

The Relation Between Industrialization, Alcohol, and Religion in the 1800's

By, Daniel J. Kaneb

History Senior Essay  
Senior Seminar Bryan Rommel-Ruiz  
April 24, 2017

The Early Republic, as radically different in government, economy and industry as the previous colonial society, still left Americans holding one thing dear, their drink. Just as prevalent as it had been in the colonial world, alcohol, particularly liquors, held an important role in society and was consumed in higher volumes than at any other point in time. Alcoholic beverages were a vital part of society, serving as a monetary substitute for trade and wages, a sterile alternative to water, a source of comfort in the cold, a major source of calories, and a central hub in most any social gatherings or public events.

Around 1830 life in the Young Republic was rapidly changing. With a shift from an agrarian economy to a fast paced and impersonal industrial society, in 1830 the life path of young men and women was not as clear as it had been a couple of decades before. This shift and the subsequent urbanization of the Young Republic brought with it anxieties and conflict, which were combatted with both the bottle and the bible. Drinking, an American habit predating the revolution, was for the first time being challenged on the grounds of morality. This paper examines the shift in American working mentality and its relation to industrialization and the anti alcohol temperance movement.

Cash was commonly scarce in the colonial world as well as the Early Republic, a problem borne from international trade and the lacking of financial infrastructure necessary for a large-scale mint. Given the asymmetric trading between England and the colonies many of the trades resulted in coins flowing out of the colonies with little flowing back. This was due to the higher quality goods which were produced in England which were then sold in colonial markets. While

certain colonial goods like tobacco, leathers and textiles were often sold in English markets, the bulk of the commerce was in the opposite direction. With little cash wealth at hand many merchants preferred the use of liquors in place of money. Liquor worked as an advantageous barter tool as: it did not spoil over the long periods of time during which many trades occurred; it was useful within almost any economy without the need for exchanging money; and it also held the unique quality of being an addictive intoxicant, which proved to perpetuate trade.

This practice was common amongst maritime trade and as mentioned by historians like William B. Weedon it played a major role in a triangle trade, which occurred between the Colonies in areas like Connecticut and Ipswich where Rum was loaded and molasses and slaves were sold, The West Indies where molasses was loaded and slaves sold, and Africa where slaves were brought on board and traded for Liquor, cash or other goods. Partially due to this trade, rum grew to be a favorite amongst the colonies, and with a constant source of molasses the production of rum proved to be a profitable enterprise and the industry took off. Rum, around the time of the American Revolution was the preferred liquor for most of the public, due to its low cost and relative ease of production, and it was everywhere in society. The average laborer could expect a few portions of rum to be factored into his wage, which supposedly worked to increase work effort and was believed to be a healthful serum aiding in digestion and overall health.<sup>1</sup> Even the soldiers were paid in part with rum, which proved to be an issue when the British cut off trade from the Early Republic limiting the production of rum, forcing people

---

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York :Oxford

to turn to cider, beer or whiskey. After the Revolution rum prices were closer to the historically higher whiskey prices, causing unease in the industry and spurring Alexander Hamilton to promote a whiskey tax, in order to keep the gap in prices. Hamilton believed this tax to be a fair and effective way to collect revenue for the indebted young nation as it protected the rum industry and it equally taxed everyone whether living on the coast or further inland where rum wasn't as available. This tax led to what we now call the Whiskey Rebellion due to the uprising in the more inland regions where whiskey was king. With the price of whiskey dropping due to an influx of technologies from Irish and Scottish immigrants who had mastered the craft of distilling whiskey in their homelands and the increased surplus of corn and grain in areas like Kentucky, rum was soon ousted as the national favorite and whiskey became the first choice for Americans. Whiskey, given its domestic ingredients and production, represented in many Americans' mind a truly patriotic good, unlike rum, which depended on international trade to acquire molasses, a key ingredient in the distilling process. The inherent battle for superiority between whiskey and rum only serves to highlight just how important alcohol had become as a trading medium in the Early Republic. Alcohol gained importance in a range of transactions with diverse parties.

