which constituted nothing less than a whole new ecology of time, the Saturday half-holiday was related as both cause and consequence to the new leisure.

To be sure, the Saturday half-holiday did not come all at once. Although it was relatively well established in New York at the turn of the century, it would take longer to establish elsewhere, and some occupations adopted the half-holiday much later than others. Although Samuel Seward of the New Jerusalem Church advocated extending the half-holiday from the summer months to all the year round as early as 1885, that trend would not come to pass for many years.⁵⁰ And though Hearn's on Fourteenth Street began closing all day Saturday as early as 1892, the trend of closing

⁵⁰ "Saturday Half Holidays."

all day would not catch on in New York until after World War I, and the five-day week would not become the norm for another twenty years after that.⁵¹ Indeed, half a century after the half-holiday was first imported from England to New York and New England and the Saturday full-holiday was becoming a reality, postal workers and other government employees were still agitating for a half-holiday.⁵²

Nevertheless, the trend that started in New York City in the summer of 1885 proved unstoppable. The rapidity with which the idea of Saturday as a day of recreation conquered New York City and subsequently spread far and wide suggests that there existed an unmet appetite for recreation and leisure. The hook was sunk deep, and for those who tasted the freedom of time, there was no going back. Indeed, over the next half-century, the idea of Saturday as a holiday would essentially colonize until it filled nearly all the space it could—all day, all year, all states. That the movement was uncontested relative to other victories in the shorter hours movement makes it no less noteworthy.

Sabbatarians, especially by the twentieth century, are commonly depicted as fighting a losing cause, and their support for recreation interpreted as a matter of accommodation to changing norms and realities. In this view, the Saturday half-holiday represents a secularizing displacement of Sabbatarian ideals of rest by more biologically based concerns regarding health and well-being.⁵³ To be sure, Sabbatarians changed and adapted to their social and cultural milieu. The primary change, however, consisted not of discarding the distinction between rest and recreation, but in rethinking the work ethic. Long-hour industrial labor posed new

⁵¹ *The Saturday Half-Holiday*, 6.

⁵² "Saturday Half-Holiday Observance," *The Postal Record* 34, no. 7 (July 15, 1921), 145; "Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Convention," *The Postal Record* 34, no. 10 (October, 1921), 264.

⁵³ Cross, *A Quest for Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840-1940*, 85.

challenges to church and society, and as a result, perhaps for the first time in millennia, concerns about idleness began to yield to concerns about busyness and overwork. Clergy members who collaborated with labor leaders like John Mitchell on securing the Saturday half-holiday may not fully have agreed with him when he argued at the 1910 Day of Rest Conference that there was no such thing as the essential dignity of labor, but their views on work and rest were becoming more complex, and included more attention to biological necessity.⁵⁴ In any case, sermons defending leisure by employing the proverb that “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones” were very much of their time.⁵⁵

Although it is largely true that Sabbatarians failed in their goal to secure a quiet Sunday free of work, recreation, and travel through legislative means, the standard narrative regarding Sabbatarians and recreation nevertheless remains problematic for several reasons. First, Sabbatarians’ and religious moralists’ affirmation of recreation was not radically new, for their predecessors were never as opposed to recreation in principle as their cultural despisers have suggested. Their support of the Saturday half-holiday suggests that, like their Puritan forebears who advocated special days of recreation, their concerns regarding recreation had more to do with their understanding and interpretation of the Sabbath than with recreation *per se*. Second, Sabbatarians’ adoption of contemporary concerns regarding physical rest for health and well-being complemented rather than displaced their concerns for spiritual rest. Their very idea of the Saturday half-holiday retained the long-held distinction between holy day and holiday, rest and recreation. Third, that Sabbatarians were among the earliest promoters of the half-holiday suggests that they were not only reacting to change, but also functioning as agents of change. Arguably, the Saturday

⁵⁴ "Labor Joins Clergy in Sunday Fight," *New York Times*, March 14, 1910.

⁵⁵ "Half-Holiday for Working Men," 2.

half-holiday represented a triumph of Victorian values such as self-restraint and delayed gratification over against the popular, working class recreational practices associated with Saint Monday.⁵⁶ Now not only work, but also recreation was regular, scheduled, and moderate. In that sense, Sabbatarians might be said to have won at least part of their agenda.

In the end, the boundaries between success and failure of the Sabbatarian agenda regarding recreation are not altogether clear. If the Saturday half-holiday was a success, it was a qualified success, for the time that it opened up for recreation created unprecedented opportunities for leisure entrepreneurs to fill it with commercialized forms of recreation. Combined with other trends, such as increased discretionary income, new forms of sport and amusement, changing roles for women, and emerging modes of courtship, the Saturday half-holiday thus contributed to the new culture of commercial amusement and recreation. Sabbatarian advocacy of the Saturday half-holiday was thus neither wholly successful nor unsuccessful, but rather contributed indirectly and unwittingly to “destabilizing” Sunday’s status as the designated day for Sabbath rest.⁵⁷ The Sabbatarians’ solution to the crisis of leisure time was thus no more effective than the Methodists’ and Unitarians’ solutions to the crisis of leisure space. Indeed, if there is one thing harder to imagine than the Sabbatarian ideal of Sunday without play, it is their ideal of Saturday without shopping.

⁵⁶ Reid, "The Decline of Saint Monday, 1766-1876," 76-101.

⁵⁷ McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 150.

CHAPTER 6

THE LEISURE REVOLUTION

1. Introduction¹

Bicycling, though it had existed in America since 1819, exploded in popularity in the 1890s. This popularity was in part a function of innovative technological developments. The earliest “velocipedes” had no pedals, “bone crushers” added pedals but apparently were not very comfortable or efficient, and ordinaries or “high-wheelers” added rubber tires and a large front wheel for efficiency at the cost of perching their riders precariously high.² Then, in 1885, the “safety bicycle” made a technological leap, employing a sprocket and chain rather than large wheels for mechanical advantage—a design that remains largely unchanged more than a century later. This design, combined with the invention of pneumatic tires in 1890, resulted in a bicycle that was fast, efficient, *and* comfortable.

¹ The recreation or leisure “revolution” of the nineteenth century is variously dated. Although the “rise of sports” has typically been located in the last three decades of the century, Melvin Adelman argues persuasively that modern sports were established well before the Civil War. Melvin L. Adelman, *A Sporting Time: New York City and the Rise of Modern Athletics, 1820-70* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986). Commenting on leisure more generally, Dale Somers similarly attributes the beginning of the revolution to 1820. Dale A. Somers, “The Leisure Revolution: Recreation in the American City, 1820-1920,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 5 (1971), 125-147. I use the term in reference to the 1890s because 1) my focus is here on what Michael Kammen has called “the heyday of commercialized popular culture”; 2) changes in outward forms of recreation and leisure in the 1890s more obviously correspond to broader changes in the culture, and to changing notions of the self (as discussed later in the chapter); and 3) because I take widespread participation to be more significant than the origins of a form. Recreation and leisure in the 1890s were of course characterized by continuity as well as qualitative change.

² In England, ordinaries were also called penny-farthings.

Bicycles also became affordable. Whereas ordinaries had to be custom built, the safety bicycle's sprocket and chain allowed for standardized sizing and therefore mass production in factories. As production skyrocketed—by the middle 1890s, the Pope Manufacturing Company was producing a quarter million bicycles per year—prices plummeted. In a sign of the emerging consumer economy, trading bicycles in every year or two became common, extending access to this consumer good further down the economic continuum.

No less importantly, bicycling became respectable. In earlier years, ordinary bicycles were popular mostly among young and athletic males who frequently came to fisticuffs with other highway users. Legitimacy came in part by means of the League of American Wheelmen, which provided legal and other advocacy for bicycling interests, but also through the involvement of the gentler sex. Safety bicycles accommodated women's clothing more easily than ordinaries, and women soon took to the craze no less than men. Thus began the phenomenon known as the "bicycle boom."³

Just as various developments in technology made the bicycle boom possible, the boom in turn effected its own changes. Bicycles, for example, popularized

³ Sidney H. Aronson, "The Sociology of the Bicycle," *Social Forces* 30, no. 3 (March, 1952), 305-312; Richard Harmond, "Progress and Flight: An Interpretation of the American Cycle Craze of the 1890s," *Journal of Social History* 5, no. 2 (Winter, 1971), 235-257; David V. Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). The roller skate craze was a similar, albeit smaller phenomenon. In 1863, James Plimpton designed four-wheeled "quad" skates, which were safer and simpler than earlier designs. By the 1860s, skating rinks were opening in and around metropolitan areas such New York and resorts such as Newport; by the 1880s, skates were being mass produced. Dwight W. Hoover, "Roller-Skating Toward Industrialism," In *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, ed. Kathryn Grover (University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst, 1992), 61-76; James Turner, *The History of Roller Skating* (Lincoln, Neb.: National Museum of Roller Skating, 1997); "Velocipede Matters—the Opening of the Jersey City Velocipedrone," *New York Times*, March 31, 1869.

skirtless “bloomers” which, due to their similarity to men’s knickerbockers, constituted a revolutionary change in women’s dress. Because safety bicycles “gave the American woman the liberty of dress which reformers had been seeking for generations,” they became the vehicle of choice for the New Woman.⁴ Bicycles also individualized and democratized transportation. In a culture that valued speed and largely defined freedom as mobility, the popularity of the bicycle comes as little surprise. Bicyclists were not constrained by the schedules of trolley cars or the expense and inconvenience of horse-drawn carriages. The bicycle thus paved the way for the automobile in several ways, none more significant than extending mobility to the masses. Entire families could now go on excursions, usually on Sundays. “The wheel,” as one preacher cleverly put it, “is creating a revolution.”⁵

The wheel also created a revolution relative to Sabbath-keeping. The individuality of the activity was not as easily regulated as the opening and closing of parks, museums, or even privately owned movie palaces. Moreover, bicycling was boisterous and physical. Believing that Sunday recreation was bad for one’s spiritual well-being, some Sabbatarians found themselves arguing that it was therefore also bad for one’s physical health, as evidenced by the *Christian Intelligence*’s suggestion that the condition known as “bicycle face” was caused in part by cyclists’ violation of the Sabbath:

Is it not possible that the law of the Decalog is binding upon bicyclists as well as upon other people, and an habitual violation of the law of the Sabbath may result in the worn, weary, and exhausted face called the bicycle face? Doctors have fallen in with the unbelief and recklessness of the times, and do not insist in their spoken and written words upon the need of one day of rest in every seven days, and they look for the cause of the bicycle face in something besides the customary Sunday runs.

The act is greatly to be deplored that throughout the United States the wheelmen are putting forth a mighty influence against the observance of the

⁴ Aronson, "The Sociology of the Bicycle," 308.

⁵ "Sermons about Bicycles," *New York Times*, June 17, 1895.

Lord's day as a day of rest and worship. Christianity is largely dependent upon a proper observance of the Sabbath. The bicyclists are doing much to destroy the Sabbath, and at the same time are injuring their own bodies and souls. The 'bicycle face,' indicating extreme weariness and exhaustion, due to the severe strain of violent exercise on seven days of the week, will be followed, as surely as the Decalog is the law of God, with moral weariness and exhaustion in the wheelmen and in those influenced by them.⁶

Although clergymen were not all agreed on the matter, some made claims to the effect that cycling led "to a place where there is no mud on the streets because of its high temperature."⁷ When they did, the satirical *Puck* created a cartoon mocking the idea that the road to hell could be paved by outdoor recreation.⁸

Sunday cycling was indeed a blow to Sabbatarianism, and not only because it competed directly with worship. The whole commercial leisure revolution also posed a more subtle, albeit indirect, threat to Sabbatarianism. Sabbatarians disliked Sunday work, but they despised Sunday pleasure seeking. Whether they cited the book of Isaiah on pleasure or not, they were concerned not only with the letter of the law, but also with the transformation of sensibilities that seemed a rejection of the Victorian code and the Protestant work ethic.

2. Commercial Leisure Revolution

The bicycle boom vividly illustrates what was true of recreation more generally in the 1890s and the decades following: modernization begat new forms of amusement and recreation, and these emergent leisure pursuits in turn contributed to the processes of modernization. With the death of Barnum in 1891, the commercialization of leisure and the formula he inaugurated—selling affordable

⁶ Excerpted in "The 'Bicycle Face'," *Literary Digest* 11, no. 9 (September 7, 1895), 548-549.

⁷ Aronson, "The Sociology of the Bicycle," 306.

⁸ *Puck*, July 21, 1897. In Herlihy, *Bicycle: The History*, 272.

amusement cloaked in respectability—spread like wildfire in urban areas, most notably in New York City. Emphasizing respectability in the outward form of amusement resulted in lessening the constraint that uplift placed on the content of amusement. That recreation was entangled with the processes of modernization as both cause and effect, reinforcing and contributing especially to emerging values and sensibilities, goes a long way toward explaining why commercial amusements were so controversial.

