David W Fletcher, *Apocalyptic Rhetoric in the Old Southwest* (Doctor of Arts Dissertation; Murfreesboro, TN: Middle Tennessee State University, 2007)
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CHAPTER FIVE: RAPID CHANGE AND APOCALYPTIC TENDENCIES

The New Madrid earthquakes and the frontier revivals brought about important religious changes for many individuals and families in the Old Southwest, but significant socioeconomic and political changes also occurred from about 1780 through the 1840s. In less than three decades the trans-Appalachian claims of Virginia and North Carolina became the states of Kentucky (1792) and Tennessee (1796), respectively, and the young nation also added Louisiana (1812), Mississippi (1817), and Alabama (1819) to statehood. In Tennessee, the territory's population tripled from about 35,000 to over 105,000 between 1790 and 1800, and the state's population increased eight hundred percent to roughly 829,000 from 1800 to 1840.[1] Settlers and immigrants began to displace Native Americans in the state's Appalachian mountains, central plains and valleys, and the Mississippi delta (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2). Agriculture and farming replaced hunting and trapping as mainstay occupations, and slavery became widely accepted as a way of life. But did these rapid socioeconomic and political changes in the state of Tennessee spark instances of apocalyptic language? Was rapid change on the frontier seen as an indication of the end of the world or the beginning of the millennium?

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[1] *Return of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States* . . . (Philadelphia: Childs and Swaine, 1793), 56; *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, 1853), ix.

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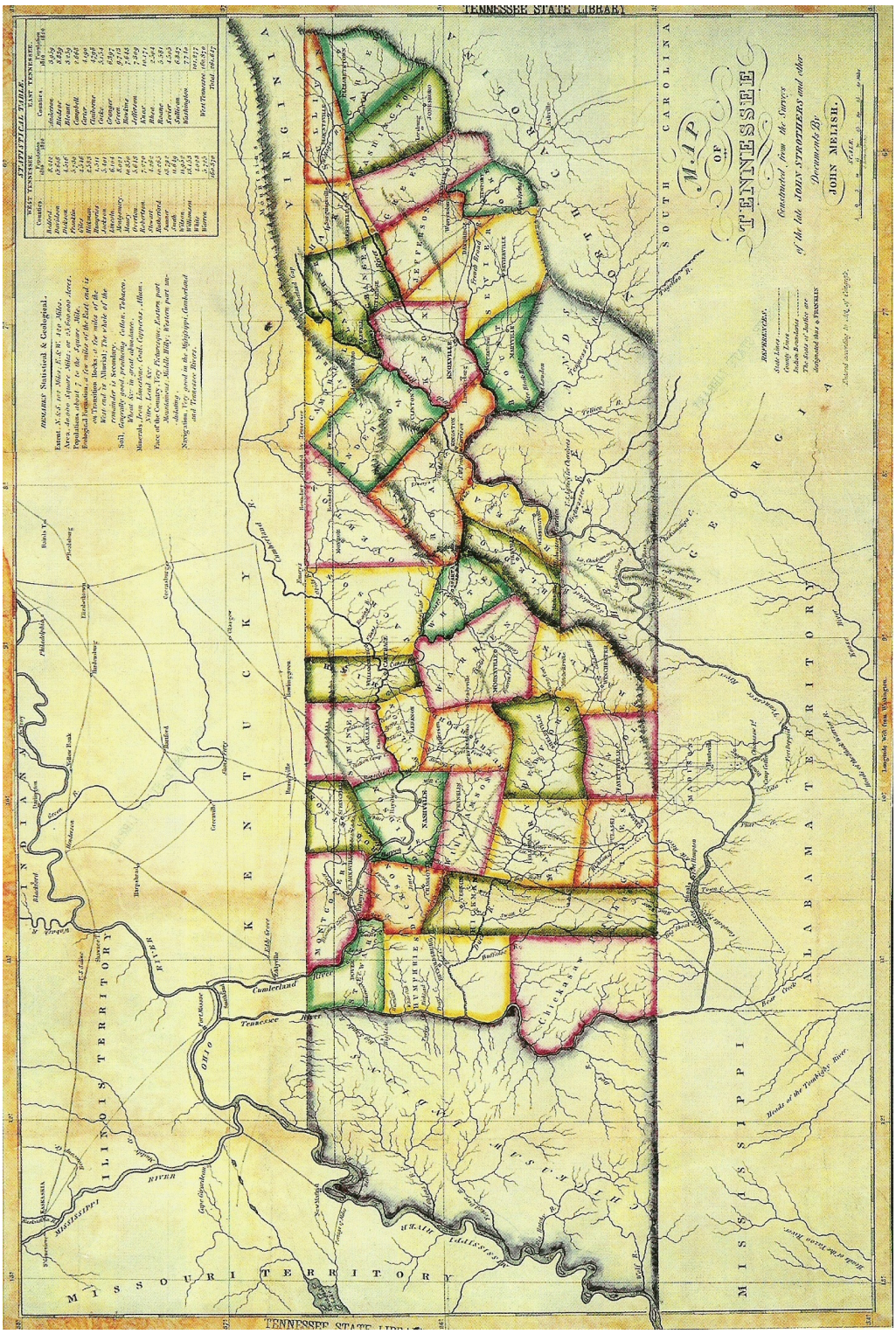

Fig. 5.1. 1818 map of Tennessee. From surveys by John Strothers (Philadelphia: John Melish and Samuel Harrison, 1818). Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Documents Collection Room, Map #1867.

