WILLIAM L. GARRISON’S LIFE IN IDEAS: THE PHILOSOPHER ABOLITIONIST

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INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to provide a biographical and historiographical examination of the noted Immediate Abolitionist leader, William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison is well worth studying since he was uniquely positioned at the heart of the immediate abolitionist movement. Garrison (1805-1879) was perhaps the best-known and most radical immediate abolitionist of the antebellum period, and was closely associated at various times with other notables such as Wendell Phillips, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Frederick Douglass. Some historians have even described his role as being uniquely indispensable to the early days of abolitionism, viewing him as the movement's spiritual leader and the center of philosophical discord within the movement’s hierarchy. In fact, the key philosophical differences within the movement have even been characterized by academic journals as divisions between Garrisonian and anti-Garrisonian factions. Noted historian Aileen S. Kraditor goes so far as to say, “… the personal and ideological idiosyncrasies of William Lloyd Garrison have been used to set the tone for discussions of the whole movement.”¹ No study of the antebellum period is complete without a study of Garrison’s life and personal philosophy.

Another intent of this paper is to try and account for the wildly differing interpretations of Garrison's motivations and principles both by his contemporaries and subsequent historians. Throughout his life Garrison was an idealistic man who defined himself and others in the framework of his individual morality and philosophy. Therefore, any biography must also study the evolution of Garrison’s personal ideology to understand its outward effect on others. As previously noted, Garrison's public expression of ideas often provoked controversy and differences of opinion. So perhaps it is understandable that there are as many different opinions about the wily abolitionist as there are authors writing about him. In other words, Garrison is
perfect fodder for further research and debate.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE GARRISON COLLECTION

The methodology to explore Garrison’s life and later academic works about his time on earth was an analysis of both primary and secondary sources. Research for this paper was founded on observations by his contemporaries, period publications such as the newspaper *The Liberator*, and related published observations in journals and books by later historians. In the absence of an actual autobiography a six volume set of Garrison’s correspondence running almost the entirety of his life, has been used here to arrive at his own reflections about his life and controversial ideas.²

Originally, various scholars had collected the letters until finally historians Walter Merrill and Louis Ruchames assembled and edited them into a multi-volume set with publication occurring from 1971 to 1981. The six volumes span Garrison’s life from 1822 until his death in 1879. In all, the six volumes contain 1,527 separate pieces of correspondence which were presented in a chronological sequence. The first four volumes contain all the known letters by Garrison that were available at the time of the volumes’ publication. The correspondence presented consisted of private letters to family, friends and associates as well as public letters to editors of publications and civic leaders.³ The four volumes run from Garrison’s first letter to the editor of the *Newburyport Herald* on May 21, 1822⁴ until his December 1, 1861 letter to James Redpath attacking the institution of slavery.⁵ The last two volumes of the series encompass only a select percentage of the available items and were mostly drawn from Garrison’s public letters (Volume five contain forty percent of his letters from 1861 to 1867⁶ while Volume six contains twenty percent from 1868 until 1879⁷).

Garrison never appeared reluctant to discuss any topic or idea in his many personal and public
letters. He was willing to discuss his rather unorthodox confidence in spiritualism and mediums saying such things as, “I am a firm believer in the reality of those Manifestations”\(^8\) and “The best medium I have ever seen is a Mrs. Tribou … She is most reliable, and remarkable as a writing, rapping, tipping, healing, and personating medium.”\(^9\) He even detailed the deadly scalding of his son Charles during a medial treatment at home, “Alas! on coming out of the bath, we found that the poor boy had been horribly scalded … from that fatal hour he became delirious ….”\(^{10}\) Given the uninhibited nature of Garrison's correspondence it is reasonable to conclude that if he held a strong belief or position it would emerge somewhere in his voluminous writings. It is expected that an examination of Garrison's letters along with other sources of research will reveal his fundamental values and allow insight into his personal philosophy.

GARRISON’S LIFE

The following is an examination of Garrison’s life as seen through his ideology. The reason for this approach was that Garrison saw the world through his own unique intellectual filter and rarely took counsel from the prevailing cultural views. Furthermore ideas and communicating them became his stock and trade as he found his way in the greater world. As a public speaker, writer, paper editor and publisher, and social advocate, Garrison professional life was always an expression of his individual philosophy and idiosyncratically based ideas. Additionally his personal life experiences were also shaped directly by his belief structure. His response to his family and his network of friends was built fundamentally upon his ideology. His friendships and social relationships with groups and institutions were dramatically affected by his particular beliefs at any given time. Ultimately his interaction with the world was controlled and shaped by his personal ideology.

As will be seen Garrison’s ideology was not a fixed structure unaltered by his transition of
life. Rather his personal ideology changed and evolved throughout his entire life. Admittedly there were some fundamental beliefs that held true throughout his life like his dislike of slavery and alcohol, and the need for social reform in the United States. But even his fundamental ideology on core issues transformed and mutated in his life. He also showed the ability to adapt his ideas not only to changes in his own life but also the greater events shaping his culture and nation. Therefore his existence and ideological belief structure were completely interrelated making the study of one almost indistinguishable from the other. In other words Garrison’s ideas and beliefs make an excellent guidepost for the structuring a biography of his life beginning with his early life straight through to the end.

CHILDHOOD

The son of an often out of work merchant sailor, William Lloyd Garrison was born on December 12, 1805 in the small town of Newburyport, Massachusetts. He was the next to the youngest child of four with an older bother James and a sister Caroline who died when she was just five years of age, and younger sister Maria.11 Garrison’s personal understanding for the need for social improvements in the antebellum period manifested during this time. He grew up in rather humble surroundings in a lower class family. His early view of society was in fact seen from the bottom rungs as a genuinely underprivileged child.12 The need for social reform and other fundamental beliefs therefore traced back to this early New England childhood and upbringing.

From both his parents he would develop important aspects of his ideology. His father Abijah Garrison led the family into financial failure. This lose of social standing was due in no small part to the bad economic times in New England seaports and a Jeffersonian foreign policy that included crippling embargo on trade with Europe. As a result Abijah spent most of his days and
money in the grog houses until he walked out on the family and forever out of young William’s life. This placed the responsibilities for two small boys solely on his mother Maria. Maria was an extremely religious person who tried to instill in her boy her deep religious beliefs. These beliefs would take hold in William but his bother would follow his father to the sea joining the navy and becoming a life long alcoholic. Through her revivalist styled Baptist church connections Sister Garrison as she was called found menial jobs and maintain a precarious life of poverty. As result of this harsh life William’s mother would die a broken when was just beginning his newspaper career.