In addition to the bicycle boom, other sports—both participant and spectator—surged in popularity, most notably baseball and football. Colleges became “theaters of organized physical combat,” including not only team sports but also track and wrestling. Many of these sports were highly physical or, in the case of boxing, downright pugilistic. Sports became a public spectacle, sometimes entertaining crowds of large numbers. The modern Olympic Games were inaugurated in 1896, as was the sports page in William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal*.⁹

The interest in physical recreation was largely but not exclusively a matter of competitive athletics. Popular outdoor pastimes now included not only hunting and fishing but also “non-consumptive” pursuits such as camping, hiking, and birdwatching. When the Dartmouth Outing Club was founded in 1909, the trend of young men seeking adventure in the outdoors had already been underway for some time. Although outdoor adventure has always suffered the tinge of elitism—appealing as it does primarily to those for whom economic survival poses little struggle—this was not a mere fringe movement. Public policy supported the pursuit of health and fitness through active, outdoor recreation by funding the preservation of both national

⁹ Higham, “The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s,” 78. The literature on competitive athletics is vast. See generally the works of Melvin Adelman, Allen Guttmann, Stephen Hardy, George Kirsch, Benjamin Rader, Steven Riess, and Nancy Struna.

and state parks, including Yosemite (1890), Niagara Falls (1885), Adirondack Park (1892), and the Catskills (1905).¹⁰ Interest in the outdoors as a place of physical and spiritual renewal coincided with an interest in the scientific study and conservation of nature, especially in urban areas. Following on the heels of New York's American Museum of Natural History (1869) and the Linnaean Society of New York (1878) were the New York Botanical Garden (1891) and the New York Zoological Society (1895), best known for creating the New York Zoological Park (later the Bronx Zoo). New York was not alone in its appreciation of nature—John Muir founded the Sierra Club in San Francisco in 1892—but efforts to preserve nature were nevertheless most common among those who did not have to contend with it on a daily basis.

In addition to newfound intrigue with physical recreation, outdoor pursuits, and natural history, attendance increased at museums and theaters. Vaudeville and other popular priced theaters drew both their content and their crowd from a combination of upper class venues such as opera halls and the legitimate theater and from lower class venues such as variety shows and minstrel shows. By offering entertainment suitable for men, women, and children that was at once affordable and respectable, entertainment impresarios discovered an enormous untapped market. In the ten years leading up to 1900, the number of seats in New York City theaters doubled, making it the entertainment capital of the world. In the early 1900s, entrepreneurs invested in even larger “palaces,” notable for their ostentatious architecture and flashing-lighted entrances, while family-friendly ten-cent theaters filled the niche for less expensive amusement, alongside Nickelodeons featuring new moving picture technology. Moving pictures were also introduced to theaters, and

¹⁰ Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America*, 13.

later occasioned the development of movie palaces, the crowds at which continued to be “huge and heterogeneous.”¹¹

Also drawing crowds that were huge and relatively heterogeneous were dance halls, ranging from neighborhood halls to more upscale Broadway cabarets. The number of dance halls in New York City skyrocketed from just over 100 in 1890 to over 500 in the 1910s, and entrepreneurs soon capitalized on the phenomenon by developing larger dance palaces that could accommodate thousands, beginning with the Grand Central in 1911. In contrast to many sports, which remained popular primarily with men, the dance craze captured the imagination of young women and teenage girls. Women flocked to dance halls not only because they liked to dance, which they did, but also because dance halls were their preferred place to meet and mingle with young men. Especially for working women who resided in boarding houses, but also for women living under the watchful eye of parents, dance halls represented an escape from supervision and certain social expectations. Dancing itself was evolving in form, no longer characterized by the gentility and restraint of waltzes and polkas, but rather by the freedom and physicality of the turkey trot and the bunny hug. Even the ragtime music, characterized by strong rhythm and syncopation, was sensual and expressive. Although some social segmentation by class remained, the dancing itself was very similar in all the halls. Debutantes enjoyed turkey trotting as much as working girls.¹²

¹¹ Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, Ch. 3; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*, Ch. 6. Quote from Nasaw, 31.

¹² Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981); Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*; Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, Ch. 9.

Amusement parks, which drew the largest crowds of any commercial amusement, grew out of two earlier sources—trolley parks and world’s fair midways. Trolley parks or commercial “picnic groves” were destinations on the outskirts of urban areas devoted to recreational activities such as dancing, boating, and swimming. Transportation companies developed these parks in order to generate business for their streetcars, which moved people back and forth to the parks. Over time, amusements such as merry-go-rounds, Ferris wheels and roller coasters were added. The transformation of trolley parks into amusement parks received a boost from the World Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago. In planning the Exposition, the tension between the competing demands for entertainment and education were dealt with by physically segregating the Midway Plaisance from the White City. This segregation, suggestive of earlier efforts to distinguish legitimate from less reputable destinations, may have pleased reform-minded planners, but the crowds’ own decisions did not. People of every station flocked to the Midway in greater numbers than the White City. The Midway included an assortment of ethnic villages, complete with costumes, shops, dancers and racist assumptions about everything foreign, unfamiliar, and dark. The main attraction and visual centerpiece of the Midway, however, was a single amusement ride—the world’s first Ferris Wheel. Arguably, the Ferris Wheel’s affirmation of Americans’ scientific and technological superiority fit nicely with the villages’ affirmation of Americans’ racial or ethnic superiority. But that is not how most visitors thought of it. Men, women, and children of all ages and backgrounds rode the Ferris wheel because it was new, exciting, and above all fun.¹³

Following the success of the World’s Fair, developers such as Paul Boynton, George Tilyou, and Frederic Thompson transformed Coney Island, already a popular

¹³ Judith A. Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), Chs. 1, 2.

destination, into a series of amusement parks, beginning with Sea Lion Park and Steeplechase Park in 1896 and 1897 respectively. Steeplechase was reinvented as Luna Park in 1903, and a third park, Dreamland, opened in 1904. The popularity of Coney Island during the “golden age” of the 1900s is hard to overstate. By 1900, the island was drawing up to half a million day trippers on Saturday afternoons and Sundays as well as holidays. Before the end of the decade, twenty million people visited the island in a single season, a larger percentage of the national population than drawn by Disneyland, Disney World and Epcot Center combined eighty years later, despite their year-round schedule. Of no small symbolic significance, immigrants arriving at Ellis Island reported seeing Dreamland’s Wonder Wheel before the Statue of Liberty. The Ferris Wheel, no less than the bicycle wheel, was creating a revolution.¹⁴

3. Leisure Entrepreneurs and the Generation of Public Crowds

Although there had never before been anything quite like Times Square at night or Coney Island on a summer afternoon, these large-scale commercial amusements are largely accounted for by a speeding up of processes that had already been underway for decades, including shorter hours and higher wages. Although generalizations about hours are “treacherous abstractions that disguise enormous differences between regions and industries,” the average worker’s hours decreased

¹⁴ John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978); Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*, Ch. 5; Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, Ch. 7; Adams, *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills*, Ch. 3. See also *Coney Island: A Documentary Film*, directed by Ric Burns and Buddy Squires (Santa Monica: 1991); *Great Old Amusement Parks*, directed by Rick Sebak (Pittsburgh: WQED, 1999).

from about 66 hours per week in 1850 to just under 60 hours at the turn of the century. Hours then fell faster still to under 50 in 1920, and eventually to less than 35 during the Great Depression.¹⁵ A worker entering the workforce shortly before the turn of the century thus saw his weekly hours decrease from about 60 to 40 in a quarter of a century—by approximately age 40—constituting not only an unprecedented decrease in working hours, but also an extraordinary increase in discretionary time. Increases in productivity were such that shorter hours often went hand in hand with higher wages. Although many workers still did not have enough money for regular outings to dance halls or excursions to Coney Island, the number of persons entering clerical, sales, and other lower level white collar jobs was increasing. So too was the percentage of income spent on discretionary, non-household products and services.¹⁶ For more and more city dwellers, the constraints that time and money placed on the pursuit of leisure were decreasing.

Shorter hours and higher wages, however, did not build theaters and amusement parks. Leisure entrepreneurs and entertainment impresarios were the primary agents of change in this process of commercialization. In contrast to the managers of publicly owned parks, museums, and libraries, entrepreneurs had a vested interest in generating the largest audiences possible. In order to generate the crowds they desired, entrepreneurs in one industry after another followed Barnum by making their attractions both affordable and respectable. The first half of this formula—the “entertainment discount revolution”—was made possible in part by changes in scale,

¹⁵ Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920*, 106; Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 1.

¹⁶ “From 1875 to 1918, working-class families increased the proportion of their income spent on items other than food, clothing, and shelter from under 10 percent to about 25 percent.” Richard Butsch, “Introduction: Leisure and Hegemony in America,” In *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 14.

technology, and financing. At the same time that F.W. Woolworth was popularizing the five-and-dime retail store, vaudeville impresarios created ten-twenty-thirty theaters. Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward Albee opened Union Square Theatre in New York, charging as little as ten cents for admission, and Frederick Thompson charged just twenty-five cents apiece for each of the 5000 seats at the Hippodrome Theatre. Amusement parks and venues for spectator sports employed the same logic of privileging volume over per unit margin. The first Ferris Wheel, for example, was an engineering marvel that stood 264 feet high and carried an astounding 2,160 persons. At fifty cents per ride, it was also highly profitable. Thompson, who got his start in the amusement industry at the 1901 World's Fair in Buffalo, later developed Luna Park at Coney Island, where admission was just ten cents.¹⁷

As entrepreneurs began applying the lessons of industrialism and management to leisure services, generating economies of scale through the construction of larger venues and the centralization of manufacturing, their innovation often led to the formation of larger companies and oligopolies, sometimes displacing small-time entrepreneurs and locally held stock companies in the process. Some impresarios, such as F.F. Proctor, and Keith and Albee, started stock companies in their own name. Mitchell Mark, who moved to New York to start a penny arcade, raised capital from financiers to open the larger Zukor and Kohn's Automatic One Cent Vaudeville Emporium. An early investor in that venture, Marcus Loew, found the business so profitable that he opened his own arcade.¹⁸ Arguably, these developments in scale, technology, and the centralization of capital constituted not merely to a further development in the commercialization of leisure, but to the emergence of a

¹⁷ Michael G. Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 32.

¹⁸ Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, 37, 155-157.

qualitatively new industrialization of leisure. To take an example from manufacturing, companies like Spalding and Rawlings automated the previously labor-intensive process of winding layers of yarn around the rubber core of baseballs, published guidebooks to standardize rules and equipment, and sought to increase their market share through aggressive advertising in national magazines. In a similar manner, locally owned saloons and theaters were acquired by larger, often national, breweries and entertainment companies, a process that would accelerate with vertically integrated entertainment conglomerates in the 1920s. Economic factors thus contributed to the development of commercial culture not only on the demand side but also the supply side. In some cases, such as the creation of copyright laws in the late nineteenth century, government policy further facilitated the shift from local, live entertainment to national, technology-intensive entertainment, by making the latter more profitable.¹⁹

The second half of the formula for success—respectability—was no less important. Having made commercial entertainment affordable to increasing numbers of clerical workers and laborers, entrepreneurs also aspired to draw members of the middle class to their venues. Because attracting the middle class required maintaining certain standards of decorum and respectability, variety shows thus gave way to vaudeville, penny arcades to working-class family Nickelodeons and eventually middle-class movie palaces.²⁰ Similarly, when dance halls and amusement parks were cleansed of their rowdier elements and self-consciously crafted as respectable venues, middle class men and women were happy to appropriate and participate in the

¹⁹ Butsch, "Introduction: Leisure and Hegemony in America," 3-27.

²⁰ Kathy Peiss, "Commercial Leisure and the 'Woman Question,'" In *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 105-117; Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, Chs. 3, 12.

amusements and physical culture previously more popular among the working class. The mixing of classes in theatres and ballparks was thus not merely or even primarily a democratization of the pursuit of happiness attributable to higher wages among those who previously could not go out, but was equally attributable to the inclusion of the middle class who previously would not go out. In contrast to the social hierarchy and segmentation that characterized public leisure during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the trend at the turn of the century was towards greater integration. This decrease of social distance between the classes entailed movement in two directions—workers emulated the middle class by dressing up and “putting on style,” while the middle class experimented with “expressive leisure.”²¹

Generating large audiences required that the audiences be mixed not only with respect to class but also to gender. Luring female customers to places of public amusement, however, meant overcoming significant obstacles. Not only working class women, but also many middle class women were economically dependent on men. Entrepreneurs thus labored to create spaces suitable to women and men alike; despite the explosion of new commercial leisure spaces, none were designed exclusively for women. Perhaps the larger obstacle for enticing women out of the home was cultural. In part because most places of commercial leisure were to date dominated by men and male culture—including drinking, gambling, and prostitution—Victorian morality restricted both middle class and working class women’s leisure largely to a combination of home-based and other non-commercial forms of leisure, such as outings to parks or involvement in church and voluntary associations.²² Although some businesses attempted to commercialize domestic

²¹ Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in New York City, 1880 to 1920*, Ch. 3.