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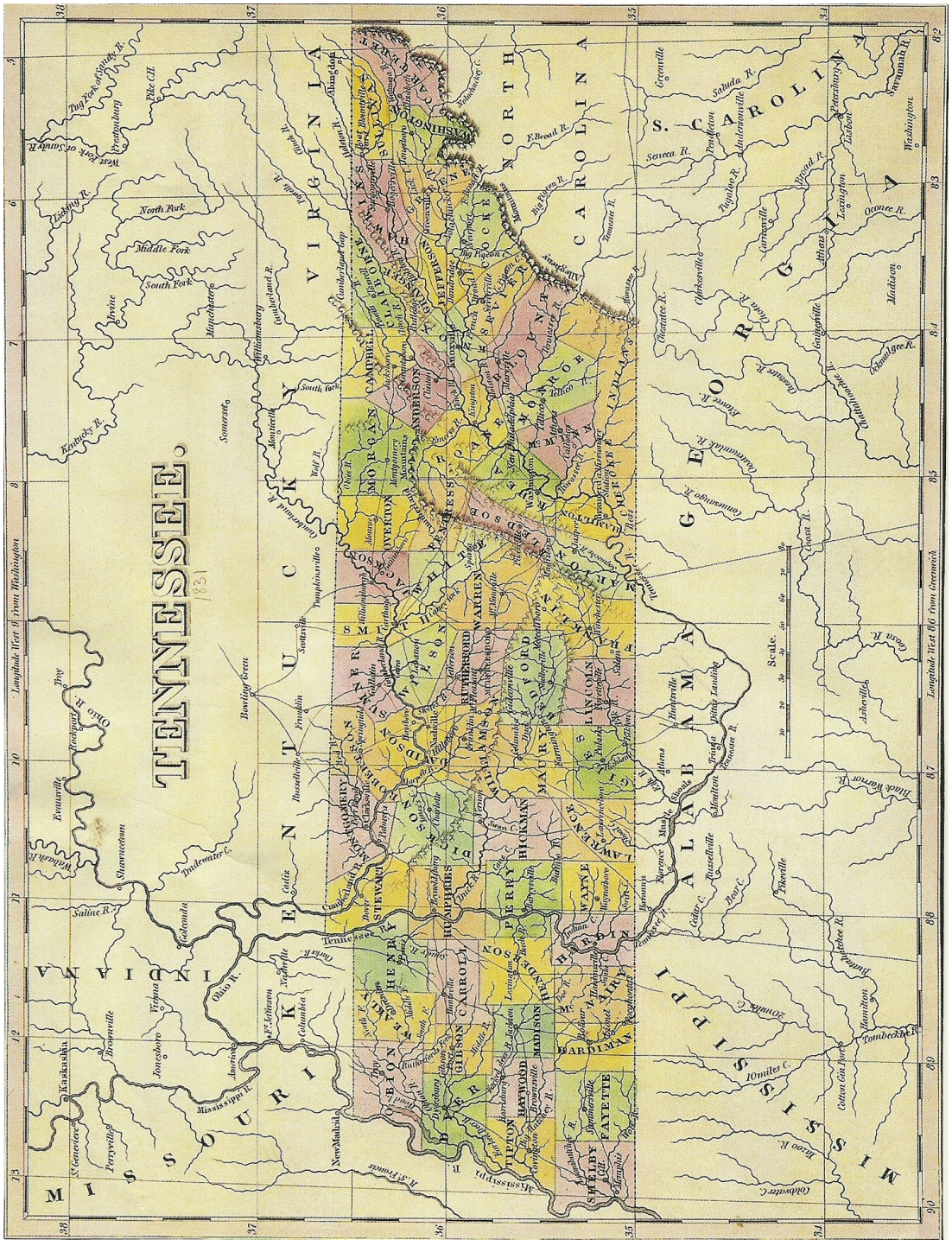

Fig. 5.2. 1831 map of Tennessee. By Young and Delleker, Sc. (Philadelphia: A. Finley, 1831). Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Documents Collection Room, Map #1874. Note the formation of new counties in territories that previously belonged to Chickasaw and Cherokee tribes.

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These changes coincided, particularly in agriculture and transportation, with equally significant advances in technology. An improved cotton gin enhanced the economic prospects of growing cotton, and this transformed the political and social fabric of the South and the central and western lands of Tennessee. The use of steam to propel water craft made raw materials and manufactured goods cheaper and more accessible through speedier transportation on the Mississippi and Tennessee rivers. By the 1830s, railroads augmented transport on the waterways with efficient movement of goods and supplies inland. Later, the invention of the telegraph ushered in the age of telecommunications. The world changed at such a pace that banking struggled to keep up with commerce, and law-making barely kept up with shifting political developments.

As early as the 1790s, Thomas Cooper, an English barrister-at-law who visited America's southwest region, sensed the dynamics of frontier settlement and the conflicts over legal claims. He stated, "For of law there is enough, claims for land interfering continually, rights being so laid upon another, that scarcely any body knows who is safe." Cooper had reason to be optimistic in spite of the hardships. He pointed out:

> The emigration to this part of the Continent has been amazing, and this is the best place in the world for people to remove to with large families, where they will find Providence sufficiently bountiful. . . . If the emigrant should be an enthusiast . . . he will think [this territory] the land of promise, and point it out to his children to be the spot for the millennium of the world, where the farce of titular dignity, and the parade of courts shall never be exhibited; where monarchy shall never intrude, to trample upon the rights of man; but a pure and equable republican form of government shall gradually introduce the practice of those virtues, which are consonant to the true nature of our species.[2]

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[2]Thomas Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America* (Dublin, Ireland: William Porter, 1794; repr., New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), 37-38.

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Cooper, an outsider, spoke from the perspective of settlers and immigrants of European descent rather than that of displaced Indians or of enslaved blacks. As he suggested, the land promised prosperity and an amiable form of government–a veritable "millennium of the world"–to those who came hopefully to the Old Southwest. Cooper compared the millennium to what he thought was the best form of civilized government, a type of government that had begun in America and was developing quickly on the frontier. This was but one example of a theme expanded by postmillennialists in the nineteenth century–the growth of democratic government as an indicator of the coming of the millennium. But Cooper's brief assessment gave an incomplete picture of the social and political forces that were altering the Old Southwest.

In the formative years from 1770 to 1840, important developments at the national level influenced rapid evolution of the Old Southwest and Tennessee. First, the federal government's opening of lands west of the Appalachians brought about the movement of land-hungry migrants from Western Pennsylvania, Virginia, and the Carolinas through the Cumberland Gap into the eastern valleys and the central basin of Tennessee. Second, settler encroachment on Indian lands and hunting grounds created hostilities that would set in motion an ongoing struggle that would not be resolved in trans-Appalachia until Indian removal in the 1830s. Third, ideas of political independence at the national level sparked various democratic actions on the Tennessee frontier that culminated in the election of two Tennesseans–Andrew Jackson and James K. Polk–to the nation's highest office. Fourth, as a result of the nation's industrial revolution and the South's burgeoning agricultural boom in response to the textile industry's need for cotton, Tennessee enjoyed

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limited but successful economic growth. Fifth, the federal abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and the continuation of chattel slavery throughout the South highlighted the political and moral contradictions of the South's "peculiar" institution. These trends illustrate how Tennessee developed and evolved as an extension of the newly-formed United States.[3] But were these events accompanied by any sense of apocalyptic anxiety or jubilation by those who directly experienced them?

In the 1770s, settlers wanting more freedom and opportunities based on land ownership found refuge in northeast Tennessee around Watauga River, North Holston, Nolichucky, and Carter's Valley. Early pioneers like James Robertson, Daniel Boone, and John Donelson began small communities that attracted others. They defended these communities successfully against Indian attacks, and they literally and symbolically threw off the yoke of British overlordship in the Battle of King's Mountain in October 1780. After 1780, tens of thousands of Scotch-Irish and other European immigrants made their way into the Old Southwest. The federal government took a laissez-faire approach toward settlement of the Old Southwest and focused chiefly on the economic advantages of developing the Old Northwest. This passive attitude in the Tennessee region led to rampant land speculation that had limited controls under Carolina state governance. The federal government did provide for logical transition of trans-Appalachia from wilderness to statehood in the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance (1787). After North Carolina

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[3]Compare the excellent study by John R. Finger, *Tennessee Frontiers: Three Regions in Transition* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2001).