In addition to serving as currency in the maritime trade, alcohol proved useful in the fur trade, primarily within the context of trading with Native populations who lacked the technology to produce the commodity themselves and had no interest in paper currency or American products which lacked quality

compared to products coming from England. This bred an increased consumption in Native populations and created an addictive driven market.

Alcohol, given its sterilizing nature, also played an important role as a safe beverage, which was more than could be said about the water at the time. The water was so dangerous in fact that many believed cold water one of the unhealthiest drinks available, and in many cases it was. This explains alcohol's commonplace nature in the Early Republic since rum, whiskey and cider were served throughout the day to all Americans including children. In addition to being sterile, alcohol also provided a large source of calories, which were necessary for the physically demanding world Americans lived in, especially when the majority of the milk was given to the children when supply was low.<sup>2</sup>

In social and political gatherings, alcohol was almost always featured and often a central aspect of the event. This was especially true of political campaigns. Often, liquors were served to voters in order to acquire their votes. This proved to be a very effective method to capture undecided voters who held little interest in actual politics, but still didn't want to pass on a free drink. This same practice was used in auctions as each bidder was often given a serving of liquor after placing a bid or winning one. This encouraged bidding and the drunken state that it left them in encouraged more bidding. Public drinking was so common that churchgoers gathered most Sundays and drank liquor before attending mass in the unheated church, bottles were often passed around the courtroom, and in some cases when the courtrooms proved too small for the audience, the court would gather in the

---

<sup>2</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York :Oxford University Press, 1979) 99.

drinking houses, often the largest gathering space of a town. In some ways, binge drinking and intoxication represented a form of freedom in the Early Republic as by his own will and freedom a man possesses the ability to intoxicate himself to the point of inebriation. Drinking at social gatherings also represented the newly found sense of egalitarianism and binge drinking was not only encouraged but demanded.

Alcohol has been an important facet in the European diet since the beginning of history, serving not only as a source of nutrients but also playing a unique role for its intoxicating effects, preservative nature and its widespread use. Alcohol, in the Early American Republic, however, additionally developed another new aspect in society, one of moral repugnancy. For the first time we see a development of a distaste for the substance on a moral ground take root in American culture. This shift is particularly puzzling given the degree to which Americans seemed to enjoy the substance. W. J. Rorabaugh estimates that Americans living between 1790 and 1840 consumed more alcohol than at any other time in our history.<sup>3</sup> This raises the question as to what allowed for this anti-alcohol movement to garner as much power as it did, given the major role the substance held in society. One major factor altering the Early Republic is industrialism, which radically altered society on almost every level, from both the sides of the producers and consumers, ushering in an age of large-scale trade and new concepts of time and work.

The Industrial Revolution is considered by many to be one of the largest societal shifts since the agricultural revolution. By 1800 England and several other

---

<sup>3</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York :Oxford University Press, 1979) 10.

European nations were already well on their way to developing an industrial economy unlike any the world had ever seen, while in the New American Republic large scale industry was just finding its roots. Industrialization brought with it some major shifts in society, many of which proved to be troublesome, but more economically profitable. One change experienced by industrial worker is the life plan set out by young men, who traditionally are responsible for providing economic stability and agricultural produce. Before the industrial revolution, most young men who could not afford land would work as field hands for farmers with larger tracts of land. Many of these young men worked for a number of seasons in harsh, poor paying positions in hopes that they could save money to buy land, which they would work themselves. In many ways this was considered a fruitful and successful life, but as land prices increased around 1790 this dream became harder to realize.<sup>4</sup> With the hopes of owning a farm under fire from the increased population growth and subsequent land shortage, young men turned away from the agricultural lifestyle and migrated to cities in order to find work. By providing many low-skilled jobs, industrial work such as textile factories employed more workers than ever, drawing in many poor young men looking for income. Urbanization in America was rampant by 1830 as the number of American cities populated above 5,000 residences hit 45,000 compared to the measly eight cities of scale that existed only four decades earlier.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York :Oxford University Press, 1979) 127.