From these early beginnings Garrison began to work out some of the ideas that more than others would hold him the remainder of his life. From his alcoholic absentee father Garrison would develop less a role model and more an objective lesson on the lesser aspects of life. In addition to the obvious connection to his professional temperance leanings, there were possibly more vague connections to his personal life. For example, in spite of his many professional obligations throughout his long life Garrison was always a devoted father and caring family man. Garrison always held the idea that he was responsible for the welfare of his family and providing fine middle class life style. In a letter to his wife during their courtship, he relates that he is motivated by his duty to humanity and not because of money though he does not spurn ‘earthly comforts’,

Engaged in the noblest cause of benevolence which has ever received the approbation of God, or the countenance of man, I am necessarily precluded from heaping up treasures upon earth. But little do I covet those treasures… But I shall not lack a full supply of earthly comforts. – All the aid that I shall need, will be liberally extended to me. If my enemies are bitter and numerous, my friends are proportionally kind and steadfast. The prospect is truly encouraging.

By means of his benefactors and his own efforts, Garrison was able to maintain a comfortable household for a large family. He even was able to employ regularly maids, “Girl after girl has
come, and proved inexperienced or worthless – how many, I will not begin to enumerate. . . .
With our large family, to be without some one to do the cooking and washing, even for twenty-
four hours, is a serious inconvenience.”

As for his mother Garrison would receive a deep belief in the power of religion. This deep
spiritual conviction Frances Maria Garrison would be reflected in most of his writings and his speeches later in life. An adult Garrison stated his private feelings to a friend on religion and sanctity of the bible, “my religious views are of the most elevated, the most spiritual character; that I esteem the holy scriptures above all books in the universe. . . .” In fact his fundamental public arguments against slavery would include a truly religious bend. He explained the reason for immediate emancipation was that slavery was a sin against God requiring an undeviating end to the holy transgression. Throughout his life did Garrison rarely wrote or spoke without invoking God or the bible.

Perhaps he also drew upon his mother for some of his ideas on devotion to one’s family. In an 1834 letter to his wife Garrison spoke of his late mother devotion, “I had another once, who cared for me with such a passionate regard, who loved me so intensely, that no language can describe the yearnings of her soul.” He spoke in similar works about his own family and his devotion, “not that I am forgetful of the sacred claims which are binding upon me as a husband and a father.” She was a stark reflection of the sacrifice Garrison saw of a parent to one’s family which he internalized in both his correspondence, ideology, and the treatment of his children. John L. Thomas discussed in his book The Liberator Garrison developed from his strong willed mother a lasting respect for other strong women that manifested in his support of women’s right movement.

Finally his need to join the middle class and his less than total support and sympathy to the
plight of the working class can perhaps in some way link to his childhood. His repeated assertions that he was a great businessman even when money was difficult may have been caused by his earliest recollections. Garrison received much of his financial support for the Liberator through donations from white abolition philanthropists and contributions from freed black communities. Nevertheless, he apparently always believed that he was a very successful independent businessman and entrepreneur. In fact, his explanation for the donations make it seem like they were part of his business model, “Every year, donations to a considerable amount were required to keep the paper in existence; but this pecuniary burden was borne with great cheerfulness by a few personal friends, because they believed that they could not devote their money to a better purpose, and the downfall of the Liberator would prove serious injury to the anti-slavery enterprise.”23 There are numerous other examples in the correspondence where Garrison offered himself self-congratulations on his business skills and money management. In an 1835 letter Garrison talks about how other, better supported, papers had failed, “How many religious and political papers have perished, (though supported by sectarian and political zeal,) since we started the Liberator, a paper of an Ishmaelish character!”24 In addition, there were his comments about the idea of the 1867 testimonial fund being placed in a trust to be managed by others, “I am particularly sensitive on this point, because whatever failings I may have, the misuse of money has never been one of them.”25 This outlook about his career and financial gain is one that Garrison maintains throughout his life.

In his letters Garrison seemed most desirous of his middle class standing and rejected the farmer and worker class. One letter he comments to his wife that, “A country life is exceedingly monotonous, presenting no other phase than that of habitual stillness and uniformity.”26 Garrison never gave the impression that he believed that he, his family, or the nation should
forsake the middle class life and return to the ‘good old days’ of agrarian based economics. Nor was he one to view problems of workers as other than ones that must be dealt with as he had raised himself from poverty to respectable businessman. In an 1875 letter Garrison summed up his feelings on the subject of the oppressed working class, “I cannot feel any heartrending emotions, therefore, or give vent to any special indignation, in contemplating the condition of people who are not under despotic or dynastic sway. . . with the rights conscience, who enjoy the right to assemble, whenever or wherever they please, to seek redress for real and imaginary grievances, who are free to make their own contracts and sell or employ their labor according to the law of supply and demand. . ..”

It is from his early life that one can see the ideas and events that shape a young Garrison. His concern about the problems of society inflicted upon the less fortunate as seen by an adolescent victim. His humble beginnings also provoked strong religious beliefs that found their way into his antislavery ideals. In the absence of wealth and the material elements of life Garrison was naturally draw to more cerebral pursuits to escape his impoverishment. But this was just the beginning of Garrison’s ideological journey in his lifetime.

APPRENTICESHIP

With his childhood experiences Garrison had developed a basic ideology to understand his world. The next phase of his life was the development of the skills to use and communicate his ideas to others. Because of their financial difficulties young Garrison did not have the opportunity of much schooling. Rather than an academic education his mother began him without in various apprentice programs like shoe making and cabinet making. However it was not until he began an apprenticeship to a newspaper editor that Garrison showed any real abilities and interest.
He served first under a Mr. Allen the editor of the *Newburyport Herald* typesetter, a hands-on job he would enjoy the rest of his life. In addition, Garrison tried his hand commentating in a series of letter to the paper. He wrote under the name “Old Bachelor’s” on subject as varied as love, fortune hunting and adventures at sea. He even discussed the issue of slavery in one of his public letters saying that it not a threat to the nation but that little virtue “exist in the morals of a people among whom slaves abound”. Ironically his loving mother tried to talk him out of writing career for fear could not earn a living. Still he was not discouraged and in an 1823 letter wrote with great pride of his published letters, “since I commenced writing for the Herald. . . . I have met with signal success. . . .” He found time away from the newspaper to join a local debate club and began practicing his public speaking skills. In addition to beginning his newspaper and public speaking career Garrison was also developing new ideas and refining earlier ones.

