_____ **John Mayfield** _____
The New Nation: 1800-1845
(rev. ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 1982)

ch. 8: "Toward the Millennium"

__Excerpt__

[Beginning of chapter]

D**URING** the first half of the nineteenth century, Americans earned an international reputation for hard work, a boundless desire for self-improvement, and a chronic impatience with the status quo. "An American wants to perform within a year what others do within a much longer period," explained a German immigrant. "Ten years in America are like a century in Spain." No aspect of personal life and no thread in the social fabric escaped this restless search for progress, for Americans really seemed to believe that some cosmic force had blessed them with an unlimited capacity to improve their lot. The result was a persistent tendency to build, tear down, and build again. A Cincinnati newspaper, for example, complained in 1845 that no one seemed content to live or do business in the same building for more than a few years. The streets were always cluttered with stacks

10 of brick and wood for new and bigger edifices, plus heaps of rubble and junk from the remains of old ones. Similarly, Americans attacked and remade the design and structure of their society. They were passionate and incurable reformers, always ready with anew plan for uplifting the individual and society. "We are all a little wild here with numberless projects for social reform," Emerson rejoiced in 1840. "Not a reading man but has a draft of anew community in his waistcoat pocket."

At first glance the American passion for reform might seem out of place. Americans prided themselves on their progress and well-being—the result, they were quick to note, of the most ambitious and successful reform ever attempted, the republican revolution. But in one sense they were victims of their own rhetoric. If, as one Independence Day orator declared, Americans enjoyed "more national happiness and individual prosperity than falls to the lot of any people on the face of the

20 globe," how did they explain the persistence of vice and injustice that afflicted the new nation? If republican self-rule rested on the good judgment of the common man, what accounted for his dogged refusal to stop swearing, stop drinking to excess, stop trying to milk his neighbors of an easy dollar?

Nothing was more embarrassing than to find great expectations followed by weak performances. One mission of the reformer, then, was to tinker with society in order I to make that last step toward republican perfection.

More worrisome was the fear that the republican revolution would be perverted in its entirety, its grand dreams and visions misused to satisfy the wrong ambitions. Already there were signs that a decay of standards had set in. Materialism and comfort had replaced virtue and self-sacrifice as the guiding ideals of the new republic. And yet financial success had not brought its anticipated gains. Americans seemed to be an insecure, worried lot who were never satisfied. "All strangers who come among us remark the excessive anxiety written in the American countenance," commented one journalist in 1845. Poverty, tyranny, or lack of opportunity could not possibly be the cause in such a prosperous land; rather, a widespread preoccupation with getting more had induced a general sense of frustration. Anxiety had resulted from the "concentration of the faculties upon an object, which in its very nature is unattainable—the perpetual improvement of the outward condition."

In short, the republican revolution had left a vacuum both in attitudes and in institutions that generated intense unease among Americans. The countless schemes for social reform that Emerson remarked were signs of this uncertainty. The reformers seemed to say that man and society could indeed become perfect, but the very need to construct utopias suggested that the society which existed around them was sadly inadequate. Too much individualism—or individualism applied in the wrong manner—could create a society that was rootless and selfish. Institutions that might channel individual effort along creative lines, on the other hand, raised the possibility that new tyrannies, worse than those of Europe, would emerge. The reformer and the ordinary citizen both were searching for a middle ground, some way of uplifting the individual while integrating him with the community.

THE quest was foreshadowed by the great revivals that swept over the nation during the first half of the century. Beginning in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801, revivalism spread South and West, then East and North, culminating in the "burned-over district" of western New York during the 1820s. Revivals were not limited to the frontier, although they did have roots in the urge to escape the loneliness and brutality and boredom of frontier life. Certainly they carried an element of the theatrical, with at times thousands of the penitent gathered in clearings, listening to a half-dozen preachers at once in what resembled a political rally more than the worship of God. Simple farmers and sophisticated businessmen might break down, weep, shout, bark, or speak in tongues; the preachers carried on regardless. Hundreds might be saved and, six months or a year later, when the next revival passed through, be saved again. Though the theologians of the East frowned on such raucous enthusiasm, the

revivalists knew their audience and redoubled their efforts to save the entire country or, failing that, whole counties and states. "It may be well to state," commented one observer in 1839, ". . . that religious mania is said to be the prevailing form of insanity in the United States."