<sup>5</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York :Oxford University Press, 1979) 128.

In the early 1800s, America was becoming a world of industrial development and commerce, and to fit this profile certain changes in American behaviors would be challenged and new sets of social morals were put in place. This shift moved against many of the traditional ideas for how American society should operate, held by famous Americans like Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, both of whom opposed the development of an industrial economy and instead supported an agricultural society. Jefferson, a plantation owner himself, believed that sticking with a simpler agricultural society would avoid many of the issues present in Britain surrounding industrialization. This longing for an agrarian society is interestingly in line with the ideals of Hellenistic and Roman societies, which many of the founding fathers saw as a model society as if they drew “heritage” from these societies. Jefferson displayed this in much of his writing especially in correspondence with George Washington who held similar hopes for an agrarian society: “Agriculture ... is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals & happiness.”<sup>6</sup> Here, a key aspect of Jefferson’s point exemplifies the relationship he believes agriculture holds with morals and happiness, which for him go hand in hand. This vision of an agrarian America was not uncommon amongst the wealthy that had access to land and resources, but with the industrial revolution well underway in America, by the 1820’s this way of life was under attack.

With pressure on the government to repay debts accrued during the revolution, those in charge were forced to choose an economic root, an Agricultural

---

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Extract from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 14 Aug. 1787* (<http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/98#X3184736>)



society like that of the Greeks or an industrial economy like the English. Those who supported an industrial economy like Alexander Hamilton also pushed for the establishment of a large national government, while Jefferson and others who dreamed of an agricultural society pushed for more state power and less centralized power. The central government was a necessity for the establishment of large scale industrial development as it would enable the government to increase trade routes by building infrastructure, to better monitor the large corporations, to collect more money, and to better quell violence.

A strong, evidence based case can be made that the development of the moral distaste for alcohol was in part borne of this industrialization, through the process of commoditization, which further removed the consumer of products from the producers. With increased trade networks and means of transportation, like canals, steamboats, roads and rail systems, products traveled further than ever. Instead of producing distilled spirits for local sale and personal use, distilleries had a larger, less personal network with whom they traded. This process aided in taking the face off of the product. Where it used to be the case that drinkers would often have a personal connection to the farmer who produced the drinks, now it was more common especially in urban areas for liquor to come from a separate community whose primary connection was economic.

This allowed for many temperance writers and supporters to demonize the product in the eyes of society, as with limited social ties it was simply a product not as much an indictment of an individual's profession. Through this commoditization, personal ties to the industry became fainter and, with this removal, a more objective

look was taken at alcohol, which previously was overlooked for the commonplace nature it had occupied as a cottage industry good. A similar occurrence can be observed within the northern elites' moral views on the nature of slavery as industrialization and transportation decreased the social overlap between plantation owners and northern elites. These both represent cases where age-old institutions and practices were first questioned and ultimately rejected by society based off of moral principles. Both also offer insight into a unique narrative of the formation of industrial class structure and the "American Dream".

In the temperate mind, alcohol now played the role of the British oppressor, working to control individuals by reducing reason and moral sanctity. For a temperate to be a good American he must fight off the oppressive force of alcohol and through his sheer will overcome its seductive properties and use his reason and will to conquer the world. Outside of sermons, groups created literature and various forms of media including plays, songs and magazines, which were published to promote the anti-alcohol movement. In an editorial published in *The American Temperance Magazine, and Sons of Temperance Offering*, writer Reverend Kirk states: "We are free a second time. We have fought a second foe, and achieved a second Independence. We dare, not to drink, not to offer; we dare to speak, to declare the truth. And the advantages of that freedom we owe to the blessings of God on that self-denial which enabled us to pledge ourselves, that for beverages we will use no more alcoholic liquors."<sup>7</sup> This internal personalized battle in many

---

<sup>7</sup> Reverend E. N. Kirk, "Results of The Temperance Reformation.," ed. Van Dien, *The American Temperance Magazine, and Sons of Temperance Offering* 1 (January 1, 1851):

senses represents the mindset commonly held to be part of the “American Values” reminiscent of the omnipresent American Dream where one can pull oneself up by the bootstraps.

