POPULAR GEOGRAPHY WRITING IN AMERICA, 1783–1888

Shane Patrick Avery
Syracuse University

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ABSTRACT

“Popular Geography Writing in America, 1783–1888” is an intellectual and cultural history that traces the connections among geography writing, print culture, and nationalism. It challenges the conventional historiographical paradigm that understands antebellum and postbellum periods in United States history as fundamentally discontinuous. The study suggests that the published geographies of Jedidiah Morse, Thomas Jefferson, Samuel Griswold Goodrich, Arnold Guyot, William Gilpin, George Perkins Marsh, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Albert Richardson, Clarence King, and John Wesley Powell created a popular discursive sense of equivalency between the physical landscape of a North American continent and the United States as a nationstate.
POPULAR GEOGRAPHY WRITING IN AMERICA, 1783–1888

by

Shane Patrick Avery

B.A., State University of New York at Potsdam, 2006
M.A., Syracuse University, 2011
M.Phil., Syracuse University, 2015

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CONTENTS

Introduction 1

Chapter 1. “To act upon a larger sphere . . . diffusing all Worldly knowledge throughout the Whole Universe”: Jedidiah Morse and the Production of National Geographies, 1784–1826 18

Chapter 2. Thomas Jefferson, Political Geography, and Print Culture 110

Chapter 3. “Things capable of sensible representation“: The Illustrated Geographies of Samuel Griswold Goodrich 173

Chapter 4. ‘We shall hold the world’s granary, the world’s treasury, the world’s highway‘: Towards a National Geographic, 1845–1888 220

Conclusion 256

Epilogue 258

Bibliography 268

Vita 308
FIGURES

Figure 1. Samuel F.B. Morse, Oil on Wood (ca. 1810–1811) Yale University Art Gallery. The image is in public domain. https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/61274 (accessed 21, April 2018). 29

Figure 2. Samuel F. B. Morse, Watercolor (c. 1810) 30

Figure 3. Geography Made Easy (1784) 73

Figure 4. Comparing Marbois’ original query (1780) with the chapters of Notes on the State of Virginia (1787) 117

Figure 5. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Universal History (1838) 185

Figure 6. Unauthorized version of Goodrich’s Parley that appeared in London c. 1830s 185

Figure 7. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Illustrations of the Animal Kingdom (1844) 190

Figure 8. Samuel Goodrich’s The Truth Finder (1850) 192

Figure 9. Parley unauthorized and re-appropriated: Peter Parley’s Visit to London, during the Coronation of Queen Victoria (1839) 194

Figure 10. Parley Parley’s Erzählungen (1845) 196

Figure 11. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Method of Telling about Geography to Children (1830) 201

Figure 12. Samuel Goodrich’s The Tales of Peter Parley about America (1830) 202

Figure 13. Samuel Goodrich’s The Child’s Book of American Geography (1837) 203

Figure 14. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Universal History on the Basis of Geography (1886) 204

Figure 15. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Method of Telling about Geography to Children (1830) 206

Figure 16. Samuel Goodrich’s, The Tales of Peter Parley about America (1830) 207

Figure 17. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Geography for Beginners (1850) 208

Figure 18. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Method of Telling about Geography to Children (1830) 216
Figure 19. William Gilpin’s The Cosmopolitan Railway (1890) 225
Figure 20. Albert Richardson’s Beyond the Mississippi (1869) 241
Introduction

To understand the historical formation of the modern nationstate students must consider both the ways in which states manufacture national identity and how heterogeneous groups articulate pluralities of identity. Although these two processes are not mutually exclusive it is possible to approach the question from state-down or agency-centered (that is, local, fragmentary, dissenting, populist, or subaltern) models.¹ In either case it is possible to question the homogeneity or universality of given national cultures and point instead to contested definitions and fragmented natures of national belonging. For many historians nationalism is a history of invented tradition.² The purview of the subject is vast and historians must see nationalism in its various political, cultural, and anthropological dimensions, which invites, or necessitates, a high degree of interdisciplinary flexibility.

Yet within this framework so much has already been forgotten. Ideological commitment is reified—that is, effaced and unspoken.³ The vocabulary on which the terms of national belonging are conceptualized requires consent to the state: its laws, its


historical trajectory, and its will to power. This perspective sees the nationstate as an powerful institution-to which only some individuals and groups are granted legal access. The dominance of the national narrative threatens stateless communities who are at existential risk to have alternative histories swallowed up. In other words, the nationstate and its laws recognize dissent only if it is expressed in the language of civil, national society; whereas the social existence of stateless individuals “violates a series of codes,” which obliterates their political autonomy and delegitimizes the discursive vocabulary for expressing an alternative worldview to the national sovereignty.

This shines a bright light on a stark binary: that of the national and of the non-national; that of belonging to the state and of statelessness. Nevertheless, as I will show, recent historical inquiry often blurs the clarity of this binary. Instead there is increased focus on the dynamic relationships that exist among national, regional, and local elements. At the same time though not quite similarly, historians challenge the national framework through reference to overarching transnational or global conditions. The process of globalization is ever-present in historical narratives—its origins are traced from the past; it forms the context of the present; and it is looming on the future horizon. Thus nationalism is problematized in various ways.


It is not an easy task for historians who need to account, on one hand, for the nationstate and nationalism in reference to the centripetal forces of a globalizing political economy while on the other account for the state and its pursuit of the “centralization imperative” in the context of contested local fragments. The center, which represents cultural normalization, is challenged simultaneously from within and from without. To meet these challenges, in the first place, it is important to recognize the trajectory of modern history as that of increasing spatial closeness, of distances conquered through the extension of various technologies. Yet the process of economic modernization that brings this about is rarely direct and concrete but instead often slippery and abstract. By its very nature unremitting and interminable it is vaguely thought of as existing in the distant past while somehow it is never completed as a global condition though it seems forever striving toward that end. Economic modernization unfolds as a continual need to alter social conditions and produce spatial transformations that are unevenly distributed across geographical places.

Tracing the origins of nationalism, globalization, and economic modernization are tricky undertakings as the economies of scales are forever proliferating. It seems

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equally tricky to disentangle the various links that exist within, between, and among nations and regions and the variety of groups therein. Thus it would seem that each of these processes is lengthy and gradual, that is, long-term transitions that Fernand Braudel eloquently described as the “underlying currents, often noiseless, whose direction can only be discerned by watching them over long periods of time.”

As such, a very delicate balance holds among local, regional, national, and global elements as relevant touchstones for the unfolding of nationalism. This delicacy is apparent in historical method, which often struggles when confronted with persistently shifting reference points. Therefore fragments and exceptions to the national arise inevitably, as Hobsbawm tells us, since “we are trying to fit historically novel, emerging, changing, and . . . far from universal entities into a framework for permanence and universality.” It follows that history from below, or at the “sub-literary level” is “exceedingly difficult to discover:

Official ideologies of states and movements are not guides . . . to the minds of even the most loyal supporters. . . . For most people national identification—when it exists—excludes or is even superior to, the remainder set of identifications which constitute the social being . . . National consciousness develops unevenly among social groupings [while] regional diversity and its reasons [are] notably neglected . . . the social groups first captured by national

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consciousness, the popular masses—workers, servants, peasants—are the last to be affected by it.\textsuperscript{10}

At the same time, Hobsbawm’s approach to nationalism primarily focuses on political agency within a framework of mass politics.\textsuperscript{11} Nationalism is cast as a historical condition that is fundamentally linked to the technological and economic developments of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the creation of mass society. Liberalism, socialism and industrialization are the springboards of modernity while the nationstate comes to claim the commanding heights of the economy in the unfolding process of national definition.\textsuperscript{12} For Hobsbawm the state is the primary agent that harnesses popular nationalism.\textsuperscript{13} As such his focus rests on a top-down model of economic and political development in which concrete technologies and institutions encompass a structural domain over which the state exercises legal and cultural authority.

So far, I have cast the question of nationalism among theoretical considerations whereas individual cases of historical nationstate formation must be grounded in empiricism. This raises the question of transmission—how is nationalist consciousness

\textsuperscript{10} E.J. Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780}, 12.


\textsuperscript{13} E.J. Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780}, 10.
raised and who raises it? Here the scholarship of Jürgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson remain relevant for understanding the structural mechanisms through which the transmission of national ideas are conveyed in the public sphere.\textsuperscript{14} Yet empiricists, in defense of the fragment, look toward the fractured or dissenting variations of nationalism thereby rejecting a monolithic public sphere.\textsuperscript{15} This is especially true for historians of the United States.\textsuperscript{16} Researchers of early American print culture consistently emphasize its fragmentary and decentralized qualities.\textsuperscript{17} For instance Jack Philip Greene in his evidently influential scholarship connects the origins of the United

\begin{enumerate}
\item Andrew W. Robertson, “‘Look on This Picture . . . and on This!’: Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States,” \textit{The American Historical Review} 106, no. 4 (Oct. 2001): 1263–80.
\end{enumerate}
States to state formation theory in the context of colonial British history. Rather than treating the Revolutionary period as a grand national beginning, Greene questions (in an iconoclastic thesis) a Revolution with limited “transformative power” and “far weaker than many students . . . have acknowledged.” For an event that historians have consistently interpreted as a massive rupture, Greene counters with a thesis of continuity. British colonists:

saw themselves as agents of the European polities . . . and [were] restricted by their deep attachment to their metropolitan legal and cultural inheritance. In the English colonies, this attachment meant they were reproducing variants of the common law cultures they had left behind. Varying from one political entity to another according to local custom, this legal inheritance gave settlers enormous flexibility in adapting the law to local conditions while making them as resolutely, even militantly, English . . . the character of expansion did not change much after the creation of the United States and that national expansion merely represented an extension of colonial expansion with a weak American state, instead of a weak British state presiding over it.

The above thesis exhibits contradictions especially in its refusal to consider the immense power the state, and in its treatment of national identity as something entirely

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fungible. Greene is hardly alone in this tendency. Thus can Linda Colley, one of the leading historians of British nationalism write of its “remarkable strengths and resilience” and of its “considerable and increasingly evident weaknesses.” I would like to problematize such contradictions as a prelude to introducing my own research. Looking at Greene specifically we can see the attempt to forge common cause with postcolonial studies more generally. He laments how postcolonial studies often limits itself in historical time (nineteenth and twentieth centuries) and in its regional scope to the “heavily peopled worlds of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia,” that is, to “colonies of exploitation, occupation, domination, in which the central objective was to mobilize land and labor to produce raw materials for export.” According to Greene these “exploitation colonies” are framed in false contrast to “settler colonialism” of North and South America which is instead defined by the comparative permanence of the population: “the extensive transplantation of European institutions; the wide latitude enjoyed by settlers in shaping economic, social, and political structures; [and] the ambiguous status of settlers as both colonizers, in relationship to indigenous peoples, and colonized, in relationship to the metropole to which they were attached.”

Here the power of nationalism has been downgraded and instead the focus is placed on the various links among economic and cultural fragments within an ambiguous colonial/postcolonial sociology full of contradictions. British colonists were at once militantly English and at once fragmented locally into diverse identities; they were permanent settlers who also eyed expansion beyond liminal borderlands; they enjoyed great freedom to craft locally powerful versions of “neo-European” institutions—but very weak ones whose power primarily cemented local attachment. The upshot here is that one of the most influential colonial American historians insists on colonial/postcolonial continuity. Nationalism and state power are rejected; in their place is a narrative of “postcolonial” fragmentation, weak nationalism, and a weaker state. Greene concludes that “so strong was the desire for land and hegemony over it that expansion scarcely needed a national component to make it go.”  

Thus there is nothing American about the American Revolution—in the words of Kariann Akemi Yokota the postcolonial transition was simply a long process of *Unbecoming British*. Patrick Griffin makes perhaps the strongest claim in this regard, writing that the very weakness of the

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state contributed to the construction of a prevailing ideology of violent, frontier nationalism(s) hostile to centralized authority.26

It would seem that the dismissal of monolithic nationalism and of state power is in large part a reaction against Benedict Anderson’s influential thesis in *Imagined Communities*, which emphasizes the force of “print capitalism” in the creation of modern nationalism and its concomitant cultural normalization.27 Take for example the strident terms in which Trish Loughran rejects the “abstracted model of the print public sphere” as an “ahistorical, postindustrial fantasy of preindustrial print’s efficacy.”28 At the same time the extent of criticism addressed to Anderson (and by extension Habermas) is paradoxically an indication of the difficulty of moving beyond the nationstate as a fundamental frame of reference.29 For Greene the postcolonial difference is negligible—simply as thin as British colonists shedding one label (British) for another (American). Are these labels so inherently empty of meaning? If the answer is yes, then from where to trace the growth of the nationstate to its current undeniably leviathan form? How too


to account for the rapid rise in the postbellum period of the United States as a dominant global superpower? If the state was institutionally weak until the latter half of the nineteenth century, how can the enduring strength of the nationstate and sovereignty be accounted for? It is reasonable to question whether the United States’ sovereignty over a large section of a sprawling continent developed from fundamental institutional weaknesses.

For Greene and others the simple binary between statehood and statelessness seem to collapse. In its stead are messy ingredients, the diversity of locales and various mechanisms of local power. Nevertheless, these accounts largely ignore the clear technologies of manipulation that often exist in the consolidation of territorial sovereignty.30 Despite the messiness and various contradictions we must seriously ask ourselves if it is wise to downplay the origins of nationalism and the power of the nationstate in the history of the United States. On the contrary, some adjustment must be made to understand the origins and emergence of the deeply powerful state in its current form: a mega-institutional structure that organizes the material conditions and the ranges of available socioeconomic opportunities for hundreds of millions of people.