The revivals were not built on any elaborate theological framework. Indeed, the Second Great Awakening seemed almost hostile to systematic thought or intellectual consistency. Strains of predestination and Calvinism existed side by side with free will and Arminianism. The revival was divinely inspired and directed; the decision to be saved was an act of personal choice. Part of what gave the revivals their intensity and emotional drama was the mechanism of that choice. The revivalists appealed beyond the mind and to the heart. Anyone, whether he or she could read or not, could grasp the message of salvation. The less rationalism, the less logical weighing of alternatives, the less likelihood the individual soul would be led astray to overintellectual theological nitpicking. The need was to act, not to think.

While the Second Great Awakening did not have a Jonathan Edwards, it did have Charles Grandison Finney. Only nine years old at the time of the Cane Ridge meeting, Finney emerged in the 1820s and 1830s as the foremost leader of American revivalism, at once its most compelling spokesman and its most disciplined apologist. Finney, whose influence on the techniques of other reforms was profound, rejected the rigidity and elitism of traditional Calvinism. He agreed that wars, depressions, and revivals could be and were evidence of God's divine plan, but he vigorously denied that man had no free will, that he was a passive reed forever bent to a predestined fate. The individual alone was responsible for his salvation. "Neither God nor any other being can regenerate him if he will not turn," he argued. "If he will not change his choice, it is impossible that it should be changed." Moreover, having chosen regeneration, the sinner had his whole life transformed "from entire sinfulness to entire holiness." In short, if only the person willed it, God could make him perfect.

Free will implied, then, that the individual needed no intermediaries between him and God. Salvation was open to all classes; neither a trained clergy nor a Puritan body of visible saints was necessary to explain and spread the word of God. Finney's contempt for the theologian was complete. While they debated the number of angels who could dance on the head of a pin, whole communities of the lost languished in sin.

To save the individual was to begin the process of redeeming the whole society from chaos and anarchy. To revivalists, the new nation was cursed with a preoccupation with material well-being and greed that threatened to undo the social fabric. Change would come only when each individual recognized his true interests and responsibilities. According to Finney, he who listened to the word of God would be transformed "from a state of entire consecration to self-interest, self-indulgence and

self-gratification for its own sake . . . to a state of entire consecration to God and to the interests of his

90   kingdom. . . ." The change in basic attitudes, begun personally, would move outward until no member of society could escape its influence. All would share a unity of purpose that transcended the selfish desires of the individual. Evangelical religion thus provided a common ethos—a religious equivalent of nationalism—that bound the community together literally by an act of faith.

BY the 1830s, Finney and those like him who had preached spontaneous regeneration began to turn to the task of institutionalizing their crusade. In providing organized means of spreading the gospel, they were yielding to the certainty that the revivals would ebb, while insuring that the message would persist until the next great wave of enthusiasm. Methodists, for example, began the century with the crying need to form churches. After 1820, their membership extensive, they turned their efforts toward

100   education and voluntary associations of reform. On the frontier, especially, the great wave of revivals was closely followed by the establishment of congregations, which in time themselves produced schools, academies, and colleges. Finney himself joined the faculty of Oberlin College in 1837. A score of denominational colleges were founded in the South alone between 1819—the date of the formation of Centre College in Kentucky by the Presbyterians—and 1850. The purpose of these schools was clear: they protected the revival impulse by giving it continuity and form.

The benevolent society, or Protestant voluntary association, ministered more directly to the people. It had its roots not on the frontier but in the Congregational churches of New England and, beyond that, in the Quaker charitable societies and even the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Benevolent societies reflected the voluntary nature of American Protestantism. By avoiding

110   theological niceties, they opened the way for lay participation. Some were nondenominational. By emphasizing that God's work was nobler and more important than worldly gain, the associations created an alternate ideal: in place of the selfish entrepreneur came the selfless missionary. Individualism was not rejected; it was enhanced with a new purpose.

