

American Minute with Bill Federer

Abolitionist Poets: William Lloyd Garrison, Louisa May Alcott, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Henry David Thoreau & Ralph Waldo Emerson -- "America ... a last effort of divine Providence in behalf of the human race"

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The Second Great Awakening spread across America in the early 1800s. Not only was **the Gospel preached**, bringing people to **a saving faith in Christ**, but believers were spurred to **share their faith in action**, bringing **social change**.

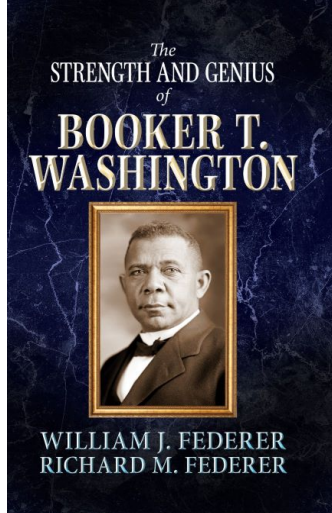


Revivalist **Charles Finney** preached:

"Every member must work or quit. No honorary members" ... [continue reading American Minute here ...](#)

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Finney's preaching inspired **William Booth** to found the **Salvation Army**, and **George Williams** to found the **Y.M.C.A. (Young Men's Christian Association)**.

Called "**Practical Christianity**," believers formed a network of volunteer Christian organizations, the "**Benevolent Empire**," to:

- Lobby for prison reform;
- Found and staff hospitals;
- Care for handicapped and mentally ill;
- Provide for immigrants;
- Establish schools for the poor;
- Go as missionaries around the world; and
- Work to **end slavery** through the **abolitionist**

Second Great Awakening led to "practical Christianity," believing if you were really saved you would work to save souls, fight sin, care for others, and work to better society.

The Benevolent Empire

This gave rise to a network of voluntary associations:

- temperance societies
- prison reform
- health & education reform
- women's rights
- self-improvement societies
- abolition of slavery

movement.

Though these organizations were largely run by Christians, over time, some began to **focus more on improving society and less on sharing the Gospel.**

This highlighted the danger of there being a **ditch on either side of the road**, namely;

- **on one side** is having **correct beliefs** but **not doing anything good**;
- **on the other side** is **doing lots of good** but **not having correct beliefs.**

This was evident in the period from the French Revolution to the Civil War.

William Lloyd Garrison published the Boston anti-slavery paper ***Liberator*** and founded the **American Anti-Slavery Society** in 1833.

He suffered hundreds of death threats for his politically incorrect stand on the value of human life.

Author John Jay Chapman wrote in the biography ***William Lloyd Garrison*** (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1921):

"The source of **Garrison's** power was the **Bible**. From his earliest days, **he read the Bible constantly** and prayed constantly. It was with this fire that he started his conflagration ...

So also, a prejudice against all fixed forms of worship, against the authority of human government, against every binding of the spirit into conformity with human law, — all these things grew up in **Garrison's** mind out of his **Bible reading.**"

William Lloyd Garrison wrote in his inaugural edition of ***The Liberator***, (Boston), January 1, 1831:

"I desire to thank God, that he enables me to disregard **'the fear of man which bringeth a snare,'** and to speak his truth in its simplicity and power.

And here I close with this fresh dedication (from Scottish poet Thomas Pringle's "To Oppression," April 22, 1828)

...

"I swear, while life-blood warms my throbbing veins,
Still to oppose and thwart, with heart and hand,
Thy brutalizing sway -- **till Afric's chains
Are burst, and Freedom rules the rescued land,**
Trampling Oppression and his iron rod:
Such is the vow I take - **SO HELP ME GOD!"**

In **"W.P. and F.J.T. Garrison,"** 1885-89, **William Lloyd Garrison** wrote:

"Wherever there is a human being, I see **God-given rights inherent in that being,** whatever may be the sex or complexion."

Former slave **Frederick Douglass** wrote in ***My Bondage and My Freedom,*** 1855:

"After reaching New Bedford, there came a young man to me with a copy of the *Liberator* ... edited by **William Lloyd Garrison** ...

... His paper took its place with me **next to the Bible** ...

... It detested **slavery** ... and, with all the solemnity of **God's word,** demanded the complete emancipation of my race ...