To this end, I am interested in nationalism in early American history and its surrounding cultural production. I wish to push back against theses that have

downplayed both the state and nationalism. On the contrary I am inspired by Martin Brückner, whose seminal research has shed light on the fundamental connections between geographical literacy and national identity in colonial and antebellum American history. Recently Brückner has looked at geographical literacy in a social context and has found evidence for the overwhelming importance not only of maps but also of geodetic writing.

In other words, I approach the strength of the nationstate as the effect of an ongoing process of geographical literacy, the latter which was an extended alphabetization campaign that contributed to the formation of the United States and its powerful and enduring claim over a vast continental landscape. During the period under consideration agents of print attempted to inculcate national literacy through mass textual inundations of discursive geographies. This includes not only maps but other widely consumed geodetic print and images contained in encyclopedic


geographies, schoolbooks, magazines, newspapers. I believe there is ample evidence to show that nationalism was articulated as an overarching geographical expression. My thesis is that early print capitalism, decentralized and localized as it was in the United States, was saturated with the tropes of geographical nationalism that were contained in some of the most widely consumed and disseminated texts in antebellum America.

Throughout this analysis I try not to lose track of historical nationalism as equal part political and anthropological. Cultural geography serves to remind historians that humans primarily experience their environments in emotional and visceral ways that cannot easily be reduced to textual studies or understood only through reference to nationalism, the state, global economies, or even the public sphere and print culture. Historians who are aware of anthropological or environmental perspectives tend to take more seriously the deeply emotional connections of humans to place, space, and physical environment. Yi-fu Tuan makes a relevant case for the deeply intimate and visceral connections that human communities make to their physical environments. Yet even still the dialectic between whole and fragment endures. For while Tuan observes the “bewildering wealth of viewpoints on both individual and group levels,” he also warns us not to lose sight of the diversity of human perception of the


environment “as members of the same species [who] are constrained to see things a certain way. All human beings share common perceptions, a common world, by virtue of possessing similar organs.”35

The point I wish to make is that historians often neglect the ways in which local, ordinary, or fragmentary human landscapes become fused with larger geographical notions about the nation.36 The primary sources on which I focus show how local attachments were absorbed into the larger geographical construction of the nation through campaigns of geographical literacy and knowledge making. These texts shaped popular consciousness and identity because they were widely disseminated. They represented the United States as a mythic home with a nationalized geographical landscape at its base.37 These sources show how it is possible for fragmentary landscapes to harmonize in the representational apparatus of textual productions.

The amazing distribution of these texts demonstrates the connection between productive print and the nation, a dynamic that became increasingly evident from the

35 Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia*, 5. Tuan looks at human sense perception first and foremost: “Egocentrism is the habit of ordering the world so that its components diminish rapidly in value away from the self . . . . ethnocentrism . . . differentiates between we and they, between real people and people less real, between home ground and alien territory. ‘We’ are at the center. Human beings lose attributes in proportion as they are removed from the center,” 30–31; the implications relate to the ordering of landscapes as a psychological and cognitive process.


1790s onward. In this sense, books of geographical literacy are part of what Laura Rigal has defined as “dense intersections of technologies of representation . . . that made and displayed production itself as the founding principle of a national unity:

The sheer size of the extended republic demanded both an elevated point of view and a representational apparatus for the production of knowledge, whereby bodies and objects might be observed, encountered, arranged, classified, displayed, and ‘diffused’ as information. . . . In a geographical sprawling confederation the empirical techniques of collection, classification, and publication in particular appeared as essential representational mechanisms through which innumerable local particulars could . . . be brought under collective view so that disinterested decisions could be made at state and national levels.  

In this dissertation I focus on how the “innumerable local particulars” became nationalized in popular consciousness. This is a difficult question as it necessitates a careful understanding of reading practices, which undeniably differed across the fragments of region, gender, race, and class. Nevertheless, the effect of this lengthy historical process is clear: the widespread acceptance of American geography as a legitimate domain of science; in this respect, the political and cultural stability of the nationstate owes a great deal to such widely-circulated national geographies, which occupied important pedagogic domains.

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The primary sources represent an important selection of popular geography writing. The dates of the research refer to Jedidiah Morse’s *Geography Made Easy*, which appeared in 1784; while the terminus, 1888, saw the inaugural publication of *National Geographic* magazine. Geography writers of this period tended to be firmly nationalist. To this end, the first chapter looks at the legacy of Jedidiah Morse and the print strategy behind the mass circulation of his geographies, which dominated the literary marketplace from 1784 into the 1820s. In the second chapter Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* is interpreted as a discursive geography and as a projection of state power. The third chapter seeks to understand *Peter Parley* as a concrete example of a geographical literacy campaign. Chapter four explores the widely disseminated popular geographical texts from the 1850s until 1888. In this chapter I pay particular attention to the professionalization of geography as a discipline. I also look at the changing nature of its print media and popular images.

Lastly, in the conclusion I consider more deeply the connection between geography and nationalism. In this sense much can be gained from an interdisciplinary approach that considers geography and history as fundamentally inseparable: the political nationstate itself has come to embody the geographical territory over which it claims legal sovereignty. Political historians often take too much for granted, especially with respect to geography. Cultural historians, for their part, are liable to lose track of
the structural forces and cultural commodities that help to shape popular consciousness and the formation of national identity.
On August 5, 1800, Reverend Jedidiah Morse embarked, *via* stage coach, on a ten day journey that upon completion he enthusiastically evaluated as “the most pleasant & prosperous of any that I ever performed in the course of my life.” The coach took him from his home pulpit in Charlestown to the coastal city of Newburyport, Massachusetts. On the following day with a fair wind, a Captain Griffin (who charitably refused compensation for the four-hour voyage) conveyed him to Smutty Nose Island where he would lodge through the evening at the property of Mr. Samuel Haley. The Haleys, an extended family numbering about “20 souls” in total, were at that time the sole occupants of the small island.\(^1\)

Morse next travelled to neighboring Star Island, a quarter mile’s distance from Smutty Nose. He offered commentary on the fifteen families there, counted at ninety-two persons. These families resided in nine separate dwellings, most of which were “in a state of almost deplorable decay.” Observing the environment in which they lived, he noted that of the fifteen families, only four were “able to help themselves & live decently.” The remaining families, on the other hand, were among “the dirtiest habitations of human creatures that I ever saw.” This impoverished group could neither

\(^1\) Jedidiah Morse, “Dr Morse’s Journal to Isles of Shoals, 1800” Jedidiah Morse Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, MssCoL 2069, The New York Public Library.
read nor write “and of course must be very ignorant.” The sparse local economy of Star Island was financed primarily through the patronage of a Mrs. Mace, the widow of “the most respectable man on the island” who had died the previous summer. She owned all of the fishing boats and employed the “rest of the poor & wretched inhabitants pretty much on [her] own terms” in day-to-day, small-scale fishing operations. Morse lodged with Mrs. Mace in her well-furnished house for the duration of the stay; in contrast to the other residents she herself “live[d] in a style becoming a person of her property.”

He stayed for eight days and nights at these glacial outcroppings approximately six miles off the coast of present-day Maine and New Hampshire and until 1820 under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Commonwealth. While in residence he preached and conducted interviews. He even baptized members of the small population. Notably, he commented on the “wretched” people he encountered, decrying their lack of physical hygiene and abundance of spiritual profanity. He kept a travel journal compiled into a manuscript but unpublished in his lifetime where he gave vivid illustrations of the poverty he encountered. One poignant and abrupt scene found him face-to-face with a sick and miserable man:

I was deeply afflicted with the situation of a poor disconsolate sick man, whom I found walking on a muddy floor, by the side of a miserable substitute for a bed, wet in every part with the rain of the preceding night & apparently without a single article of anything to render him comfortable. At his request [18] I prayed with him, commended him to the care of a compassionate God, & left him.
Morse’s interactions with impoverished individuals were briefly recorded in the manuscript. More time was devoted to offering historical and economic analysis of the place. In this sense he connected the poverty and economic stagnation on the Isles of Shoals to the hardships wrought by the Revolutionary War. Prior to the War a functional fishing industry had brought a sense of economic purpose to the residents. The violent extrication from the British Empire affected the local infrastructure negatively. Visiting in the summer of 1800 the author saw a dire situation:

Formerly these islands contained nearly 100 families, who formed a regular, orderly & respectful Society. The War dispersed the most of them. A few of the poorer class were left behind to take care of themselves, & have degenerated to their present state. The houses which were left by the former inhabitants & their meeting-house not excepted, they have, several years ago, pulled down & burnt as fuel—& since these & all the trees & the bushes even have been consumed, they have cut up, dried, & burnt many acres of the sward, leaving only naked rocks where formerly, there was the finest pasturage for cows.—Conceive of human beings being reduced to such straits for fuel, on a bleak island almost without shelter, destitute of beds or bedding, with clothes scarcely sufficient to cover their nakedness & a very scanty pittance of food, without physicians or midwife, or any provision as cordial in cases of sickness—& you may form some just ideas of no small portion of these islanders, during the winter season. The sight & the contemplation of so much poverty & wretchedness could be supported by a human mind only by the hope of being able to afford them some relief.

Though afflicted by the sight of such wretchedness the author did not record names or anything concrete about these community members. Indeed no specific details
of the non-property owners are made clear. They exist as vague figures in the text, categorized broadly as functionally and spiritually illiterate. Structurally, the episodes in which the author finds himself face-to-face with poverty seem incongruent with the rest of the travel journal. After complaining about drunkenness, illiteracy, and the general atmosphere of blasphemy embedded in the local culture, the writer turns to organized relief. He sketches a blueprint based on implementation of an institutional religious framework: distributing print materials, erecting a church house and school, and finding a suitable pastor to lead the community away from its indolence. Upon returning to the continent, Morse records how he immediately began fundraising efforts to these ends, calling on prominent men in nearby port cities of Exeter, Newburyport, and Portsmouth. In addition, he intended to use the donations he collected to spread awareness (through print circulation) about the untenable conditions under which the islanders suffered. He ended the narrative with a call for urgency, citing the necessity for enacting relief before the start of a cold winter.2

It would be Morse’s first and last trip to the Isles of Shoals in his lifetime. The significance is in how the author represents the place: its history, people, and geography.

2 Primary sources indicate that Shoals’ residents continued to suffer through destitution, even after a semi-permanent missionary presence was established following Morse’s visit. The missionary society, under whose banner Morse visited, continued its activity on these small islands fairly regularly for almost six decades, according to official records. James F. Hunnewell, The Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians and Others in North America, 1787–1887 (Cambridge, Mass.: University Society for Propagating the Gospel, 1887).
In the first place, Morse’s conclusion that the recent War had forced the residents to burn down and deplete the landscape can be questioned. In fact the case for this is dubious since we know that the timber along the coastal regions was the first to be exhausted by colonizers. The bounty of coastal trees referred to by early modern European explorers declined quickly along the coast. Indeed as early as 1623 the English fisherman Christopher Levett, credited with the first literary description of the Isles of Shoals, described its landscape in the following terms: “The first place I set my foote upon in New England was the Iles of Shoulds, being Ilands, about two Leagues from the Mayne. Upon these Ilands, I neither could see one good timbertree nor so much good ground as to make a garden. The place is found to be a good fishing-place for six Shippes, but more cannot be well there, for want of convenient stateroom, as this yeares experience hath proved.”

In other words, Levett noted more than 170 years prior to Morse the limitations of Shoals with respect to its timber resources. Morse’s myopia is perhaps


understandable, given the economic disruption invariably associated with war, but his misunderstanding and misreading of the landscape, and its socioeconomic conditions, in this case is clear—the place was never a garden and the material conditions of its residents throughout its history had been checkered at best. But in Morse’s view the lack of religious order mirrored the unproductive local economy; unproductive souls mirrored an unproductive landscape. This was not a surprising conclusion for Morse to reach given the longstanding motif of declension in the Calvinist worldview that often reconciled economic prosperity with godliness. Here the obverse is the case as the physical and spiritual landscapes mirror each other. Morse framed the theological illiteracy of the residents in a causal way with the un-bountiful landscape. The author conflates the nakedness of ungodly individuals “with clothes scarcely sufficient to cover their nakedness” with a perception: desolate physical conditions described as the “burnt acres of the sward . . . only naked rocks.” Transposed is the trope of nakedness,

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6 The reliability of Morse’s conclusion that the War was the sole cause of the economic distress for a given group of New England coastal fishermen andfisherwomen, e.g., in Shoals, can be generally questioned by reference to contemporary scholarship. Daniel Vickers in his impressive socioeconomic colonial survey of the fishermen of Essex County, Massachusetts, described as common the fishing industry’s capitalist system of “clientage,” which saw at best checkered and at times dire economic conditions for the laborers of the industry, especially when compared to the standard of living of landowning farmers in the same county. Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630–1850* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994), 10, 100.

which overlaps sin visited upon the bodies of the people and the landscape they inhabit. Although an outsider to the place, Morse projected his power through exercising religious authority and through his interpretation of the landscape. He was at once spiritual leader and economic interventionist. He could make sense of the distress in a familiar moral tone and offer a plan forward.