There was no inherent conflict, then, between personal salvation and the use of organized agencies of reform. The one was an individual, the other a social, expression of Christianity. Here was a close parallel between individual religion and democratic politics. As the political party glorified the common man while organizing him into a collective body, so did the voluntary association. It was a subtle blending of an ideal with the need for giving shape and form to the society whence that ideal sprang.

120   As the voluntary associations and benevolent societies matured, they, like the political parties, became more professional and more disciplined. In the cities, the local gentry were instrumental before

1830 in starting the associations, but as the decades progressed they withdrew, replaced by a new class of reformers who made benevolence and the work of God their occupation. Increasingly, the informal ideal of an organization staffed by volunteers gave way to one in which the leadership was disciplined, more professional, more committed to fund raising and publicity than to personal acts of sacrifice. By the time of the Civil War, the voluntary associations were led by persons who approached reform as an occupation and a business.

Associations were not confined to evangelical religion; they served an endless variety of purposes, including temperance, abolitionism, and prison and educational reform. Their presence indicated that

130 Americans were deeply concerned about the problem of social order. Without them, action toward common goals was difficult, sometimes impossible. Tocqueville, finding associations everywhere, concluded that they served an essential role in a democracy. "In aristocratic societies," he wrote, "men do not need to combine in order to act, because they are strongly held together. Every wealthy and powerful citizen constitutes the head of a permanent and compulsory association." "Among democratic nations, on the contrary, all the citizens are independent and feeble; they can do hardly anything by themselves." Thus, if "it be proposed to advance some truth, or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of a great example, they form a society. Wherever, at the head of some new undertaking, you see the government in France, or a man of rank in England, in the United States you will be sure to find an association." And so, "the most democratic country on the face of the earth is

140 that in which men have in our time carried to the highest perfection the art of pursuing in common the object of their common desires, and have applied this new science to the greatest number of purposes."

Benevolent associations were especially effective when they merged their efforts with those of state and local governments. An example was the almost total transformation of criminal justice that swept the nation during the 1820s and 1830s. During the colonial era, crime was attributed to the individual's innate depravity, and the usual punishments were exile, humiliation, or death. After the Revolution this attitude gave way to a gentler view that stressed man's inherent goodness. Improper instruction in moral values and a bad environment created the outlaw, and proper instruction and a good environment could reclaim him. To the Boston reformer Samuel Gridley Howe and others like him, a democratic society incurred a solemn responsibility to its outcasts. "When a government seizes

150 upon a person," Howe argued, "especially if he be young, and deprives him of all liberty of action, it assumes at once the offices, and incurs the responsibilities, of a parent and guardian." Good parents simply did not abuse their children with fetters, or dungeons, or scaffolds. They instructed them in wholesome conduct and moral values. The prison, then, was much like a school, "the only school," in

fact, ". . . which thousands of its hapless subjects ever enter." "How important, then," concluded Howe, "is the question, whether it is a school of virtue or a school of vice!"

And so new associations for penal reform emerged. In 1825 the Boston Prison Discipline Society organized under the leadership of Louis Dwight, an earnest and rather brittle agent of the American Bible Society. As a youth, Dwight had been headed for a traditional career in the ministry; an accident in a chemistry class injured his lungs and destroyed his plans. For a time he worked as a traveling agent of the American Bible Society—a job that exposed him to the wretched condition of prisons and the miserable lot of convicts. Using the techniques and format of one voluntary association, he began another and became for years the foremost advocate of prison reform in the new nation. Dwight's ideals lost some of their religious content in the transfer, for the Boston society was directed more toward educating the criminal in proper standards of social conduct and moral values than in training him in the tenets of a particular faith. Yet the religious overtones of Dwight's work were unmistakable. It was his intent to remove the prisoner from all evil influences, teach him self-discipline, and prepare him for a wholesome return to freedom.