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ceded its western lands in 1789, Tennessee became part of the Southwest Territory in 1790 and attained statehood in 1796.[4]

These events for settlers and their leaders seemed like the natural result of the progress of civilization under the guiding hand of a Providential Ruler. When John Donaldson and his companions set out for the Cumberland Valley from East Tennessee, he prefaced his travel notes with "Journal of a Voyage, intended by God's permission, in the good boat Adventure." A few days later, after they passed through rough waters safely, he wrote, "By the hand of Providence we are now preserved."[5] Except for these brief allusions, Donaldson made no other reference to deity or religious matters in his travel journal. The famous David Crockett, who admitted that he "never made a pretention to Relegion in my life," could recall during periods of migration how "all other friends having failed, I determined then to throw myself on Providence, and see how that would use me." In times of danger, to which Crockett was no stranger, he could talk about being in "a devil of a fix." When his wife Polly died, he even confessed, "It was the doing of the Almighty, whose ways are always right, though we sometimes think they fall heavily on us; and as painful as is even yet the remembrance of her sufferings, and the loss sustained by my little children and myself, yet I have no wish to lift up the voice of

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[4]*Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, edited by Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, D.C.: 1904-37), 32:314-320; *Annals of Congress*, 1st Congress, 2nd session, 2 April 1790, 106-109; 4th Congress, 1st session, 1 June 1796, 491-492.

[5]Cited in J. G. M. Ramsey, *The Annals of Tennessee to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (1853; repr., Johnson City, Tennessee: Overmountain Press, 1999), 197, 201.

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complaint."[6] But this overt reference to deity was unusual for Crockett. He used very little religious language in his autobiography and never engaged in the cosmic reasonings or end-of-the-world conjectures of apocalyptic discourse.

When John Sevier, Tennessee's first governor, announced to the legislature the admission of Tennessee to the Union, he lauded the "flattering prospect of peace, happiness and oppulence" and "the blessings and liberties of a free and Independent republic," but for this important event he made no reference to deity or to providential guidance. Sevier, a descendent of Huguenot farmers, occasionally referred to "the smiles of a Heavenly father," "the great being above," or "the propitious hand of Providence" in speeches to the state legislature and other political correspondence.[7] But Sevier never made use of apocalyptic imagery in spite of difficulties for the state like Indian uprisings and the threat of war with France.

Concerning the latter, Sevier warned the legislature in December 1798:

> I am not induced to believe that the dangers threatening the peace and safety of our country is by any means abated or relaxed; on the contrary, I have my fears, that much deception, duplicity and intrigue is carrying on with intention to divide our good citizens in sentiment, create party discord, confuse our councils, and if carried into effect (which I pray God to avert) will finally blast and put an end to these inestimable blessings of liberty and independence gained and acquired by our past struggles with the loss of so much of our most valuable and dearest blood.[8]

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[6]David Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett of the State of Tennessee*, edited by James A. Shackford and Stanley J. Folmsbee (1834; repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 37, 99, 125-26.

[7]Robert H. White, ed., *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 1796-1821*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Tennessee Historical Commission, 1952), 17, 26, 58, 91.

[8]Ibid., 47.

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Sevier uttered one of his strongest warnings to the state legislature in this address. The governor was concerned that the gains made by the first settlers of Tennessee might be irrevocably lost. Even so, there was no talk of cataclysmic upheaval and no mention of apocalyptic ruin. By September the following year the situation had improved, and the governor could say, "Emigration and population is daily increasing, and I have no doubt, under the propitious hand of Providence [and] your patronage . . . that our state will become more and more respectable and conspicuous, and the Citizens [will] enjoy all that happiness and comfort this human life in an ordinary course will afford them."[9] Like the governors who followed him, Sevier sincerely viewed divine guidance as useful and helpful.[10] But the situation shifted steadily and unpredictably so as to preclude talk of any end of an epoch or future millennium. Apocalyptic language for most frontiersmen and their leaders was more appropriate for religious rather than political contexts.

For Native Americans, though, social and political changes in the Old Southwest did bring cataclysmic upheaval and apocalyptic ruin–an end to their way of life and removal from their ancestral lands. The permanence of white settlement on tribal lands did not go unnoticed by the Indians, nor had it gone unchecked without response for many, many decades. But their resistance had become fragmented as a result of earlier and ongoing British, French, and even Spanish influences. In addition, the indigenous natives had to face the assault of a United States that was growing and expanding rapidly and pervasively. The federal government picked up where colonial authorities left off

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[9]Ibid., 91-92.

[10]See Appendix E.

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and made repeated treaties with the various tribes. From about 1780 to 1830, large tracts of tribal lands were ceded to the federal government through treaties with the Cherokee at Hopewell (1785), Holston River (1791), and Tellico (1798), with Cherokee and Creek in Dearborn's Treaty (1806), and with the Chickasaw at Old Town (1818).[11]

After the War of 1812, the federal government worked relentlessly to resettle the tribes west of the Mississippi. Favored by speculators who wanted Indian lands, by farmers who feared Indian hostilities, and by missionary groups who wished to "save" the Indians from extinction, official removal policies began under Thomas Jefferson, continued under James Madison, and came to fruition with Andrew Jackson who signed into law the Indian Removal Act in 1830. In the early 1820s, the Choctaw and Creek had signed removal agreements, and part of the Cherokee agreed to removal in the Treaty of New Echota (1835).[12] But a large number of Cherokee held out until federal troops removed them forcibly in the winter of 1838-1839.

During the relocation, the Reverend Daniel Butrick, a Moravian missionary who lived among the Cherokee at Brainerd Mission and accompanied them on their westward trek that began at Ross's Landing near Chattanooga, reflected on the tragic incidents of the previous year. On 31 December 1838, he gave a gloomy, if not prophetic, summation of the year in his journal entry. He penned:

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[11]*Journals of the Continental Congress*, 30:187-190; *American State Papers*, 2, *Indian Affairs* 1:14, 38-44, 54-57, 124-125, 637-638, 698-699; 2:164-166.

[12]*Statutes at Large of the United States of America, 1789-1873*, 7, Indian Treaties, 411-412, 488-489.

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> This morning we were permitted to read the texts for the last day of the year. O what a year it had been! O what a sweeping wind has gone over, and carried thousands into the grave, while thousands of others have been tortured and scarcely survive.
>
> And why? As coming from God, we know it is just. But what have they done to the U. States? . . . For what crime then was this whole nation doomed to this perpetual death? This almost unheard of suffering? Simply because they would not agree to a principle which would be at once death to their national existence.
>
> The year past has been a year of spiritual darkness. We have had but few happy seasons, and as for myself, I have by no means been faithful to my trust. I have wanted faith & love & zeal. A great part of the time my heart has been grieved to hear the awful profanements and see the scenes of wickedness which have been brought before us.[13]

Butrick sensed deeply the pains and hurts of the Cherokee people. At the start of removal, he had felt alone and helpless. Puzzled and filled with questions that had no good answers, he wrote, "[I] feel lonesome, and can only say, Where is my God? . . . Our situation is impossible, is hazardous, and difficult, and we have no sufficiency at all to support or carry us forward." When the process of relocation had begun, he was agitated by the actions of "the removing agent, N. Smith, [who] with the cruelty of a Nero, forced them into boats, into poisoned air, and hurried them away to a land of darkness, and the shadow of death, where they must sicken and die."[14] But Butrick found comfort in his "Heavenly Father" and "Redeemer." He prayed often and offered supplications for the protection and well-being of his Cherokee friends and flock. As

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[13]*The Journal of Rev. Daniel S. Butrick, May 19, 1838 - April 1, 1839*, Cherokee Removal: Monograph One (Park Hill, Oklahoma: Trail of Tears Association, Oklahoma Chapter, 1998), 52.