The development of this mentality also coincided with the shift in mentality of time, which for the industrial working class was for the first time measured per hour instead of per season as the farmer once was. No longer did the work year consist of long periods of little work and relative leisure intermittent with harvest rushes; instead the industrial workers found themselves working long continuous hours with little variation in work and generally poor conditions. With the establishment of strict schedules and dangerous machinery, alcohol consumption on the job became a major concern and issue for employers. It is only natural that the economically elite group who owned these factories were supporters of the temperance movement if only for personal gain, as it enacted a mindset better suited to the developing industrial work discipline.

The developments that allowed industrialization to thrive were the same that pushed the increased production and in turn consumption of alcohol. These conditions were primarily the increased grain and corn production in areas like Kentucky, which provided an unprecedented surplus in corn and grain, two key ingredients in the national spirit of whiskey. With this surplus of food, the need for farmers dropped in many regions and young workers were forced to head to the city for work giving birth to a large workforce seeking employment in the young

---

185, accessed April 1, 2017,  
<https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=qZ0eAQAAMAAJ&hl=en>.

industrial economy. It is also interesting to note that despite the changes in public opinion that occur during the Early Republic (and subsequently during the industrial revolution) surrounding alcohol, the alcohol industry in many ways represented the earliest of our industrial economies and acted as a precursor to many industries which used the pre-established trade networks such as slavery as noted by historians like William B. Weedon.

Another factor in the increased alcohol consumption and the rise of the temperance movement is the urbanization aspect of industrialization. Industrialization attracted many young poor men to urban centers and in the early 1800s it was clear that cities were on the rise. With this increased population and particularly the influx of young poor men, tensions in cities were increasing more than ever. But was not only the change in population that shook society, as the industrial system also brought a newly structured society.

Paul E. Johnson partially cites the shift from an apprentice-based system, which is patriarchal in nature, to a less personal wage employment in a factory setting. Johnson argues that by removing the ties previously held between employer and employee, the world of the employee and employer drifted apart. With industrialization changing the structure of business in the early 1800's, production was separated from sales and business enterprises took advantage of economies of scale and divisions of labor. This meant replacing the apprentice based system preceding industrialization and relying on wage laborers who lived separately from their employers. By separating "living" and "working" worlds, the masters' influence over the lives of their employees dwindled. No longer was it the master pouring the

drinks for his employees after a day's work, but instead a band of wage earning employees drinking and socializing amongst themselves. This formed a new level of camaraderie amongst the wage earners as they enjoyed their drink together after work. This separation allowed for animosity to grow between the working class and their wealthier employers particularly on the side of the employers.<sup>8</sup>

The end of the apprentice style workshop also left young wage earning men without the "family" like support structure that assured they stayed out of trouble and lived "respectable" lives. In the traditional apprentice based workshop the Master would be held responsible for much of his employee's actions. The relationship often resembled a more familial role than the industrial employee employer relationship. This familial relationship often implied shared faith and morals, as well as a paternal nature, which naturalized the inequality. Shared faith was of major importance to many elites especially in post-Puritan cultures like the Northeast. Here adherence to the Sabbath was traditionally enforced and well respected, but with a shift in social demographic and lack of a means to influence the life outside the workplace, this tradition was under threat in the eyes of the elite.<sup>9</sup>

With an influx of young men into urban areas for work and the lack of the former means of social control the employers and other wealthier citizens felt as though the society were falling into shambles. By 1829 upper class complaints about rowdy theatergoers, violent young men, poor work ethic and Sabbath breakers all