The reaction to Shoals reveals more about the author than it does about the place. A short distance (even for the time) from Boston metropolitan civil society, the Isles of Shoals struck its visitor, whose perspective was that of a prominent Yale graduate and pastor of the First Church of Charlestown, as an unfamiliar and barren wasteland. As the author describes the island landscape as depressed and disordered he emotes a sense of its being remote. Distance in this case is created not by geographical proximity

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8 Perhaps we can gain insight into the travel manuscript by thinking of the Isles of Shoals as an eastern frontier from the perspective of an established Boston metropolis. In 1970 Charles E. Clark made a case, in a seminal study, for describing “the land beyond the Merrimack” as a region onto itself, thereby separating northern from southern New England into “essentially alien culture[s].” Even if Clark exaggerates his case, it is reasonable to see the hardscrabble fishermen Morse encountered as occupying a space on the economic periphery of civil society, especially in Clark’s terms of “conveying a sense of its initial remoteness.” Charles E. Clark, The Eastern Frontier: The Settlement of Northern New England, 1610–1763 (New York: Knopf, 1970), Kindle. Clark also suggested that the “magistrates and ministers of Massachusetts . . . entertain[ed] imperial and missionary ambitions with respect to the land and the people of New Hampshire and Maine.” Additionally, historians of the region have characterized a continuous tension throughout New England’s colonial history between the collective and established religious authority and its “dissenting borderlands,” which were considered profane and ungodly: Joseph A. Conforti, Saints and Strangers: New England in British North America. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2006). See especially chapter 3: “Beyond Puritan New England: Profane, Maritime and Dissenting Borderlands,” 67–97. It is reasonable to see some continuity in the long transition from a colonial to a postcolonial frontier dynamic.
but treatment of Shoals and its people as generic objects of charity who are not identified or documented on their own terms. Morse conflates Shoals with an idealized notion of a productive agricultural New England landscape. The historical and geographical descriptions of the islands are unreliable. He is unable to see the geological difference between the landscape of these small glacial island outcroppings and continental New England with which he is familiar. Without doubt, Shoals was an economically bleak community that suffered from its inauspicious location off the coast of New England during a time of naval blockages and economic privation at the hands of the British Empire during wartime. Nevertheless, the confidence with which the author understands the historical trajectory of Shoals as a geographical place is betrayed by a lack of concrete or factual detail about the individual community members with whom the writer interacts. His illustration of a physical geography as naked finds its counterpart in a conception of a naked human geography. In fact, other than the names of the several property owners, no specific information is provided. Of course, Morse had a clearly stated objective (raising money and establishing religious structures) before arriving. The historical past, and even the lived present, were less important than the future, which would be administered by a Congregationalist machinery going forward.
In this specific journey Morse misrepresented the human geography of the island community. His ideological and spiritual judgements belie any expression of their human existence; to Morse the residents lack a culture or purpose; they are supposed wretched and nameless while simultaneously the geographical space they inhabit is targeted for a specific economic and cultural purpose. As a community the human geography and the physical geography are seen as illegitimate and broken; the former escape the writer’s attention as individuals or as members of a community.

Although the negative effect of the War on the community cannot be doubted the stories of the residents are muted as the machinery of relief is inaugurated. It is remarkable both as travel literature and as a moment in the life of Jedidiah Morse. While the textual narrative is punctuated by literary or sentimental abruptness the personal experience of the narrator conveys an intense sense of lifelessness and the absence of human geography. The encounter with the poor and wretched seems almost like alien contact with drunken, sick, and spiritually damned fishermen.

The incomplete literary picture is disappointing for the historian who, rather whimsically, wishes to hear the voices of those local residents and how they made sense of their own lives. But Morse was an ambitious professional author and was consumed by other publishing concerns, which were considerable. When Jedidiah Morse died in 1826, the Doctor of Divinity was remembered and eulogized primarily for his
accomplishments as a geographer. The gravestone at the Grove Street cemetery in New Haven, Connecticut, puts this point into focus with the words “FATHER OF AMERICAN GEOGRAPHY,” which are etched directly below the pastor’s name, placed prominently above the Christian epitaph announcing his having “DIED . . . IN THE JOY OF A TRIUMPHANT FAITH IN CHRIST.” The leading position of the epitaph reflects the importance that the family placed on their patriarch’s geographical accomplishments. For more than forty years Morse continuously published geography books, achieving popularity through commercial success. While thus engaged the author considered himself to be providing a geographical definition of the United States whose independence was asserted through a violent war that coincided with his tenure as a student at Yale University from 1779–1783. Moreover, the achievement of a geographical legacy primarily rested on a publishing strategy that brought to market various textual iterations bearing geographical titles. Not surprisingly, this led to significant authorial notoriety, creating a popular literary and cultural association between the surname of Morse and geography.

Alongside the commercial success of the geography books, the Morse family cultivated the notion of a geographical legacy. The father enlisted two of his sons as coauthors and editorial assistants, while the third, the painter and inventor Samuel F. B. Morse,

Morse, highlighted his father’s legacy through several paintings featuring artistic representations of the Morse family situated among geographical motifs. For instance, a portrait of his father Jedidiah, dated 1810–1811 [figure 1], features the elder Morse holding his pen while engaged in the act of writing a manuscript, presumably updating the latest edition of his geography series.

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10 Kenneth Silverman, Lightning Man: The Accursed Life of Samuel F.B. Morse. (New York: Knopf, 2003). Samuel Morse acquired the nickname “Geography” during his time at Yale, suggesting the popular cultural association of the Morse family with the mass scale of their patriarch’s publications.
Figure 1. Samuel F.B. Morse, Oil on Wood (ca. 1810–1811) Yale University Art Gallery. The image is in public domain. https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/61274 (accessed 21, April 2018).
Figure 2. Samuel F. B. Morse, Watercolor (c. 1810)
Courtesy of the Museum of Political History, Smithsonian Institution
In the background a bookshelf contains four volumes: volumes 1 and 2 of *Universal Geography*, which he had begun publishing in 1793, as well as the first two volumes of *American Gazetteer* (1797). To the right of these four larger volumes are three smaller ones, tilted to the right: *Geography Abridged*, *History of New England*, and *Elements of Geography*. A fourth smaller volume sits on its side on the top of the shelf, partially obscured, titled only *Sermons*. In a sense the titles of these volumes that appear in the painting serve as a partial bibliography, indicating the various publications Morse authored within the multiple genres in which he participated. Not appearing on the shelf in this bibliographical portraiture are his inaugural publication, *Geography Made Easy* (1784), which went through twenty-three editions appearing through 1828; *The American Geography* (1789); *The General Gazetteer* (1816); or *The Traveller’s Guide* (1823).

Finally, in the bottom left of the painting is the very top of a globe that has been placed on the floor, partially obscured by the writing desk at which Morse is working. Samuel F. B. Morse attempts to capture the essence of his father’s writing career, which was devoted to updating multiple textual iterations comprising his geographies. Thematically speaking, it hints at Jedidiah Morse’s devotion to reprinting and mass circulation.
In another example, a watercolor (c. 1810) features the entire Morse family gathered around a table on which a globe is placed centrally. The patriarch’s pointed index finger rests on the globe as the rest of the family gazes on with expressions of keen interest. An open book appears at the right-hand corner of the table, which offers the textual confirmation of the knowledge acquired about the centrally placed object. The famed geographer stands behind the center of the table and seems to be in the midst of instructing his family on some point related to global geography. Morse, here represented as an expert in command of his subject, bears resemblance to a pastor delivering a sermon in the mold of his Calvinist ancestors. However, in this case he is itemizing physical knowledge of the entire world, not of a revealed theology. Interestingly, the globe itself seems like a complement to or an extension of the surrounding furniture. In this artistic representation the world’s physical geography appears domesticated and stable, an object of knowledge understood formally, but taught comfortably in a spacious drawing room.

The number of Morse geographies that were circulated in print was, relative to their time, spectacular. Although the exact number of published books is difficult to ascertain, the Yale librarian Winfield Shiras has counted fifty-six separate publications bearing the title of geography, which gives a clear sense of the scale of Morse’s
commitment to commercial publishing and mass circulation. Furthermore, in a qualitative, empirical analysis, William Gilmore has counted Morse geographies as the third most widely consumed book in the rural and urban areas of the northern United States for several decades of the postrevolutionary period, a consumption figure dwarfed only by Noah Webster’s schoolbooks and the Bible. Nevertheless, despite clear evidence of the overwhelming commercial success of Morse’s works, historians have scarcely considered his authorship as a geographer in context of America’s emerging national print culture.

From a local perspective, Morse’s dedication to publishing mainly brought controversy. In particular, parishioners from First Church in Charlestown, Massachusetts, complained about their pastor’s spiritual neglect throughout his thirty-year tenure. Biographers have revealed the acrimonious local relationships Morse navigated while serving at the historic First Church, excavating primary-source

11 Winfield Shiras, *List of the Works of Jedidiah Morse, with Notes.* (New Haven: Yale University [1935?]) This typescript volume is in general circulation at Yale. I am thankful to Michael Frost of Manuscripts and Archives for providing a digitally scanned copy.

correspondence that reveals long-term strain. Perhaps the host of parishioners who complained most vociferously of their pastor’s neglect would not have been surprised by the text on his gravestone at New Haven. Rattled and annoyed by the aloofness of their spiritual leader, they often petitioned for his attention through grievances. From their perspective, the pastor’s preoccupation with geography and other publishing activities directly interfered with his responsibility to the congregation, setting up a clear thematic tension between the local and the translocal. In fact, neglect and dereliction of religious duty were accusations against which the pastor was frequently forced to defend himself throughout the three decades in which he engaged in concurrent careers as a preacher and self-styled geographer.

To this end, the tenure of his pastorship was punctuated with an emotionally bitter and contentious resignation. A seven-page letter from 1814, a few years prior to his departure, provides a vivid illustration of the acrimonious environment that had coalesced around Morse’s geographical pursuits. Churchgoers pointed to their

dissatisfaction with a widening public-sphere authorial ambition coming at the expense of local responsibility. Interestingly, the letter uses rhetoric that calls into question the value of Morse’s geographical accomplishments. Anonymously signed “Friend,” librarians have identified this letter’s handwriting as that of a Charlestown First Church deacon, Isaac Warren, who writes: “I feel so deeply sensible of my own defects that I dare charge no fellow mortal, and especially a Professing christian, and one standing so high in the christian World as Dr. M[orse] with any thing inconsistent with his responsible professional duties. What is here suggested, therefore, shall be more by questions than by charges.”\(^\text{14}\) Before leveling criticism, Warren writes of himself as a historically staunch defender of the locally unpopular pastor: “Perhaps there are few in the Parish that have been more ardently attached to Dr. M[orse] or more disposed to vindicate his character against malignant aspersions abroad.

The phrase “malignant aspersions abroad” could be a general reference to the several opprobrious, widely publicized controversies in which the pastor had found himself embroiled through several decades of popularity, which will be the focus of the next section. Yet thereafter the tone of the letters shifts, as the pseudonymous “Friend” launches a volley of rhetorical questions at his “shepherd,” the sum of which amounts

\(^{14}\) Friend [Deacon Isaac Warren] to Jedidiah Morse, April 1814, Morse Family Papers, MS358, box 6, folder 158, Yale University Library, New Haven, CT. Librarians have attributed authorship to Charleston First Church deacon Isaac Warren. (emphasis in original)
to an accusation of both spiritual and professional pastoral neglect: “But alas! What can be said, when it really appears extremely difficult to reconcile some things . . . may it not be asked how it is possible for the shepherd to reconcile in his own mind, to be so deeply, and may it not be said, almost constantly, occupied in things so foreign from his duty . . . ? Is it possible for one who really feels the worth of immortal souls, to let, not only weeks, but months, pass away without producing scarcely one, original, well studied discourse?”

Warren sees a tension between the local spiritual mentoring required of a pastor and the “things so foreign from his duty.” As Warren continues his letter, the “things so foreign” become clearly defined. The charge is that Morse’s authorial ambitions are worldly, as opposed to local pursuits. The “well studied discourse” mentioned refers to old sermons that were recycled and used again. Perhaps Warren had heard the same sermon on too many occasions. In any event, Morse’s geographical pursuits are insinuated as directly interfering with his local affairs:

It may further be said that Dr. M[orse]’s benevolent and enterprising mind is calculated for more noble purposes and more extensive usefulness to the World, and to act upon a larger sphere than to be confined to the narrow limits of his own Parish. . . . It is admitted [sic], that Dr. M. possesses talents for extensive usefulness, and by his numerous publications, he has been instrumental of diffusing much general information in the World. . . . the writer of this, feels it a friendly duty to beg of Dr. M to make it a subject of serious enquiry whether it is consistent with the obligation he is under to the people in his charge? . . . Dr. M. is requested to ask himself, how would he be
satisfied, if he were to contract with a Printer, at even, but a thousand dollars a year, for his own private involvement. . . . Would Dr. M. think it a sufficient excuse if he should say, “I am endeavoring to be useful, on a great scale, and to do much good in the World, by promoting general knowledge”?

The letter ends with an emotional plea for the pastor to abandon his worldly ambitions and instead return his attention to the spiritual concerns of the First Church members who were:

daily sighing, and longing for opportunities for Christian conversation, with their minister, not on disputes, and controversies, or Politics, but on real, internal experimental religion. . . . Would [it] not be considered vastly more valuable to be instrumental in converting one lost sinner, than to be useful in defusing [sic] all worldly knowledge throughout the Whole Universe? . . . if he was divested of these perplexing concerns of a worldly nature—but the same attention to the publications that has been for years past, and now, a new series is coming out.

Clearly authorial success as a geography writer came, at times, with a significant local cost, a dynamic suggesting that increasing national prominence led to a parallel increase in local alienation.

At any rate, local frustration failed to dissuade the pastor from his objective: spreading geographies as widely, and updating them as often, as possible. As local critics in the Church struggled to come to terms with commercial geography, in early America Morse anticipated and found an audience receptive to the importance of his
work. He defended the necessity of his exertions in republishing, claiming the obvious civic utility of newly updated, ever-more accurate editions. Beyond local friction, without question the number of editions brought to market ensured that the Morse family surname became nationally synonymous with geography. Although to some extent adulation, the epitaph on his headstone does give an accurate sense of the popular cultural association between Morse and geography. Morse cemented his legacy through flooding the market with what he cast as authoritative, bounded geographies rooted in a methodological commitment to itemizing and validating the territorial and cultural integrity of a brand-new nation.