These ideas and efforts were eagerly seconded by public officials throughout the Northeast. At about the same time Dwight was launching his society in Massachusetts, New York State was busy developing a revolutionary approach to prison discipline. Anew facility at Auburn attempted to solve the problem of rehabilitation by a unique combination of military routine, hard work, and total silence. Prisoners awoke at the same hour each morning, spent the day laboring together at collective tasks, and retired for the night in tiny cells three feet wide, seven feet long, and seven feet high. Any communication among prisoners was strictly forbidden. They marched to work in lockstep, ate their meals in rigid silence, and slept alone. Even a glance was outlawed, and violations of the rules were answered with the whip. The only break in this unremitting regime was the occasional visit by some charitable reformer, who provided the inmates with Bibles or simple tracts outlining a moral lesson. The Auburn experiment instantly found advocates—including Dwight—who praised it for the discipline it imposed and the moral instruction it provided. Encouragingly, the Auburn system also returned a profit, and other states eagerly copied it.

Alternate plans appeared, however. Pennsylvania experimented with various formats before settling on a plan of total solitary confinement. Auburn had experienced periods of unrest and one major riot—the result, explained Pennsylvania officials, of the tiny size of the cells. The obvious solution was to build a larger prison, the Eastern State Penitentiary at Cherry Hill: at the center was an octagonal Fortress—very like a medieval castle—from which seven radial arms of cells extended. Each cell was ten by twelve feet and had its own small exercise yard. A turreted wall ringed the entire

6

facility. Solitude was absolute: for the duration of his term a prisoner saw no one (except, again, the occasional missionary), received no letters from home, no news from the outside world, no word from other prisoners. He spent his time, presumably, in quiet meditation on the evil of his ways, read the tracts presented to him, and worked at solitary tasks.

Each system had its advocates who engaged in long, detailed, and often acrimonious debates over which plan worked best. The similarities between the two, however, outweighed the differences. Each was a center for rehabilitation, not penance. Each encouraged discipline, either by a tightly controlled routine or by removing all opportunities for diversion. Each attempted to school the prisoner in moral values. Most of all, each was designed to isolate the criminal from those who would help perpetuate his evil habits. European observers—including Tocqueville and Gustave de Beaumont—who visited them left with praise for their humane and sensible approach to criminal reform. Only later did lockstep, utter silence, and total isolation appear somewhat less than ideal.

What was most notable about these systems was the suddenness with which they appeared and the zealous devotion they inspired. Europeans marveled at the commitment Americans brought to prison reform. The Eastern State Penitentiary, for example, cost Pennsylvania $700,000 and kept a small army of guards and volunteers busy at its maintenance. The success of the Auburn system of congregate labor prompted Connecticut to move its condemned out of the dark squalor of an abandoned copper mine into a modern copy of the New York facility at Wethersfield. New York soon began to differentiate between youthful offenders and hardened criminals, entrusting the former to reform schools financed by private groups.

Behind these efforts were the persistent efforts of the voluntary associations. Dwight almost singlehandedly convinced the Connecticut legislature to build Wethersfield. By 1845 Dorothea Dix had extended the crusade to include separate facilities for the insane. The burden of paying for these changes ultimately fell on the public, but the beginnings were made by men and women who acted, voluntarily, through benevolent societies. However flawed the changes may appear in retrospect, the new prisons were an ambitious and typical testament to the reformer's desire to remake society—and his ability to organize his efforts.

The Jacksonian American, then, was profoundly, and in his own way expertly, concerned with forming institutions. What puzzled so many contemporary observers was the fact that these "institutions" fit no traditional mold. They lacked the elaborate hierarchy of Anglicanism or Catholicism; they carried no inherited legitimacy, as did the English aristocracy. They were, initially, bureaucratically primitive. They were products of a creative tension that existed in the new republic. Combining localism with nationalism, individualism with collectivism, voluntary associations were

220 mechanisms of ordering the community which were open to the participation of all. They fostered their own elites, it is true, but these elites differed fundamentally from those known before. Anyone who gave of his loyalties and his time was eligible. As in the political party, there were rewards, yet to the reformer these were nothing less than the perfection of an entire nation.