[14]Ibid., 1, 26.

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Butrick reflected on what he heard and saw, he spoke frequently about death, personal salvation, and the end-of-life or apocalyptic reward of heaven.

Butrick especially was troubled by the death of small children among the Cherokee, and he used language of eternal consequence to give dignity and meaning to their senseless demise. On 8 August, he noted poignantly:

> In the morning some people came from the camps to dig a grave for a little child who died last night. Soon after a woman came to have a coffin made for another child just over the creek, who died this morning. Thus, the poor little children are almost all dying off. Well may Rachel weep for her children, and refuse to be comforted because they are not.
>
> About the middle of the afternoon, the corpse of a little girl was brought from the camps. After the coffin was put in the grave, we all knelt down, and commended ourselves once more to the care of Him who is the Resurrection and the life. I could but weep at the sight of this pleasant and mournful victim for the grave.
>
> As we were leaving the graveyard, we saw the procession bearing to the grave the little boy who died over the creek. We therefore returned again to that place where the dead are now so frequently deposited. There we again wept, and again sought the mercy of our Heavenly Father.
>
> O how distressing to the Cherokees who think so much of the graves of their friends, to be now called to leave so many of their dear little babes in this land of enemies, where they can never hope even to drop a tear on their graves again.[15]

The Reverend's sympathy for the Cherokee adhered to traditional Christian ideas about life, death, the afterlife, and their apocalyptic meanings. When one of the Cherokee known as brother Hawk died, Butrick wrote in his journal, "O how quick the transit from time to eternity, and how sudden the change from earth to heaven. Yesterday he longed

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[15]Ibid., 27-28.

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to be with Christ, . . . and now in the fullness of joy, he triumphs in redeeming love, basking in the sun beams of eternal noon."[16]

But Butrick also was troubled by what he saw as the Indians' proclivity to moral baseness, that is, moral failings by the Reverend's standards. In the struggle between good and evil for the souls of the Cherokee, he lamented the "temporal and eternal ruin of this little handful of Indians" by the federal agents with their "dark rhetoric of hell." He disagreed with the practice of "conjuring over the sick" and compared it to idolatry. After a rough night near Walden's Ridge where the detachment he traveled with was subjected to the swearing and drinking of another group, he thought, "O what a hell must it be to be confined with blasphemers for ever & ever." He pitied above all the plight of the Cherokee who chose to do evil. Near Pikeville in the Sequatchie Valley, what he called the "Vale of Sodom" where "the people were wicked exceedingly," he wrote:

> I could but weep in view of the poor Cherokees, who, on the brink of destruction, seemed yet emulous to excell in those awful practices which, have provoked the Lord to leave them to suffer these evils; and I told some of our dear brethren that if an angel could weep, he must weep in view of such a spectacle.[17]

For Butrick, as for many Protestant missionaries to Native Americans, the crucial matter for the Cherokee during the period of removal was their life-and-death struggle for personal salvation rather than the apocalyptic reordering of their world. For the Indians' themselves, as others would testify later, the Trail of Tears and the removal of the Cherokee from their ancestral lands in the Old Southwest marked a sad, but climactic,

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[16]Ibid., 38.

[17]Ibid., 10, 11, 31, 42-44.

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episode in the westward push of progress or modernity under the crushing weight of capitalistic enterprise, liberal democracy, and Christian civilization. This tragic loss had apocalyptic or end-of-their-world consequences for the Cherokee and subsequent generations of Native Americans.[18]

Another example of abrupt change in the Old Southwest came with Tennesseans' flirtation with independent or non-federated rule in the brief State of Franklin (1785 to 1788) and political alignment with non-British governments in the Mero District (1788 to about 1809).[19] These experiments in political sovereignty reflected the isolated nature of the trans-Appalachian frontier and the influence of liberal republican ideas that had been popular among Deists and "enlightened" thinkers during the Revolution. The constitution of the State of Franklin, for instance, paralleled the federal constitution in that it provided for freedom of worship and the separation of church and state. But the frontiersmen had a strong sense of allegiance to Christian faith and practice, so they restricted public office to those who believed in God and "the truth of the Protestant religion."[20] The provisional constitution, which was disapproved by the convention at Greeneville in November 1785, went even further and prescribed specific tenets of Christian faith for the state's office-holders. Section 3 of the document specified:

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[18]William T. Hagan, *American Indians*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 75-101; Clara Sue Kidwell, Homer Noley, and George E. Tinker, *A Native American Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 163-165.

[19]Samuel Cole Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin* (Johnson City, Tennessee: Watauga Press, 1924); John Allison, "The 'Mero District,'" *American Historical Magazine* 1, no. 2 (April 1896): 115-27.

[20]Section 32, cited in Williams, *History of the Lost State of Franklin*, 336.

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> No person shall be eligible or capable to serve in this [the House of Representatives] or any other office in the civil department of this State . . . who will, either in word or writing, deny any of the following propositions, *viz*:
> 1st. That there is one living and true God, the Creator and Governor of the universe.
> 2d. That there is a future state of rewards and punishments.
> 3d. That the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are given by divine inspiration.
> 4th. That there are three divine persons in the Godhead, co-equal and co-essential.[21]

In the end, a majority of the delegates favored a revised version of North Carolina's state constitution over the provisional one that included these explicit Christian sentiments and apocalyptic ideas (e.g., "a future state of rewards and punishments").

Like the earlier Cumberland Compact (1780) that was formed by settlers in the central part of the state,[22] the framers of the State of Franklin began their government with a general sense of dependency upon "Divine Providence" for their well-being and key Christian teachings for their leadership. Rather than any apocalyptic beginning, the political experiment was justified on the basis of expediency and the notion of civilization's progress. For pragmatic leaders such as John Robertson and John Sevier, self-sufficiency in economic matters, safeguarded by a sure transportation route along the Mississippi River to the port of Spanish-controlled New Orleans, and the federal government's promise of protection or lack thereof loomed even larger. But these

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[21]"The Provisional Constitution of Frankland," *American Historical Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1896): 55.

[22]See A. W. Putnam, *History of Middle Tennessee or, Life and Times of Gen. James Robertson* (1859; repr., Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 94-102.

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experimental initiatives soon fizzled, even though the tradition of stubborn independence sometimes bordering on rebellion lingered.