In addition it must be stressed that Morse’s first printed geography (1784) predated the U.S. Constitution and the *Federalist Papers*. Commercial success indicates cultural relevance at a particular moment of historical time. In this case, as will be shown, Morse reprints were perceived as fulfilling a basic need for a pedagogy of geographical literacy. Insofar as a nominally American geography was an orientation that would not have made sense in a colonial context, it follows that the instant success of Morse geographies indicates the simultaneity of commercial popularity and cultural impact. It is important to note that eighteenth century and seventeenth century colonists related to continental space in ways that were fundamentally different from the
Americans inhabiting the newly postulated United States. Moreover, as historical and cultural geographer Donald Meinig has demonstrated, a gradual transformation from “precarious European footholds,” to a “macroculture of world impact,” involved first and foremost a process of nation building around a process of “internal areal integration.” The nation “became a vortex for everything” as “small groups of political activists” forged bonds between the geographical nucleus of the new nation and its outlying periphery.

Accordingly, this chapter seeks to understand the history of and context behind a print cycle that took a half-century to run its course. Since Morse’s texts are examples of mass production in the early United States, their success and popularity are worthy of historical investigation. The sheer number of volumes that were circulated is clear evidence of their impact as a cultural mediating force in the context of print capitalism. Morse saw himself as presenting the national public with its nationstate—an easily cogitated geopolitical body.

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17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. 
Moreover, I aim to show that Morse geographies are remarkable when considering their contribution to an almost overnight acceptance in the public sphere of a fact-based American geography. This relates to what Laura Rigal has written on the remarkable ranges of sites” at which national cultural production intersected with labor in the 1790s. Importantly, Rigal points out the “dense intersections of technologies of representation . . . that made and displayed production itself as the founding principle . . . . The sheer size of the extended republic demanded both an elevated point of view and a representational apparatus for the production of knowledge, whereby bodies and objects might be observed, encountered, arranged, classified, displayed, and diffused as information.”18 In other words, the geographical expression of the United States as a territorial entity was an opportunity for book publishers to develop a nationally based visual and literary culture. In this sense, the proliferation of Morse’s textual geographies can be viewed through the lens of intellectual production. This perspective identifies intellectual labor as a process of specialization, which depends on the framework of the nationstate for its expression.

In simple terms, Morse collapsed the difference between print distribution and scientific methodology. The former factor was an explicit objective as much as it was a strategy, namely the aim to achieve the widest possible circulation, while the latter

factor can be defined as Morse’s methodological search for geographical source material that could ensure that the indefinite expansion of the geographies matched the indefinite expansion of the nationstate that it was attempting to capture as a fixed geopolitical reality.

Nevertheless, the publication history of the geographies reveals a strange paradox: as the texts became more ubiquitous, they gradually became irrelevant, fungible, and amorphous. Isaac Warren’s description of the writer “diffusing all worldly knowledge throughout the whole universe” may be contextualized by the historian as a reference to the clearly visible sense Warren had of the scale of production that had been achieved in the name of American geography. However, the tone of the phrase is skeptical and near mocking. Warren seems to be asking his pastor whether or not his next “series” served any useful purpose at all.

I highlight the possibility that these texts are best understood in reference to their unstable and imprecise methodology. Owing to a lack of a clearly defined method, updated volumes were printed that the author himself considered outdated at the very moment of their publication. As Morse’s print strategy was to inundate the marketplace through updated reprinting, the upshot was a variety of textual forms, appearing and reappearing in different packaging over the course of decades. The geographical
information elected for inclusion was subject to continuous editing depending on the
volume: the content was restructured, renamed, expanded, abridged, combined, or
separated depending on the volume, with new versions always claiming to be
significantly improved from previous ones. Hence ideals of universal information and
circulation reinforced each other, ultimately leading to a publishing history that
demonstrates a clear attempt to capitalize on the nationstate as a focal point of
marketplace consumption.

In sum, Morse spent over forty years of his life publishing, revising, and
reissuing a multiplicity of geography volumes under different titles and structures, a
process that his sons continued posthumously. The objective was to classify accurately
the constituent parts of what came to be called in one textual iteration an *American
Universal Geography*. Yet this pursuit was fraught with anxiety. Morse keenly expressed
his struggle to identify clearly the scientific principles to justify continual reprinting. In
this process he confronted the limitations of facts and truth based on an unstable
process of categorization. Despite commercial and cultural success, at the time of his
death Morse seriously questioned the validity of his geographical writing and the
insecure methodology underpinning it.

Literature scholars have noted that Morse’s print strategy was one that
associated authoritative pronouncement with the very materiality of printing—that is,
with the very act of printing itself.\(^{19}\) This strategy was in part a response to long-standing conventions within the print culture of colonial New England that were gradually being recalibrated in the postcolonial period. Hence while local parishioners of Charlestown may have had difficulty reconciling their pastor’s religious practices with his geographical pursuits, the historian can see them as complementary expressions of cultural production at a significant moment in historical time. Moving beyond biographical considerations, this section suggests that Morse can be recognized as a prominent agent in the print culture of early America.

To begin, Morse’s embrace of the authoritative power of mass circulation must be understood within the context of a print culture that was shifting from colonial to national conditions. Morse conceptually reoriented or grounded continental geography into a model of an integrated, monolithic United States that had broken away cleanly from a British colonial apparatus and was instead embodied by the image of a federally sovereign state.

Nevertheless, despite the trajectory of the argument thus far, historians of print culture have shown that the transition from a colonial to a national literary culture in the early United States followed a long, uneven trajectory. Throughout the colonial period British colonists overwhelmingly relied on imported books from Europe, especially from London. Notwithstanding the bitter and bloody nature of the Revolutionary conflict, Anglophilia persisted in the book trade well into the nineteenth century. Robert Gross has noted the continuity of a “striking” and “unstinting demand for literary imports” from London in the first few decades of U.S. history. This is explained by two factors: first, the lack of technical expertise of American printing compared to that of Britain; and second, the continuing consumer and artistic demand for British imports. Furthermore, while the domestic printing of newspapers and pamphlets proliferated following the war, in a strictly empirical sense the expansion of domestic book publishing proceeded slowly in the United States, at sites that were local and regional as opposed to national. In fact, historians have determined that the tipping

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point at which domestic book production exceeded that of foreign importation occurred sometime between the 1830s and the 1840s.\textsuperscript{22} As an ideal, however, literary nationalism and ideas of national culture were immediately trumpeted in print by newly styled American writers during and following the generational divorce from colonial Britain.

This turn toward a nationalist orientation was especially pronounced in Morse’s geographies, a perspective he shared with other prominent Federalist writers. Morse’s attempt to harness the power of print reflects the intention to effect a cultural and geographical shift from a colonial to a postcolonial situation. Thus the importance of the dynamic between the American Revolution and printing cannot be doubted, with Richard Brown referring to the ideology of the American Revolution as “the ideology of an informed citizenry” that without doubt “magnified the political importance of printing and significantly altered its purposes.”\textsuperscript{23}

For instance, Morse’s Yale colleague Noah Webster trumpeted the pedagogical function of literacy, including geographical literacy, for inculcating a national identity. Webster, referred to by an early twentieth-century biographer as the “schoolmaster to America,” sold tens of millions of schoolbooks under the various genres of spellers,

\textsuperscript{22} Robert A. Gross, “An Extensive Republic,” 44–46.

grammars, dictionaries, and histories, achieving spectacular rates of distribution well into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{24} Webster circulated a pedagogy based on theories of national language in which he advocated strongly for a program of literacy through national alphabetization.\textsuperscript{25} Writing in 1787, Webster identified a pedagogical program for addressing the “defects” plaguing American education—the cause of which he identified primarily as the “want of proper books”:

Another defect . . . which, since the revolution, [has] become inexcuseable [sic], . . . is the want of proper books. . . . Every child in America should be acquainted with his own country. He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice. As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country; he should lisp the praise of liberty and of those illustrious heroes and statesmen who have wrought a revolution in her favor. A selection of essays, respecting the settlement and geography of America; the history of the late revolution and of the most remarkable characters and events that distinguished it, and a compendium of the principles of the federal and provincial governments, should be the principal school book in the United States. These are interesting objects to every man; they call home the minds of youth and fix them upon the interests of their own country, and they assist in forming attachments to it, as well as in enlarging the understanding.\textsuperscript{26}


According to Webster, books filled with geography, history, and “principles” of federal and local governments could all be used as tools to “assist in forming attachments” to the nation. In this regard, Webster was a cultural activist and architect. He offered a program of top-down national identity formation with the federal state located at a powerful core. Webster offers a blueprint for a nation based on belief, and suggested it must precede the establishment of key political and cultural institutions.

Morse reflects a similar impetus to nation building as that prescribed by Webster. In general, this can be tied into the history of political Federalism in which Webster, Morse and, most famously, John Adams and Alexander Hamilton articulated the role of educated elites in shaping national institutions, policies, and culture formation from the top down. Generally speaking, Federalists emphasized ideals of moral virtue, social, cultural harmony/homogeneity, enlightened deference, and social obedience. Many prominent Federalist leaders denounced democracy and the notion that ordinary people were fit to govern or look after themselves; to avert disaster or social anarchy the people must be led by the properly educated and morally upstanding members of the political body.27

In particular, Federalists recognized geography as a potential tool for cultural and national architecture, as a letter from John Adams to his wife Abigail reflects:

Geography . . . is a Branch of Knowledge not only very usefull, but absolutely necessary to every Person of public Character whether in the civil or military Life. Nay it is equally necessary for Merchants. America is our Country, and therefore a minute Knowledge of its Geography, is most important to Us and our Children. . . . You will ask me why I trouble you with all these dry Titles, and Dedications of Maps. —I answer, that I may turn the Attention of the Family to the subject of American Geography.— Really there ought not to be a State, a City, a Promontory, a River, an Harbour, an Inlett or a Mountain in all America, but what should be intimately known to every Youth who has any Pretensions to liberal Education. [sic] 28

Here Adams urges a nomenclature of geographical knowledge based on the principle of the nation: “American is our Country, and therefore a minute Knowledge of its Geography” asserts the a priori existence of a country comprised of physical features and in need of the itemization of its geographical knowledge. In other words, the whole nation exists prior to its geographical features; the whole enables the parts to be located, documented, and made into facts so they might be “intimately known” to everyone—civic and military leaders, merchants, children, the family, anyone with pretensions to a proper education.29 Adams asserts that a bedrock of American pedagogy is constructed


29 In his chapter “The Cultural Mediation of the Print Medium,” Michael Warner has identified a “protonationalist consciousness” in some of Adams’s earliest (1765) published writing. Warner attaches great significance to Adams’s intellectual reconciliation of an enlightenment republicanism with a Protestant historical worldview, noting that the rhetoric and language used by Adams in this regard “became a pillar of American nationalism” in the public sphere. Michael Warner, The Letters of the Republic, 1–33, 1–2.
by inculcating a geographical awareness into all publicly minded persons. In essence
early Federalist leaders saw geography discourse, broadly construed, as a potential
vehicle for identity formation; although the bounded frame of the nation had already
been represented as abstract and final, there was still a pressing need to itemize its
constituent parts, the sum of which, when known, crystallized an orientation of
knowing.

When Federalism fractured, and when Federalists disagreed, it was often along
religious fault lines. It is difficult if not impossible to disentangle the concurrent
contexts of religion and politics. Besides, Morse himself would not have wished to
disassociate them. To begin with the historiography of Protestantism: the literature of
the Puritans, is vast. In the *longue durée* sense, Calvinism was the primary factor in the
print culture of colonial New England.\[^{30}\] It is a mistake to understated the continuing
influence of Calvinism into the nineteenth century, which was maintained by a strong
institutional presence even as religious movements became more socially fragmented

[^{30}]: Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap
of Harvard University, 1981); Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social
Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1998); Harry Stout, *The
University, 1986); James R. Rohrer, *Keepers of the Covenant: Frontier Missions and the Decline of
Congregationalism, 1774–1818* (New York: Oxford University, 1995); Jonathan D. Sassi, *A Republic
of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolution New England Clergy* (New York:
Oxford University, 2001); and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the “Spirit” of Capitalism and
Other Writings*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells
during the Second Great Awakening.\textsuperscript{31} Hence despite the relative statistical decline of orthodox Calvinism vis à vis other denominations, Congregationalist leaders like Jedidiah Morse still exercised social power well into the nineteenth century, especially over the printing press. As a state religion Congregationalism was not completely legally disestablished in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts until 1833, which speaks to the enduring social, cultural, and political influence of its agents and their ability to gain access to the power of the state and its bourgeoning institutions.\textsuperscript{32}

Morse has perhaps gained greatest historical fame—at least from the perspective of the political and cultural historians who have concentrated carefully on the topic—

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\textsuperscript{31} Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780–1830: An Hypothesis,” \textit{American Quarterly} 21, no. 1 (spring 1969): 23–43. “The need to have order and definite goals in the midst of strain undoubtedly assisted the epidemic of organization that followed the war” (34). Nathan O. Hatch, \textit{The Democratization of American Christianity} (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1989). Jonathan Sassi has rejected Hatch’s assertion that “Congregationalists as a denomination were singularly ill prepared to organize churches for the raw and unsettled communities that Yankees were creating on the frontier” (59). Instead, Sassi points to the “standing order’s” enduring “preponderance in the public realm [through its continued] access to public influence through its close interconnection with the region’s ruling elites.” Sassi, \textit{Republic of Righteousness}, 27.
\end{quote}