His words were ... holy fire ... The **Bible** was his text book ... **Prejudice against color was rebellion against God."**

William Lloyd Garrison worked with another abolitionist, **Amos Bronson Alcott,** father of **Louisa May Alcott,**

author of *Little Women* (1868).

In 1843, **Amos Bronson Alcott** founded a utopian community called **Fruitlands**, but it failed seven months later, as **Louisa** wrote in *Transcendental Wild Oats*.

In 1830, **Amos Bronson Alcott** helped found the **first Boston anti-slavery society organization**, with **William Lloyd Garrison**.

The Alcott home in Concord, Massachusetts, called "The Hillside," was a stop on the **Underground Railroad** for **escaped slaves** to rest on their way north to freedom.

During the **Civil War**, the Union Army sent out a call for **battlefield nurses**.

Louisa May Alcott enlisted and served. She wrote:

"My greatest pride is that I lived to know the **brave men and women who did so much for the cause**, and that I had a very small share in the war which **put an end to a great wrong**."

She, along with her mother and sister, **gave free lessons** in reading and writing to **African American women**.

In 1879, Massachusetts allowed **women vote** on issues of schools, bonds, and taxes.

Alcott was the first woman to register to vote in Concord. She wrote on 1881 to Thomas Niles:

"I can remember when **anti-slavery** was in just the same state that **suffrage** is now, and take more pride in the very small help we **Alcotts** could give than I all the books I ever wrote."

Some notable lines of **Louisa May Alcott** are:

- "The door of opportunity opened just a crack."

- "Happy is the son whose faith in his mother remains unchallenged."
- "Watch and pray, dear, never get tired of trying, and never think it is impossible to conquer your fault."

Alcott wrote:

"My child, the troubles and temptations of your life are beginning, and may be many; but **you can overcome and outlive them all** if you learn to feel the **strength and tenderness of your Heavenly Father** as you do that of your earthly one.

The more you love and trust Him, the nearer you will **feel to Him**, and the less you will depend on human power and wisdom.

His love and care never tire or change, can never be taken from you, but may become the source of lifelong peace, happiness, and strength.

Believe this heartily, and go to **God** with all your little cares, and hopes, and sins, and sorrows, as freely and confidently as you come to your mother."

In 1848, **Louisa May Alcott** convinced her family to move to Boston, where they attended **Federal Street Church** and heard the preaching of **William Ellery Channing**.

Amos Bronson Alcott said **Channing**: "Throws upon the principles of Christianity a light which dissipates the darkness in which it has been so long enclosed."

The Alcott's old home, "**The Hillside**" was purchased by **Nathaniel Hawthorne**, who renamed it "**The Wayside**."

He hired **Henry David Thoreau** to survey it in 1852.

Nathaniel Hawthorne was a romanticist author, famous

for *Twice-Told Tales* (1837), *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The Marble Faun* (1850), *The House of Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Blithedale Romance* (1852).

He wrote:

- **"Christian faith** is a grand cathedral, with divinely pictured windows. Standing without, you see no glory, nor can possibly imagine any; standing within, every ray of light reveals a harmony of unspeakable splendors."
- **"Our Creator** would never have made such lovely days, and have given us the deep hearts to enjoy them, above and beyond all thought, unless we were meant to be immortal."

William Ellery Channing, who graduated from Harvard in 1798, described how the **French Revolution** had **shaken the faith** of the **Harvard student body**:

"College was never in a **worse state** than when I entered it. **Society** was passing through a **most critical stage**.

The **French Revolution** had **diseased the imagination** and **unsettled** the understanding of men everywhere.

The **old foundations of social order, loyalty, tradition, habit, reverence for antiquity, were everywhere shaken, if not subverted. The authority of the past was gone.**"

This era of **shaken faith** led to **skepticism**, similar to what was **experienced in Europe** following the **Napoleonic Wars, and World Wars I and II.**

Alberto M. Piedra wrote in **"The Dechristianization of France during the French Revolution"** (*Institute of World Politics*, Jan. 12, 2018):

"French governments between 1789 and the *Concordat*

of 1801 ... formed the basis of the gradual trend toward **dechristianization**, later transformed into a less radical **laïcité (secularization.)**

Most scholars would argue that the goal of the revolutionary government between 1793 and 1794 ranged from the **public reclamation** of the massive amount of **land, power, and money held by the Church** in France to the **termination of religious practice** and **the extermination of religion itself ..."**

Piedra continued:

"La Constitution Civile du Clergé ... July 12, 1790 ... resulted in ... **religious practice ... outlawed** and **replaced with the cult of the "supreme being," a deist state religion ...**

Dechristianization ... increased in intensity with ... the *Law of Suspects* (September 17, 1793) ...