In particular Garrison took the role of Federalist advocate as demonstrated by his public attack on General Jackson’s run for the White House, “your fellow countrymen, perceive your unfitness for office to which you and so many are aspiring.” He was also an advocate for other causes. He was against a 1827 tariff proposal in Congress citing in an open letter to the *Boston Courier* “I will state that my feelings are equally strong with his, in favor of commerce and against an exorbitant tariff” and on another occasion, “I am satisfied that the true source of national wealth arises preeminently not from the encouragement of any branch of industry, but from a fair and liberal support to all.” Interestingly the socially radical Garrison was to become a pro-business idealist his entire life. Even in after becoming active in the immediate abolitionist movement he said in the *Liberator*, “We shall be able, ere long, to supply not only our home consumption, but the wants of the Southern Republics … and here opens a new world of wealth
to be gathered by our merchants and manufacturers.”

However at this time Garrison still lacked a unifying ideology to focus his advocate efforts once he struck out on his own. As young new editor Garrison would try three different newspapers in the late 1820s before making his fateful move to Baltimore. On each occasion Garrison failed to find the winning combination for a successful paper. It was the combination of bad luck and not finding the right message for the customers of each paper. Garrison had the idea that he wanted to become a social commentator on the various ills of the culture. His first newspaper called the Federalist oriented Newburyport *Free Press* he made light of some local political dirty tricks that caused a backlash of bad press by his new found political enemies that cost him his editorship. This inauspicious first foray into the political arena would a harbinger for his rejection of the Liberty and Free Soil Parties. His next attempt at editorship was in Boston with the temperance centered *National Philanthropist*, the incorporated witty verses as, “What is the cause of every ill? That does with pain the body fill? It is the repeated gill Of Whiskey.” Here Garrison served his six months contract and left the newspaper under rumors that he wasn’t offered another contract. Returning to Newburyport Garrison gave a third try with the *Journal of the Times* another pro-Federalist paper. Here Garrison expands his ideas into other areas to include gradual emancipation as advocated by the American Colonization Society (ACS). But he is again going up against the establish paper he apprenticed under its editor Mr. Allen and was again unable to shake away needed readers before closing shop. In all these newspapers Garrison had not found his readership or his true message. But in Boston he met a man who would help him find his ideological calling and his professional purpose in life.

In 1828 while serving as the *National Philanthropist* he met a middle-aged Quaker printer
visiting Boston named Benjamin Lundy. Lundy published a paper called the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* that sparked young Garrison’s attention. Amidst he attempts to start his own newspaper in 1828 Garrison conversed with Lundy on the subject of slavery. The interest was mutual because Lundy walked from Baltimore to Boston in 1829 to persuade the young twenty-two year old editor to join his newspaper. Another indicator of Garrison blossoming interest was his Boston speech to the city’s Congregational societies and the ACS. He spoke for perhaps the first time in public on the issue of slavery at the Fourth of July ceremony to a group that, bids fair to be overwhelming. By September of the same year Garrison joins Lundy in Baltimore to public a new version of the *Genius*.

**CONVERSION TO ABOLITION**

It was during this time working with Lundy that Garrison made his transition to an immediate end to slavery position and transforming into the abolitionist Garrison known to history. Different historians have contributed to various reasons Garrison embracing the immediate abolitionist stance. For example the idea is that his exposure to Blacks in Baltimore and particularly his reading of Black abolitionist David Walker’s *Appeal* that greatly influence Garrison to convert from gradual emancipation. Another reason put forward that Garrison like other White abolitionists were driven into immediate abolition movement because of their failure in the new market economic. His time in jail for libel of a Newburyport merchant Francis Todd by alleging that he had a business relationship with a notorious southern slave trader named Austin Woolfolk has been reasoned provided him the time to reflect and develop his new ideas on slavery. Garrison served his time in jail until the New York abolitionist and wealthy philanthropist Arthur Tappan paid his hundred dollar fine forty-nine days later. One theory is that Garrison was a total convert before to immediate abolitionism before leaving Boston and
joining Lundy in Baltimore.\textsuperscript{45} Garrison was only humoring Lundy that he a devotee to the ACS and was just biding his time until he struck out on his own. Still another reason given for Garrison became an immediate abolitionist was he like other leaders of the movement “internalized the religious dictates of dominating mothers.”\textsuperscript{46} The reasons Garrison broke with Lundy and the ACS covers a wide spectrum of explanations and reasons. In absence of clear and undisputable proof reasonable conjecture is that it was a combination of reasons for Garrison’s conversion.

Regardless of all the assertions as to the controlling factor that transformed Garrison into the archetype immediate abolitionist, he really did transform during this point in life into a public advocate for ending slavery now and not some unknown time in the far future. He also demonstrated the talent to internalize his experiences and adapt his ideology to the changing events. This talent he would continue display throughout his life both professionally and personally. Moreover Garrison was able to change his ideological stance from time to time without changing his core values. As a well known author on the abolitionist movement stated, “Most of all I was increasingly struck by the logical consistency of his thought on all subjects. This is not to say his opinions did not change. . . . But the changes themselves represented a logical development, and I discovered no mutually invalidating convictions or torturings of logic. . . .”\textsuperscript{47} His transition to the immediate abolitionist position seems to fix with his earlier ideas and experiences. He had been a young editor and burgeoning social advocate looking for a cause, and he had found one that he appealed to ideology.

PROFESSIONAL ABOLITIONIST

Garrison was now a profession advocate for the immediate end of slavery and prepared to assert all his profession energies to that goal. It was the beginning of the 1830s that Garrison
began his most productive time in the immediate abolitionist movement. His ideological assault on slavery took the form of a two prong attack beginning with his new newspaper, the *Liberator*. Unlike his earlier attempts the Liberator in conjunction with his public speaking engagements would serve as his very public voice of his personal ideas to the nation.