For example, during the winter of 1796, William Blount, Tennessee's first United States Senator, and other reckless men ran afoul of federal law in their conspiracy to take by force Spanish Florida and Louisiana. This was the sort of brazen independence, purported to be "criminal" and "scandalous" by the Spanish authorities, that had to be restrained and resulted in Blount's impeachment by the House of Representatives and his expulsion from the United States Senate.[23] Before he could be removed from office formally, Blount retired to Tennessee where he was welcomed wholeheartedly, and the state legislature chose Andrew Jackson to replace him in the Senate. Jackson did not rise to national fame until after his victory over the British during the battle for New Orleans in the early part of 1815. Widely celebrated as a result, Jackson and his supporters profited immensely from the publicity. Perhaps the creativity of Tennesseans in their political savvy might have contributed to the overall movement of the nation from republican to democratic ideas and practices. But this shift, in the minds of most, followed the benefits of divine blessing and providential guidance and did not rise to the level of any apocalyptic significance.

The Old Southwest and the country were ready about a decade later for a different type of president. The decline of elitism and the desire of artisans, merchants, and

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[23]Frederick J. Turner, "Documents on the Blount Conspiracy, 1795-1797," *American Historical Review* 10, no. 3 (April 1905): 574-606; Francis Wharton, comp., *State Trials of the United States during the Administrations of Washington and Adams* (1849; repr., New York: Burt Franklin, 1970), 200-321.

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yeoman farmers for a greater voice in the affairs of government led to the rise of popular politics and the ascendancy of the Democratic Party. In 1824, the famed Jackson ran for president and won the popular vote but not an "absolute majority" of the electoral vote. Four years later, he indisputably won both and became the nation's first president from the trans-Appalachian region. Jackson transcended regional concerns remarkably well while serving as president for two terms, but he brought the brashness and stubbornness of the Tennessee frontier to Washington. Jackson, a slave owner and an aristocrat, actually represented a smaller spectrum of the general populace than his supporters had led the nation to believe. But, like James Polk twelve years later, he energetically pursued policies that favored common people and the country's westward expansion.

As Jackson began his presidency, he revered and aspired to the "public virtue" of his "illustrious predecessors." This type of executive leadership espoused "firm reliance on the goodness of that Power whose providence mercifully protected our national infancy, and has since upheld our liberties in various vicissitudes." Jackson like previous presidents felt encouraged "to offer up my ardent supplications that He will continue to make our beloved country the object of His divine care and gracious benediction."[24] As the nation grew and evolved, presidential speech consistently articulated the "public philosophy" of America's exceptional situation and a sense of God's guidance of it all.

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[24]"First Inaugural Address of Andrew Jackson," 4 March 1829, Avalon Project at Yale Law School, 1996, http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalonpresiden/inaug/jackson1.htm (accessed 13 January 2007).

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But presidential rhetoric, as Dante Germino suggests, fell short of "political messianism" or "apocalyptic nationalism."[25]

In his official addresses and letters, Jackson followed this paradigm dutifully and avoided the extremes of apocalyptic rhetoric even when grave danger threatened the nation. In his December 1832 proclamation, Jackson forcefully responded to South Carolina's nullification of the federal tariff and the state's threat of secession and warned, "Disunion by armed force is *treason*." But Jackson ended this resolute edict on a conciliatory note, almost as if he were appealing to his opponents' religious sensitivities. He concluded:

> May the Great Ruler of Nations grant that the signal blessings with which He has favored ours may not by the madness of party or personal ambition, be disregarded and lost; and may His wise providence bring those who have produced this crisis to see the folly before they feel the misery of civil strife, and inspire a returning veneration for that Union which, if we may dare to penetrate His designs, He has chosen as the only means of attaining the high destinies to which we may reasonably aspire.[26]

In the middle of this crisis, Jackson comfortably touted the God-centered notion of the Union's special role as "the only means" to attain "high destinies," but he did not offer any speculations on apocalyptic meanings for the Union's preservation or dissolution.

Another area of quick growth for the Old Southwest and Tennessee involved the economy. After the Nashville Bank opened in 1804, Tennessee prospered from increased

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[25]Dante Germino, *The Inaugural Addresses of American Presidents: The Public Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), 15.

[26]James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents 1789-1897* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896-99), 2:654, 656.

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commerce and steady but relatively slow urbanization compared to the eastern seaboard and the industrial North. By the mid-1800s, the state had only two urban areas that could be called cities–Nashville and Memphis–and a few smaller towns–Chattanooga, Clarksville, Murfreesboro, and Knoxville. Population gains from 100,000 in 1800 (two percent of the nation's five million) to about 800,000 in 1840 (five percent of the country's seventeen million) gave the state an expanding pool of laborers.[27] The state's vital economic force, as for most of the South, came from agricultural production and export of corn and wheat, cotton and tobacco, and livestock. The upswing in banking after the War of 1812, in which Tennesseans participated prominently, gave the state a good economic boost. The economy turned sour by the end of the decade as rampant spending and too much debt led to a collapse of the fragile pecuniary system and the Panic of 1819.

In Knoxville, which had lost its status as Tennessee's capital to Murfreesboro in 1818, the Panic caused ill feelings. Creditors and debtors of the capital-deprived "Old State Bank" felt cheated by the creation of a capital-enriched "New State Bank" in Nashville. In eastern parts of the state, the views of many were echoed in "The Bank that Jack Built," a biting satire in the *Knoxville Register*.

> . . . These are the Banks, which the city adorn,
> That gave *Credit* to Rags, all tatter'd and torn,
> By which the fleec'd Farmers, all poor and forlorn,
> And the bamboozled Traders, all shaven and shorn,
> Were robbed of their goods, and their Beef, Pork, and Corn,

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[27]*Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States* . . . (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Allen, 1841), 70, 103, 370.

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> Which they sold for the Rags, all tatter'd and torn
> That were issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
> By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
> That own the Bank that Jack built.
>
> These are the *Knowing ones*, * * * *
> Who laugh in their sleeves at the losers forlorn,
> And buy up the Rags, all tatter'd and torn,
> (Refused by the Banks which the city adorn)
> That the Farmers and Traders, all shaven and shorn,
> Received from their Goods, and their Beef, Pork, and Corn,
> When issued as money, noon, evening and morn,
> By the cunning Directors, that manage the Men,
> That own the Bank that Jack built.[28]

The cadence and crescendo of this satirical composition exuded negative feelings and highlighted the injustices of the new bank to those who felt cheated. The author intended to stir up opposition to the new bank and hinted in the poem at "breaking points" that were typical of apocalyptic thought (e.g., "all tatter'd and torn," "all shaven and shorn"). Some sense of the timelessness of apocalyptic ideas also was exploited (e.g., "noon, evening and morn"). But the author did not mention any divine or providential guidance and did not suggest the possibility of resolve to the situation or any new beginning (e.g., collapse of the financial system, reordering of the banking structure). "The Bank that Jack Built" contained seeds of apocalyptic thought but was not complete in its imagery.