- 1) **all priests** and **all persons protecting them** are liable to **death on the spot**,
- 2) the **destruction of all crosses**, bells and other external signs of worship,
- 3) the **destruction of statues, plaques, and iconography** from places of worship ...

In 1793, the **Christian calendar was replaced** with one reckoning from the **date of the Revolution** and the **Festivals of 'liberty, reason, and the supreme being'** were officially established ..."

Piedra concluded:

"During the two-year **Reign of Terror**, **anti-clericalism became more violent** than any other in history ...

The Festival of Reason ... November 10, 1793 in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris ... **loose living girls** took occasion to **celebrate at the main altar the cult** to the

Goddess Reason with Phrygian bonnets on their heads.

The **wave of massacres** started in 1789 ... Rene Sedillot writes in his book *Le Coût de la Révolution Française* that in Paris **1,300 assassinations took place in four days."**

The **French Revolution's hatred of traditional Christianity** crossed the ocean, and a **watered-down version influenced various New England preachers**, most notably, **William Ellery Channing**.

His preaching contributed to the birth to **"Unitarian Christianity,"** out of which a group of idealistic New England authors, philosophers, intellectuals and politicians formed the **"Transcendental Club"** -- which enjoyed **popularity** prior to the Civil War.

They attempted to maintain **Christian morality without acknowledging the divinity of Christ**.

They held to **Biblical concepts** of the **individual, freedom of conscience, self-control, and the existence of the being of God**, but fell short of **attributing** the origin of these concepts to **Judeo-Christian thought**.

Transcendentalists were essentially **religious libertarians** who championed **self-reliance, independence**, seeing the **divine experience in everyday life**, and believed salvation was earned by doing good works.

Channing was initially a **moderate abolitionist** till the **British** successfully **abolished slavery** in the **British West Indies** in 1834.

When **none of the predicted economic and social upheavals took place in the Caribbean**, **Channing** changed and began doing good works to **abolish slavery**.

At first, **transcendentalists** maintained basic Christian doctrines, being called **Unitarian Christians**.

Channing wrote March 31, 1832, (*Memoir of William Ellery Channing*, vol. 2, p. 416):

"I have always inclined to the doctrine of the **preexistence of Christ**, though am not insensible to the weight of your objections."

A similar attitude was expressed by **Abigail Adams**, who attended the First Parish Church in Quincy, and wrote May 5, 1816, that she still believed Jesus was divine:

"I acknowledge myself a unitarian – Believing that the **Father** alone, is the supreme God, and that **Jesus Christ** derived his Being, and all his powers and honors from the Father."

Over time, unitarians and transcendentalists **stopped believing in the atonement of Christ**.

They cut themselves loose from the anchor of Biblical absolutes.

The resulting **moral drift affected the pulpits of Congregational Churches in New England**, as well as **New England academia**, most significantly, **Harvard**.

In 1805, **transcendentalism** forever changed **Harvard**.

Jedediah Morse, "Father of American Geography" was **one of the overseers of Harvard**. He **tried** to keep the college **anchored to traditional Christianity** but **he was out-voted**.

The other **college overseers** voted to break from the nearly **two centuries of Calvinistic Protestantism** by choosing a **Unitarian, Henry Ware**, to chair of the **Harvard Divinity School**.

Soon there began a **purging of the past faith**.

At **Yale**, there was a pushback to this liberalism, led by **Timothy Dwight**, the 8th President of the college.

Dwight listened patiently to that era's version of woke students who were enamored with French infidelity, secularism, and the loosening of moral restraints.

Then **Dwight** systematically answered their questions and exposed the shallowness of their reasoning in a series of weekly lectures, giving "a well-reasoned defense of the Bible's accuracy."

Dwight's son, **Sereno Edwards Dwight**, was a student at Yale during this time. Sereno, who later became U.S. Senate Chaplain, wrote:

"From that moment, infidelity was not only without a stronghold, but without a lurking place."

Another **Yale student** wrote:

"It seemed for a time as if the whole mass of the students would press into the kingdom. It was the Lord's doing, and marvelous in all eyes. Oh, what a blessed change! It was a glorious reformation."