---

<sup>8</sup> Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) 55.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) 38.

found their villain, alcohol.<sup>10</sup> By pinning these social disgraces on alcohol many of the employers were in support of the temperance movement. Liquor was largely banned from workplaces and other aspects of life controlled by the middle class, but hard drink was still able to seek refuge in the social lives of much of the wage earning class. These drinking sessions after a day of long and often dangerous work helped unify the workers into a new class in a sense, that before major urbanization was largely non-existent. The unification of this class established an identity, which to the wage earners represented hard work and camaraderie, but to the elite represented hard drink and loose morals. The socioeconomically elite were in a sense scared by this class considering its size and growth and soon looked for new methods of control.

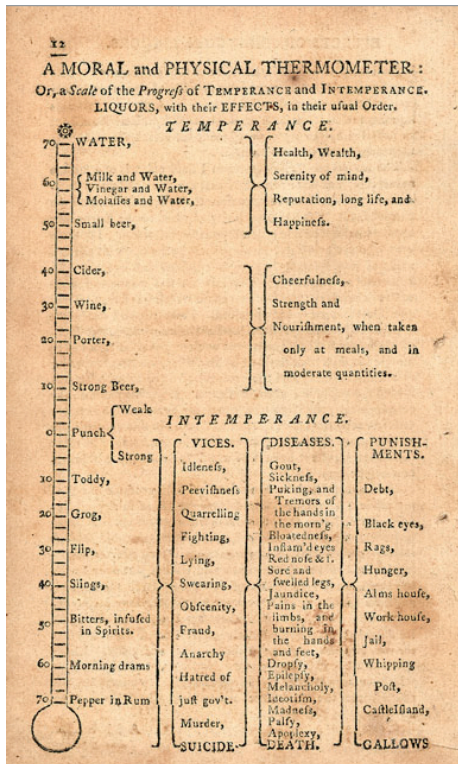
Johnson makes an argument that the temperance movement and the evangelical movements surrounding the revival religion were a product of Marxist movements enacted by the economically elite in order to control the “rambunctious” and heavy drinking wage earning class. By using Rochester New York, Johnson is able to capture a glimpse of a boomtown economy, powered by one of the first innovations in industrial transport: the canal. Johnson argues the role of evangelicalism and the temperate movement in general was a last resort for garnering control from the “unruly” working class population, which had grown in population greatly since the construction of the canal. In hopes that the working class would follow their lead, the socioeconomically elite showed much support for

---

<sup>10</sup> Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) 55.

the temperance movement and revival religion, as the working class would relate it to the wealth accrued and wish to emulate their life. Johnson's focus on class divide is continuous through the text often pitting society as a working class vs. middle class power struggle. Though this does seem like an over simplification at times and more societal influence should be introduced, Johnson does do a good job depicting the tumultuous nature of the industrializing society.

With anxieties high, temperance leaders like Benjamin Rush and Lyman Beecher provided the proper rhetoric and voice for those who saw the changes in their world as apocalyptic, allowing them to rally behind the movement. These men warned of the "evils" of alcohol and worked hard to be heard, publishing articles or images like Benjamin Rush's famous Temperance Thermometer (Image Below) in newspapers.



11

Voices like Lyman Beecher solidified what many of the middle and upper class city folk had already concluded themselves, that liquor was the largest threat to society.

“Intemperance is a national sin, carrying destruction from the center to every extremity of the empire, and calling upon the nation to array itself, en masse, against it.”<sup>12</sup> Lyman’s view on alcohol as shown in this quote from his Six Sermons on

Temperance is exemplary of the zealous nature behind much of the temperance movement, highlighting the extreme “danger” which alcohol brings to society. How the attitude developed so radically is an interesting question in itself, given most temperance members were once drinkers themselves. So what was it that caused

<sup>11</sup> Rush, Benjamin. *Image*. pdf. <http://www.teachushistory.org/second-great-awakening-age-reform/resources/original-temperance-thermometer>