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from his participation in the discursive representation of the “Illuminati conspiracy,” a matter that received significant attention in literary and political discourse of the late 1790s. Morse was among the most popular of spokesmen in the early United States who sounded the alarm on the dangers of Jacobinism in print, a movement that he viewed as an imminent threat to the established Christian order for its rabidly democratic and atheistic political ideals. The Illuminati conspiracy in America climaxed around the reception of the exposé _Proofs of a Conspiracy_ (1797), written by Scottish mathematician John Robison from the University of Edinburgh. Robison’s publication drew wild, unwarranted claims for a causal relationship between the French Revolution and a provincial Masonic group from Germany that had already been dissolved by Bavarian authorities. Ultimately, the mainstream transatlantic community marginalized Robison’s work, which was discredited by various authors who had found factual inaccuracies in his account. Yet Morse’s reputation suffered from a steadfast belief in the conspiracy and a continued defense of Robison; his Yale colleague and co-conspiracy

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theorist Timothy Dwight fared worse, earning the public moniker “The Pope of Connecticut” from Jeffersonians while simultaneously alienating more moderately inclined Federalists.34

Nevertheless, during the very public discussions of Illuminati danger, in which credence was given to the imagined machinations of a secret cabal lurking insidiously inside America, Morse came to embrace controversial print as literary opportunity. Literature scholar Leon Jackson has highlighted Morse’s activities in this regard, referred to as the “commercialization of controversy.” Specifically, Jackson describes the theological print war between Calvinists and Unitarians in New England, a literary dispute whose narrative reached an important cultural moment in 1805 when a Unitarian (one who denied the doctrine of the trinity) was installed at Harvard Divinity School as chair.35 As Jackson shows, during this drawn-out public debate Morse came to embrace the power of mass production, adopting an “aggressively commercialized


35 Mark M. Arkin, “The Force of Ancient Manners: Federalist Politics and the Unitarian Controversy Revisited” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 4 (winter 2002): 575–610; Neil Brody Miller, “‘Proper Subjects for Public Inquiry’: The First Unitarian Controversy and the Transformation of Federalist Print Culture,” *Early American Literature* 43, no. 1 (2008): 101–35. Morse, along with Lyman Beecher and Timothy Dwight, was a prominent voice in the spread of Congregationalist benevolent associations in postcolonial New England. These societies grew in opposition to Unitarianism. Morse was a key point man in the establishment of Andover Theological Seminary, whose mission was to publicize, train, and educate orthodox Calvinist members. He believed atheism would lead to a breakdown of the social order. In an attempt to combat its spread, he became an aggressive print agent.
form of print evangelism.” Interestingly, Morse came to believe in a print strategy that equated mass circulation techniques with social authority. Comparatively, a long-standing feature of authorship in the republican political tradition was the espousal of anonymous authorship. This practice was based on the belief that reason, not the identity of the writer, was the only relevant appeal in the search for truth. In diametric opposition to this tradition, Morse suggested that anonymity was an invalid and unverifiable social position in the literary marketplace, arguing instead that the credibility and social position of the author played an essential role in the public’s reception of printed truth and the trustworthiness of its information.

To this end Morse was a technical innovator with respect to the development of a machinery for the mass circulation of cheap texts in early America. Both cost and scale of distribution came to be seen as the means for exercising influence over ordinary readers, especially in matters of political and evangelical conversion. For our purposes the details of the religious and political debates in which Morse was active are less important than the scale of circulation achieved from the printers with whom he contracted. To illustrate the scale of evangelical publishing, it is worth remarking on Morse’s close relationship with the London Religious Tract Society (RTS), with whom he

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began corresponding in 1799, the year of its inception. In the first fifty years of its operation, RTS printed a half-billion religious tracts, broadsheets, and handbills.37

Convinced by the potential of a machinery of mass production, Morse became a prominent activist in tract publishing. In 1802 he incorporated a tract society in Massachusetts whose object was “to collect, compose, print, and distribute small religious tracts, and to dispose of them to subscribers and purchasers on the lowest terms.”38 He defended the weight and authority of cheap religious print. Morse was subsequently a cofounder of the American counterpart of the RTS, the New England Tract Society, which eventually was incorporated as the American Tract Society (ATS).39 In effect, ATS was a merger that combined the resources of forty smaller societies that had sprung up in the intervening years. By 1828 ATS was printing three to four million items annually in America, a scale of distribution that would have been technically impossible in the eighteenth century.


38 *An Address to Christians Recommending the Cheap Distribution of Religious Tracts*, 6–7. (emphasis in original)

Morse’s case reflects the explosive growth of New England print. In the postcolonial period the expansion of print as mobilized especially by Protestant capital was exceptional while the connection between Protestant evangelism and print was pronounced. Robin Klay and John Lunn have argued in no uncertain terms that from an economic perspective “American publishing was an industry built on the Protestant religion.” While precise data tends to be provisional, economic historians calculate that by 1860 the print industry had the ninth-most level of production in the United States. Hence despite the fragmented and regional character of print it grew into an industrially quantifiable economic staple in the national marketplace of the antebellum United States.

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42 On the creation of a national market see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815–1846* (New York: Oxford University, 1994); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University, 2007). Sellers, a Marxist, tends to emphasize, not unlike Max Weber or E. P. Thompson, the tendency of religion to justify or accommodate the individual psyche to commercial, individualistic values. Howe, on the other hand, has a more optimistic view with respect to religion as a genuine cultural practice; he sees religion as a vehicle for humanist reform, individual possibility, and national achievement.
Moreover, a sense of long-term historical change is helpful for understanding the empirical growth of print commerce through 1860. Apart from the impact of religion on stimulating print production, social reading practices accompanied transformations in the ideological outlook of American readers. Drawing from the important Business of Enlightenment thesis developed by Robert Darnton, historian David Jaffee has described a “Village Enlightenment” in New England. Jaffee defines influential agents of print as the “mobile men who made, or tried to make, a livelihood from the distribution of culture.” As a cultural practice, print commerce spread into rural New England. In 1760 Massachusetts had only nine functioning printers, a number that exploded to 120 by 1820. Of course, other regions in Early America witnessed a similar rise in commercial printing; in this aspect the data is conclusive. During this time rural entrepreneurial printers, relatively small business enterprises, became linked in their


46 Jack Larkin, “‘Printing is something every village has in it’: Rural Printing and Publishing,” in An Extensive Republic, 145–59.
technical operations with urban counterparts such as Baltimore, Boston, Charleston, New York, or Philadelphia. These market-based networks laid the foundation for rapidly accelerating patterns of domestic print consumption, production, and distribution throughout the United States. One of the defining characteristics of America’s print industry was its capacity to enlarge the scale of production for cheaply printed materials like newspapers, almanacs, and magazines.

At the same time, the expansion of cheaply printed materials does not mark a decisive break from the colonial period since such materials, especially almanacs and newspapers, were circulated actively throughout colonial Britain in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, important trends begun in the eighteenth century were only intensified by the development of domestic print production that began to orbit around the idea of the nation. For instance, the creator of the decidedly commercially successful *Farmer’s Almanack*, Robert B. Thomas, referred in his inaugural edition (1792) to the importance of “useful” books for the cultivation of both civilizational and individual self-improvement. Thomas celebrated the earlier almanacs of Benjamin Franklin as inspiration, and declared a wish to extend the useful genre for spreading practical information, especially with regard to accelerating improvements in

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agricultural science grounded in empirical observation. For Thomas this “ideology of improvement” prescribed national literacy as a participative ideal for the independent and self-sufficient farmer: for whom access to affordable volumes pertaining to America’s history and geography offered the effective chance to participate in the rhetorically optimistic promise of its shared civilization. The print consumption ideals that Thomas articulated in The Farmer’s Almanack display his commitment to widening distribution patterns of cheaply printed texts on the basis of national American orientation. A combination of inexpensive availability and a widespread belief in their value in inculcating a national pedagogy evinced an optimism with respect to the potential for civilizational improvement in an American republican experiment.

The clear connections forged among technologies of print, religion, the nation, and a republican ideology of practical agricultural improvement formed a discernible context for the expansion of domestic print production in New England. Congregationalists seemed particularly adept at building institutional frameworks into the frontier following political independence from colonial Britain. In the years after the American Revolution, orthodox Calvinists displayed for the first time a strong

48 “Now comes on the long and social evenings, when the farmer may enjoy himself, and instruct and entertain his family by reading some useful books, of which he will do well in preparing a select number. The following I should recommend as worthy of perusal by every American: Ramsay’s History of the American Revolution: Morse’s Geography: and Belknap’s History of New Hampshire.” Robert B. Thomas, The Farmer’s Almanack (1792), as cited in David Jaffee, “The Village Enlightenment in New England,” 332.
commitment to missionary activity, coinciding with a period of rapidly accelerating social migration.\textsuperscript{49} In precise terms, the first thirty years of the national period in Massachusetts saw nearly a thousand official state charters granted to missionary associations, commonly known as benevolent societies. These associations often sought to evangelize the frontier through commercial print techniques. Jedidiah Morse was a prominent leader in several of these societies, and his overall membership was concretely remarkable.\textsuperscript{50} Of course, the basic objective of religious enterprises was to ensure the viability of religion during periods of social migration and fragmentation. In this sense it must be remembered that to some degree the frontier was a site of denominational competition. Social control of the frontier as a site of power with respect to the dynamic of institutional attachment of scattered communities, was a competitive exercise; effective print circulation was a means for achieving the goal of religious

\textsuperscript{49} James R. Rohrer, \textit{Keepers of the Covenant}, 17.

\textsuperscript{50} In a chapter titled “His Labours as a Philanthropist,” Morse’s first nineteenth-century biographer mentions the following associations in which he participated actively: The Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Indians and Others in North America; The Massachusetts Society for the Information and Advice of Immigrants; The American Colonization Society; The Hampshire Missionary Society; The Constitution of the Massachusetts Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; The American Tract Society; The American Bible Society; The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; Charlestown Association for the Reformation of Morals. While these societies varied in scope and significance, they were all committed to orthodox Calvinism, standing firmly against the innovations of liberal Unitarianism. William B. Sprague, \textit{The Life of Jedidiah Morse, D.D.} (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company, 1874) 127–91.
conversion, or at least maintaining church membership among frontier migrants.\textsuperscript{51}

From the perspective of social cohesion and culturally based identity, the maintenance of institutional frameworks was an especially important consideration for New England Calvinists, who believed that the individual should not function outside of the community; for covenant theology the concept of sin was not of private but of inherently public interest.\textsuperscript{52}

Thus in the last decade of the eighteenth century Calvinist evangelism became wedded to mass production. In effect, institutional structures sprang up rapidly throughout postcolonial New England. This process was tied up with social migration across geographical frontiers, including westward into the Ohio Valley and northward to Maine, the latter of which did not become independent from Massachusetts until 1820. To orthodox religious leaders the absence of centralized sovereignty or the


prospect of an institutional vacuum on the frontier region signaled danger. Perhaps more than any other social segment in the fledgling United States, orthodox religious leaders from southern New England seized on mass print evangelism as a potential means for maintaining continuity with traditional values. Cheap distribution of printed texts was seen as a potential solution to the problem of the unchecked diffusion of human geography across continental frontier that was widening and opening without relent. Thus it was to harness cultural and religious values on the frontier that intellectual leaders from the New England religious establishment adopted evangelical mass print. In a case study of Protestant geographical texts in New England, Amy DeRogatis describes coordinated efforts among benevolent societies to inculcate familiar values and maintain some semblance of institutional cohesion or order, referring to the “social matrix” of a “moral geography” in her impressive empirical


Thus the process of mapping, ordering, and planning the physical geography of the frontier became a fundamental concern for the political and social leaders of southern New England; different textual devices, maps, land surveys, laws, charters, and so on were united conceptually by a morally inflected geography that functioned as a mediating force for the maintenance of historical and cultural continuity.

In an occupational sense, the intellectual labor or authorship of Jedidiah Morse exemplifies the shifting historical role of the New England pastor, which was undergoing an important functional transformation in the political context of the 1790s. Donald M. Scott highlights decline in importance of local and town-based religious institutions, which were gradually being replaced by translocal benevolent societies, understood as professional networking institutions. A crucial point in this shift was the advent of a nationally competitive political system tied to organized political parties, namely Federalist and Jeffersonian. In some sense, the rise of benevolent

Amy DeRogatis, Moral Geography. “In the frontier context, Protestant missionaries hoped to build a particular kind of “home” that both reinforced their own religious identity and distinguished them from the “irreligious” others who also populated the landscape. While insisting on the homogeneous nature of their religious community, the missionaries and their sponsoring society’s urgent need to inscribe morality on the physical landscape make sense only when considered in the context of encounter with others. Creating an imaginary home . . . that was steeped in both biblical and national memory allowed all the characters not only to step into sacred history but also to construct a providential future from the ground up. And in the process of mental and physical mapping, they ultimately defined who they were in relation to their spatial and moral world” (183).

associations was a response to national politics since these organizations functioned as institutional tools for members of the Calvinist establishment as a defense against the erosion of their social power. The ideal of a benevolent empire guided Calvinist New England leadership in the national period in its attempt to justify the extension of authority and to maintain a special function in shaping patterns of behavior. Finding different ways to exercise power must have appeared to be an urgent task to orthodox New England pastors, who often viewed social change as highly undesirable and feared the excess of revolutionary democracy. In short, the decline of orthodox power in New England was undeniable, but equally was undeniably slow. Nathan O. Hatch approximates that in 1740 the New England clergy made up approximately 70 percent of all professional activity in Massachusetts; by 1800, in contrast, that number had decreased to approximately 40 percent—a qualitative analysis that lends evidence to an interpretation that accounts for both the decline and enduring influence of Calvinism into the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

This foregoing context leads to a rather-cautious and reasonable conclusion that the postcolonial Calvinist pastor had to exercise social power in the context of shifting political, technical, and informational landscapes concomitant to the newly conceived

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58 Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of Christianity*, 125.
federal union. Through writing and publishing widely, Morse enlarged the sphere of his influence. The traditional leaders of New England had to negotiate its place as a region within the geography of a federal United States, regions that in the 1790s had already demonstrated clear signs of strong sectional interests and intense political rivalries at the national level, especially in the domain of print culture.