A **Yale tutor** wrote:

"Yale College is a little temple; prayer and praise seem to be the delight of the greater part of the students while those who are still unfeeling are awed with respectful silence."

Through the efforts of **Timothy Dwight**, over a third of Yale's student body experienced conversion, with many entering the ministry.

The **secular push, though, continued in academia**, especially among intellectual elites, fueled by German

philosophers.

Over time, the **anti-Christian ideas** that began with **French Revolution** took root and became predominant on **American college campuses**.

Education became increasingly **secular**, and eventually hostile and intolerant of **Biblical faith**, and even **God**.

By the late 1800s, philosopher **Friedrich Nietzsche** called it hypocritical for **those who have rejected Christianity and God** to consider themselves "**moral**" ("Twilight of the Idols," *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed., trans. Walter Kaufman, NY: Penguin Books, 1976, p. 515-6):

"When one gives up the Christian faith, **one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet** ... By breaking one main concept out of it, the **faith in God**, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one's hands.

Christianity presupposes that man does not know ... what is good for him ... **God ... alone knows it. Christian morality ... stands or falls with faith in God.**"

One of the students of the liberal **Harvard Divinity School** was **Theodore Parker**, who graduated in 1836.

Parker identified as a **transcendentalist** and was ordained as the pastor of the **Unitarian Church** in West Roxbury, Massachusetts.

He wrote:

"I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve ... by ... sight, I can divine it by conscience.

And from what I see I am sure **it bends towards justice.**"

Around this time, **Millard Fillmore** helped organized a **Unitarian Church** in 1821 near Buffalo, New York.

In July, 1850, **Fillmore** became the 13th U.S. President when Zachary Taylor died.

Fillmore articulated the **Democrat position on slavery:**

"God knows that **I detest slavery, but** it is an existing evil, for which we are not responsible, and **we must endure it, and give it such protection** as is guaranteed by the Constitution, till we can get rid of it without destroying the last hope of free government in the world."

Parker criticized the **Democrat Party's pledge to continue slavery:**

"See what the Convention says of the **Democratic party:** — 'We understand the **Democratic party** to be **pledged to decline any legislation upon the subject of slavery,** with a view **either to its prohibition** or **restriction** in places where it does not exist, **or to its abolition in any of the territories** of the United States' ..."

Parker continued:

"There are some very sad examples ... A man of high standing in the New England churches ... **defends slavery** ...

Perhaps I ought not to say, 'if' Christianity supports slavery. We all know **it does not, never did, and never can.**" (Frances Power Cobbe, *The Collected Works of Theodore Parker*, 1863, Volume 5, p. 103-133).

When **Fillmore** signed the **Fugitive Slave Law**, which **empowered the Federal Government to track down and arrest escaped slaves**, **Theodore Parker** publicly

rebuked him:

"There hangs in my study ... the gun my grandfather fought with at the battle of Lexington... and also the musket he captured from a British soldier on that day.

If I would not peril my property, my liberty, nay my life to keep my parishioners **out of slavery**, then I should throw away these trophies, and should think I was the son of some coward and not a brave man's child."

Though **evangelical Christianity** and **unitarian transcendentalism** were **separate from each other theologically**, they were able to **join together in patriotism and opposing slavery**.

Parker's religion of **doing good works** resulted in him becoming one of the many outspoken **abolitionists**.

His writing may have influenced **Abraham Lincoln**, whose **Gettysburg Address**, November 1863:

"Our fathers brought forth ... a new nation, conceived in **Liberty**, and dedicated to the proposition that **all men are created equal** ...

That this nation, **under God**, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government **of the people, by the people, for the people**, shall not perish from the earth."

Parker had previously stated in "The Effect of Slavery on the American People," to the **New England Anti-Slavery Convention**, May 29, 1850:

"**The American idea** ... seems to me to lie at the basis of all our ... institutions ...

The idea that **all men have unalienable rights**; that in respect thereof, **all men are created equal**; and that **government is to be established** and sustained for the purpose of **giving every man** an opportunity for the

enjoyment and development of all these unalienable rights ...