In fact many people use the issue of the *Liberator* on 1 January 1831 as the start date for the nation’s entire immediate abolitionist movement. Garrison began without any financial assets, no actual subscribers and only his ideas as capital. He established intellectual holdings in the letterhead of the first issue that this was not to be just a local newspaper when he said, “Our Country is the World and our Countrymen are Mankind” and that his ideas would heeded, “I am earnest- I will not equivocate- I will not excuse- I will not retreat a single inch- and I WILL BE HEARD” The longest continuously published abolitionist newspaper served as his thirty plus year manifesto of Garrison and his followers’ antislavery beliefs.

Through his innovative marketing ideas he turned the *Liberator* and other financial efforts into combination political special interest group, national public advocacy organization, and weekly publication containing news, articles, commentary and advertisements. One article on the subject of the Liberator and its innovative advertising of abolitionist labeled consumer goods running the gambit from abolitionist candy to books even called it, “the vanguard of capitalist liberalism” His explanation for the donations make it seem like they were part of his business model, “Every year, donations to a considerable amount were required to keep the paper in existence; but this pecuniary burden was borne with great cheerfulness by a few personal friends, because they believed that they could not devote their money to a better purpose, and the downfall of the *Liberator* would prove serious injury to the anti-slavery enterprise.” By running the *Liberator* like a modern charity selling special interest items, publishing for a niche
audience and taking donations from wealthy benefactors Garrison was able to maintain a middle class life style most of his adult life. For example he was able lobby for his cause full time, raise and educate his large family, maintain a home, employ servants, travel abroad extensively, entertain visitors regularly, and retire comfortably.

Admittedly he had precarious and continuous cash flow problems and equity difficulties almost all his career. Garrison was perpetually borrowing money, fund raising, running speaking tours, and selling subscriptions *Liberator*. For instance, he freely talked about his reoccurring money problems, “… I now stand in debt …unable to pay either my rent, or my grocer’s bill, and my credit is, of course, suffering.” In spite of finance problems that plagued the paper its entire thirty-four years in circulation and its readership numbering in the low thousands, the *Liberator* helped make Garrison a nation figure with his ideas reverberating in the national press and even finding its way into the lexicon of the Deep South. As a trained editor and publisher the newspaper provides Garrison a perfect outlet for his various ideas. Amazingly still he was able to make a living just by selling his social reform ideas to the public through this and other forums.

The second prong of his attack was his critical participation in the formation of the Immediate Anti-Slavery Societies in the 1830s. This was an important object as Garrison said, “a deep conviction that without the organization of abolitionist into societies, THE CAUSE WILL BE LOST.” Beginning in 1832, Garrison with a few followers founded first the New-England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS). He dominated the first meetings and drafted the society’s constitution to include the immediate abolitionist preamble, “immediate freedom from personal bondage of whatever kind, unless imposed by the sentence of law, for commission of some crime.” Even when an abolitionist Quaker named Arnold Buffum was elected president there
was little doubt among the members present that it was the Garrison ideas that ruled the organization’s ideology and tactics. It was rather the role as the association’s secretary that Garrison felt contented controlling the NEASS through his philosophical dictates. The first mission was to begin a series of petition campaigns directed at the United States Congress that would be come popular among other abolitions groups in the 1830s and 1840s. In fact petitions became so popular that by 1840 the House of Representative banned from any legislative consideration. Another early mission of the organization was to send Garrison to England to linkup with important abolitionist leaders in that country thus making him an even more important movement leader in his own country. The NEASS was the first of the abolitionist groups that would become know later collectively as Garrisonians.\footnote{57}

The next year he established the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) that grew in a matter of just a few years into organization with chapters spread across the northern United States. Garrison is generally credited with single-handedly drafting the American Anti-Slavery Society’s Declaration of Sentiments which not only opposed slavery but also racism, coloniza\footnote{58}tion and violent on any kind thus dictating the group’s early efforts and direction. Garrison again made sure that the AASS founding Declaration stated that slavery “required its immediate abandonment, without expatriation.” As with the NEASS his influence would be more of a philosophical nature and less in an operational position with other notable movement leaders like Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Elizur Wright, and William Green vying for functional control of the leadership positions. His control in the AASS would be less absolute than the NEASS but it still added to growing influence.\footnote{60} These organizations with his newspaper served as his power base to circulate the Garrisonian ideology. Garrison was then ready to pursue in resolute manner his ideological objectives.
IDEALOGICAL BATTLES

Above and beyond his tangible battles with the pro-slavery South and sympathetic racist groups that raised mobs against abolitionists in the North Garrison waged a kind of ideological war over his personal ideas and beliefs. His first objective as national abolitionist leader was to take on the very popular anti-slavery American Colonization Society (ACS) by publishing a pamphlet title *Thoughts on African Colonization* in 1832. The pamphlet denounced the ACS as working hand in hand with evil slave owners to delay serious emancipation in the present by advocating Blacks impractical repatriation to Africa in the far flung future.\(^6^1\)

While being popular with the general population that just wanted the Black slave problem to go away and conventional politicians that wanted to delay any difficult decisions the ACS was prefect. The ACS’s actions included a small elite membership working exclusively through legislative action and the court system. The ACS successes tended to be limited to helping individual slaves win freedom in court, inconsequential legislation and a general sense that something was being done.\(^6^2\) As an ACS supporter Garrison came to see little by little was participating completely in the political process the ACS had compromised the fundamental goal to end slavery.\(^6^3\)

As a former gradualist his transition to the immediate end of slavery was complete and one only has to read thoughts on the subject to understand his position. For example Garrison's disdain and contempt for the ACS' racist policy of deportation of African Americans occurred over thirty-five times in the first volume of his letters alone.\(^6^4\) In one letter, Garrison bluntly describes ACS members’ condescension for blacks,

\... in a single sentence: *they have an antipathy against the blacks.* They do not wish to admit them to an equality. They can tolerate them only as servants and slaves \... They tell us that we must always be hostile to the people of color, while they remain in this country. If this be so, then we had better burn our bibles, and our Declaration of Independence...\(^6^5\)
In the Liberator he quoted a ACS member as saying that teaching Blacks to read was bad and would only encourage them to stay the United States to which Garrison said, “Here is the cloven foot of colonization”66 This personal battle against the ACS would be one that Garrison would fight relentlessly for the next thirty years. In the end he was successful along with other supportive anti-ACS advocates to render the once powerful organization to virtual obscurity. The battle with the ACS was amalgamating to both Garrison follower and the movement on a whole. Not all of Garrison’s ideas would have this binding effect on the immediate abolitionist membership.