THE association provided a means of reforming society without rejecting it. It was inevitable, however, that some would repudiate American society altogether or, more likely, try to remake it by forming alternate examples of social harmony and perfection. They were not unlike the New England Puritans, who, by creating a city on a hill, hoped ultimately to inspire England to mend its ways. Unlike the Puritans, however, these reformers envisioned an earthly utopia based on the innate

230 goodness of mankind. They were, in a variety of ways, perfectionists.

Perfectionists were not so naive as to think that humanity was without faults. There was far too much evidence to the contrary. Nor did they necessarily believe that all men and women could achieve absolute perfection all the time. They did believe, however, that man's essential nature was good, not depraved; thus, they attacked one of the basic tenets of Calvinism. Their ultimate goal was to construct a society in which neither institutions nor the petty greed of individuals would stifle the better qualities of mankind. Perfectionists, then, attempted to promote harmony, comfort, cooperation, and personal development all at once.

By far the most successful of the perfectionist communities was that started by John Humphrey Noyes. Born in 1811, Noyes possessed both wealth and a religious, inquiring mind. In 1834 he lost his

240 license to preach when, inspired by the revivals, he refused to admit that human nature was basically sinful. From that point the perfectionist spirit grew in his mind, until in 1839 he decided to begin a community that would give shape to his ideas. Originally settling in Putney, Vermont, Noyes and his small band of followers were forced to flee to New York in 1846—primarily because of their unorthodox view of marriage. In 1848 they began anew near the small upstate town of Oneida.

The Oneida community was an experiment in religious communism. All money was held in common; all responsibilities were shared. One labored according to one's talents and endurance, but excessive work and competitiveness were discouraged. The emphasis was on harmony, matched by personal moral development. Women, for example, cooked only once during the day, thus freeing their time for reading and meditation. The food was simple; members of the community ate whenever they

250 wished. At night the community gathered in one of its large rooms for the "criticism," wherein the virtues and faults of a particular member were exposed, discussed, and evaluated. More often than not, a person who thought himself well on the way to perfection emerged from these sessions with a feeling

of total failure and self-contempt; no one, certainly, who endured the criticism walked away from it unchanged. It was part of Noyes's emphasis on communal sharing: if the entire group participated in the development of one of its members, the community as a whole improved accordingly.

Noyes's most controversial tenet of collective harmony was his system of "complex" marriage. "Religious love," he wrote, "is very near . . . to sexual love." Thus, if all were united in Christ, all were husband and wife. Noyes avoided the extreme male dominance of Mormon polygamy, while simultaneously rejecting the "feminine" ideal of Shaker celibacy. His goal, again, was to promote harmony and to discourage jealousy and competition. He who could share the marriage bed could share all.

For all its renunciation of competitiveness, the Oneida community proved to be a remarkably successful enterprise in capitalism. Oneida fruits, silks, and silver were praised for their quality and their workmanship. Oneida riding leathers and harnesses were sold as far north as Hudson's Bay. Part of the community's success stemmed from its attitude toward work. Where all labored, but no one met deadlines, there was time for skillful craftsmanship. Part, also, lay in the fact that all profits were poured back into the community, which within a few years possessed a neat, spacious, and valuable physical plant.

In time, neither financial success nor free love could keep the community together. As the first generation died or left, the second failed to develop the intense commitment to religious communism necessary for continuing the experiment. Noyes himself eventually left Oneida in 1877—the same year that his first cousin, Rutherford B. Hayes, became President. For most of its thirty years, however, Oneida had remained the most successful attempt at creating a working utopia in the United States.

Others were not so successful. Experiments in utopianism were usually the products of religious sects such as the Shakers, but in 1824 Robert Owen, the widely known English reformer, introduced the concept of worker communes. Owen had established model villages for the workers at his Lanark, Scotland, textile mills; then he had turned his efforts to the United States. At New Harmony, Indiana, on land he had purchased from disillusioned Shakers, he undertook to rehabilitate 2,400 souls—"the dregs of the dregs of society"—by a work-rest-play-study-meditate regime. When he explained it in Washington to a fascinated audience that included James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, it sounded as if the millennium were at hand; in two years, however, the movement was wrecked by declining funds, personal rivalries, and ordinary laziness. A similar community at Nashoba, Tennessee, at which Frances Wright hoped to colonize slaves who would earn their freedom by their labor, also failed.