This idea demands ... a democracy,

that is, a government **of all the people, by all the people, for all the people**; of course, a government after the **principles of eternal justice, the unchanging law of God**; for shortness' sake, I will call it **the idea of Freedom.**"

Parker himself may have gotten that idea from **Daniel Webster**, who told the U.S. Senate in 1830:

"It is, Sir, the people's Constitution, the people's Government, made **for the people**, made **by the people**, and answerable **to the people.**"

Earlier, British politician **Benjamin Disraeli** wrote in *Vivian Grey* (1826):

"All power is a trust; that we are accountable for its exercise; that **from the people** and **for the people** all springs, and all must exist."

The line may have originally been from **John Wycliffe** in 1384, who was **the first to translate the Bible into English so the common people could read it**:

"This Bible is for the Government **of the People, by the People, and for the People.**"

Theodore Parker wrote:

"Since the Revolution, there have been three instances of great national importance, in which **freedom has overcome slavery ...**

1. In **prohibiting slavery from the North-west territory**, before the adoption of the Constitution;

2. In **prohibiting the slave-trade in 1808**. I mean, in

prohibiting the African slave-trade; the American slave-trade is still carried on in the capital of the United States;

3. The **prohibition of slavery in Oregon** may be regarded as a third victory."

A colleague of **Channing** and **Parker** was poet **Henry David Thoreau**.

Thoreau wrote:

- "It's only by forgetting yourself that you draw near to **God**."
- "If Nature is our mother, then **God** is our father."
- "When you knock, ask to see **God** — none of the servants."
- "As I stand over the insect crawling amid the pine needles on the forest floor, and endeavoring to conceal itself from my sight, and ask myself why it will cherish those humble thoughts, and hide its head from me who might, perhaps, be its benefactor, and impart to its race some cheering information, I am reminded of **the greater Benefactor and Intelligence that stands over me** the human insect."

In the spring of 1862, while he lay dying, **Thoreau** was asked by his aunt Louisa if he had made peace with God. **Thoreau** responded, "I did not know we had ever quarreled."

Henry David Thoreau wrote in *Civil Disobedience*, 1849:

"That government is best which governs not at all; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have."

Thoreau influenced Leo Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi, and

Martin Luther King Jr.

King, while at Morehouse College in 1944, read **Thoreau's** *On Civil Disobedience*.

Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote:

"In this courageous New Englander's refusal to pay his taxes and **his choice of jail rather than support a war that would spread slavery's territory into Mexico**, I made my first contact with the theory of **nonviolent** resistance.

Fascinated by the idea of refusing to cooperate with an evil system, I was so deeply moved that I reread the work several times. I became convinced that noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good.

No other person has been more eloquent and passionate in getting this idea across than **Henry David Thoreau** ... The teachings of **Thoreau** came alive in our civil rights movement ...

Peaceful protest(s) ... are outgrowths of **Thoreau's** insistence that evil must be resisted and that no moral man can patiently adjust to injustice."

Another contemporary of **Channing**, **Parker**, and **Thoreau** was poet **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, born May 25, 1803.

An advocate of individualism and personal freedom, **Emerson** wrote

"This is the **history of governments** ... a man who cannot be acquainted with me, **taxes me**; looking from afar at me, ordains that a **part of my labor shall go to this or that whimsical end**, not as I, but as he happens to fancy ...

... Hence, **the less government we have, the better ...**

The **fewer laws ... the less confided power.**

The antidote to this **abuse of formal Government**, is, the influence of **private character ...**

The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary ...

He needs no army, fort, or navy, - he loves men too well; no bribe, or feast, or palace, to draw friends to him; no vantage ground, no favorable circumstance."

Ralph Waldo Emerson composed some of the best loved poems in American literature, including ***The Concord Hymn***, of which a stanza is inscribed on the base of Daniel Chester French's Minute Man Statue:

"By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled;
Here once the embattled farmers stood;
And fired the shot heard round the world."

Emerson commented on John Quincy Adams:

"No man could read the **Bible** with such powerful effect, even with the cracked and winded voice of old age."

In 1848, **Ralph Waldo Emerson** visited Paris between the February Revolution and the bloody June Days.

When he saw that mobs had cut down trees near the Champ de Mars to form barricades across downtown city streets, he wrote in his journal:

"At the end of the year we shall ... see if the Revolution was worth the trees."