Other opponents of the "loan office" bill that established the new state bank made use of biblical language to emphasize its potential injustice and wrongdoing. Eight members of the state's House of Representatives protested passage of the bill in their letter to the General Assembly. They scolded:

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[28]"Miscellaneous," *Knoxville Register*, 29 August 1820. See Appendix F for the entire poem.

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> But your protestant is of the opinion that this balance of outstanding notes will never be redeemed. . . . Shall the people be taxed to pay this deficiency; shall the public creditors be forced to pay their debts, or shall the plighted faith of the state be forgotten? . . . It is the opinion of your protestant, that the plighted faith of this state will kick the beam. . . . How are the people relieved? They have asked for fish, and you have gave them a serpent; they ask us to bind up one arm, and we strike off the other with a Butcher's cleaver.[29]

The leader of the "loan office" measure, Felix Grundy, was rebuffed in a full-page article by a contributor to Nashville's *Clarion* who used the pseudonym "Hamilton." "Hamilton" retorted, "He who receives such paper, bottomed on such securities, must have a faith in the credit of the state which 'believeth and hopeth all things.'"[30]

Andrew Jackson and his companions were more direct in their words chosen to oppose the "loan office" measure. They wrote:

> Upon an attentive scrutiny of its provisions, it will be found to be extremely deceptious and fraught with the most destructive consequences.
>
> The large emissions of paper, from the banks by which the country was inundated, have been the most prominent causes of those distresses of which we at present complain. They greatly increased the facilities of borrowing money, gave property a fictitious value, and introduced amongst us every species of extravagance and folly.
>
> It would appear . . . that the poison which generated the disease, is here attempted to be administered for its removal.[31]

Notwithstanding the critics, Governor McMinn urged the legislature in special session to pass the "loan office" bill. He spoke just as candidly in favor of the benefits of treasury notes as a "general plan" to relieve "the distresses of the times." He believed differently

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[29]Pleasant M. Miller, et al., Letter protesting passage of Loan Office bill, *Journal of the House of Representatives . . . of the State of Tennessee*, 13th General Assembly, 2nd session (Murfreesborough: G. A. and A. C. Sublett, 1820), 100-101.

[30]*The Clarion and Tennessee Gazette* (Nashville), 31 October 1820.

[31]"Tennessee Bank and Relief Law," *Niles' Weekly Register*, 2 September 1820.

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about the reasons for economic depression. He argued: "Treasures which are now hoarded up to be used in fattening on calamity will be drawn out, and again circulated in the ordinary channels of useful industry, when the schemes of grinding oppression are foiled."[32]

Both sides to the economic debate used this type of rhetoric based on moral and even religious reasons but seldom if ever resorted to end-of-the-world or apocalyptic ideas to make their arguments about economic uncertainties. The prediction of either failure or success with money matters was nebulous, and the consequences in the here-and-now were too dire (e.g., financial ruin, starvation). Most citizens who had spare resources wanted pragmatic not apocalyptic solutions. The state's economic evolution in the long term, as well as the nation's, underwent disturbing ups and downs. The cycle of economic slump with negative spinoffs for business owners, farmers, and common laborers went unforeseen by prognosticators and occurred again two decades later during the Panic of 1838.

More positively, the role of Tennessee in the South's economic progress followed the expansion and improvement of transportation routes in the region. The railroads, which were to play a significant role in the logistics of the Civil War, did not come to Tennessee in a big way until the 1850s. But shipping by water and travel overland made important strides in Tennessee in the early antebellum period. The first settlers had relied on old Indian trails such as Avery and Natchez traces and natural passageways like the

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[32]Message to the General Assembly, 26 June 1820, *Journal of the House of Representatives . . . of the State of Tennessee* (1820), 8, 12.

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Cumberland Gap and the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers. The application of new technologies such as steam power to boats and macadamized materials to turnpikes and roads enhanced these passageways, eased the strains of travel and shipping, and shortened transit times considerably. Tennessee functioned in this way as an important conduit from the eastern seaboard, the Piedmont, and the Gulf of Mexico to the heartlands of the South. The lack of unobstructed rivers and roads also emphasized East Tennessee's relative isolation from the rest of the state and its independent development agriculturally and socially. Tennesseans in eastern parts of the state relied increasingly on connections in the immediate trans-Appalachian locale (i.e., the Blue Ridge Mountains of Carolina and Virginia) and their peripheral areas (i.e., the Piedmont and the Coastal Plains). The state's inhabitants and leaders, however, viewed these advances as the blessings and benefits of providential care.

This ease of transportation across Tennessee into the South's heartlands seemed much different to the luckless African-Americans. Better transportation routes accelerated their relocation by the thousands from the eastern seaboard to the lands of the Mississippi Delta. This followed a general trend, as migration from soil-depleted coastal plantations and farmlands in the East brought possibly a quarter of a million slaves into Tennessee and the new states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. There the growing of cotton flourished and could be exported more easily along the Mississippi River down to port in New Orleans. In 1808, Congress had prohibited American involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, but this did not deter southern and Tennessee slave-owners from breeding and marketing their human chattel on southern soil.

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Naively unaware of the symbiotic nexus between slavery and the South's socioeconomic vitality, Tench Coxe, a political economist from Philadelphia, had observed over a decade earlier:

> The separate American states (with one small exception) have abolished the slave trade, and they have in some instances abolished negro slavery; in others they have adopted efficacious measures for its certain but gradual abolition. The importation of slaves is discontinued, and can never be renewed so as to interrupt the repose of Africa, or endanger the tranquility of the United States. The steady use of efficacious *alteratives* is deemed preferable to the immediate application of more strong remedies in a case of so much momentary and intrinsic importance.[33]

In the supply-and-demand game for cotton, "efficacious alteratives" notwithstanding, planters simply could not resist the economic profits reaped by their exploitation of slaves, something Coxe should have recognized. This spawned a bitter political struggle between free states and slave states for control of federal legislative bodies–a struggle that would rip apart Tennessee and the nation in the 1850s and 1860s. For the slaves, the end of the transatlantic slave trade and migration to the Mississippi River valley removed them from their coastal roots, degraded their cultural distinctiveness, and brought about an entirely American-born slave population and an American slave culture. All these transformations had important apocalyptic or end-of-their-world consequences for African-Americans and the nation.

Fortunately, there were voices of dissent against slavery at the national level and in Tennessee, primarily the eastern part of the state where smaller farms did not depend as heavily upon slave labor. Other factors such as religious and philanthropic beliefs

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[33]Tench Coxe, *A View of the United States of America in a Series of Papers . . .* (Philadelphia: William Hall and Wrigley & Berriman, 1794; repr., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965), 437.