²² Exceptions, as previously noted, included the legitimate theater for the working class, and Barnum’s museum for both middle and working class women. For the

leisure through products such as player pianos, the profitable path clearly lay in generating large crowds for public entertainments. Up against nothing less than the longstanding association of home with female respectability, some venues serving primarily middle class men and women, such as cabarets, dealt with concerns regarding propriety and promiscuity by admitting only couples. More commonly, in places of popular entertainment, entrepreneurs sought to make their facilities safe for women by domesticating male behavior and cleansing them of the wrong kind of women.

One notable example of this process of legitimation of working class leisure was the transformation of variety shows into vaudeville—a transformation of both form and content. Many variety shows had their beginnings in concert saloons, where the business was more in the drinking and backroom prostitution than in the show. As the shows themselves became more profitable, attracting a more diverse and respectable crowd required cleaning up not only the language and double entendres on stage, but also the environment. Vaudeville and other theater owners employed several strategies for managing their audiences, including admission gates, ushers, and darkening the hall. Drinking was limited to intermission and prostitutes were banned. Opulent architecture and plush seats provided additional reassurance that the theater was a place of refinement. Similar strategies characterized the evolution of Nickelodeons from penny arcades, and even the Coney Island amusement parks from the island's other entertainments. Not coincidentally, New York's vaudeville theaters were located close to department stores—both were “palaces of consumption” catering

working class, beer gardens were reasonably respectable relative to most other options.

to women. Public amusements were thus cleansed of prostitution precisely when the majority of women suddenly became valued as consumers.²³

To a significant degree, then, the formula of affordability with respectability worked. More specifically, the decoupling of class and respectability made commercial leisure a force for mixing and integration. To be sure, there were still places of male-only entertainments, and even baseball parks never successfully attracted large numbers of women. Nevertheless, not only women but also children were accommodated at amusement parks and vaudeville theaters, thereby creating new public crowds that were diverse with respect to age, class, and gender. Such spaces were also diverse with respect to the large number of immigrants from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. Although many stage presentations depicted immigrants in highly stereotyped roles, immigrants were welcome at the door so long as they dressed well, behaved properly, and could pay their way. As many historians have emphasized, this mixing of classes and genders at theaters, dance halls, and amusement parks constituted nothing less than a new, shared public culture.²⁴

²³ Ibid.; Peiss, "Commercial Leisure and the 'Woman Question'," 112; Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*, Ch. 3. See also Bruce A. McConachie, "Pacifying American Theatrical Audiences, 1820-1900," In *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 47-70.

²⁴ Many historians refer to these developments as the emergence of *mass leisure* or *mass culture*. But as Michael Kammen argues, nearly all turn of the century amusements are better understood as "popular culture." The distinction is more than a matter of mere semantics or even scale, though it is partly a matter of scale ("thousands of people at an amusement park as opposed to many tens of millions worldwide watching the Super Bowl") and partly a matter of technology ("it's the difference between games of skill at the state fair and video games, or between 'scoping' the boardwalk at Coney Island or Atlantic City and surfing the web at home"). To Kammen, mass culture requires mass media. He thus takes the half-century beginning in 1885 as the heyday of commercial popular culture, and the advent of newspaper and radio syndication near 1930 as the beginning of the overlap of the prime of popular culture and what he calls "proto-mass culture." Mass culture as we know it—"nonregional, highly standardized, and completely commercial," as

4. *Sunday Amusements a Direct Threat to Sabbatarianism*

Responses to the commercial amusement revolution ranged widely. At opposite ends of the spectrum, leisure entrepreneurs championed new amusements and Sabbatarians denounced them. Given the sparring of these groups over Sunday laws, the conventional wisdom regarding recreation and religion at this time is that entrepreneurs radically increased recreational choices, conservative clergy remained opposed to most forms of recreation, and liberal Protestants changed with the times,

exemplified by television, fast-food chains, shopping centers, and computerized bulk mailing lists—does not arrive until the late 1950s. Qualitatively, Kammen defines the distinction as follows: “I regard popular culture—*not always but more often than not*—as participatory and interactive, whereas mass culture (until the 1980s, when computers caused significant changes that have yet to be fully charted), *more often than not* induced passivity and the privatization of culture.” Popular culture is exertive and experiential; mass culture is receptive and informational. Despite this terminological clarification, and his suggestion that the extent of the integration of classes during the period of commercialized popular culture is often overstated, Kammen nevertheless agrees with the general observation about a new, shared public culture emerging in the 1890s: “Very clearly, new forms of popular culture flourished during the half century following 1890 because technology and entrepreneurial innovations made them so much more affordable than they had ever been. Consequently, popular culture also became more socially inclusive, though the basis for that inclusiveness is not entirely clear.” Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century*, 22, 36.

The term *mass culture* often implies notions of hegemony, complete control over the processes of cultural production, and the inability of the crowd or audience to respond to the cultural product or service. This is overstated even in the case of radio and television broadcasts, where audiences still have the opportunity to make what they will of the broadcasts they consume; moreover, many artifacts of mass culture are never profitable because they fail to become popular. In the case of theater, dance halls, ballparks, or amusement parks, where live audiences gather together at the same time and place, the suggestion of passivity on the part of the crowd is all the more inappropriate. Lawrence W. Levine, “The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and its Audiences,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December, 1992), 1369-1399. This article may also be found in Lawrence W. Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

taking the side of workers and accommodating themselves to new developments in the arena of leisure. All of these generalizations need refinement.

To be sure, the rapid spread of commercialized recreation and leisure was bad news for Sabbatarians. The leisure revolution challenged Sabbatarian reform interests in several ways, most obviously by posing a direct threat to the older ideal of a quiet Sabbath, characterized by public worship followed by quiet rest at home.

Sabbatarians worried, and not without reason, that increased opportunities for Sunday amusement and recreation would translate into decreased attendance at Sunday worship. Likewise, Saturday evening entertainments displaced Sabbath preparation. In addition to competing for precious discretionary time, many forms of active recreation and public amusement were boisterous and drew crowds, which, Sabbatarians alleged, disrupted the public decorum necessary for others to keep the Sabbath properly. "Surely we are near to destruction," one clergyman fumed at a meeting to organize opposition to the relaxation of Sunday closing laws.

The shouts of the Sunday newsboys, the clatter of the Sunday saloons, the ribaldry of the Sunday theatres are come upon us. Soon Delilah will be here and will shear our locks. We are told that for the working classes we should open Sunday museums, Sunday theatres, and run Sunday excursions into the county. It is the voice of Esau. If we have Sunday theatres, why not Sunday dry goods stores? It is Sunday amusements which are cutting the throat of the day of rest.²⁵

To make matters worse, Sunday recreation did not even make an appeal to the exceptions of necessity or charity. When Sabbatarians lost their battle against Sunday mails, as with setbacks suffered in the campaigns against Sunday labor, travel, and newspapers, they lost on their own terms—i.e., in the name of necessity or charity, exceptions that Sabbatarians themselves allowed in principle. Sunday amusements, however, were different. To be sure, some framed the need for Sunday amusement

²⁵ "Sabbath Champions Rap New Sunday Law," *New York Times*, January 9, 1908.

and recreation as necessity. Rev. Julius H. Ward, for example, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly*, claimed that “The running of horse-cars on Sunday has come to be a public necessity in the great cities; the Sunday excursions into the suburbs are almost a necessity to the working-classes; people cannot stand up to their daily burdens without these recreations.”²⁶ Still, such language was a meager concession to Sabbatarian strictures, and in any case was limited to those with elite sensibilities. Generally speaking, workers did not justify their interest in Sunday amusement in the name health or fitness much less psychological necessity. They wanted to watch baseball or go to the arcade because it was fun.

Active Sunday recreation was especially problematic, not because active recreation was intrinsically immoral, but because exertion was inconsistent with the ideal of Sabbath rest. Previous leisure-related controversies had surrounded Sunday lectures, sacred concerts, and the opening of libraries and museums. Liberal and conservative ministers had disagreed on the propriety of such activities on Sunday, but even the more liberal clergy who supported educational activities and the opening of world’s fairs on Sundays had little place for active recreation such as cycling.²⁷

Of all forms of Sunday recreation, however, commercial amusements were the most odious to Sabbatarians. When one person’s amusement resulted in another’s labor, the result was doubly distasteful, not to mention concerns regarding the greed that motivated such services. To Wilbur Crafts, for example, commercialized amusements were worse even than bicycling. Although he personally opposed cycling on Sunday, so long as the cyclist “makes no man work, and disturbs no man’s peace, the law has nothing to say. But when amusements require Sunday work, or involve Sunday trade, or actually disturb the peace of the general rest-day, or use its leisure so

²⁶ Julius H. Ward, "The New Sunday," *The Atlantic Monthly*, April, 1881, 532.

²⁷ McCrossen, *Holy Day, Holiday: The American Sunday*, 90.

as to injure public morality, then, and then only, the law steps in.”²⁸

Sabbatarians and leisure entrepreneurs thus faced off with each other. Sabbatarians advocated for strict enforcement of Sunday laws, and entrepreneurs—especially the owners of theaters, dance halls, and baseball teams—brought test cases of Sunday laws to the courts through intentional violations. Sabbatarians and entrepreneurs also vied for the allegiance of workers. Entrepreneurs argued that they were the ones providing workers with the amusements they desired, while clergy argued that the effect of opening commercial amusements on Sunday would be longer, not shorter, hours at work.

5. Opposition to Commercial Amusements Widespread

Although the history of Sunday closing of theaters, baseball games, and other commercial amusements is well known, a narrow focus on legislative history too often results in dismissing Sunday laws as nothing more than anachronistic holdovers of an earlier era that reflected only the values and interests of a small number of conservative religious moralists or rural, upstate Republicans. Such accounts underestimate the extent to which Sabbatarianism proved adaptable to Progressive Era reform, and consequently how widespread was the opposition to commercial amusement on Sunday.

First, we should note that even the strict Sabbatarians’ quarrel was never with recreation *per se*. When Crafts was invited to give an address entitled “What Are Innocent Sunday Recreations?” he began by distinguishing between amusements and recreations: “Those who assigned me this topic made a profound distinction in

²⁸ Wilbur F. Crafts, "What are Innocent Sunday Recreations?" In *Sunday Rest in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Alexander Jackson (Cleveland: International Federation of Sunday Rest, 1905), 119.

speaking of ‘Sunday recreations,’ rather than Sunday amusements. There are no ‘innocent amusements’—except for children.” Crafts, like the Puritans before him, was laboring to maintain a certain taxonomy of leisure pursuits, distinguishing between rest and recreation, and between lawful and unlawful recreation. In his words, he distinguished between true recreation and “amusements that do not recreate, but dissipate.” True recreation, by contrast, is “not only our privilege, but our duty.”²⁹ It is a privilege and duty, however, that belongs to secular days of the week, most obviously Saturday afternoon, and not to be confused with rest, for which Sunday is reserved. The conflict over commercial amusements at the turn of the twentieth century cannot be understood apart from these distinctions. Indeed, from the 1840s on, virtually all of the tracts on the topic, both for and against, bore titles such as “Christianity and Amusements,” not “Christianity and Recreation.” Nevertheless, no matter how much conservative clergy and lay leaders such as Crafts desired to affirm recreation in principle, they struggled to do so in the context of a six-day workweek.

Perhaps more importantly, liberal Protestants largely shared conservatives’ aversion to commercialized amusement and recreation on Sunday. To be sure, liberals associated with the Social Gospel movement were more affirming toward amusement in general and even non-commercialized forms of Sunday recreation. “I am in favor of young men playing baseball on Sunday for their own amusement,” stated W.B. Rainsford. “I tell them to come to morning service, then go out on their bicycles. Or go out and play baseball or golf or some form of beautiful sport. Such sports improve the body and make those who participate all the better for it.”³⁰ Liberal Protestants thus affirmed the goodness and usefulness of amusement, as well as Sunday sport and recreation “after services”—a position not unlike that articulated by James I in the

²⁹ Ibid., 115, 116.

³⁰ Steven A. Riess, *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture*, Revised ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 140.

Book of Sports.