Other causes and ideas would develop as Garrison refined his ideology and expanded view of the world. An important example maturing of philosophy was his outlook on religion. As a young boy he was raised in his mother orthodox religion and seemed to embrace the Baptist faith well into adulthood. But as he moved beyond his simple upbringing Garrison was exposed to new ideas. One such religious concept was Garrison’s contact with Perfectionism when meet with Perfectionist leader John Noyes 1837.67 The basic idea of Perfectionism was that one could through individual freewill live a life without sin. For many of his fellow abolitionists the Perfectionist religion was too radical, rejected the old religious hierarchy control of the individual’s religious life, and was ultimately a serious distraction to the abolitionist cause.

This charge of diverseness by the more orthodox abolitionists would be leveled more and against the idealistic centered Garrison. For Garrison however Perfectionism was logical and fit with his anti-slavery ideology in that man singularly and collectively could reject the sin of slavery.68 Perfectionism would lead Garrison to see slavery not as single social issue but a systemic problem with both a sinful state and the church tied to the institution of slavery. Another group that had problems with Garrison was the clergy of the mainstream faiths. By
1837 there was war outside and inside the movement between Garrison and the powerful religious hierarchy in the North. This was group he called, “a cage of unclean birds, and synagogue of Satan.” At the center of the debate was Garrison anti-Sabbath belief that he use to attack what he believed was a pro-slavery clergy both in the North and the South.

He alleged that the Sabbath rather than being the one holy day of the week was just another day. In fact everyday was just as holy as the Sabbath and people should not practice their faith only on Sunday. In a public letter Garrison said, “The Christian Sabbath is not one of time; it is not dependent upon recurrence of one day in seven; it sanctifies every moment, and, being wholly spiritual, comes not by observation.” What the Sabbath had become to Garrison was a way for corrupt clergy to control population which had lost the real meaning of religion. By taking this position on the Sabbath he felt he was logically combating the elements in society that helping to preserve the institution of slavery.

Nevertheless Garrison growing radical beliefs served also to further fracture AASS unity with leaders like Lewis Tappan saying he was taking positions, “that had better not have been discussed.” The attacks by pro-clergy elements like James Birney and Henry Stanton would grow so strong that Garrison would write in the Liberator of a diabolic clerical plot out to get him moved from the abolitionist movement. In fact Amos A. Phelps with others would found a parallel NEAA pro-clergy organization called the Massachusetts Abolition Society in 1839. Undeterred Garrison pushed on the flesh out his personal beliefs and by natural extension of his position the movement’s doctrine.

A less conflictive position at least in the beginning of the movement was Garrison’s nonresistance stand. Garrison had been a pacifist most of his adult life and had even avoided militia training as young man. In 1838 Garrison as other organizations he belonged even wrote
the Declaration of Sentiments for the Non-Resistance Society at their founding convention in Boston.\textsuperscript{75} When Lovejoy was killed a year earlier Garrison praised his abolitionist position still found fault in his futility taking up of arms. Garrison wrote in the Liberator, They were not required as philanthropists or Christians; and they have certainly set a dangerous precedent in the maintenance of our cause."\textsuperscript{76} Naturally his feelings on violent and slavery combine with his overall ideology.

This nonresistance position Garrison truly believed and even advocated would vex him over the years. Still he always held that nonviolence was the personal answer for him and felt it best for the movement. Still when he wrote of the bellicose nature of Walker’s Appeal in the Liberator Garrison said, “that if any people were ever justified in throwing off the yoke of their tyrants, the slavers are that people.”\textsuperscript{77} Even when his son George joined the Union Army in 1863 Garrison tried to appeal to his principles of peace. But in the end Garrison did not reject his soldier son and expressed his concerns for him as any good father.\textsuperscript{78} Garrison was a man who idealized peace but he empathized with others’ need to standup and fight the evil of slavery.\textsuperscript{79}

Perhaps his most fundamental idea to combating slavery was that of moral suasion. Moral suasion would come to permeate his strategies and further radicalize message. The concept was that the end of slavery required people change their not their laws, public institutions, politics, or government but the way they thought in a fundamental way.\textsuperscript{80} To stop slavery was not to just make it illegal but make associate in any form with the institution of slavery immoral throughout the entire North. Once the Southern people saw divine righteousness in the North they as a society would naturally follow suit and end slavery forever.\textsuperscript{81} In some ways moral suasion was a logical extension of his Perfectionist beliefs, nonresistance stand, the political failures of the
ACS and his own petition drives, and the overall rejection of mainstream religious denominations to confront the sin of slavery. Garrison idea of moral suasion would prove to be the key concept that ultimately divided the Immediate Abolitionist movement between those that wanted to work within the system and those that want to go directly to the people to cause change.

However the spark that fractured to movement was the Garrison idea on women’s rights in the Antebellum United States. From the beginning of the movement had been keen to draw women into the movement. He enthusiastically supported women led populist petition drives that overwhelmed the United States Congress by their sheer volume. He was also supportive of other women led efforts like abolitionist fairs that raised huge amount of money. More important he encouraged women to participate not in auxiliary organizations but in the main abolitionist societies in key leadership roles and even participating in ‘Promiscuous’ audiences with both men and women in attendance. In an 1839 open letter Garrison states the NEAS constitution (he wrote) stated, “That we consider the anti-slavery cause of philanthropy, with regard to all human beings…MEN and WOMEN, have the same duties and same rights.”

Women such as Sarah and Angelina Grimke, and Maria Chapman within the movement became an important power base for Garrison to use and protect. His public discussion on the need for women’s right was primary reserved for the pages of Liberator. But it was difficult to dissociate Garrison the publisher and Garrison the abolitionist leader so naturally the debate flowed over into society’s meetings. His inclusion of women provoked more conservative society members already upset at Garrison’s other radical ideas. Garrison in an 1839 letter cites some the agitators, Phelps, St. Clair, Torrey, Wise, &c., I learn intent to organize a new and hostile society next week, which will put down the women, the Childs, the Chapmans, the Grimkes, and the
Kellys from active participation in anti-slavery meeting. . . .