<sup>12</sup> Lyman Beecher, *Six sermons on the nature, occasions, signs, evils, and remedy of intemperance* (New York: Tract Society, 1843) 61



these men who had partaken in drinking, which as stated earlier was omnipresent in society, to abstaining completely? Rorabaugh suggests an interesting insight into this historical phenomenon, proposing that it was perhaps the break from drinking, which in turn lowered the tolerance making the drink more potent for those whom had abstained for a period of time.<sup>13</sup> This would aid in the radicalization of the movement giving the temperate person an even more powerful view on alcohol due to their low tolerances. Though this is would not explain the roots of abstinence, it does explain its radical nature.

The church community itself may have been the largest draw to the temperance movement, as many wealthy families and important figures attended a church. Brushing shoulders with this crowd was not a bad idea for an ambitious young man. This was especially true if an employer were in attendance and expected to see his employees present. In fact religion turned out to pay better for many making it no surprise that workingmen were not uncommon in these services.<sup>14</sup> These services also helped to create a tight knit community that would be able to apply social pressure to keep society in check, so if one were caught breaking Sabbath or one's temperance there were social consequences. An important point is that this not only provided negative consequences, but also must have served as a personal and spiritual fulfillment that sustained their anxieties, much as liquor had

---

<sup>13</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York :Oxford University Press, 1979) 189.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) 121.

once been used. Now when the anxieties of the world overcame men they had god to turn to and there fellow temperate neighbors.

As mentioned above in the eyes of Temperance members, the previous role alcohol had played, that of an expression of freedom and the great egalitarian drink had been radically shifted to the role of the British oppressor in the revolution. In the 1820's, Temperance groups were established on patriotic grounds stating that the struggle for freedom from liquor was equivalent to the fight against the British considering their task a second Independence.<sup>15</sup> By using this analogous tale created by temperance writers, a patriotic rallying call was established. This was a radical development making abstinence from liquor, which was practically a national pastime only a few years prior, more like a patriotic duty. Again, Americans were using nostalgia in a sense.

Perhaps liquor and religion, as previously mentioned, in many ways served the same purpose. The Evangelical movements, which came out of the temperance, were in many ways, a coping method for those in the tumultuous world of the Young Republic much as alcohol had served that purpose before. With the simplicities of an agrarian society drifting away faster than ever, Americans were left in an unsure world, and religion and drink were the tools to comfort them. A key difference is that with the implementation of temperance, a society is better equipped for an industrious world, both physically and mentally. With increased sobriety there are no doubt fewer accidents in the hazardous factories and construction sites, but by

---

<sup>15</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York :Oxford University Press, 1979) 195.

including a heroic battle-like analogy in the fight for abstinence they also helped create the ideals of a self made man. This is an ideal that has worked its way into what we call the American Dream.

## Sources

Beecher, Lyman. *Six sermons on the nature, occasions, signs, evils, and remedy of intemperance*. New York: American Tract Society, 1843.

Jefferson, Thomas. "Jefferson Quotes & Family Letters." Extract from Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 14 Aug. 1787 [Quote] | Jefferson Quotes & Family Letters. Accessed December 21, 2016. <http://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/98#X3184736>.

Johnson, Paul E. *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*. New York, New York: Hill and Wang, 1986.

Kirk, Reverend E. N. "Results of The Temperance Reformation." Edited by Van Dien. *The American Temperance Magazine, and Sons of Temperance Offering* 1 (January 1, 1851): 180-86. Accessed April 1, 2017. <https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=qZ0eAQAAMAAJ&hl=en>.

Rorabaugh, W.J. *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Rush, Benjamin. *Image*. .pdf. <http://www.teachushistory.org/second-great-awakening-age-reform/resources/original-temperance-thermometer>

Veach, Michael R. *Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey: An American Heritage*. University Press of Kentucky, 2013.

Weeden, William B. *Economic and Social History of New England, 1620-1789*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1890.