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contributed as well to anti-slavery in both East and West Tennessee. As early as 1819, Elihu Embree, son of a Quaker minister and one of the first iron makers in upper East Tennessee, published the first abolitionist paper at Jonesboro called the *Manumission Intelligencer* and subsequently, beginning in April 1820, the *Emancipator* (Fig. 5.3).[34] From its inception, Embree used his *Emancipator* to critique and condemn slavery on biblical and moral grounds. One contributor, "Modern Listner," likened the situation with the slaves in the South to ancient Egypt and the slavery of Israelites, a disobedience to be punished by "an unerring Providence." Despite his hope that "the co-operation of divine Providence" might yield a workable solution to "the evils of slavery," "Listner" decried "so many living on the gain of oppression, contrary to their better judgement" and feared "the cup, which was once filled for Egypt, and for other criminal nations, will be doubly filled for the ten fold more enlightened, and consequently, ten fold more criminal land of America."[35] Embree and supporters like "Listner" frequently chided the slaves' abusers with apocalyptic threats of eternal doom. In lyrics that castigated "The Slave Holder Leaving the World after Bequeathing His Slaves to His Heirs," the editor sternly forewarned:

> From father to son, is injustice descending–
> The heirs of the parent, thus heirs of the crime;
> That slavery is legal, such men are contending,
> And lab'ring to prove that the right is divine!

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[34]*The Emancipator (Complete): A Reprint . . .* (vol. 1, nos. 1-7, April-October 1820; repr., Nashville: B. H. Murphy, 1932), 1-112.

[35]Ibid., 3-4.

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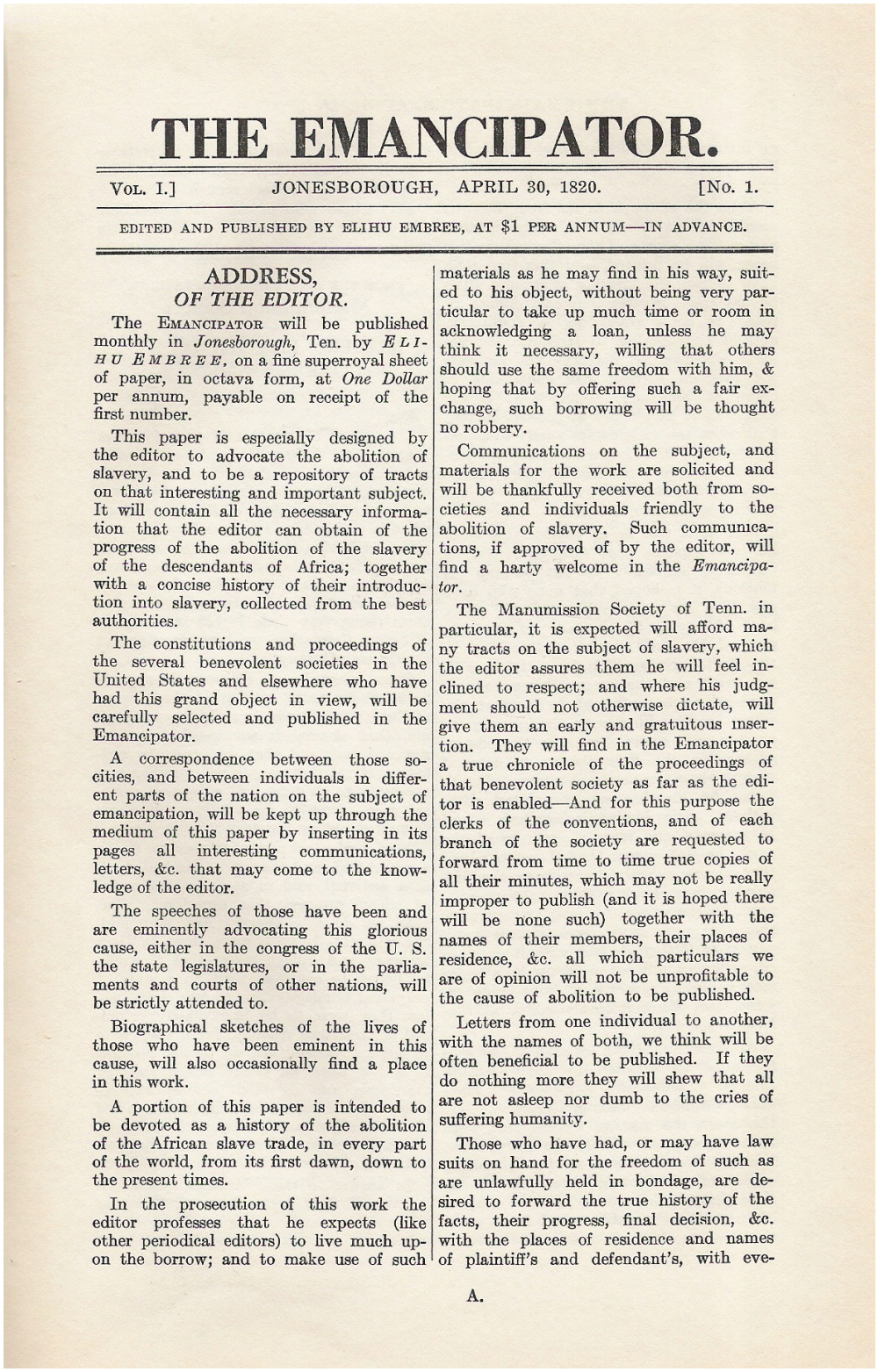

THE EMANCIPATOR.

VOL. I.] JONESBOROUGH, APRIL 30, 1820. [No. 1.

EDITED AND PUBLISHED BY ELIHU EMBREE, AT $1 PER ANNUM—IN ADVANCE.

ADDRESS,
OF THE EDITOR.

The EMANCIPATOR will be published monthly in *Jonesborough*, Ten. by *ELIHU EMBREE*, on a fine superroyal sheet of paper, in octava form, at *One Dollar* per annum, payable on receipt of the first number.

This paper is especially designed by the editor to advocate the abolition of slavery, and to be a repository of tracts on that interesting and important subject. It will contain all the necessary information that the editor can obtain of the progress of the abolition of the slavery of the descendants of Africa; together with a concise history of their introduction into slavery, collected from the best authorities.

The constitutions and proceedings of the several benevolent societies in the United States and elsewhere who have had this grand object in view, will be carefully selected and published in the Emancipator.

A correspondence between those societies, and between individuals in different parts of the nation on the subject of emancipation, will be kept up through the medium of this paper by inserting in its pages all interesting communications, letters, &c. that may come to the knowledge of the editor.

The speeches of those have been and are eminently advocating this glorious cause, either in the congress of the U. S. the state legislatures, or in the parliaments and courts of other nations, will be strictly attended to.

Biographical sketches of the lives of those who have been eminent in this cause, will also occasionally find a place in this work.

A portion of this paper is intended to be devoted as a history of the abolition of the African slave trade, in every part of the world, from its first dawn, down to the present times.

In the prosecution of this work the editor professes that he expects (like other periodical editors) to live much upon the borrow; and to make use of such materials as he may find in his way, suited to his object, without being very particular to take up much time or room in acknowledging a loan, unless he may think it necessary, willing that others should use the same freedom with him, & hoping that by offering such a fair exchange, such borrowing will be thought no robbery.

Communications on the subject, and materials for the work are solicited and will be thankfully received both from societies and individuals friendly to the abolition of slavery. Such communications, if approved of by the editor, will find a harty welcome in the *Emancipator*.