Still, historical accounts that seem to agree with the Jewish publication that described the enforcement of Sunday laws as constituting “a spasm of municipal Calvinism”³¹ fail to see several contextual factors, most notably the broad support for such laws. When it came to the matter of commercialized amusements, there was little difference between the conservative Crafts and early proponents of what came to be known as the Social Gospel such as Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong. Gladden was a liberal Congregational pastor influenced by Horace Bushnell and the German theologian Albrecht Ritschl. Like the Unitarians a generation before him, Gladden believed that amusements should be publicly managed. While it “may be wise to allow the material interests of men to adjust themselves according to [the law of supply and demand],” he wrote, “amusement is not one of the material interests of men. Man’s need of amusement is one of the needs of his higher nature—his spirit, as well as of his body; his use of amusement affects his mind and his character directly and powerfully.” Like education, amusement “is one of the great interests of human life which Christianity must claim and control.” He spoke of the “kingdom of amusement” as “one of the kingdoms of the world which, according to the prophecy, are to ‘become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ.’” His model of excellence in this regard was the Cleveland Educational Bureau, a public entity “devoted to educational and religious purposes” such as debates, lectures, orchestral concerts, dramatic readings, and the distribution of “useful literature.”³²

Josiah Strong held similar views. Like Gladden, Strong was influenced by

³¹ Batya Miller, "Enforcement of the Sunday Closing Laws on the Lower East Side, 1882-1903," *American Jewish History* 91, no. 2 (June, 2003), 271.

³² Washington Gladden, "Christianity and Popular Amusements," In *Applied Christianity: Moral Aspects of Social Questions* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1887), 265, 269, 270.

Bushnell and was in turn an influence on the later thought of Walter Rauschenbusch. In words that Crafts was happy to quote, and which in fact could have been his own, Strong opposed Sunday amusements and recreations in the strongest terms:

The Continental Sabbath can hardly be called a rest day. The time not devoted to business is, by the multitude, given up to amusements. But many amusements can no more take the place of Sabbath rest than of night rest. Reaction may be afforded by a change of activities, but the intense living, the headlong rush of this generation stands in peculiar need of repose, the rest that comes only from quiet. As a matter of fact, a holiday Sabbath is commonly followed by a jaded Monday. Among the lower class of operatives in France, Germany, and even in England, the effects of Sabbath dissipation very commonly make Monday an idle day. European manufacturers say that American workmen earn more than European by being able to do more work Mondays. Among us, wherever the Continental Sabbath has prevailed, Monday is the poorest workday in the week, showing that Sunday amusements have served to exhaust rather than recuperate.³³

Elsewhere Strong defended Sunday prohibition of Sunday amusements against a hypothetical interlocutor invoking freedom of conscience on communitarian grounds: it is the “duty of the state to guard the leisure of the day from uses dangerous to public morals.” This is the same ground, he added, on which rests compulsory education and the common school system.³⁴

Liberal Protestants, no less than conservatives, also opposed commercial amusements on Sunday because they entailed Sunday labor. Bishop William T. Manning, an outspoken proponent of sports who went so far as to initiate a sports bay in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, remained opposed to commercialized Sunday recreation in 1926. Although “wholesome recreation and pleasure have their right place” on Sunday, “With regard to commercialized forms of sport and amusement on Sunday the case is different; the objection to these is that they cause a large number of

³³ Quoted in Wilbur F. Crafts, "What is an American Sunday?" In *Familiar Talks on the Boy and Girl of Yours* (New York: Baker and Taylor Company, 1922), 384.

³⁴ Josiah Strong, "The Civil Sabbath," In *Sunday the World's Rest Day*, ed. Duncan J. McMillan (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1916), 497.

people to work on Sunday instead of letting the day be as it should be, as far as possible a day of rest and freedom for all. We ought not to make other people work on Sunday for our amusement.”³⁵

The labor rationale appealed not only to Protestants, but also to some number of Catholics and Jews. At the International Congress on Sunday Rest convened in Chicago at the same time as the World’s Fair in 1893, speakers included not only the usual Sabbatarian suspects, but also Catholics such as Cardinal Gibbons and Archbishop Ireland, and Rabbi Felsenthal as a representatives of the Jewish tradition. Samuel Gompers, the Jewish president of the AFL was not able to attend, but wrote, “I am in entire accord with the purposes of the congress.” The New York Sabbath Committee and Lord’s Day alliance similarly collaborated with a number of labor organizations to host a Day of Rest Conference in New York in 1910.³⁶ Opposition to Sunday labor thus appealed not only to Republicans but also to some number of Democrats; both Theodore Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan were Sabbatarians of sorts.

All of this is to say nothing of those who at times supported Sunday law enforcement not out of principle but out of vested political or commercial interests. In the 1880s and early 1890s, entrepreneurs took advantage of the fact that Sunday laws were enforced only sporadically, opening theaters, dance halls, and other places of entertainment. From 1895 to 1897, however, New York Sabbatarians had a friend in Republican Mayor William Strong, along with his appointed police commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt. Especially at first, Roosevelt vigorously enforced Sunday laws, a task that became more complicated in 1896 with passage of the Raines Law, which prohibited the serving of liquor on Sunday except in hotels. Roosevelt’s enforcement

³⁵ "Manning Rules Out a Puritan Sunday," *New York Times*, February 26, 1926.

³⁶ "Labor Joins Clergy in Sunday Fight."

and the administration's emphasis on reform alienated the growing Jewish population, thereby contributing to the election of Tammany candidate Robert Van Wyck in 1897. Under Van Wyck, arrests decreased and enforcement of Sunday laws generally was relaxed, but this was due not so much to principle as to corruption in the police force that preferred extortion to enforcement. Three years later, Jews, tired of Tammany's practices, largely supported and helped elect Republican Seth Low. Low, in debt to the Jewish vote, ordered the police force to relax enforcement of some Sunday laws, which resulted in a huge Sunday fair on the Lower East Side, thereby alienating Sabbatarians. "What a spectacle for a great Christian civilized city with a reform Mayor and administration," opined the Christian Endeavor Society. "Think of it, o ye gods! Men who professed that they were going into office to enforce laws and punish lawbreakers actually permitting and encouraging the wholesale and disgraceful violation of law."³⁷ To make matters more complicated still, the police force, still controlled by Tammany, began strictly enforcing Sunday laws as a means of embittering Jews to Low's administration. As the complicated politics of the day would have it, Democrats on the police force were enforcing laws they didn't believe in while the Republican mayor was in the awkward position of apologizing that the enforcement of laws he did believe in was actually a function of police corruption! And the strictest enforcement of Sunday closing of theaters was yet to come in 1907 under Mayor McLellan—a Democrat.³⁸

Legislative histories are correct to note that attitudes toward Sunday

³⁷ "The East Side Sunday Fair," *New York Times*, April 29, 1902.

³⁸ Miller, "Enforcement of the Sunday Closing Laws," 269-286. There are many newspaper articles pertaining to the Sunday closing of theaters in New York in 1907 and 1908, especially December 1907. Sunday closing was flaring up in many distant locations as well, including Cleveland, Kalamazoo, and Kansas City; Canada, England, and France. "New York True 'Blue'," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 1907; "Sunday Laws," *New York Times*, March 24, 1907.

amusement and recreation changed before the laws did. Indeed, as Sabbatarians noted in their many laments, Sabbath desecration was not limited to the “enemies of religion.” Average churchgoers themselves were taking a more liberal attitude to Sabbath observance—playing in the afternoons, and skipping services during summer vacations. In that sense, such laws were an anachronism. And yet, Sunday restrictions persisted precisely in the most modernizing cities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. During the quarter century beginning in 1890, Sabbatarians continued to win judicial battles, as the courts consistently found Sunday laws constitutional. Overturning these laws legislatively also proved surprisingly difficult—bills to legalize baseball and other sports on Sunday, for example, introduced in the New York State legislature annually beginning in 1897, rarely got out of committee. As elected representatives understood, concern regarding the transformation of Sunday into a day of commercial amusement in America’s modernizing cities was widespread.

Attitudes toward Sunday recreation and Sunday closing laws were thus complex. In between strict Sabbatarians and entertainment entrepreneurs, many people held mediating views and saw no contradiction, for example, between supporting amateur baseball and opposing professional baseball on Sunday. In fact, nobody benefited from the prohibition of professional baseball on Sunday more than semi-professional managers and players. In a similar manner, saloons benefited from the shutting down of theaters, and “Raines Laws hotels”—thinly disguised places of prostitution—benefited from the shutting down of saloons. Sabbatarians thus had some strange bedfellows in their advocacy of certain Sunday closing laws. For their part, workers were not all of one mind on the matter of commercialized Sunday amusement. On the one hand, they recognized that Sunday laws had been helpful in securing shorter hours, and clergymen were standing up to the interests of capital. On

the other hand, most workers didn't care which day they had off and, generally speaking, they wanted the amusements that entrepreneurs were providing. In the end, Sunday laws and their enforcement had little to do with Calvinism; at the turn of the twentieth century, as at the turn of the seventeenth, many people had reasons for opposing Sunday recreation that had little to do with religion. Nevertheless, no matter how broad the consensus that amateur recreation should be accommodated or that commercial recreation should not, the contest between Sabbatarians and leisure entrepreneurs further exacerbated the relationship between recreation and religion.

Regarding the relationship of recreation and religion more generally, perhaps the persistence and eventual decline of Sunday laws is not the most important part of the story. Such laws were always an external form—an aid to worship, and a symbol of Christian civilization. As Sabbatarians rightly recognized, at risk was not only the letter but also the spirit of the law. Take, for example, Madison Square Garden's annual six-day bicycle race. When in 1907 Sunday laws were being enforced, the race started at 1:00 AM Monday instead of midnight Sunday, and ended the following Saturday at 11:00 PM.³⁹ Needless to say, such examples of following the letter of the law on the narrowest possible terms suggested that conformity to Sunday laws was itself a game of sorts. After all, the 11:00 PM finish did not exactly leave much time to prepare for the Sabbath. Despite widespread ambivalence about seeing Sunday transformed into a day of commercialized amusement, the larger problem for Sabbatarians was that churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike were also fascinated and drawn to those same amusements. At stake then was not only the letter of the Sunday laws, but all that those laws symbolized.

³⁹ "Start of Long Grind." *The Washington Post*, December 9, 1907.

6. Commercial Recreation an Indirect Threat to Reform Interests

Sabbatarians worried not only about Sabbath desecration, but also about the commercial leisure revolution more generally. Although Sabbatarians were equally opposed to Sunday labor and Sunday pleasure-seeking, pleasure-seeking posed a more fundamental challenge. Ideally, Sabbath rest supplemented and thereby reinforced the work ethic. Affirmations of sport and recreation, including advocacy of the Saturday half-holiday, were usually instrumental in nature; physical activity served to build strength, character, or at least as an outlet of excess energy. Understood as such, recreation was also a supplement to the work ethic. The leisure revolution, however, especially in the form of commercial amusements, made play and the pursuit of pleasure an end in and of themselves.

The Victorian code of duty, self-constraint, and exercise of the will, is best understood as a form of anti-modernism; it was an effort to resist the tendencies and implications of industrial capitalism and its material culture, including the pursuit of pleasure. As the factors that had constrained leisure in the nineteenth century—time, money, and space—tumbled, so too did the constraint that ideology had placed on leisure. Although historians are not entirely agreed on the timing or exact nature of the transition, there is a consensus of sorts that the decades around the turn of the twentieth century entailed a transformation of sensibilities. The transition is alternately described as a transition from providence to progress, production to consumption, character to personality, nature to experience, self-denial to self-fulfillment, and ego to id. As Sabbatarians themselves sometimes seemed to realize, the transformation of sensibilities was itself in part a function of changes in material culture. As Daniel Rodgers put it, “The shift in values went beyond mere matters of

bicycles and baseball games.”⁴⁰ Indeed, the revolution created by the bicycle wheel and the Ferris Wheel threatened not only quiet Sunday Sabbaths, but also the whole Victorian code that the Sabbath symbolized.