This fight of women in the movement would come to a head in 1838-1840 and set off a series of organizational fractures over Garrison’s principal ideology.

These concepts just discussed were the core ideas that evolved and defined Garrison ideology and his life during the 1820s and 1830s. There were others ideas shape Garrison thinking but these beliefs provided the structure to him as a man and abolitionist leader. They also defined Garrison’s responses to the significant events that occurred such as the establishment of the Liberator, incorporation of a respectable middle class life style, his philosophy evolvement in the genesis the immediate abolition movement in the United States, and his ideological battles with Southerners, mainstream clergy, anti-Black and pro-slavery Northerners and the ACS. This period would be the intellectual pinnacle in his ideology development that stimulated the growth of the immediate abolitionist movement. From this point Garrison reputation would continue to grow but his influence on the movement would become more isolated. At the same time Garrison’s advancement of his professional philosophy would seem at first look decidedly more radical in nature. The 1840 and 1850s eventually would be a period of ups and downs in Garrison’s role as an abolitionist leader chaotic times.

It should be noted that his private life would be more in line with his vision of a stable family man. From his happy marriage in 1834 to his wife Helen Garrison whose correspondence from Garrison was fill with such expressions as found in an 1876 letter, “For was there ever a more loving wife, or a more affectionate and devoted mother? How strong was the magnetism with which held us together! And such a home as made for me for more than two score years! And how blessed she made it for all her children!” He and Helen would have five boys and one girl of which all but one would out live their parents. As a family they seem very devoted to one
another and seem to have no major strife. Garrison was a loving father who enjoying being around his wife and children. Even after his children were grown there was a great deal positive interaction. Garrison said in an 1875 letter to Wendell Phillips, “I have more satisfaction and comfort in my children than words can express.” He also was supportive of his extended family caring for his wife’s elderly parents in their last years, and his bother James who came to live with him until he died of cancer. Garrison lived up to his ideal of a loving and caring father who could always be counted on. His family in turn would provide him the solace for the difficult period building up to the Civil War.

GARRISONIANS AND NON-GARRISONIANS

The 1830s had been a period growth in the immediate abolitionist movement with hundreds of societies forming a mass movement in the Northern states. Garrison and his ideology had ridden the crest of that populist wave. However by the end of the decade the movement of suffered the fate most social movements that mature and grow to incorporate various interest groups like Evangelists, nonresistants, transcendentalists, Quakers, political-action abolitionists. There had been other groups early on but Garrison and related societies have been the innovative leaders in large part because the aforementioned ideas. As the fracturing occurred Garrison was normally at the center or had a public position on the disagreement. In time historians would come to title these difference interest groups within the movement as either Garrisonians or Non-Garrisonians and Anti-Garrisonians. The disagreements in the late 1830s over the Garrison’s position on the Sabbath and women’s roles were building to a showdown within the movement at the beginning of the 1840s.

The internal conflict reached high point in the AASS during 1840 between political-action Anti-Garrisonians and the moralist Garrisonians. Garrison and his followers prophetically
believed that any political third party based on the single issue of slavery would ultimately fail and those in the party would in the end compromise their morality as the ACS had earlier.\textsuperscript{96} Garrison while a nonvoter himself believed abolitionists had more power lobbying the political major parties while remaining morally distant from corrupt politicians. He said at one point, “use all parties and sects…but be used by none.”\textsuperscript{97} A position he maintained as along the Union consisted of both a North and pro-slave South, and during the glory days of the Liberty Party and a lesser degree with the Free Soil Party.

Garrison won the ideological battle within the society and with his 600 followers retained philosophy control of the AASS. He would however lose ideological war for control of the mass movement to the losers like; the Tappan brothers, James Birney and Henry Stanton who marched off to form the more popular Liberty Party.\textsuperscript{98} The same year Garrison would make his second of five trips to England and would become embroiled in more controversy. His ideas on women’s right would result in his self banning himself from the London based World Anti-Slavery Conference in order to set with the excluded female AASS members in the balcony.\textsuperscript{99} Both cases Garrison followed his beliefs and both cases diminished his overall influence within the mass movement.

The 1840s would also usher in the refinement of Garrison’s moral suasion notion in a more radical form. He would finally and completely embrace the idea of disunion of the United States that would brand him a true radical. Garrison said explicitly in an 1842 letter, I am for the repeal of the union between the North and South- alias between LIBERTY and SLAVERY.\textsuperscript{100} Until the onset of the Civil War, he decried the Constitution as a proslavery document and advocated disunion of the Union as the only answer to the slavery question. The letters continue to reflect his thoughts on other basic beliefs such as his position about the role the Constitution played in
the institution of slavery, "I pronounce it the most bloody and heaven-daring arrangement ever made by men for the continuance and protection of a system of the most atrocious villainy ever exhibited on earth." In another letter he even refers to the Constitution as the “covenant with death.” He makes similar censorious remarks about the Constitution with growing regularity no less than thirty times between 1833 and 1858. During a speech Garrison even burned a copy of the Constitution at a 4th of July abolitionist picnic in 1854 while saying, “So perish all compromises with tyranny and let all the people say, Amen.” This idea that slavery could only end by a breakup of the United States into a separate North and South would be Garrison’s signature idea during the buildup to the war.

Garrison also traveled more than ever before on the lecture circuit along with Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass and others over the next two decades. He became a popular speaker and publicly well known across the nation speaking on a variety of topics such as, the evils of the Mexican War, the need for social reform, women’s rights, nonviolent, the moral corrupt of the church and state, the need disunion and most importantly the ultimate end of the number one sin of slavery. This public recognition however did not make the infamous Garrison and his ideas less radical. He continued to press the aforementioned ideas in ever stronger terms during speeches and in the *Liberator*. The significantly the nation press was also his forum repeating his titillating and outlandish pronouncements in their papers across the country.