In the midst of local forms of political, religious, and social fragmentation came Morse’s geographical activities, which were meant to stabilize physical geographical fragments by fixing them as items in the conceptual framework of a new nation that was represented as geopolitically and culturally stable. The publishing history of the texts are the focus of the next section, but prior to commencing this some prefatory remarks will shed light on geography writing as a concrete literary practice, a topic

59 Richard Brown, who focuses on information distribution based on case studies of individual writers, highlights important empirical developments: “In both the town and in the province the character of information diffusions remained remarkably stable. Even though some notable changes occurred, such as the advent of newspapers, in 1730—as in 1676—the central feature of the transmission of public information remained hierarchic, that is, public news travelled from the highest circle of the elite downward through the ranks. Since the Bay Colony’s elite was still concentrated in Boston in 1730, it reinforced the pattern of spatial diffusion whereby information spread outward from Boston, the center of colony politics and commerce. As there was a hierarchy in the social order, so there was a hierarchy among Massachusetts towns for the flow of information.” (27–28). Brown contrasts a “hierarchic diffusion pattern” with the nineteenth-century ideal of “universal information” linked to an “information explosion” (217) occurring in the early nineteenth century, which saw a phenomenal expansion simply in terms of the amount of information that was available for the public to consume.

afforded prominence in recent scholarship. In seminal research, Martin Brückner has discussed the growing functional importance of geographical modes of writing and their essential importance in North American identity formation, noting that the “construction of the American subject was grounded in the textual experience of geography” through growing textual devices promoting geographical literacy in the colonial and early American period. Brückner understands “geodeitic” writing as a concrete literary practice in addition to its being a concrete “everyday practice” for readers who consumed geographical texts and discourses. The rapid rise of cartography and land surveys were initially significant tools in the administrative apparatus of the colonial British Empire, which of course retained their urgency in the national period. Yet in an overarching sense, emphasis is placed on the expanding social impact of geography discourse in the mediation of textual “ontological meta-settings in which authors turned the continent’s physicality into a dynamic literary trope.” In other words, the ability of state institutions to develop effective legal claims to justify unequivocal sovereignty in liminal, fluid borderlands relied on consent of a


64 Martin Brückner, The Geographic Revolution in Early America, 6.
geographically literate population; individual landowners, who claimed legal protection from the state, depended on the overarching principle of a national geography. Geography therefore became fundamental in the state’s ability, at various levels, to make astonishingly important claims: on its future capability and willingness to govern the geographical places claimed under its sovereign jurisdiction.

Apart from the formal function of geography in the state administrative apparatus, Morse was a nationalist writers of late eighteenth-century America who embraced geographical discourse, through the medium of cheaply printed texts, as a means of inculcating nationalist pedagogy. This marks a clear departure from the function of geodetic practices in the colonial apparatus. The audience for an American geography would not have registered in the marketplace of colonial print culture. Geography of the colonial period was primarily imperial and cartographic in its function, as opposed to the pedagogic and nationalistic function typified by Morse.

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Taylor’s monograph highlights empirical and theoretical processes involved in borderland integrity during this period of contested sovereignty. In fact, borderland integrity is an inherently geographical concept. On the mediating force of geography, Brückner has written: “Americans invented [a] variant of modern nationalism that evolved out of the ideological tension between regional diversity and geopolitical unity . . . reconcile[d] through the programmatic diffusion of geographic literatures that introduced the nation as a material and inherently readable form.” Martin Brückner, “Lessons in Geography,” 315.
In the purest sense of literary thematics, the notion of continental geography became an irresistible trope in early America. Popular writers across various genres made claims on behalf of the nation while exploring abstract connections to the individuals who were imagined as having a mandate to inhabit it spatially and historically.\textsuperscript{66} Looking at the production history of the amorphous geographics pioneered by Morse will lend further empirical insight into the ways in which early American writers used geographical literacy both to gain consent and to set discursive and institutional parameters of a newly imagined nationstate.

\textit{WHAT is this Year a Geographical Truth, May Next Year be a Geographical Error}

Geography writing captured Morse’s youthful ambition. After graduating Yale, Morse worked in New Haven as a tutor and local school teacher, an interlude before eventual ordination, the intended profession for a doctor of divinity and a clear dictate of the deacon Morse Sr.\textsuperscript{67} The inaugural foray into the genre appeared shortly after Morse completed his undergraduate curriculum: \textit{Geography Made Easy} (1784), a 214-page volume. The initial justification for publishing in this genre was terse and

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotetext{66} Myra Jehlen, \textit{American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1986).

\end{footnotesize}
underdeveloped. Then only twenty-two, the author announced in a thin preface that the need for an “American Geography” was “too obvious to need a mention. Mankind are generally fond of acquainting themselves with the world, were it possible for them to be possessed of the proper means; but geographical books have hitherto been too voluminous and expensive for the purchase, of by far the greater part of the inhabitants of the United States, which has, to them, been an effectual bar to an acquaintance with this science.” Two factors, the large size and high cost of available books, functioned as an “effectual bar” to the geographical literacy of “the inhabitants of the United States.”

The title, which suggests that geography has been made easy, seems to refer to the comparative ease with which Americans could purchase or acquire access to the “science” being offered. The cheapness of the book meant the exclusion of maps, which were expensive to print and required technical expertise that Morse lacked.

Morse’s discussion of method was scant. The source material is not specifically identified:

[The author] assures the public that he has been very assiduous in collecting everything necessary to complete a book of this kind; for which purpose he has had recourse to a great variety of authors, miscellaneous papers, and verbal information, too many here to be particularly enumerated and acknowledged. Neither does he conceive it necessary to recapitulate them,

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68 Jedidiah Morse, preface to Geography Made Easy: Being a Short, but Comprehensive System of that Very Useful and Agreeable Science (New Haven, CT: Megs, Bowen and Dana, 1784).
since it must always be expected, that in a work of this kind, selections from previous publications must be made.69

It should be noted that a lack of precision with respect to source material was typical of the vaguely defined genre. Nevertheless, the discursive geography had literary roots in Europe. Primarily, this broadly construed genre included descriptions of the physical earth, especially of the relationship between place and country, with the latter often being the general organizing principle under which particular physical features were related.70 Yale students in the eighteenth century would have encountered classical world geographies, nearly all of which were imported from London and Europe.

To clarify, geography was not an academic field in the modern sense of the concept. To a twenty-two-year-old young author with no basic background in mapmaking and who had never traveled outside of New England, geography writing qua geography may have seemed at once obvious, ill defined, and amorphous.71 As a mental concept its meaning was left largely unexamined.

69 Jedidiah Morse, preface to Geography Made Easy (1784).

70 O. F. G. Sitwell, Four Centuries of Special Geography: An Annotated Guide to Books that Purport to Describe all the Countries in the World Published in English before 1888, with a Critical Introduction (Vancouver: UBC, 1993), 1–36.

71 Historian of science David N. Livingstone explains that prior to the nineteenth century, while geography lacked prestige within university curricula, as a mental concept it had been commonly understood since the ancient period as discursive writing that described and gave meaning to the several “grand transcendental abstractions” of region, environment, culture, landscape, and society. David N. Livingstone, The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 7–8.
In a larger transatlantic context, geography as a field of professional research began to appear as an academic discipline in its own right in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Prior to this time, historians of science have noted the relative absence of geography in eighteenth-century university curriculum, pointing to the Prussian scientist Alexander von Humboldt as the driving force behind its emergence as a subject of serious scientific inquiry, enhancing its already-existing role as a powerful tool of state imperial power. Margarita Bowen explains that prior to the nineteenth century geography as a system of knowledge was approached with less seriousness compared to that of other hard sciences such as chemistry and medicine, noting it was neither taught consistently nor seriously researched in universities or academies, and sustained [instead] in a memetic textbook tradition supplemented by travellers’ tales, compendia and gazetteers. . . . Even the growing popular demand for geographical descriptions of the world throughout the eighteenth century seems only to have increased the volume of such works without any major improvement in their quality . . . [as even] significant display of interest in the subject by leading thinkers such as Kant and Herder towards the end of the century did not appear to stimulate immediate advances in research.

Clearly, Morse’s first geographies fall within the “mimetic tradition” that Bowen refers to. Since Morse had not had the opportunity to travel outside of New England, his book was essentially a compilation of the cut-and-paste variety, using extant

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geographical sources printed in the colonial period. The methodology undergirding the authorship would become one of the most important factors in the reprinting of future editions.

Initially, however, we can simply note that the success of *Geography Made Easy* in the literary marketplace earned Morse considerable social and cultural currency. The title remained in print continuously throughout his life, reaching a twentieth updated edition in 1820. It would be fair to say that Morse more or less stumbled into the discourse of geography during his period of teaching when a local printer in New Haven happened to show an interest in publishing the notes on American geography Morse had compiled for his students. The consumer demand for a commodified form of this genre quickly became clear. Sales of *Geography Made Easy* were immediate, and the commercial success of the first edition certainly piqued the young man’s interest. In a 1785 letter to his father overflowing with excitement Morse described his commitment to geography in terms particularly patriotic and devotional, a sentiment that was lacking in his initial preface to *Geography Made Easy* cited above but appearing consistently in subsequent editions: “My Geographies . . . sell beyond my most sanguine expectations. I have sold between 3 & 400 within 3 weeks. . . . My own country merits my first & greatest attention. And as the Geography of it has hitherto been very
incomplete, as well as inaccurate, I am disposed to avail myself of every possible advantage in order to remove these inconveniences.”

This letter reflects a retroactive nationalist sentiment. The Treaty of Paris that ended the protracted military conflict with the British Empire was signed in September 1783, a mere thirteen months prior to the publication of *Geography Made Easy*. The claim that an “American geography” had “hitherto been very incomplete, as well as inaccurate” is a remarkable assertion. It would not have registered linguistically or geopolitically in a British colonial context to have published an American geography since the American nation had not been viewed as an organizational principle of colonial knowledge.

Zeroing in on the structure of *Geography Made Easy* and its related content is necessary in order to understand the development of its subsequent publication history. Absent a table of contents, the book’s first section provides ten pages of a basic dictionary of geographical and meteorological definitions, such as continents, lakes, peninsulas, maps, and winds. Thereafter the content is divided unevenly. The broad pattern of division is by continent, nation, or under the umbrella of a vaguely construed geographical region as it was conventionally understood at the time. Underneath the larger sequencing of the four continental categories of America, Europe, Asia, Africa, or

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within the smaller geographical units of country, nation, or region were textual descriptions of smaller transcendental geographical categories. Nevertheless, the length of the textual descriptions was uneven. Not surprisingly, the newly formed United States received the bulk of the attention. The smaller categories were various. The most common but not universally included are “boundaries and extent,” “climate social and production,” “government,” “history,” and “inhabitants and character.” [Figure 3] This lack of structural uniformity and uneven length assigned to different nations or regions relates to the author’s limited access to reliable source material that claimed to have documented the basic categories under its purview.

Figure 3. Geography Made Easy (1784)

A screenshot of pages 28, 32, 207. This sample gives a sense of typical length, format, and manner of discursive geographical descriptions, including the structure of categorical headings. Pages 207 and 208 give a sense of the dearth of information contained under some regional headings. “Negroland” was a conventional geographical label for western Africa throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and reflects the vagueness and imprecision of metageographical assumptions. The book is in the public domain and is hosted at HathiTrust digital library.
NEW-HAMPSHIRE.

town, on the same river, lies Exeter, a beautiful little village, famous for ship building.

At Dresden, a town on Connecticut river, is the western part of this state, is a flourishing College, of about 120 students, under the direction of a president and three professors. It was founded 1769, principally for the purpose of educating and civilizing the Indians.

Air, Soil, Productions and Commerce.] The air of this state is serene and healthy, the inhabitants experience the extremes of cold and heat. The soil is of a loamy good kind in some parts, but various, producing fine crops of grass, corn, rye, oats and barley. Their timber is oak, and excellent for ship building, pine, hemlock, birch, beach and maple. Their exports consist chiefly of lumber: great numbers of ships are built on the river Piscataway, and sold at foreign ports.

Inhabitants.] New-Hampshire contains about 100,000 inhabitants, who in general are good farmers, industrious and hospitable.

History.] See Connecticut.
Religion.] The religion of this commonwealth is established by their excellent constitution, on a most liberal and tolerant plan. No subject shall be hurt, molested or restrained, in his person, liberty or estate, for worshipping God in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of his own conscience, or for his religious profession or sentiments, provided he does not disturb the public peace. The legislature are required to make suitable provision for the institution of public worship in the several towns and parishes, and for the support of public teachers in each. All monies paid by the subject for the support of public worship, is to be applied to the support of the teacher of his own religious sect. All denominations of christians who conduct regularly and peaceably shall have equal right to the protection of law. There are several denominations of christians in this state, of which the congregationalists or independents are the most numerous. Their mode of worship and manner of exercising church discipline, are conformable to the rules exhibited in the Cambridge platform. The churches claim no jurisdiction over each other, and the power of Ecclesiastical councils is only advisory. Besides these there are episcopalian. The baptists, are a numerous, growing, litigious and illiterate set of people. There are also a number of separatists, and a few friends or quakers.