As John Higham has argued, the leisure revolution was part of a larger “reorientation of American culture in the 1890s” that was a reaction against the social and cultural constraints of everyday life during the Victorian era:

From the middle of the nineteenth century until about 1890 Americans on the whole had submitted docilely enough to the gathering restrictions of a highly industrialized society. They learned to live in cities, to sit in rooms cluttered with bric-a-brac, to limit the size of their families, to accept the authority of professional elites, to mask their aggressions behind a thickening facade of respectability, and to comfort themselves with a faith in automatic material progress. Above all, Americans learned to conform to the discipline of machinery. The time clock, introduced to offices and factories in the early 1890s, signaled an advanced stage in the mechanization of life.⁴¹

The emphasis on virility and muscularity in everything from outdoor recreation and competitive athletics to music, literature, and even politics, Higham suggests, was a reaction to the more domestic and feminine ethos of the Victorian era. The changes in college athletics of the 1890s followed shortly on the heels of the transformation of higher education toward the ideal of the modern, research university. A taste for speed and violence along with a love of all things outdoors represented a “gospel of health through rugged exercise” and an “enthusiasm for the tonic freshness and openness of nature.”⁴² Ragtime music, along with the cakewalk, was embraced as a rhythmically robust alternative to the more staid tradition of European music. To those with a sense of the devitalization of modern life, westerns and wilderness adventures such as those of Jack London offered a revitalizing alternative. In politics, a new nationalism, symbolized by the pledge of allegiance created in 1892, constituted

⁴⁰ Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920*, 95.

⁴¹ Higham, "The Reorientation of American Culture in the 1890s," 79.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 80.

the unifying of national energy and enthusiasm relative to foreign nations, thereby displacing the lack of national confidence that followed the Civil War. This new sensibility of activity and masculinity, defined in contrast to the refinement, conformity, and artificiality of an earlier era, found its chief spokesperson and representative in Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt, who gave his famous address entitled “the Strenuous Life” in 1899, “was the outstanding fugleman of the whole gladiatorial spirit. He loved the great outdoors, the challenge of sports, the zest of political combat, the danger of war. He exhorted women to greater fecundity. He brought boxing into the White House and contributed immensely to its respectability.”⁴³

Lewis Erenberg, in his study of New York cabarets and nightlife, suggests that liberation from Victorian constraint was also the symbolic message of Harry Houdini’s vaudeville acts. “Houdini fashioned an act that ritualized the theme of individual masculine escape or self-liberation from all manner of tight or confining spots.” In Erenberg’s view, popular nightclub acts such as Houdini’s enacted new, emerging, post-Victorian attitudes and sensibilities. Houdini “gloried in his muscles and his loincloth, presenting a picture of natural man overcoming restrictions and conventions of society, the corporate world, authority, and gentility.”⁴⁴

The rebellion against the Victorian era’s emphasis on the “gospel of work” entailed not only the “gospel of play” but also the “gospel of relaxation.”⁴⁵ Building on Higham’s thesis, Daniel Rodgers has argued that S. Weir Mitchell’s “rest cure,”

⁴³ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁴ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930*, 68.

⁴⁵ William James, “The Gospel of Relaxation,” *Scribner's* 25 (April, 1899). Although commonly attributed to James, the term was used several years earlier in Herbert Spencer, “The Gospel of Recreation,” *The Popular Science Monthly* 22 (January, 1883), 354-359.

Elwood Worcester's Emmanuel Clinic, and the advice of several authors to seek spiritual contentment in repose and receptivity "are important clues that there were more uses to the new leisure time than strenuous recreation." Whereas advocates of active recreation "had challenged the preeminence of the will and the old ascetic legacies of Protestantism in the name of the free flow of instinct . . . advocates of rest quietly abandoned not only the doctrine of effort but the bedrock assumption of scarcity."⁴⁶ The assumption of scarcity was also challenged by economic theorist Simon Patten, who, in his bestselling *The New Basis of Civilization*, spoke of a transition from a pain to a "pleasure or surplus economy." Patten "announced that not only poverty but self-discipline, self-denial, obedience, chastity—all the prudential virtues of the age of scarcity—has been outmoded by the new turn of the economy."⁴⁷ In Rodgers's words, this blow to the bedrock assumption of scarcity was a blow to Sabbatarianism, for Sabbatarianism "symbolized the injunctions to duty and self-discipline, the obligations of careful, watchful control of self and time that were at the heart of the Protestant Reformation."⁴⁸

Beginning with Philip Rieff's seminal work *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, a number of historians have sought to interpret cultural change at the turn of the century as both cause and consequence of Freudian psychology. Building on the work of Rieff, Warren Susman has argued that the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century entailed a transition from a "culture of character" to a "culture of personality"—from "*citizenship, duty, democracy, work, building, golden deeds, outdoor life, conquest, honor, reputation, morals, manners, integrity, and above all, manhood,*" to that which is "fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing,

⁴⁶ Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920*, 114.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

masterful, creative, dominant, forceful.”⁴⁹ In an article entitled “From Salvation to Self-Realization,” T.J. Jackson Lears describes change with respect to shifting notions of the self:

In the United States as elsewhere, the bourgeois ethos had enjoined perpetual work, compulsive saving, civic responsibility, and a rigid morality of self-denial. By the early twentieth century that outlook had begun to give way to a new set of values sanctioning periodic leisure, compulsive spending, apolitical passivity, and an apparently permissive (but subtly coercive) morality of individual fulfillment.

To thrive and spread, a consumer culture required more than a national apparatus of marketing and distribution; it also needed a favorable moral climate. . . [T]he crucial moral change was the beginning of a shift from a Protestant ethos of salvation through self-denial toward a therapeutic ethos stressing self-realization in this world.⁵⁰

Richard Fox adds that public amusements were a threat to conservative Christians because, in essence, they made all the world a stage; in crowds, as in theater, “acting was being.” In contrast to the older ideal of grounding selfhood in virtues such as service and sacrifice, the “performing self” is “a self that create[s] itself continuously in action, especially (given the alienating character of modern labor) in leisure action.”⁵¹ In a somewhat similar vein, Christopher Lasch has written that whereas under the conception of Providence, “moral wisdom lay in the limitation rather than in the multiplication of needs and desires. . . . The modern conception of progress

⁴⁹ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); Warren I. Susman, "'Personality' and the Twentieth Century Culture," In *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, eds. John Higham and Paul K. Conkin, (1979), 214, 217. Elsewhere, Susman writes, “One of the fundamental conflicts of Twentieth Century America is between two cultures—an older culture, often loosely labeled Puritan-republican, producer-capitalist culture, and a newly emerging culture of abundance.” Susman, *Culture as History*, xx.

⁵⁰ T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," In *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, eds. Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 1.

⁵¹ Richard Wightman Fox, "The Discipline of Amusement," In *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the World*, ed. William R. Taylor (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1991), 97.

depends on a positive assessment of the proliferation of wants.”⁵²

Building on the insights of psychology, some scholars argue that the significance of commercial amusements, especially nighttime amusements, lay in part in their dreamlike quality. “In nightlife,” Erenberg writes, “people from varied social worlds found outlet for their desires, found representations of themselves with which they could identify. In the 1910s and 1920s, they helped create a new-style public dream, one concerned with vitality rather than gentility, consumption rather than production, mutuality rather than sexual separation, personality rather than character, all contained by a degree of social selectivity.”⁵³ Although these contrasts are almost certainly overdrawn, the point remains: it is not a coincidence that amusement parks appropriated the language of Wonderland about the same time Max Weber was announcing the disenchantment of the world. In this instance, changes in material culture and broadly held social attitudes preceded cogent articulation of the concept. In other cases, ideas anticipated changes in culture. Emerson’s famous line, “Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion,” could have been the motto of Coney Island’s Dreamland. In any case, we may observe that commercial entertainments emphasized illusion and experience just as American philosophers such as William James and John Dewey were exploring experience as a new, alternative source of values. Public crowds and public philosophers, each in their respective venues, were focused on the exercise of choice and preference rather than conforming to some external meaning or purpose.

We will never understand the persistence of Sabbatarianism into the early

⁵² Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 45. On the therapeutic ethos and shifting concepts of the self, see also the works of Casey Blake, Stuart Ewen, Karen Halttunen, Daniel Horowitz, John Kasson, William Leach, Donald Meyer, and Joan Rubin.

⁵³ Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930*, xiv.

decades of the twentieth century, and the resistance to emergent forms of commercial leisure more generally, until we understand such resistance and reaction in the context of these broader cultural changes. The commercial leisure revolution posed not only a direct threat to Sunday worship and decorum, but in its emphasis on experience, the actualization of desire, and sheer fun detached from any external beacon, the revolution posed an even more fundamental challenge to the work ethic and the Victorian ethos that the Sabbath stood for. Whereas liberal Christians embraced (non-commercial) amusements as a possible and even necessary means of reform, conservative Christians worried more about the dangers inherent in the pursuit of pleasure. Thus Crafts' continuing emphasis not just on the Fourth Commandment, but also on the passage from Isaiah 58 on turning "from doing thy pleasure on My holy day." To conservatives like Crafts, the project of reforming amusements was a Faustian bargain, for amusements were selfish pleasures, and certain to re-form persons more than persons could reform them.

7. Coney Island Cakewalk

When it came to reforming recreation, liberals were optimists and conservatives pessimists. When reformers from Sawyer and Olmsted to Gladden and Addams emphasized respectability, they hoped for a 'leveling up' of popular taste. Conservatives, by contrast, feared a 'leveling down' of taste. The reality, of course, was neither one nor the other but a compromise between the two. Entrepreneurs, following the example of Barnum, gained audiences by making concessions to respectability. More often than not, however, those concessions were thin and, in any case, not exactly what the reformers had hoped for. That change consisted primarily of the middle class adopting the more expressive or exertive sensibilities of the lower

class rather than vice versa is nowhere more apparent than the remarkable film “Cakewalk at Coney Island.”⁵⁴

The kinetoscope, developed by Edison in the early 1890s, initially was used not only for the purposes of recreation and entertainment, but also for the documentation of Americans’ favorite ways of passing their leisure time. The earliest videos include men boxing, female seminarians pillow-fighting, and families sleighing in Central Park. In “Cakewalk,” a large number of men and women in bathing suits parade and dance along the water’s edge for the camera. Over a period of a few short minutes, the film illustrates many aspects of the emerging culture of leisure. Most obviously, the dance is active and outdoors at an amusement destination that has no connection or continuity with the world of work. The crowd is large and presumably consists mostly of strangers, thereby rendering its members anonymous. Men and women are dancing together, in bathing suits, the dance itself occasioning much physical contact between them. Those captured on film are also clearly performing—i.e., exuding a self-consciousness occasioned by the new technology recording their movements. Most notably, however, the film shows a white, probably mostly lower middle class audience, appropriating a dance from those lowest on the social ladder—African-Americans. This was not the turkey trot much less a formal waltz, but the improvisational dance of blackface and “darky” performers that previously had served to provide social distance between black performers and white audiences.

Needless to say, this was a far cry not only from Ocean Grove’s seabathing “sanctified by the word of God and prayer,” but also from the refined and elevating

⁵⁴ Although citations to this film short are not entirely consistent, most place it in the 1890s. Scenes from “Cakewalk” are available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sDnVIEsn_k, and in Burns and Squires, *Coney Island: A Documentary Film*.

effects hoped for by liberal Protestant amusement reformers such as Sawyer and Gladden.⁵⁵ A decade after mixed-sex dancing on stage had been regarded as racy, mixed-sex dancing in public represented the normalization of naughtiness. Ironically, those participating in the Cakewalk were able to do so precisely because the creators of the park had rendered the environment just respectable enough—there were no prostitutes, no actual nudity, and the crowd was well-behaved. Most ironically of all, there were no blacks.

Although for the participants, the Coney Island Cakewalk was merely a matter of fun, the film is nevertheless a signpost of emerging meanings associated with the new leisure. When in earlier decades white audiences laughed at lazy and playful blacks on stage, there remained a significant social distance between the crowd and the actors who rejected the Protestant work ethic. Arguably, the laughter reinforced and reassured the audience about their own work ethic. By the turn of the century, when large numbers of white men and women were cakewalking and frolicking for the camera on Coney Island, the distance from those who mock the work ethic had decreased, even if the distance between whites and blacks had not. For these among other reasons, John Kasson has described Coney Island generally as “a harbinger of modernity,” “a symbol . . . of major changes in American manners and morals,” and “a case study of the growing cultural revolt against genteel standards of taste and conduct that would swell to a climax in the 1920s.”⁵⁶ Indeed, as several scholars have suggested, the Roaring Twenties had their roots in the “Gay” or “Naughty” Nineties.

⁵⁵ Uminowicz, "Recreation in Christian America," 22, 23.

⁵⁶ Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century*, 8, 9.

8. Conclusion

Although Sabbath-keeping lost its taken-for-granted status in New York and New England as early as the 1790s, it was not until the 1890s that large numbers of Americans embraced recreation, including Sunday recreation, in the simple name of fun. Prior to the triumph of leisure entrepreneurs, religious reformers spent much of the nineteenth century inventing various responses to the crises of leisure time and space. These efforts were not without some success. Parks and private resorts provided alternatives to saloons and streets for many adults and children alike, and the campaign for the Saturday half-holiday was particularly well received. In keeping with temperance and the Victorian code of refinement and respectability more generally, these reform efforts consisted largely of recreational activities that were rationalized or instrumentalized toward a moral or religious purpose.