However, by the 1850s Garrison’s message was diminished by the violent in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Garrison’s nonviolent message was pushed to side in nation seemingly bend on a violent civil war. During this time the AASS and NEAS drastically lost membership as former Garrisonians shift to political movements like Republican Party. At the same time his radical message of disunion seemed less and less drastic as others like John Brown
preached a violent revolt. Nevertheless Garrison stayed on message always pushing his nonresistance form of moral suasion as before. He also remained the public eye as one of the best known abolitionists of the antebellum period. In 1859 edition of The New American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge Garrison rated more space than, “Emerson, Thoreau, Stowe, Phillips, and Douglass combined.” With events like the Dred Scott case happening in the latter 1850’s, many in the North were less skeptical Garrison’s and other abolitionists’ accusations against slavery. Even conventional politicians like were campaigning against the status quo like Lincoln in 1858 saying the union could not go on “half-slave, half-free.” Garrison commented that some members of main stream press were, “now severally treat abolitionists with respect…and refer to their doctrines and measures without misrepresentation.” The 1850s proved very much a period of undulating fortunes to Garrison’s professional standing.

POPULAR PROPHET AND REPUBLICAN ADVOCATE

The beginning of the war would cause an even greater sea change for Garrison’s reputation but not in his personal opinions and ideas. For example Garrison was totally uncompromising in his opinions about other fellow abolitionists’ thoughts, beliefs and positions. When speaking of his former ally Frederick Douglass in 1860, he was unrestrained, "I regard him as thoroughly base and selfish, and I know that his hostility to the American Anti-Slavery Society …is unmitigated and unceasing." Even his close friend, Wendell Phillips, was not protected from Garrison’s criticism when they disagreed on support for President Lincoln, “…while he [Wendell Phillips] is still listened to for his oratorical ability, his criticisms are daily becoming less valuable and less regarded.” As can be seen from his letters, Garrison was more than willing to express himself on other abolitionist’s viewpoints when they disagreed with him or his
ideology. The times and people had changed but not Garrison’s fundamental beliefs, ideology and sense of self-righteous in any situation.

All the same time Garrison became a mainstream commentator and Republican supporter during the Civil War. He still believed that slavery was a sin but his radical call for disunion had in fact come to past. Not the way he foresaw or hoped it would unfold in a nonviolent conversion of the society but nonetheless it was happening. The Civil War had in essence broken the ‘Covenant with Death’ and restored the Constitution. He was even willing to curb his nonviolent stand in the face of this juggernaut of a war, “Let us all stand aside when the North is rushing like a tornado in the right direction” Nevertheless Garrison was not uncritical when saw the Republicans and Lincoln doing some that violated his ideology as exampled in one 1861 letter referring to the president’s limited mental powers, If he is 6 feet 4 inches high, he is only a dwarf in mind.” Any perceived equivocation by Lincoln on the issue of ending slavery would quickly draw Garrison’s public angst while continuing to support the general war effort. After Lincoln’s signing of the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation Garrison words were normally filled admiration rather than scorn for Lincoln and his party. By the end of the war Garrison was completely in Lincoln’s camp writing personal words praise to the president and with a sense of familiarity recommending a friend for a cabinet position.

In popular culture he had at last become the respected senior statesman for the immediate abolitionist movement and prophet who seen the end of slavery and to some the conflict that had ensued. With the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment 1865 the sixty year old Garrison concluded publicly that he and the abolitionist movement’s mission to end slavery was complete. He ended publication the Liberator after thirty plus years and prepared for retirement. He even attempted to close the abolitionist societies closely associated with him. Others in the movement
to include his old associate Phillips would publicly opposed his efforts. As a result the AASS and NEAS would continue for a few short years under Phillips control but without Garrison’s vision they also closed shop for good. His professional career as a fulltime abolition idealist was at last over.

POST WAR RETIREMENT

Many would accuse Garrison that his ego and the need for public praise the real reason and not his ideology for ending his fulltime participation in the abolitionism. The reasoning for stepping down in part true for Garrison did feel the veneration was justified as well as mission accomplished. He had for over thirty years followed unwaveringly his ideology when an entire nation seemed against. He had seen his foremost idea that slavery was inherently evil therefore must end actually come to past. There were other social causes and advocacy groups but with the abolition of slavery in the United States there was just no practical need for societies with abolition in the title. This was in Garrison’s mind rightly a time of reflection on the successes of his ideology and rewards that would include two triumphant trips to Europe in 1867 and England 1877.

He was a man in the end who was very content with himself and a secure retirement funded by his friends and many admirers. He as reflected in his letters to family members Garrison found a great deal of happiness in the simple pleasures of home, family and caring for his wife who had suffered a debilitating stroke in 1863. His letters also indicate that Garrison continued generate a large amount of public and private correspondence for various social causes like women’s rights, the freedmen cause, Chinese immigration, pacifism, and temperance. He even reconciled with some of his colleagues in the movement that had dared to disagree with his philosophy too include Phillips who as a gesture of friendship would preside at Helen funeral.
But his controversial time as a full time philosopher, social advocate, newspaper editor and nonviolent provocateur were at an end. William Lloyd Garrison passed away a year after Helen’s death at home among family on May 24, 1879.\textsuperscript{129}

\textbf{HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW}

The controversy did not end with Garrison death rather it moved into the scholarly field of historical studies. The following provides a brief historiographical analysis of the changing interpretations of Garrison and his ideology. Since becoming a historical figure Garrison’s reputation just like in life has ebbed and flowed on each rendition. There are almost a many versions of William L. Garrisons as historians writing on about him. The reason for this is in large part due to the nature of his professional career. As discussed earlier in the paper Garrison life revolved around his ideology. Therefore most of the analysis of Garrison also revolved around ideology and its influence leaving a great deal of room for interpretation and conjecture. The following is representative selection of the books and articles from 1873 to the present focusing almost exclusively on Garrison.

The interpretations from the late 1800s best examined are Henry Wilson’s \textit{History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America} and James Rhodes’ \textit{History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 Volume I 1850-1854}.\textsuperscript{130} Importantly both writers experienced the Civil War and had a contemporary understanding of the period and provide a unique perspective compared to later writers in the field. They also portray two different versions of Garrison and the degree of his influence on abolitionist movement and general population the North.