The socialist utopian idea reappeared in America in the 1830s and early 1840s, this time inspired by the French socialist François Marie Charles Fourier. Albert Brisbane brought Fourierism to the

United States in 1834 and set down its principles in 1840 in *The Social Destiny of Man*. The core of the Fourierist communities was the phalanx, in which labor and capital together built self-sufficient societies based on the sanctity of hard work. As a resident of a phalanx, one labored in the fields or shops, did intellectual or creative work, and meditated. There was no room for the slacker. Fourierism, as Brisbane interpreted it, was a form of industrial perfectionism. Altogether, more than forty such communities were founded; none lasted long. It was a splendid means of reforming oneself, perhaps, and it did have the saving grace of involving communities as well. But the sacrifices were so large and the results so minimal that most simply grew tired and turned elsewhere, concentrating their efforts on particular needs.

WHILE the perfectionist communities always had some ties to the society around them, the Mormon movement attempted to reject American culture altogether. This most complex and ambitious of the several efforts to erect an alternate society began curiously in New York, in the imagination and frustrations of Joseph Smith. Born in Vermont, Smith was descended from a family whose chief distinction seemed to be an utter lack of distinction. Smith's mother, for example, was a naive, credulous woman who embraced vigorously and randomly any number of the religious enthusiasms of the day and who desperately hoped that one of her sons would grow to prominence as a modern saint. His father drifted through several occupations and several towns (nineteen in one ten-year period) in search of economic success. He was a visionary Yankee, not a shrewd one, and spent much time trooping through the countryside with a divining stick, in search of hidden water. From most reports Joseph Smith was an amiable, gregarious boy with a gift for words, although he was not well-read. He shared his father's instinct for quirky ideas and his mother's passion for the mystical.

In 1816, when Joseph was nine, the family moved to Palmyra, New York. At that time Palmyra was entering a decade of rapid change: a section of the Erie Canal was dug nearby, and the area attracted speculators and families on the move, many of them down-and-out Yankees such as Smith's own. During the 1820s, the village was at the center of the "burned-over district" of religious revivalism and, coincidentally, Antimasonry in upstate New York. In such surroundings Joseph Smith fit well. Like other migrants in the region, he had never known financial security or social status: like others, he found excitement in religious phenomena of all sorts. He cherished a "peek stone"—a small glazed rock—which he was persuaded gave him special powers of vision and which he used to search for buried treasure during his frequent walks in the woods.

On one such walk Smith was seized, as he related it, "by some power which entirely overcame me." Unable to speak, he was surrounded by an intense light from which two figures appeared, God

the Father and Jesus Christ. All religions were a hoax, they informed him; he must renounce them.

320 Smith's mother believed every word of the tale and encouraged her son to seek out the two figures again—a charge that Smith happily accepted. Shortly thereafter he reported finding, with the aid of his peek stone, a set of golden plates on which were inscribed a miraculous story of a lost tribe of Hebrews, the true disciples of Christ, who had wandered into the New World centuries before and whose ragged offspring were the Indians of the American West. The plates also foretold the coming of a new messiah, a Prophet, who would reassemble the lost tribe and establish the kingdom of God on earth. No one else, apparently, ever actually saw these plates. Smith allowed three men to "view" them; one admitted that he had looked through "the eyes of faith . . . though at the time they were covered with cloth." In time angels appeared and bore the mysterious tablets away.

But not before Smith had dictated their contents to ascribe and had them published. *The Book of*
330 *Mormon* appeared in 1830, and at the same time the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was born. From its humble and rather bizarre beginnings, the sect made remarkable progress. For fourteen years Smith expanded both his powers and his following in a religious odyssey that took him through three states, several reorganizations, and, finally, to death. In 1833 his small band moved to Kirtland Hills, Ohio—also a center for revivalists and religious eccentrics—and increased their number to several thousand. A second colony was started in Missouri, but both groups were tormented by public hostility—and subverted by Smith's questionable ventures into banking. In 1839 a new town, Nauvoo, in Illinois, was begun, and Mormonism began to prosper.