The bicycle wheel and the Ferris Wheel brought to a climax in the 1890s the amusement revolution that got its start in the 1840s, not only by changing the way people spent their newfound leisure time, but also by affirming the pursuit of pleasure independent of moral or religious ends. Still, the widespread embrace of commercial amusements overlapped with rather than replaced widespread anxieties about them. Although much has been made of liberal Protestants' accommodation to emerging forms of recreation and leisure, for example, they often drew the line at commercial amusements. Perhaps they self-consciously distanced themselves from Puritans lest they be mistaken as Puritans. As for Crafts and his fellow conservative Sabbatarians, whatever else they were wrong about, they were right about one thing. Emerging forms of recreation and leisure were part of a larger process of social transformation that, once sanctioned by reform efforts, would re-form the reformers.

At the turn of the twentieth century, then, Sabbatarianism was not yet an

anachronism. The movement drew energy from the anxieties about emerging ways of spending leisure time and so, like other expressions of anti-modernism, belonged very much to the modern milieu. At the same time, the seeds of the movement's destruction had been sewn. Barnum and his fellow entrepreneurs accomplished much of the task. Sabbatarians, however, were at times unwitting accomplices to the task. By advocating that recreation have its own designated times and places, Sabbatarians were also agents of the modernization of leisure. Weekends at Coney Island, disconnected in time and place from the world of work, would be unthinkable without the regularization of labor and reform of the calendar for which Sabbatarians had so energetically advocated.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION: FROM SABBATH TO WEEKEND

1. Introduction

The end of Sabbatarianism has been variously dated. One could point, for example, to the 14th Annual Lord's Day Congress in 1915, the last major event of its kind. The conference coincided with the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, and Congress's unwillingness to close the exposition on Sunday was a sign of things to come. The conference also was probably the last time anybody quoted the *Book of Sports* as if it had currency. Although M.D. Kneeland wished to distance himself from "extreme position[s] on either side" of the amusement debate, including Wilbur Crafts on the Sabbatarian side, he nevertheless defended the Puritans against Macaulay's famous claim that they hated pleasure. He also defended the Puritan perspective on the *Book of Sports*, and referred to the incident as "the low water mark in English history." Kneeland's address, entitled "Sports and Amusements," thus continued the long line of argumentation that recreation was secular, and therefore had no place on Sunday. While speaking in favor of "a rational use of secular sports, games and amusements on week-days," he opposed "their indulgence on the day set apart for rest and worship" in the strongest terms. He further cited the existence of the Saturday half-holiday as a rationale against Sunday recreation. By 1915, however, to most persons within as well as without the church, the arguments for maintaining "the distinction between Sunday and week-day sports and games" were as dated as the *Book of Sports*.¹

¹ Kneeland, *Sunday Sports and Amusements*, 331, 338, 331, 333.

The reasons for the demise of the Sabbath crusade at this time were several. The Great War, as with other wars before it, did not do the Sabbatarian cause any favors. In addition to servicemen who became accustomed to taking their recreation when they could get it, professional baseball teams justified Sunday games with patriotic ceremonies. Within months after the war, New York State passed a law legalizing Sunday baseball games and Sunday theater. Amidst these setbacks, the Lord's Day Alliance became more strident and aggressive in pushing blue laws at all levels. Combined with Prohibition, passed in 1919, reform efforts provoked a backlash. Despite the hope it occasioned among reformers, Prohibition became possible not primarily because the cause had increasing support, but because southern states were letting go of their long-held aversion to federal legislation.² The Scopes trial of 1925, while not directly related to the Sabbatarian cause, furthered the rift between fundamentalist and more liberal churches, making collaboration on social causes more difficult. In a 1926 survey of pastors on the question "Should Christians Play on Sunday?" the answers followed party lines, with fundamentalists answering "no," and others answering "yes."³ Gains made by organized labor for shorter hours also rendered Sunday legislation less important. Simply put, by the 1920s, Sabbatarianism had less appeal, especially to workers and progressives. The backlash against moral reform efforts included publication of *Ye Olden Blue Laws* and *Anti-Blue Law Magazine* in 1921, and Mencken's famous quip about Puritans in 1925.

Other factors contributed to the demise of the Sabbatarian legislative crusade as well.⁴ Setbacks occasioned internal division, as the Lord's Day Alliance of New

² Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

³ "Should Christians Play on Sunday?" *The Literary Digest* 88, no. 5 (January 30, 1926), 27-28, 57-59.

⁴ Chamlee, *The Sabbath Crusade: 1810-1920*.

York withdrew from the national organization, and recommended the removal of General Secretary Bowlby. During the Depression, funds dried up, and the New York Sabbath Committee folded. Above all, however, the very sensibility of the Sabbatarian movement—duty, modesty, and restraint—was out of touch with the times. The Roaring Twenties were in many ways a flowering of the transformation of sensibilities that began in the 1890s. The problem was not merely enemies of the Sabbath outside the church, but the “gospel of consumption” that was ubiquitous, even within the church.⁵

Of course, Sabbath advocacy was never limited to the legislative crusade or even to voluntary associations, and the Sabbath question remained a live question in churches and the lives of many believers. From 1915 to 1940, approximately the years between the World Wars, Christians of all kinds continued to ponder what was and was not appropriate on Sunday, and those opinions and decisions often had very public consequences. In the 1920s and 1930s, however, Sabbatarianism faced one final threat: the weekend. That the five-day week contributed to the demise of Sabbath-keeping is of course a great irony, given Sabbatarians’ advocacy for the Saturday half-holiday. That the five-day week posed a threat to traditional notions of Sabbath keeping nevertheless is evidenced by the fact that Sabbatarians welcomed with great ambivalence the very increase of leisure time for which they had advocated.

2. The Five-Day Week

Although in 1917 only 11 companies are known to have adopted the five-day week, a decade later that number rose to 262—still a small number, but nevertheless

⁵ Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work*, Ch. 2.

the beginning of a trend. The majority of these firms were in the New York City area garment industry. That was not a coincidence. The Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America had resolved to pursue the five-day week in 1920. Moreover, in New York City, where many unions called strikes from 1920 through 1927, one in three residents was Jewish. Not only was religion a primary motive among union members, but the first known instance of a company voluntarily adopting the five-day week, in 1908, was a New England spinning mill in which majorities of both management and employees were Jewish.⁶ Organized labor may have led the movement for shorter hours, but it took the interests of religion to translate shorter hours into fewer days.⁷

Rabbi Bernard Drachman first championed the five-day week in 1910, sixteen years before it was taken up by the AFL. Drachman, president of the Orthodox Jewish Sabbath Alliance, despised Sunday blue laws and their adverse effect on Jewish Sabbath observance. Ideally, Jews desired Saturday off from work, and the freedom to return to work on Sunday. While some Reform Jews supported observing the Sabbath on Sunday for practical reasons, Orthodox Jews did not.⁸ The cause for a Saturday Sabbath, however, seemed almost hopeless. Even if securing Saturday from industry proved possible, the suggestion of Sunday work was anathema to Christian Sabbatharians, not only because it would lead to the opening of movie theaters, but also

⁶ *The Five-Day Week in Manufacturing Industries* (New York: National Industrial Conference Board, 1929), 17-19; Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work*, 71.

⁷ "The idea of cutting the workweek by cutting the days of labor had its earliest origins in Sabbatarianism and, more recently, in the Saturday half-holiday campaigns begun in the late nineteenth century and the actual scattered achievement of the five-day week as early as 1908." Roediger and Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day*, 237.

⁸ "Rabbis Favor 5-Day Week," *New York Times*, February 7, 1924. Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, "The Jewish Sabbath Movement in the Early Twentieth Century," *American Jewish History* 69, no. 2 (December, 1979), 198-199.

because it was taken to constitute a business advantage for Jews.⁹ The Lord's Day Alliance and the International Reform Bureau were alive and well into the early 1920s, advocating for Sunday law enforcement and the passage of new Sunday laws.

Drachman articulated the five-day week as a way through this impasse. In an article published by the New York Sabbath Committee and later presented to Christian audiences, Drachman argued that Sunday laws constituted religious tyranny, and that the concept of a civil Sabbath was an insincere subterfuge. Other nations, Drachman noted, require one day of rest, but do not specify the day.

Realizing, however, that there are numerous practical difficulties in the way of bringing about a general acceptance of this view, I wish to put before you a proposal, based upon a practical consideration of the question . . . : the proposal of a weekly Holy day and Holiday, that is to say that there should be two days of rest weekly. This solution of the problem would, I believe, cope with all the difficulties, which are so keenly felt by all those interested in the question of Sabbath observance.¹⁰

The difficulties, more specifically, were twofold. First, Christians and Jews desired different days as their holy day. Second, "There is another very serious difficulty in the fact that the need of a large portion of the community for a day of recreation and recuperation interferes very greatly with the observance of the one weekly day of rest as a time of worship and religious quietude." Men and women who have been confined to the shop or factory for six days "are in no mood for church-going on Sunday or Saturday," but rather crave outdoor, physical recreation.

This craving for exercise and recuperation is quite natural and justifiable, yet it is impossible for religious authorities to consent to its unrestricted gratification on the Sabbath. To do so would be to deprive the holy day of its devotional character and would reduce it to a day of merely secular recuperation. There seems to be but one way to overcome the difficulty. That would be to have

⁹ Ibid., 201.

¹⁰ Bernard Drachman, "The Jewish Sabbath Question," *American Jewish History* 69, no. 2 (December, 1979), 223. Original printing: Bernard Drachman, "The Jewish Sabbath in its Relation to the General Question of Sabbath Observance," In *Sunday, the World's Rest Day* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1916), 516-529.

two days of rest in the week, one to be purely secular in character and devoted to physical recuperation, the other to be purely religious and devotional.

This “ideal solution to the Sabbath problem,” Drachman said, would satisfy both body and soul—both the needs of recreation and religion.¹¹ This was a broader use of the term *rest* than had been employed by Christian Sabbatarians in the past, but the rationale was exactly the same: designated “secular” days of recreation were the key to preserving the holy day of rest and worship.

In the 1920s, Drachman’s proposal gained traction. Its most obvious appeal was to Jews. In 1924, the Jewish Sabbath Alliance resolved to campaign for the five-day week instead of a more liberal Sunday in order “to please both Jews and Christians.”¹² By the middle 1920s, orthodox, reform, and conservative rabbis were united and outspoken in their support of the five-day week. Other religious groups supporting the five-day week included Adventists, who supported it for the same reason as Jews, and Catholics, who had less attachment to the work ethic than most Protestants, as well as stronger sympathies for ethnic immigrants and the working class.¹³

Many, but not all, Protestants supported the five-day week. Not surprisingly Bishop Manning was an outspoken advocate.¹⁴ Many Protestant businessmen, however, were opposed. The first notable exception to this rule was Henry Ford, who began transitioning his company to the five-day week in 1926. As Ford’s superintendent put it in a public statement, “This is not philanthropy. It is simply good business. More leisure gives more people more time to spend on automobiles, and the more leisure there is to spend in riding the more cars will be needed in which

¹¹ Drachman, "The Jewish Sabbath Question," 224-225.

¹² "Rabbis Favor 5-Day Week."

¹³ "For a Five-Day Working Week," *New York Times*, May 10, 1926.

¹⁴ "Industry Divided on Five-Day Week," *New York Times*, June 25, 1923; "Urges Playgrounds as Cure for Crime," *New York Times*, October 20, 1926.

to ride.” Such reasoning rightly anticipated the shift toward a consumer economy and the continuing commercialization of leisure.¹⁵

In advocating for a weekly holiday, Ford retained the distinction between holy day and holiday suggested by earlier Sabbatarians. “The five-day week . . . is just as sound from the spiritual standpoint,” he said, and “the church will be one of its chief beneficiaries. But the church has definite duties to perform as well as benefits to reap. There is a sharp line between idleness and leisure. Leisure to be effective must be properly directed. The church will receive rewards from this new leisure commensurate with the force it exerts in directing the intelligent use of it.” In language that was clearly aimed at being consistent with Sabbatarian concerns, Ford was also careful to distinguish between Saturday and Sunday.

The five-day week provides the opportunity for physical recreation on the sixth day and leaves the seventh day free for moral and religious observation. It helps restore the Sabbath to its former high place. It means larger attendance at church.

In recent years camouflaged interests at work under the name of ‘liberalism’ have been stealthily taking the day from [the workingman]. For thousands Sunday the day of rest has been changed into Sunday a day of labor. The more the people take their pleasure on Sunday the more the people are compelled to work. Some of this Sunday labor is necessary, most of it is not. The five-day week by giving people the sixth day for physical recreation and the seventh for religious observance will go far toward bringing Christianity nearer to the people.¹⁶

This was similar to the reasoning of Drachman, with one notable exception. To Drachman and other leading Jewish Sabbatarians, the weekly holiday was for culture. To Ford, it was for consumption.¹⁷ Indeed, Ford may have been the first person to

¹⁵ "Ford Raises Pay of Men to Meet the 5-Day Week," *The Washington Post*, November 15, 1926.