Beginning with Wilson’s explanation of Garrison’s life the reader is presented with an idealistic but radical Garrison whose influence was limited. In one chapter of his 1877 book Wilson talked how the abolition movement was really an outgrowth of the Christian religion.\textsuperscript{131}
The radical Garrison and the Garrisonians, “never constituted more than a fraction of the antislavery host. The veteran William Goodell estimated their number at about one eight. The large majority of Abolitionists retained their connection with both the ecclesiastical and political organizations of the land.”¹³²

Whereas, Rhodes’ later 1892 book presented a less radical and more influential Garrison. He defines Garrison as, “The apostle who had especial fitness for the work, and who now came forward to embody this feeling and rouse the national conscience from the stupor of great material prosperity, was Garrison.”¹³³ He goes on in another chapter to explain that Garrison’s influence went beyond his followers but, on those who were already voters and on thinking youths who were to become voters, and who, in turn, prevailed upon others.”¹³⁴ Rhodes even went as far as to say that Garrison helped establish the Republican Party, “Yet the only practical result of their labor lay in the fact that, having convinced men that slavery was wrong, they made Republican voters, while they were urging their followers not vote.”¹³⁵

The next century’s study of Garrison kicked off with a 1913 Garrison biography by another radical John Jay Chapman. His essay that praised Garrison for being a radical was considered too radical itself and was disregarded by historians at the time.¹³⁶ Today his biography has achieve more respect, “John Jay Chapman, William Lloyd Garrison (N.Y., 1913), is a biographical essay of great discernment.”¹³⁷ It was not again until 1933 with Gilbert Barnes’ The Antislavery Impulse that Garrison’s historiography made major progression in the study of abolitionism and Garrison. An example of its influence can be found in the books and article that cite The Antislavery Impulse since its publication.¹³⁸ Barnes paints a less than flattering picture of Garrison. He depicts Garrison as a total self-centered fanatic that was hated by those in the movement save his closest followers but for whatever reason became the personification of
the movement. In Barnes words, “The time had passed, however, when he could be cashiered of voluntarily leave the ranks. . . . Though the Massachusetts society split apart and the movement in New England fell into hopeless disrepute, Garrison still remained a hero to his disciples and the legendary figure of abolitionism to the nation.”140 The remaining 1930s and 1940s was a time when Garrison and abolitionists in general were simply disregarded at best as madmen or at worst a contributing factor to a needless war.141 The 1950s would be the next period of reassessment of Garrison and his ideology.

Russel Nye’s biography titled William Lloyd Garrison and the Humanitarian Reformers in 1955 was the first book length on Garrison. It was over all a favorable interpretation of Garrison. He presented Garrison as not a god or a demon but a man with strengths and weaknesses. Nye’s Garrison was an important abolitionist but not the underpinning to the movement, “The movement, set in motion by others, was carried to its conclusion by methods he could not accept and ideas he could not understand. Abolition passed through him, not from him.”142 The Civil Rights movement in the 1960s provided a new point of reference and additional relevancy for further study of abolitionists and Garrison.143

The book that best reflected Garrison’s resurgence in the 1960s was Aileen Kraditor’s Means and Ends in American Abolitionism.144 In her biography she reformed Garrison into a pragmatic thinker and even gave him a sense of humor.145 She also made him the spiritual leader and the center philosophical debate in the movement.146 The main argument was that it was not Garrison and his followers who had unrealistic goals for the abolitionist movement, rather abolitionists who wanted to turn the movement into a political party were the ones that were unrealistic.147 Garrison had returned to an important level influence and standing within the abolitionist movement and the general culture around the time of the Civil War.
Since the 1970s there have been a large number of books and articles on abolitionist movement. They have explored different social aspects to include women, minorities in the North, racism, religion, economic change, and republicanism in order to understand Northern culture and the movement itself. In the books reviewed for this paper that were written between 1970 to present Garrison figured prominently in most of them as a leader and major participant in the immediate abolitionist movement. Also during this period a major contribution the study of Garrison and this paper was the multi volume set of Garrison letters produced by Walter M. Merrill and Louis Ruchames between 1971 and 1981. In 1994 there was also a collection of articles from the Liberator edited William Cain. The latest major Garrison biography titled All On Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery continued the premise of Garrison as key figure in the abolitionist movement. In the author May promotes Garrison as no less, “an authentic American hero who, with a biblical prophet’s power and a propagandist’s skill, forced the nation to confront the most crucial moral issue in its history.” If this 1998 book is any indication Garrison’s resurgence has not abated.

CONCLUSION

It is fitting that Garrison life is seen against the backdrop of his ideas rather than using the events that occurred during his time on earth as a yardstick. As seen Garrison himself was very much controlled by his ideas and filter his actions through his ideology. He was in some ways very German in following his inner voice like when Martin Luther spoke at the Diet of Worms, “I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.” As a young man garrison seemed to draw strength from his internal ideas and sense of self. He invented himself around his inner ideology and continued follow his ideas even when threaten by mob violent.
Garrison life revolved around his ideology and expounding them to public he opened himself to much scrutiny by everyone. Since his ideas were considered as radical and revolutionary at the time the man and the ideas were subject of wide-ranging judgments. Still his ideas did not boast the complexity of Albert Einstein or Stephen Hawking. Garrison’s ideology was rather simple and easy to understand for those that got past the rhetoric of the age. His message called for the nonviolent end to slavery, equality for men and women, a church and government free of corruption and the fair treatment of all. True Garrison vision was an idealist view of the world but it was vision he held true to his entire life.

Studying Garrison it is almost impossible to separate Garrison the man from his philosophy. A close study of his letters both private and public produces an image of a man devoted to his family and his personal beliefs. In fact most of his letters to family and friends blended his private thoughts with his professional beliefs on social reform. He seemed to seldom stray far from the internalized vision of Garrison the abolitionist leader, editor and social commentator. Even when courting his wife Garrison found room in his love letter to talk about ending slavery.

As a historical figure Garrison was noteworthy in the function he preformed in relationship to the abolitionist movement. He and his ideology did produce a small group of abolition followers and a modest readership of the *Liberator*. More importantly his public position on issues like slavery, the Constitution, the Sabbath, nonviolent, women rights produced a great deal of debate and seemed help keep the issue of immediate emancipation in the public eye throughout the antebellum and Civil War period. It was his dogged adherence and the controversy of his ideas that in the end gave them staying power.

A belief review the historiography of Garrison has also shown the controversy and longevity of his ideas. Since he did not lead a great army of followers, control vast amounts political
patronage or rule a huge publishing empire his effects on the movement to end slavery has been hard to gage. Garrison’s primary currency was the fathomless ideology he advocated in his letters, speeches, and newspaper. As a result Garrison and his ideology have and will continue to produce much disparity as to their meaning, origin and effect.
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