The Manumission Society of Tenn. in particular, it is expected will afford many tracts on the subject of slavery, which the editor assures them he will feel inclined to respect; and where his judgment should not otherwise dictate, will give them an early and gratuitous insertion. They will find in the Emancipator a true chronicle of the proceedings of that benevolent society as far as the editor is enabled—And for this purpose the clerks of the conventions, and of each branch of the society are requested to forward from time to time true copies of all their minutes, which may not be really improper to publish (and it is hoped there will be none such) together with the names of their members, their places of residence, &c. all which particulars we are of opinion will not be unprofitable to the cause of abolition to be published.

Letters from one individual to another, with the names of both, we think will be often beneficial to be published. If they do nothing more they will shew that all are not asleep nor dumb to the cries of suffering humanity.

Those who have had, or may have law suits on hand for the freedom of such as are unlawfully held in bondage, are desired to forward the true history of the facts, their progress, final decision, &c. with the places of residence and names of plaintiff's and defendant's, with eve-

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Fig. 5.3. Elihu Embree's *The Emancipator*. Reprinted in Nashville by B. H. Murphy, 1932.

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Unjustly, they live on the gain of oppression--
  Pretend they are marching the road to the sky,
Give their slaves to their heirs, as legal possession,
  Yet hoping for heaven when e'er they shall die!

But hard! the bell's tolling–the heirs are all mourning,
  The slaves, too, are raving almost in despair;
The mouldering body to dust is returning,
  Convey'd to the tomb, and deposited there!

The heirs, for their parent, no longer are grieving,
  They, of his estate, are each taking his boon;
While he for oppression, and bondage bequeathing,
  Is summoned to judgment, to meet with his doom!!![36]

Apocalyptic warnings like this came from Christian teachings about personal salvation and the individual's reward of heaven or hell. But early advocates of emancipation intuitively sensed the wrath of God's justice threatening the nation and its blessings,[37] although they never presaged the dissolution of the Union in apocalyptic fashion.

Others in the Old Southwest opposed slavery on the basis of philosophical and humanitarian reasons. In 1826, Frances Wright started a biracial utopian community called Nashoba near Memphis in West Tennessee. Wright sought to liberate the slaves of Nashoba by means of common labor and enlightened education and then, as a concession to local supporters, resettle the freed slaves in Africa. Inspired by utilitarian philosophy and utopian ideology, Wright's experiment never attracted enough local support and, after reports about maltreatment of the slaves, collapsed in less than five years. Wright's

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[36]Ibid., 77-78.

[37]See Appendix G and the editor's thoughts after "hearing of the separation of a negro woman and her children."

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vision of a society that treated blacks and whites equally, a sort of secular millennium, was not realized.[38]

Rather than the utopian ideas of Wright and other visionaries, Protestant Christianity ironically played the biggest part in both the approval and the denunciation of slavery. Thanks to Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists, Christianity had come to Tennessee's frontier with the early settlers, and they experienced gains but new schisms with the outbreak of revivals in the early 1800s. But the illusion of an increase in spirituality did not alleviate the burden of slavery's moral turpitude in the state. Protestant ministers, entrenched in the socio-political matrix of antebellum slave-holding culture, were dependent economically and psychologically on the goodwill of their churches in a pluralistic society that had severed formal connections between state governments and any specific Christian church.[39] Clergy out of necessity had to conform to the prevalent pro-slavery outlook, and a lot of churchmen held religious beliefs that justified the practice of slavery.[40]

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[38]For her views, see *A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South* (Baltimore: Benjamin Lundy, 1825). On the Nashoba experiment, see John Egerton, *Visions of Utopia: Nashoba, Rugby, Ruskin, and the 'New Communities' in Tennessee's Past* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 13-35.

[39]See Forrest Church, ed., *The Separation of Church and State: Writings on a Fundamental Freedom by America's Founders* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004); Martin E. Marty, "Living with Establishment and Disestablishment in Nineteenth-Century Anglo-America," *Journal of Church and State* 18, no. 1 (1976): 61-77.

[40]Jack P. Maddex, Jr., "Proslavery Millennialism: Social Eschatology in Antebellum Southern Calvinism," *American Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 46-92.

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For those who disagreed, they had the option to move to a free state, and many did just that. After twenty years of rigorous itinerant work in Kentucky and Tennessee, Methodist pastor Peter Cartwright decided to move his family to Illinois in 1824. He reflected later in life on this decision:

> I had seen with painful emotions the increase of a disposition to justify slavery, and our preachers, by marriage and other ways, became more and more entangled with this dark question, and were more and more disposed to palliate and justify the traffic and ownership of human beings, and the legislatures in the slave states made the laws more and more stringent, with a design to prevent emancipation. Moreover, rabid abolitionism spread and dreadfully excited the South. I had a young and growing family of children . . . was poor . . . [and] lands around me were high, and rising in value. . . . Although the thought of leaving thousands of my best friends was severely painful to me, and sometimes almost overwhelmed me, and shook my determination, yet I saw, or thought I saw, clear indications of Providence that I should leave my comfortable little home, and move to a free state or territory.[41]

Cartwright personally and existentially felt the apocalyptic angst of the slavery question, even though he did not use specific apocalyptic terminology. For his own sanity and the benefit of his family, he had to break away from the past (i.e., an end to his old world) and start a new phase of life in a new place. For the whole nation, unfortunately, things were not as easy.

As Cartwright, other clergy, and humanitarians learned by personal experience over a period of time, attempts to refine slavery to genteel standards simply were not effective. In its biblical justifications of slavery, Protestant Christianity in the South and in Tennessee failed to disrupt its gross abuses. Thus, the church failed to live up to the biblical imperatives found in the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount with respect

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[41]Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (1856; repr., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 165.

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to the slaves and became incapable of educating and truly reforming the hardheartedness of its congregants. An apocalyptic event, a civil war, was necessary to undo what decades of abuse had done and what Protestant Christianity and the federal government could not, or would not, do.

Tennesseans were affected deeply by these events, as they experienced excitement and disappointment that often accompanied times of accelerated change. They were part of an expanding and robust young nation, but quick cultural and societal evolutions brought danger and uncertainty. In the Old Southwest, religious movements reflected the hopes and aspirations as well as the ambiguities and doubts of the era. Political and social thought genuinely adhered to what Germino calls a "God-centeredness" in contrast to a deistic "man-centeredness."[42] Advancement of civilization was the key, and progress that improved the country's infrastructure and society itself was the goal to be attained at any and all costs. Civic leaders seldom raised any apocalyptic concerns about this progress, except those like Buttrick and Embree who sympathized with the plight of African Americans and Native Americans. While they did not voice concern for society's "outcasts" in forthright end-of-the-world language, they did see in light of traditional Christian teachings the struggles of blacks and Indians as a life and death battle for personal salvation. For the problems of slavery and Indian removal, an apocalyptic consciousness and its clear expression both religiously and politically would emerge later.

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[42]Germino, *Inaugural Addresses of American Presidents*, 15.