¹⁶ "Ford Adjusting Pay to Five-Day Week," *New York Times*, November 14, 1926.

¹⁷ The Jewish socialist E. Haldeman-Julius attempted to reframe Ford's five-day week as useful for culture and not merely consumption. E. Haldeman-Julius, *What the Ford Five-Day Week really Means* (Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius Publications, 1927). Chapters include “Is Leisure Really Useful Only for Wearing Out More Ford Cars?” and “Culture Is the Great and Wonderful Opportunity of This Age.”

refer to Saturday and Sunday as a “two day holiday,” a formulation that would have been anathema to Christian and Jewish Sabbatarians alike.¹⁸

Three decades into the new century, then, support for the five-day week was spreading in theory, but not so much in practice. Although a 1929 survey by the National Industrial Conference Board found that the five-day week had “passed from the status of a vague future possibility to that of an accomplished fact in several hundred establishments, and has become a live question in many others,” 80% of the employees covered by the survey worked for Ford. More typical among large corporations, perhaps, was the representative of U.S. Steel who found the first half of the Sabbath commandment—“Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work”—a convenient basis for opposing the movement. The number of manufacturing industry workers enjoying the five day week at the end of the decade remained less than three percent, and the number in construction only slightly higher.¹⁹

In the 1930s, however, the Depression and the New Deal accomplished what the religious-labor coalition alone could not. Up against overproduction and unemployment, industrialists increasingly saw the logic of, or at least lost the ability to resist, a shorter workweek. Beginning in 1931, William Green of the AFL advocated the five-day week as a solution the Great Depression. The five-day week, he suggested, will help support recreation industries—“the hotels, lunch rooms, camps,

¹⁸ Samuel Crowther, "Henry Ford: Why I Favor Five Days' Work with Six Days' Pay," *World's Work*, October, 1926, 613.

¹⁹ *The Five-Day Week in Manufacturing Industries*, 7, 1, 33, 19, 8. "Industry Divided on Five-Day Week." US Steel quote from Roediger and Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day*, 239. According to the survey results, “popular interest attaches chiefly to the shortening of hours and increase of leisure with which the five-day movement is associated” (1). In addition to crediting the role of Jews and Jewish business owners, the survey also noted that support for the five-day week had come from the entrance of women into the workforce. Women needed Saturday, it was recorded, both to watch children who were not in school, and to clean in preparation for the Sunday Sabbath.

gasoline stations which make tours and week end trips possible; the amusement parks, athletic fields, and other places of entertainment; the clubs and reading rooms, theatres, concerts, lectures.” Sounding more like Henry Ford than Rabbi Drachman, Green added, “Leisure always encourages spending,” and “The five day week would put billions of dollars into circulation annually.”²⁰ Even labor was now advocating for the five-day week on the basis of consumption rather than culture.

Ironically, on the eve of the five-day week’s arrival, some conservative Sabbatarians—theological descendents of the Puritans who had first advocated the idea of days of recreation three centuries earlier—hesitated. The New York Sabbath Committee, though they published Drachman’s proposal for the five-day week both in their Bulletin and as an offprint, prefaced his article with three questions: “first, since neither the Divine law nor human necessity requires more than one weekly rest day, would not two be resisted as excessive? second, since it is difficult to protect one, how could we hope to protect two? third, what kind of a Sabbath would either have, while the other enjoyed a hilarious holiday?”²¹ The hesitation may have been partly political. Jews, Adventists, and organized labor—those advocating for the five-day week—tended to oppose Sabbatarian-backed blue laws. Whatever resistance the movement encountered among Sabbatarians, however, was quickly overcome, and conservative Protestants soon backed the five-day week as well.²²

When the Fair Labor and Standards Act (FLSA) capped the workweek for those involved in interstate commerce at 40 hours beginning in 1940, the act was largely symbolic. Not only did the act not apply to most workers, but given that

²⁰ William Green, *The Five Day Week Inevitable* (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Labor, 1932), 18-19.

²¹ Bernard Drachman, "A Weekly Holy Day and Holiday," *The Bulletin of the New York Sabbath Committee* 2, no. 2 (1915), 8-10.

²² "Hoover Commends Lord's Day Group," *New York Times*, December 7, 1931.

average weekly hours had already fallen to below 35, the act was largely ratifying a change that had already come to pass.²³ Nevertheless, the legislation gave significant symbolic sanction to the forty-hour week and, indirectly, to the five-day week. Despite its limited scope, we might say that the FLSA, like the Saturday half-holiday law, was “declaratory of public desire.” Indeed, scholars and pundits already had begun pondering the “problem of leisure.”

The five-day week became a reality by the end of the 1930s, and in many respects, Sabbatarianism had made it possible. Although organized labor had led the battle for shorter hours, it took religious interests, beginning with those who proposed the half-holiday, to suggest the arrangement of leisure hours into concentrated blocks of time. Then, in the 1920s, because blue laws effectively prohibited Saturday Sabbath-keeping, Jewish Sabbatarians led the campaign for the five-day week. The five-day week thus not only coincided with, but probably contributed to the demise of Sabbatarianism as an organized movement, for with leisure secured, Sabbatarianism had far less appeal.

New leisure activities and technologies also challenged Sabbatarian ideals. Even the movies and public amusements of the 1890s, as problematic as they were for Sabbatarians, at least in theory could be regulated by law. Golf, because it took place mostly at private clubs, and perhaps especially because it was regarded as a refined recreational pursuit, was more complicated. More complicated still was the automobile, which blurred the lines between public and private recreation. And then there were home-based amusements, such as radios and “talking machines” (phonographs), which inaugurated a new era in the privatization of leisure. The Sabbath may have given birth to the weekend, but the weekend—and its gospel of

²³ Hunnicutt, *Work Without End: Abandoning Shorter Hours for the Right to Work*, 1.

consumption—in turn consumed the Sabbath. By the 1940s, even Presbyterians largely lost interest in and dropped the subject.²⁴

3. *From Saints Days to Saturdays*

Recreation reform efforts that began with the Puritans in the seventeenth century thus came to a conclusion in the early to mid twentieth century. This observation, however, yields no single and self-evident reading. The story has often been told with a sense of inevitable and evolutionary progress out of the Dark Ages of recreational repression to the present period of enlightenment, complete with clear judgments regarding winners and losers in the process.²⁵ In contrast to the narrative that reformers set out to restrict recreational choice and entrepreneurs set out to expand choice, however, I suggest that both reformers and entrepreneurs were engaged in a more complex cultural process that included contributing to the selection of choices from which persons could choose. In contrast to the narrative that Sabbatarians essentially failed in their quest for quiet Sundays, I suggest that they actually succeeded in one of their main goals: securing a weekly day of recreation.²⁶

²⁴ Benton Johnson, "On Dropping the Subject: Presbyterians and Sabbath Observance in the Twentieth Century," In *The Presbyterian Predicament: Six Perspectives*, eds. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1990), 103.

²⁵ Herbert Butterfield famously defined Whiggish historiography as "the tendency in many historians . . . to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present." Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: Norton, 1965), v.

²⁶ McCrossen somewhat similarly credits Sabbatarians with a qualified success in maintaining Sunday as a day apart. Alexis McCrossen, "Sabbatarianism in Nineteenth-Century America," In *Religious and Secular Reform in America*, eds. David K. Adams and Cornelis A. van Minnen (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 133-158.

In explanations of Sabbatarianism, motive has been asked to do too much work. In reducing cultural conflict to class conflict, the social control thesis, for example, fails to capture the creative ways in which clergy and labor appropriated each other's language for their own purposes, forming alliances when it was pragmatic to do so, and exercising independence of thought when the alliance was no longer useful. Church and labor leaders both spoke of "Sunday rest," for example, and yet meant different things by it. This difference—the difference between Sunday rest as Sabbath rest, and Sunday rest as recreation and leisure more broadly construed—was downplayed so long as church and labor leaders were united in their opposition to Sunday labor. The difference reemerged, however, upon the controversy over Sunday recreation. In failing to ascribe agency to workers, the social control thesis underestimates workers' ability to infuse language with their own meaning and to appropriate it for their own purposes. It thus misses the subtle and dynamic nature of Sabbatarianism—its adaptive meanings, uses, and shifting alliances.

The standard narrative of recreation reform also tends to take Sabbatarianism's illiberalism at face value, without seeing the parallels that Sabbatarian logic had with other, more enduring, causes. To be sure, religious reformers often pursued symbolic and other legislative actions aimed at establishing America's status and identity as a "Christian nation." With respect to both means and ends, however, the cause of Sabbatarianism was indistinguishable from that of public schools. In the early nineteenth century, for example, the argument for public schools consisted of the following:

- (1) Education is necessary for the preservation of free institutions.
- (2) It prevents class differentiation.
- (3) Education tends to diminish crime.
- (4) It reduces the amount of poverty and distress.
- (5) It increases production.
- (6) Education is the natural right of all individuals.
- (7) Education will rectify false ideas as to unjust distribution of wealth.

Substituting “the Sabbath” for “Education,” that is essentially the argument Sabbatarians were making, complete with emphasis on the preservation of free institutions. In a further similarity, critics claimed that public schools constituted “a violation of the rights of the individual.”²⁷ Public schools have retained widespread support where Sabbatarianism has not, but the rationales are nearly identical.

The logic of Sabbatarianism is also the logic that undergirds the parks movement. To those who argued that Sunday laws violated others’ liberty, Sabbatarians responded that opening up Sunday to any and all activities does not necessarily increase freedom. The freedom to recreate noisily, for example, results in less, not more, of other cultural goods, such as quiet contemplation. This is almost exactly the argument that Olmsted made with respect to public parks.²⁸ To the extent that parks are special places set aside for certain kinds of behavior and not others, they constitute a kind of sacred space. Perhaps the less-is-more argument has been more persuasive with respect to space than to time because, as many have noted, American culture has had a unique way of locating the sacred in landscape. As Sydney Mead famously noted, “in America space has played the part that time has played in the older cultures of the world.”²⁹ One might say that as the sacred became located more and more in space, and less and less in time, parks have become spatial analogues of the Sabbath.

What is curious about Sabbatarians is not their interest in restricting other people’s choices in the name of the public good—in that respect they were typical Americans, or at least typical Whigs. What is curious about Sabbatarians is the way

²⁷ William Green, *The Five Day Week* (n.p.: North American Review Corporation, n.d.).

²⁸ Joseph Sax, *Mountains without Handrails: Reflections on the National Parks* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1980), Ch. 2.

²⁹ Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 6.

they, in effect, established a dichotomy between a sacred day of rest and other, secular days of the week. This is precisely the sort of sacred/secular dichotomy that the early reformers, including Calvin and Luther, were reacting against. Indeed, members of the Anti-Sabbath convention quoted Calvin, Luther, and other reformers at length in support of their cause.³⁰ There is some evidence that in seventeenth-century England, situated between those who embraced Sabbatarian doctrines as “ancient truths consonant with Scripture,” and those who took them to constitute “a Jewish yoke, against the liberty of Christians,” there was a third group that “conceived them grounded on a wrong bottom; but, because they tended to the manifest of religion, it was a pity to oppose them.”³¹ However self-conscious some early Sabbatarians may have been about adopting the cause for its social utility, such self-consciousness was lost among the many for whom the doctrine hardened into increasingly inflexible dogma. This was especially the case among nineteenth-century religious moralists, such as Lyman Beecher, who appropriated Whig discourse into Christian theology. To a far greater extent than most Sabbatarians were able to see or willing to acknowledge, their theological convictions were determined by their social, cultural, and economic context. This return to a sacred/secular dichotomy is one reason many Protestants believed that Sunday—the day of *re-creation*—must exclude *recreation*.

Perhaps another reason Sunday recreation fell victim to theology is that the Reformation focused theological reflection on labor rather than leisure. In theory, the critique of sacred/secular dichotomies and the desacralization of Saints Days in the seventeenth century entailed a qualified affirmation of secular recreation. In practice, however, the Reformation did not provide many theological resources for navigating new social realities such as the arrival of leisure time, much less the commercial

³⁰ Parkhurst, *Proceedings of the Anti-Sabbath Convention*.