History.] See Connecticut.

Province of Maine.

Belonging to Massachusetts, lies E. of New-Hampshire, containing all that tract of country between this state and Nova-Scotia, about 320 miles long and 150 broad. Bounded N. by Canada, B. by Nova-Scotia, S. by the Atlantic, W. by New-Hampshire.
vernment at all. The Mahometan religion is profes-
sed throughout the country.

NEGROLAND.

This country lies south of Zaara; 2300 miles
long and 700 broad.

Air, Soil and Commodities.] The air is very hot,
but wholesome. The soil is fertile, especially near the
river Niger, which runs through the country from east
to west, and overflows at a certain time of the years,
like the Nile. The commodities of this country are
gold, slaves, elephants-teeth, bees-wax and some drugs.
There is a well here, whose water is as sweet as ordina-
tory sugar.

Climate, Religion and Government.] The Negroes
are an uncivilized, ignorant, crafty, robust people.
Their colour is deep black, their hair short, like wool,
flat noses, thick lips, and white, even teeth. The
Negroes are governed by a number of absolute princes.
The inhabitants are mostly pagans and idolaters, and
some few christians.

Guinea.] Guinea lies south of Negroland, 1800
miles long, 600 broad. The soil is preferable to that
of Negroland. The inhabitants are more courteous
and

208 ETHIOPIA.

and ferrible; in other respects the difference is immes-
terial. The greater part of the poor Negroes are
brought from these two countries.

ETHIOPIA.

Under the general name of Ethiopia is inclu-
ded all the remaining part of Africa; containing
an extent of 3500 miles from north to south, and
With success in hand he soon set about planning an updated edition that would eventually appear nearly five years subsequent to *Geography Made Easy* (1784). During this time he began offering more-elaborate thoughts on the nature of geography writing as intellectual production, as well as the methodology underpinning what he cast rhetorically as a conventional and much-needed science. The interceding time between volumes was dedicated to improving, correcting, and expanding the categories, which would appear with the rebranded title *The American Geography* (1789). In a lengthier preface, Morse gave a more-robust explanation of his inspiration:

So imperfect are all the accounts of America hitherto published . . . that from them very little knowledge of this country can be acquired. Europeans have been the sole writers of American Geography, and have too often suffered fancy to supply the place of facts, and have thus led their readers into errors, while they have professed to aim at removing their ignorance. But since the United States have become an independent nation, and have risen into Empire, it would be reproachful for them to suffer this ignorance to continue; and the rest of the world have a right now to expect authentic information. To furnish this has been the design of the author of the following work; but he does not pretend that the design is completed, nor will the judicious and candid expect it, when they consider that he has trodden, comparatively, an unbeaten path - - - that he has had to collect a vast variety of materials - - - that these have been widely scattered - - - and that he could derive but little assistance from books already published. Four years have been employed in this work, during which period, the Author has . . . maintained an extensive correspondence with men of Science; and in every instance has endeavored to . . . derive his information from the most authentic sources. . . . It is possible, notwithstanding, and indeed very probable, that inaccuracies may have crept . . . in; but he hopes there are none of any great importance.75

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The new book is offered as a corrective to previous errors that had been made, yet Morse neglects to mention that he had relied on those foreign “imperfect accounts of America hitherto published” for the content of *Geography Made Easy*. Initially, Morse drew heavily from William Guthrie, whose *New Geographical, Commercial and Historical Grammar* (1770) had been the principal commercial geography in America prior to Morse. The author makes a claim for a forceful binary between a non-American perspective and a properly American one for rendering the epistemology of an American geography. Interestingly, Morse now sets up a straw man—the unnamed “Europeans”—without mentioning them specifically. Yet the preface of *Geography Made Easy* (1784) only alludes to the shortcomings of large expensive texts within the same genre, whereas the 1789 preface offers an elaborate discussion on terminology and

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76 Morse does refer to the Scottish writer William Guthrie as a source of material for his own work. Guthrie’s *New Geographical, Commercial and Historical Grammar* was first published in 1770 in London and achieved unprecedented circulation for its genre, going through forty-six imprints until 1843 during its exceptionally long life. Printers in Britain tended to use Guthrie’s geography as a benchmark and often pasted sections from Guthrie into unauthorized editions, reflecting the common cut-and-paste practices that typify the mimetic book tradition of the genre currently under discussion. Morse more or less replicated an analogue of Guthrie in mimicry of his former British countryman. Moreover, the eighteenth century shows a persistent blurring of this genre, which is aptly called historical geography. Guthrie in fact published in both genres; the form and structure of Guthrie’s *Grammar* contained large sections of historical narrative. Laird Okie, “William Guthrie, Enlightenment Historian,” *The Historian* 51, no. 2 (Feb. 1989): 221–38; Robert Mayhew, “William Guthrie’s *Geographical Grammar*, the Scottish Enlightenment, and the Politics of British Geography,” *Scottish Geographical Journal* 115, no. 1 (1999): 19–34.
method. It is worth noting that the 1789 preface marks a linguistic sleight of hand: notwithstanding the inchoate origin of the United States *qua* nationstate, Morse retroactively declared its geographical information tardy, lacking, and inaccurate. Clearly a historical elision, it nevertheless gave him a pretext for claiming pedagogical imperative. He offered his work as urgent and invaluable to the new nation while simultaneously pursuing its commercial viability.

As Morse expanded his scope, he became open to various sources. He made it a priority to discuss openly the challenges of method. In fact, he engaged the public while attempting to publicize his search for material as a shared scientific endeavor. First, in some cases he sifted through countless fragments of miscellaneous geographical accounts that would have been widely scattered in almanacs and newspapers. The 1789 preface is candid about the miscellaneous nature of the source material, casting them rhetorically as diffused.

[The author] flatters himself . . . that the work now offered to the public will be found to be as accurate, compleat and impartial as the present state of American Geography and History could furnish. After all, like the Nation of which it treats, it is but an infant, and as such solicits the fostering care of the country it describes; it will grow and improve as the nation advances towards maturity, and the Author will gratefully acknowledge ever [sic] friendly communication which will tend to make it perfect.

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In the prosecution of the work, he has aimed at utility rather than originality, and of course, when he has met with publications suited to his purpose, he has made a free use of them; and he thinks it proper here to observe, that, to avoid unnecessary trouble, he has frequently used the words as well as the ideas of the writers, although the reader has not been particularly apprized of it.

For the Author distinctly to acknowledge the obligations he is under to many citizens of these states, as well as to some foreigners of distinction . . . would swell this preface to an improper length.78

Thus was offered *The American Geography* of 1789, a 534-page octavo, double the page count of its predecessor. Here the structure and content were expanded; new categories such as “military strength,” “natural growth,” “customs and diversions,” “trade,” and “history,” were included under North American geographical entries. Also newly included are national historical inserts that can be considered quasi-geographical or clearly not within the purview of geography, such as “Defects of the Old Constitution—Convention,” “Sketch of the Life of General Washington,” “Stamp Act of 1765,” and “Lexington Battle.” These entries reflect a determined cultural nationalism. This edition is devoted overwhelmingly to America, with small inserts of the remaining purported countries of the world relegated to the final sixty pages.

The inclusion of these miscellaneous historical interests is due in part, no doubt, to the methodological a priori commitment to expanding the scope of the text: future

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78 Jedidiah Morse, *The American Geography* (1789), v, vi.
books will grow alongside the advancing nation. Further, the historical subjects chosen for inclusion illustrate the common practice of early historical writing, which assigned high value to important events and figures that were seen as contributing to the genesis of the nation. While the inclusion of historical content also reflects the mimetic textbook tradition of the time, the commitment to a print strategy is also apparent.

In the interim period between volumes Morse began an extensive correspondence network, actively publicizing an intention to continue reprinting. The success lent him the cultural authority to appeal to the public regarding the civic usefulness of future volumes. He developed a robust literary correspondence network that enhanced access to source material, the lifeblood of methodology of corrective reprinting. Literary correspondents sent published texts and unpublished fragments. Notably, the search for source material brought him into contact with several of the leading political and literary figures of his generation. Among the foremost allies in his project was fellow clergyman Jeremy Belknap, a founding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Belknap’s *The History of New Hampshire*, published in three volumes serially from 1784–1792, received widespread acclaim despite not performing well
commercially.\textsuperscript{79} When initially informed of Morse’s intention to pursue updated material, Belknap offered the following advice:

To be a true Geographer, it is necessary to be a Traveller. To depend on distant and incidental information is not safe; and there is a material difference between describing a place that we have seen and one that we have not seen. I would advise you to collect as little as possible from second-hand authors. The best descriptions are given by eye-witnesses, provided they are honest. As water passing through various strata of earth acquires different tinctures, so a story, told by a succession of authors, partakes of the humours, inattention, and prejudices of them all.\textsuperscript{80}

Morse, who at that point had never traveled outside of New England, took Belknap’s advice. At the close of 1786 he found the opportunity to take a nine-month tour, making it as far south as Midway, Georgia, before returning to New Haven.\textsuperscript{81} Along the way, he was able to collect source material and also engage the attention of notable figures. The success of his first geography seemed to give him some social currency; he was able to call on influential people, including luminaries Benjamin Franklin and George Washington, to inform them of his geographical undertaking. Both received him cordially, but did not offer any material assistance. The aim was clear: to


\textsuperscript{80} As cited in Ralph Brown, 157.

\textsuperscript{81} Ralph Brown, “The Geographies of Jedidiah Morse,” 158–60.
inform others of the project while also enlisting support for possible access to source material. He targeted an alliance with the emerging state but did not receive any formal cooperation. The reputation garnered was nevertheless significant.

Upon his return Morse wrote to Belknap, updating him on the trip and inviting him to share sources:

I send you the enclosed manuscript ‘Geography of New Hampshire.’ [since we last corresponded] I have travelled through all the States, with a particular view of collecting the necessary information for a second publication on the same subject. . . . The work, which will be enlarged to an octavo volume, of at least four hundred pages, is preparing for the press. . . . I have left blank leaves for your corrections and additions. Do not spare me in the former. . . . The nature of the work does not admit of much originality. The book must derive its merit . . . from the accuracy and good judgment with which it is compiled, rather than the genius with which it is composed. To save me from the odious character of a Plagiarist, general credit will be given in the preface for all selections inserted in the work. To particularize such would be needless and endless. This is my apology for having made so much use of your publications in the enclosed account of New Hampshire.\(^8^2\)

Belknap honored Morse’s request, and did not spare corrections:

[Your] request . . . is so general and the object so diffusive, that a more minute and particular topographical knowledge than I am possessed of, and a much greater portion of leisure than I can command, would be necessary to my gratifying your desire. Were you to travel through the States of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, with a map in your pocket (or in your head, which would be better) and make inquiries of intelligent, sensible

\(^8^2\) From Jedidiah Morse to Dr. Belknap, 18 January 1788. *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 6, no. 4, 382. [emphasis in original]
people . . . you could get more in a week’s time than I could furnish you in some months.\textsuperscript{83}

When later asked to offer commentary on the published edition, Belknap was no less muted in criticism: “[Your work] may convey to a total stranger a tolerably just view in general of the country, yet there are some faults which ought, by no means, to have been committed by an \textit{American}, however pardonable they might be in an European Author.”\textsuperscript{84}

Nevertheless, the work sold. New editions were printed in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. The text’s main appeal seemed to draw from its lucidity and clarity with respect to how the material was arranged and arrayed. In a sense, this was a centralized text, with clearly organized descriptions and figures. In the wake of the success of the 1789 edition, Morse eyed continued expansion. Belknap and others had suggested that Morse stick only to American geography and leave out the other regions of the world. Seemingly, the same logic held: Morse, who criticized Europeans for their inaccuracies on America, might balk at compiling information on other countries to which he had never traveled. In a letter to Belknap Morse waffled but committed to his decision both

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Belknap to Morse, 16 June 1788; as cited in Ralph H. Brown, \textit{The American Geographies of Jedidiah Morse}, 169.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} Belknap to Morse, 17 February 1789; as cited in Ralph H. Brown, \textit{The American Geographies of Jedidiah Morse}, 169.
\end{itemize}
to multiply the morphologies of his geographies and to make them global in scope. One
of these new iterations would be fashioned as a “Gazetteer”:

As a Gazetteer makes a part of the plan I have in view, I should be obliged by
such a concise and comprehensive, acc\(^t\) of the several townships, counties,
&c. in Mass\(^ts\) & New Hamp. . . . If any event or curiosity has rendered a town
remarkable, I should like to have that added to the description, & anything
more whh. you think proper to add.

The hint . . . that I had better confine my book to a description of America
only, is a good one,, & the reasons to support it are weighty. I have the same
advice given me before. The only reason whh. induced me to think of
extending it to a description of the whole world was to preclude the necessity
of importing a Classical Geography. But your advice can be followed, & my
views answer’d by publishing the work in two vols.;—the first to
comprehend a description of America only; the second . . . to be an Abridgm\(^t\)
of the Geography of the Eastern Continent. I conclude, however, I shall say
enough (& if the public don’t say so too I shall be glad) when I shall have
published the first vol. Last week I put to press a second edition of
“Geography made Easy.” I have written, or shall write, it entirely over again,
& scarcely anything contained in the first edition will be republished save the
title. I hope to have it ready for sale in 8 or 10 weeks.