At Nauvoo, Mormonism began to take form as a hierarchical, authoritarian alternate to the expansive republic from which it originated. Smith's power was such that he could direct his followers
340 to vote as a bloc, and he used that power in the Illinois elections of 1840 to secure a unique charter for the new town. The mayor and aldermen exercised almost unlimited powers; they could pass, amend, or repeal laws at will. The community was strictly governed from the top and was almost entirely self-sufficient, with its own toolworks, factories, and sawmill—even a university. All this was guarded by a town militia of over two thousand troops, of which Smith was the undisputed commander. Within a few years the Mormon hierarchy had produced a city of spacious streets, careful planning, and seductive attractiveness. During the same period Smith's missionaries had reached Europe, and hundreds of immigrants from the factory towns of England were making the long trek to the New World to join their leader.

In 1844 Smith finally overstepped himself. Success bred egotism, and egotism led to the kind of
350 reckless megalomania that could be, and was, fatal. The Prophet outraged the state and a considerable number of his own disciples by his practice of polygamy, which he justified as a logical and divinely

ordained extension of the self-sufficient, paternalistic design of the church. The logic escaped many, however, and the movement began to fracture internally. More damaging was his ill-timed candidacy for the Presidency. Smith tried to persuade both political parties, and the federal government, to support his plan for a separate Mormon state. When that failed, he joined the contest directly, on a platform that contemplated, among other things, emancipation for slaves. What little tolerance Smith still enjoyed from Illinois officials disappeared. In June, Smith forcibly exiled the dissidents within his church; they fled to nearby Carthage, and anti-Mormon citizens in the surrounding communities called out their militia. Joseph Smith and his brother were imprisoned in the Carthage jail, promised a fair

360   trial by the governor, and promptly murdered by a mob.

      Their leader gone, their membership divided and split, Mormons once again took to the road. One group left for Iowa, another for Wisconsin, and yet a third—under Brigham Young—for the West. In 1847 Young reached the hills surrounding the Great Salt Lake in Utah, surveyed the valley before him, and calmly pronounced: "This is the place." Within a few years the theocratic Mormon government had established a well-run and prosperous colony of several thousand, all living and working outside the laws of any jurisdiction but their own. Young reiterated Smith's approval of polygamy, the faith's most controversial practice. More startling to the discerning observer was the consolidated, hierarchical design of the community. The "State of Deseret" was democratic in name only; each of its citizens was a saint in the Kingdom of God. But work, currency, the law, and families were organized

370   and governed by a paternalistic authority headed, naturally, by Young. The group wanted no part of the government or the society they had left. Their insistent demand for autonomy and their polygamy involved them in a decade of quarrels with Washington, which ruled the Utah Territory after the Mexican War. Only in 1858 was an uneasy compromise reached.   Who would join such a movement? The reasons are as varied and particular as the number of individual Mormons. Some were drawn by the content of the Mormon message, which promised regeneration and a new commitment to Christianity. Some were undoubtedly swayed by the personal magnetism of Joseph Smith, who seemed to grow more confident, more charismatic, as the years went by. But overall, the hierarchical, authoritarian structure of the church and its promise to make saints of ordinary men and women appear to have had their greatest impact on persons whose histories were much like that of their leader. The

380   wandering Yankees, the visionaries, the failed shopkeepers and frustrated artisans who joined Smith had somehow been left behind in the rapid expansion of the new republic. Born into a society that promised them unlimited progress, they had achieved only mediocrity and sour dreams. The English workingmen who responded to the Mormon missionaries had experienced much the same disillusionment in industrial Britain. Mormonism offered them sainthood, an ultimate and eternal

realization of their hopes. The hierarchy to which they submitted imparted a sense of order to a changing world. Throughout ran the conviction that the church was a redeemed nation, a state unto itself, chosen by God to preserve morality and obedience to a higher law in a world otherwise corrupted by materialism and vice. Mormons may have rejected American society, then, but in certain ways they owed their very existence to it. [Chapter continues.]