³¹ Thomas Fuller, in Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, Vol. 1, 147.

leisure revolution. Despite a rich tradition of theological reflection and teaching on rest, there was no similar tradition of theological reflection on recreation. The Reformation doctrine of calling had no analogous theology of leisure. When pastors and other Christian leaders were challenged to articulate a coherent set of principles and boundaries to govern new social realities and behaviors in response to the rise of recreation in the nineteenth century, they were unprepared. Lacking a Protestant play ethic, they had to navigate the rise of sports and the commercial amusement revolution without a map.

Nevertheless, Protestant clergy and lay leaders were not merely reactionaries. They were also innovators. Just as the doctrine of calling “sacralized” work by giving it a higher place than it previously had held, the Puritan doctrine of Sabbath “desacralized” Saints Days and the festival calendar. The effect of this desacralization was twofold. Negatively, Puritans in England and New England opposed Saints Days and other ritualistic festivities, as well as Sunday recreation. Positively, they favored recreation that was secular and regular.

In the nineteenth century, Protestant clergy and lay leaders did not respond to the crises of leisure time and space in a unified way, but they did respond. Unitarians, Methodists, and some evangelicals instrumentalized recreation for moral and religious purposes, in effect sanctifying or “resacralizing” it. Sanctifying amusements, however, undermined the rationale for opposing them on Sunday. Opposition to commercialized amusements on Sunday persisted precisely because they were not anybody’s idea of sanctified amusements. Conservative Sabbatarians’ skepticism about sanctifying amusements led them to advocate for the Saturday half-holiday. In each instance, religious reform consisted of both a negative and a positive maneuver. The leaders of the YMCA tried to keep children off the streets, and in the process invented indoor sports such as basketball and volleyball. Members of the New York

Sabbath Committee opposed Sunday concerts in Central Park, but also helped secure the Saturday half-holiday. When it came to recreation, religious reformers thus expanded some choices even while restricting others.³²

This two-fold response to the crises of leisure time and space may have been unsystematic, and it certainly entailed unintended consequences, but it was not without logic or precedent. With respect to both banishing ritual festivities and securing periodic days of recreation, Sabbatarians were not only successful, but they were successful at implementing ideas and goals proposed by seventeenth-century Puritans. Advocacy of the Saturday half-holiday in particular was perfectly in keeping with the designated days of recreation proposed by the Puritan Parliament in the 1640s. Moreover, the negative and positive maneuvers of recreation reform were inextricably linked: Sabbatarians advocated for Saturdays *because* they opposed Saints Days.

Protestant England and America thus inaugurated the weekend largely because of Sabbatarianism. That Sabbatarians led the way to successfully securing a weekly holiday challenges received notions regarding the relationship of recreation and religion, as well as our usual juxtaposition of religious reformers as either reactionary or progressive, theocratic or socialist.

In suggesting that even the most conservative religious moralists made creative contributions to the recreational landscape, this account may appear to constitute a partial vindication of Sabbatarians relative to accounts that seek to vilify reformers for attempting to exercise control over the lower classes. I have attempted, however,

³² Although truly sustained theological reflection on leisure does not occur until the middle of the twentieth century, Christian leaders of the nineteenth century were forced to begin the process of thinking critically and “thinking Christianly” about play, recreation, and free time. Although they did not use the term at the time, Christian leaders struggling with these questions and realities were developing nascent theologies of leisure. That process of critical reflection on recreation among persons of faith is worth more serious consideration than it has to date received.

neither to vilify nor to vindicate, but to understand—to focus less on motive than on effect. If this is a partial vindication, it is also a cautionary tale for would-be moral reformers. After all, the history of reform is in part a tale of the unintended and often ironic ways in which reformers and those who positioned themselves as defenders of tradition unknowingly served as innovators, effecting changes that they neither foresaw nor desired. On the eve of the five-day week, for example, which in one sense was the culmination of their longstanding advocacy for leisure during the “secular” days of the week, Protestant Sabbatarians demurred. As they rightly realized, their own advocacy for secular leisure was contributing to an altogether new lifestyle and sensibility focused on fun, pleasure seeking, and consumption. In this sense, Sabbatarianism folded not only or even primarily because it was anachronistic. Sabbatarianism also self-destructed.

Sabbatarianism was thus an ambiguous success. Whereas Sabbatarians hoped for one day of recreation and one day of rest and worship, the emergence of the singular “weekend” suggests a relatively undifferentiated block of time free for rest *and* recreation. Looking at it from this perspective, as Martin Marty once put it, the long weekend has been a bigger God-killer than Nietzsche.³³ In the end, Sabbatarians may not have been as reactionary as they are commonly depicted, nor as countercultural as they aspired.

4. Epilogue: The problem of leisure to the present

Sabbath advocacy endured longer than many believed it would in part because the Sabbath itself was adaptable. As a result, dating its demise has proven a dangerous

³³ Martin E. Marty, "Remembering the Sabbath," *Sightings*, August 14, 2006, http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications/sightings/archive_2006/0814.shtml.

endeavor. Indeed, there are today new shoots of Sabbath advocacy, suggesting that rumors of its death may have been greatly exaggerated. To be sure, Sabbatarianism as an organized cause has receded both in the news and in popular consciousness since World War II. Some Sunday laws remain, but they are mostly ignored or forgotten rather than defended or despised. The Lord's Day Alliance still exists, but is a mere vestige of its earlier form. Still, "the Sunday question" is not dead, but rather taking a different form.

Following the sociologists and journalists who began addressing the new "problem of leisure" in the 1930s, theologians also made a more concerted effort to develop theologies of play, leisure, and even festivity. German Catholic scholars contributed some of the earliest of these;³⁴ beginning in the late 1960s, a number of mostly liberal Protestant scholars added to this literature;³⁵ and evangelical contributions to the topic have arrived more recently.³⁶ Ironically, just as theologians were getting around to address the newfound leisure, the fate of leisure changed yet

³⁴ Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic & the Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, Inc., 1935); Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (New York: New American Library, 1963); Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*; Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

³⁵ Robert E. Neale, *In Praise of Play: Toward a Psychology of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy*; Sam Keen, *Apology for Wonder* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); David L. Miller, *Gods and Games: Toward a Theology of Play* (New York: World Publishing, 1970); Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971); James V. Schall, *Far Too Easily Pleased: A Theology of Play, Contemplation, and Festivity* (Beverly Hills: Benziger, 1976).

³⁶ Robert K. Johnston, *The Christian at Play* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983); Leland Ryken, *Redeeming the Time: A Christian Approach to Work and Leisure* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995). See also Paul Heintzman, Glen E. Van Anel and Thomas L. Visker, eds., *Christianity and Leisure: Issues in a Pluralistic Society* (n.p.: Dordt College Press, 1994); John Byl and Tom Visker, eds., *Physical Education, Sports, and Wellness: Looking to God as we Look at Ourselves* (n.p.: Dordt College Press, 1999).

again. As a number of sociologists and economists have documented, the average number of hours Americans spend at work has actually increased since 1945.³⁷

Given that this “new, new problem of leisure” at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the same as the old problem of leisure—i.e., too little, rather than too much—perhaps it is not surprising that many writers are turning their attention back to Sunday and Sabbath. Modern Sabbath literature begins with Rabbi Abraham Heschel’s brief but critically acclaimed 1951 volume, simply entitled *The Sabbath*.³⁸ During the last twenty years, Christian publishers have generated a remarkable number of titles on Sabbath and Sunday.³⁹ In the last few years, scholars have

³⁷ See generally the works of Juliet Schor and Arlie Hochschild, especially Juliet B. Schor, *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure* (New York: Basic Books, 1991); Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1997).

³⁸ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951).

³⁹ As is evident from the titles, most of these books are not academic, theological treatises, but are rather oriented to praxis and Christian living. Karen Burton Mains, *Making Sunday Special* (Waco: Word Books, 1987); Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Thomas R. Swears, *Approaching Sabbath* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); Walter J. Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1991); Tilden Edwards, *Sabbath Time* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1992); Don Postema, *Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest* (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1997); Donna Schaper, *Sabbath Sense: A Spiritual Antidote for the Overworked* (Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 1997); Martha W. Hickman, *A Day of Rest: Creating a Spiritual Space in Your Week* (New York: Avon Books, 1999); Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam, 1999); Donna Schaper, *Sabbath Keeping* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1999); R. H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000); Bruce A. Ray, *Celebrating the Sabbath: Finding Rest in a Restless World* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2000); Dorothy C. Bass, *Receiving the Day: Christian Practices for Opening the Gift of Time* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001); Lauren Winner, *Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline* (Brewster, Mass.: Paraclete Press, 2003); Lynne M. Baab, *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005); Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006); Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press,

provided us with *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl*; *The Peculiar Life of Sundays*; and *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath*.⁴⁰ Not to miss the moment, popular writers have addressed the topic of busyness with titles such as *Doing Nothing* and *How to be Idle*.⁴¹ That the current interest in Sabbath is not merely a function of time poverty is suggested by the title of Judith Shulevitz's *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time*.⁴² Her much-discussed 2003 *New York Times* article, "Bring Back the Sabbath," struck a chord with Jews, Christians, and secularists alike. Shulevitz, a non-practicing Jew, provides a qualified defense of Sabbatarian rigor.

Most people believe that all you have to do to stop working is not work. The inventors of the Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking. . . . This is why the Puritan and Jewish Sabbaths were so exactly intentional, requiring extensive advance preparation—at the very least a scrubbed house, a full larder and a bath. The rules did not exist to torture the faithful. They were meant to communicate the insight that

2006); Dan B. Allendar, *Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009). The theological debate, however, is not entirely over. Samuele Bacchiocchi has argued for Saturday Sabbatarianism, while D.A. Carson and colleagues emphasize Sunday as Lord's Day rather than Sabbath. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1977); D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999).

⁴⁰ Christopher D. Ringwald, *A Day Apart: How Jews, Christians, and Muslims Find Faith, Freedom, and Joy on the Sabbath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Craig Harline, *Sunday: A History of the First Day from Babylonia to the Super Bowl* (New York: Random House, 2007); Stephen Miller, *The Peculiar Life of Sundays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Tom Lutz, *Doing Nothing: A History of Loafers, Loungers, Slackers, and Bums in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006); Tom Hodgkinson, *How to be Idle: A Loafer's Manifesto* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).

⁴² Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House, 2010).

interrupting the ceaseless round of striving requires a surprisingly strenuous act of will, one that has to be bolstered by habit as well as by social sanction.⁴³

That is a sympathetic reading; as we have seen, Sabbatarian rigor had many motivations, not all of them so pure. Perhaps this new respect for Puritan Sabbath-keeping is a nostalgic reaction to the 24/7 culture that maintains little differentiation with respect to time.

Chief among the culprits of our collective harriedness that Shulevitz identifies is the commercialization of leisure—the “perpetual motion machine that is the marketplace.” She is not alone. Critics of mass culture in the Marxian tradition regard the commodification of leisure as a source of tyranny or hegemony, and at least some who draw on this tradition see the Sabbath as a potential resource of resistance.⁴⁴ Other secular writers and organizations are also turning to Sunday and Sabbath as resources for warding off the specter of overscheduled busy-ness. Take Back Your Time, a non-profit organization that has made a big splash relative to its modest size, advocated a legislative amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act called the Minimum Leave Protection, Family Bonding and Personal Well-Being Act of 2007. As part of their strategy to gain support for the movement, Take Back Your Time has sought partnerships with the Massachusetts Council of Churches and the Lord’s Day Alliance. Balance4Success, another non-faith-based organization, has a campaign entitled Taking Back Sundays for the purpose of boycotting youth sports on Sunday. Their mission is “to replace busyness with balance to insure kids' success.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Judith Shulevitz, “Bring Back the Sabbath,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 24, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/02/magazine/bring-back-the-sabbath.html>.

⁴⁴ Bethany Keeley, “One Day of Hope: Resistance, Spirituality, and Sabbath-keeping,” Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, August 23, 2005, <http://wor.li/1482>.

⁴⁵ See [Timeday.org](http://www.timeday.org) and [Balance4Success.com](http://www.balance4success.com). In Britain, see [KeepSundaySpecial.org](http://www.KeepSundaySpecial.org).

Meanwhile, atheist author Sam Harris has said that “We may even want, for perfectly rational reasons, to say we want a Sabbath in this country.”⁴⁶

If these recent trends are any indication, the Sabbath may yet serve as a resource for those concerned with time poverty and consumer capitalism’s colonization of time. Ironically, as secular and liberal groups appropriate the Sabbath as a means of resisting the tyranny of the marketplace, political alignments may make it harder for conservative Protestants to take up the cause. Then there is the fact that on Sunday many Christians are watching football or, as Shulevitz puts it, charting the shortest distance between their megachurch’s ATM and the mall.

⁴⁶ "God Debate: Sam Harris Vs. Rick Warren," *Newsweek*, April 9, 2007, <http://www.newsweek.com/2007/04/08/the-god-debate.html>.

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