When abolitionist publisher and Presbyterian pastor **Elijah Lovejoy** was murdered by pro-slavery Democrats

in 1838 and his printing press destroyed, **Ralph Waldo Emerson** said:

"It is but the other day that the brave **Lovejoy** gave his breast to the bullets of a mob, for **the rights of free speech and opinion.**"

Emerson stated:

- "I think **we must get rid of slavery**, or we must get rid of freedom."
- "It now appears that the **negro race** is, more than any other, susceptible of rapid civilization. The **emancipation** is observed, in the islands, to have wrought for the **negro** a benefit as sudden as when a thermometer is brought out of the shade into the sun. It has given him eyes and ears."

Abolitionist Sen. **Charles Sumner** attended **Trinity Episcopal Church** in Boston, and **King's Chapel**, described as **Unitarian Christian** in theology, **Anglican** in worship, and **Congregational** in church government.

Sumner took **Ralph Waldo Emerson** to the White House to meet Republican President **Abraham Lincoln**.

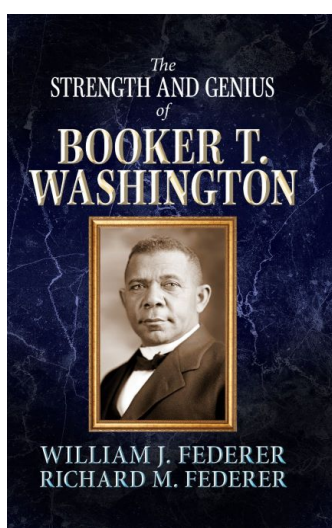
Having voted for the **Lincoln**, **Emerson** stated of the Southern Democrat states in a lecture at the Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.:

"The South calls **slavery** an institution ... I call it destitution ...

Emancipation is the demand of civilization."

In 1865, **Ralph Waldo Emerson** remarked at a memorial service for Abraham Lincoln:

"I doubt if any death has caused so much pain as this has caused."



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On September 12, 2001, the day after Islamic fundamentalists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, **J.C. Watts, Jr.**, gave a speech quoting **Emerson:**

"Politics has taken the day off. Today Congress remembers and recognizes the afflicted and the sorrowing and those who come to the aid of their fellow man. **Ralph Waldo Emerson**, in 1842, captured what we are thinking as a nation today:

'Sorrow makes us all children again,
destroys all differences of intellect.
The wisest knows nothing.'"

In *The Conduct of Life* (1860), **Emerson** wrote:

Fate-

"Men are what their mothers made them."

In *May-Day and Other Pieces* (1867), **Ralph Waldo Emerson** wrote:

Boston Hymn, st. 2-

"**God** said, I am tired of kings,
I suffer them no more;
Up to my ear the morning brings
The outrage of the poor."

Fragment-

"Wilt thou seal up the avenues of ill?
Pay every debt as if **God** wrote the bill."

Ode, st. 5 -

"United States! the ages plead, -
Present and Past in under-song, -
Go **put your creed into your deed**,
Nor speak with double tongue."

Voluntaries III-

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is **God** to man,
When Duty whispers low, Thou must,
The youth replies, I can."

Regarding civilization, **Emerson** wrote:

"The **true test of civilization** is, not the census, nor the size of the cities, nor the crops - no, but **the kind of man the country turns out.**"

In *Social Aims*, **Emerson** wrote:

"Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy."

In *The American Scholar* (1837), **Ralph Waldo Emerson** wrote:

"In how many churches, by how many prophets, tell me, is man made sensible that he is an infinite Soul; that the earth and heavens are passing into his mind; that he is drinking forever the soul of **God?**"

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote:

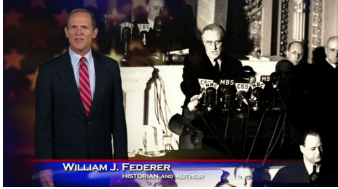
- "All I have **seen** has taught me to trust the **Creator** for all I have **not seen.**"
- "**America is another name for opportunity.** Our whole history appears like a **last effort of divine**

Providence in behalf of the human race."

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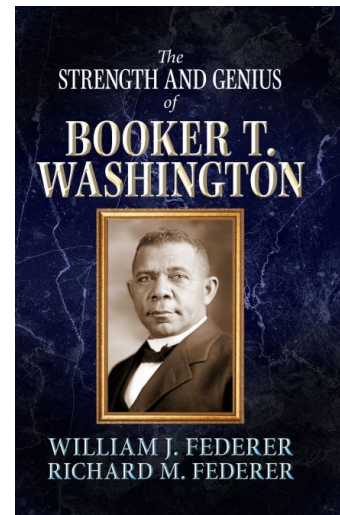
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