If any of your literary friends could conveniently be interested in giving me
information respecting such parts of the United States or of No\(^a\) Amer. as it is
not easy for me to be otherwise made acquainted with, it would give me
much pleasure.\(^{85}\)

The depth of commitment to republishing is remarkable. Morse simultaneously
envisioned a gazetteer, a second volume for the “Eastern Continent,” and a second

\(^{85}\) Jedidiah Morse to Jeremy Belknap, 3 June 1788, Collections of the Massachusetts
Historical Society 6, no. 4, 407.
edition of *Geography Made Easy*, which he curiously claims: “I have written, or shall write, it entirely over again.”

As a founding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Belknap was able to furnish Morse with source material and pertinent information. Morse attempted to strike up similar correspondence with other men who had access to archival documentation. For instance, he was related by marriage to Ebenezer Hazard, who played an important role in initial efforts made toward centralization of source material for national archives. In short, Morse reached out in all directions, writing to the various governors of the states throughout the new federal union, to members of the state assemblies, federal cabinet members, presidents, and so on almost without discrimination. He corresponded with influential figures by introducing his geographical ambition, requesting assistance for access to relevant source material for inclusion in his forthcoming volumes. He sought alliances with federal and local practically lusting for an alliance with local, state, and federal bureaucracy. A petition survives in which Morse requested free postage (franking) from the Congress for all matters concerning the correspondence of geographical materials, although it is likely

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that such a dispensation was not granted.\footnote{87} While not officially involved with the state, an alliance was sought.

In addition to reaching up, he also reached out to an anonymous public for any sort of documentation or literary description remotely pertaining to geography. To this end, for the several years leading up to the publication of The American Geography he had questionnaires printed on broadsheets, with the aim of circulating them through urban print networks as well as through state assemblies. These questionnaires amount to a plea. One such example, printed in Philadelphia in 1787, was addressed “To the FRIENDS of SCIENCE.”\footnote{88} The broadsheet is an advertisement and a call to public action. In announcing authorship to the public, Morse boasted of having sold 1,500 copies of Geography Made Easy while at the same time announcing his plan for an expanded version. Once again, he derided existing geographical information as inaccurate, mentioning that: “geographers of foreign countries, not being possessed of the proper materials, have filled their accounts of these states with numerous inaccuracies. It is time these inaccuracies were corrected. We are independent of Great-Britain, and are no longer to look up to her for a description of our own country.” To correct these inaccuracies, the author hoped to “avail himself of the advantages of all

\footnote{87} Ralph H. Brown, “The American Geographies of Jedidiah Morse,” xxx.

\footnote{88} A clearly legible photograph of the original broadsheet (Philadelphia, 1787) is printed in Ralph H. Brown, “The American Geographies of Jedidiah Morse,” 163. All quotations come directly from this photograph.
the most accurate maps, and detached geographical pieces, which have been published,
respecting the United States; and will thank any gentleman to inform him where they
can be procured.” Although he boasted of having “been favoured with the
communication of gentlemen well qualified to give information on so important a
subject; [and having] likewise established a correspondence with several respectable
characters in different states, from whom he has every reason to expect a valuable
addition to the materials already collected” such advantages might not be enough to
meet the difficult endeavor that he had undertaken: “Yet all the information that may be
obtained on a subject so extensive, variegated, and interesting, is greatly to be desired;
and every man of science may have it in his power to contribute some observations
which may be useful . . . to all or any of the annexed enquiries.” Furthermore, Morse
requested that all the newspapers in the country give serious consideration to printing
his questionnaires at no charge: “that they may thereby contribute to the public good.”
Hence he courts not only potential consumers but also active participants in a shared
endeavor. Morse projects geography as shared national concern, attempting to stimulate
active national participation for advancement of the “public good.”

Morse was participating in the natural history writing conventions of his time. Historian
Andrew J. Lewis defines the practice of science and natural history writing in
the early republic period as an “ill-defined and capacious set of practices that resists
easy delineation” and as a “cluster of activities.” Lewis refers to the agents of this cluster of activity as “ordinary folk” who corresponded over the miscellaneous phenomenon of natural history both as individuals in private and in cheap print material of newspapers, magazines, and almanacs. These ordinary folk existed alongside published, more-formalized natural history authors who belonged to associations like the American Philosophical Society, which had been modeled after London’s Royal Society. The members of these institutions cast themselves as committed to rigorous standards of science, but often lacked any official capacity and institutional support in the first decades of U.S. history. Aside from cartography and land surveys, which had always been the purview of the colonial state, natural history activities were rarely subsidized. In 1820s federal and state governments began consistently to fund the budding natural practices that over time gradually formalized into the disciplines of geology, zoology, archaeology, comparative anatomy, and so on. In addition, it was in the first two decades of the nineteenth century that these subjects consistently became part of university curricula in America. Hence these formal private associations and university disciplines played an important role in nursing the “state

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centers of calculation” in the early republic, which historians of science trace back to the systematizing of Francis Bacon forward to the rationalism of the French Enlightenment. What united the practitioners of natural history writing was primarily methodological: commitment to fact collection, both “classificatory” and “taxonomic,” grounded in empirical common-sense observation. The emphasis here is social, participative, and, discursive: the “efflorescence of activity . . . from ordinary folks and elites . . . scrutinizing plants and animals, artifacts and antiquities, geological formations and natural phenomena . . . pursuits resembling the modern scientific disciplines of botany, ornithology, archaeology, and geology.”

Informal natural history practices in early America existed largely without direct support of the state. As a cultural practice, natural history writing was not considered a legitimate object of state resources, especially during the first decades of U.S. history. Nevertheless, this did not last long as the heterodox set of practices of natural history gave way to professionalization. From the 1820s to the 1840s federal, local, and state governments recognized the value of professional scientific activity, especially

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geological surveys and wildlife assessments that were meant to enumerate resources. Hence while Morse sought support from the state for his geographical works from 1784 onward, the limited support he received was informal—namely, enabling access to source material—but seldom included financial subsidy. Without official support, Morse needed to engage and lobby individuals and the anonymous public; in doing so he fashioned his project as an important and legitimate scientific practice that would benefit the nation and the nationstate.

The success of the *The American Geography* (1789) was unequivocal. The popularity seems to have stemmed from its simple features, its accessibility as a reference guide, its clear potential as a teaching tool, and its low cost. Nothing quite like it existed in the literary marketplace because the terms of reference were not localized, as in the colonial period, but instead nationalized. It is an abundantly nationalist cause: the offer of centralized information of the nation at anyone’s fingertips.

By the time *The American Universal Geography* appeared in 1793, the author had once again doubled its size. A second volume of the “Eastern hemisphere,” as large as the first, adapted and copied from Guthrie’s *Geographical Grammar*, obviated the need for continuing to import the commercially successful foreign import. This volume became the standard full edition of Morse geographies, with an 11th edition published

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93 Richard J. Moss, *A Station of Peculiar Exposure*, 167; Ralph Brown, “The Geographies of Jedidiah Morse,” 176; in a letter from 1794 he claims to have sold 20,600 volumes (Moss, 49)
by 1807. Meanwhile, an abridged *Geography Made Easy* ran concurrently, which by 1820 reached its twentieth edition. By this time Morse had achieved considerable fame and was inundated with correspondence and documentation. This influx of information meant further expansion of the miscellaneous nature of the content, which came to include inserts on natural history and also “curiosities.”

*The American Universal Geography* stimulated a somewhat banal critical response. James Freeman, a Unitarian and founding member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, published a sixty-one-page criticism of the work, which enumerated errors and offered annotated corrections in a page-by-page manner. Freeman was methodical in offering criticism, citing seven main problems: “A Want of uniformity in his method and plan—Inconsistencies and contradictions—Inaccurate maps—Want of judgement in selecting his materials and authorities—Local, professional, and religious prejudices—Appearances of haste and carelessness—Mistakes and omissions.” The manner and miscellaneous nature of the corrections offered by Freeman can be taken from a few representative examples:

As an author, who like Mr. M. solicits information from all quarters, will probably receive many trifling and erroneous accounts; his duty to the public requires that he should reject them. To this obligation . . . Mr. M. has not paid much attention. From other glaring examples, I will select the character that he has given the inhabitants of Bermuda; which, he says, was sent to him by

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94 J. F. [James Freeman], *Remarks on the American Universal Geography* (Boston: Apollo, Belknap and Hall, 1793), 5. [emphasis in original]
an intelligent gentleman, who has resided there a number of years: ‘However industrious the men are abroad, at home they are indolent; much given, particularly of late, to gaming and luxury. The women are generally handsome and comely; they love their husbands, their children, and their dress. Dancing is their favourite amusement. The men must be equipped in taste, when they appear in company, should they not have a dollar in the pound to pay their creditors; the women must array themselves like the belles of Paris, should they not have a morsel of bread to preserve their blooming complexion. They are thoroughly acquainted with one another’s families, and from their tea tables, as from their atmosphere, arises constant gusts of scandal and detraction. . . . Their friendly intercourse is too much confined within a narrow circle, bounded by cousins or second cousins.

Freeman did not find the description credible:

Is this a candid description, or is it a dull and illiberal satire? I would ask Mr. M. whether it possesses any discriminating features? Are not men and women of other climes fond of dress, and addicted to scandal? In all small towns, the inhabitants are well acquainted with one another’s families. In every part of the world, where the women are handsome, they are generally comely. Why then did not Mr. M’s correspondent say at once, that the people of Bermudas are human beings?95

Here Morse was criticized for pointless representations of human geography and culture, which became among the book’s most commonly cited faults. Other corrections were more mundane:

P. 450 “Long Island extends a hundred and forty miles.” Long Island extends a hundred and eighteen miles.96

And still more of the absurd variety:

95 J. F. [James Freeman], Remarks on the American Universal Geography, 11–12.

96 J. F. [James Freeman], Remarks on the American Universal Geography, 54.
P. 613 “Mr. M relates an idle story of a fairy island, inhabited by a race of beautiful and hospitable women, the daughters of the sun, whose husbands are fierce men and cruel to strangers. Those who endeavour to approach this island, are involved in perpetual labyrinths; and, like enchanted land, still as they have imagined they have just gained it, it seems to fly before them.—Surely such a fiction as this ought not to be admitted into a book of a geography.”

Another pamphlet, written by St. George Tucker, a Virginian and professor of law at College of William and Mary, offered criticism similar in tenor to that of Freeman. Tucker’s main objection centered on the secondhand and derivative nature of Morse’s source material; his review was acerbic and thoroughly dismissive:

A few days past I saw, for the first time, that compilation, which had been offered to the public under the splendid title of the ‘American Universal Geography’: a title, which, however luminous it may have appeared to its author, I had some difficulty in understanding, not being sufficiently versed in Philology to comprehend that American Geography could be universal, or Universal Geography confined to one of the four quarters of the globe. Observing, however, that the copy right was secured according to act of Congress, and recollecting, that by that act every book claiming its protection must have a title to distinguish it from all others, I was no longer at a loss to conjecture the reasons . . . in selecting one, which was not likely to be appropriated by any other person.

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97 J. F. [James Freeman], Remarks on the American Universal Geography, 59.


Tucker’s criticism extends beyond sarcasm. He objects to the illogical conflation of the American with the universal. Similar to Freeman, Tucker objects particularly to a misrepresentation of human and cultural geography, in this case of Virginia. In this volume Morse had made some disparaging remarks of Richmond. Tucker responded by calling into question the credibility of the author to offer any original observations on the state of Virginia:

I turned over the leaves to a part, where I could best judge of the accuracy of his information, as well as his candour and impartiality; namely to the article VIRGINIA; where I was apprized by a note, that the author had made free use of Mr. Jefferson’s notes on Virginia; and this a single glance of the eye assured me was very literally true. Indeed, the author’s veneration for Mr. Jefferson’s taste, appears, to have made him forego the use of his own optics. . . . Had the author . . . confined his representations of Virginia to extracts from Mr. Jefferson’s notes, I should by no means been offended with him. . . . But the author . . . interspersed his extracts . . . with some observations of his own . . . [which are] the result of his own observation, or the illusion of his own fancy.100

A recurring theme in the critical reception of Morse geographies thus rests on three interrelated points: the secondhand or unwise use of faulty source material, interpretative errors with respect to human and cultural geography, and basic factual inaccuracies. Naturally, Morse’s view toward the rest of the world was culturally specific and conditioned by the degree of importance he attached to the cultural and

ideological landscape of New England. This seemed to be widely recognized by the general public, yet notwithstanding the work was still clearly endorsed as authoritative for several decades.

Thomas Jefferson’s remarks on Morse’s geographies offers a window into the common judgment of the work that was at once recognized for its deficiency and its utility. In 1795 Jefferson received a letter from Christoph Daniel Ebeling, a student from University of Göttingen who became a professor of Greek and history at the Johanneum Gymnasium in Hamburg. Ebeling pursued active research interest in the politics, history, and geography of North America. As a geographer writer, Ebeling was Morse’s contemporary. In 1777 he first conceived of *Erdbeschreibung und Geschichte von Amerika* (Description of the Geography and the History of America), the first volume of which would not be published until 1793. Released serially in updated editions, this title eventually extended to seven volumes, the last of which appeared in 1816, a year before his death. Ebeling was also the editor of three volumes of *Amerikanische Bibliothek* (American Library) in 1777–1778, which translated into German primary source documents pertaining to the Revolution, and *Amerikanisches Magazin* (American Journal) in 1795–1797. Overall, Ebeling was devoted to presenting original and authentic information on North America to German society since he detected a pronounced British bias in

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101 Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia*. 
German print culture. He hoped his research on America would offer insight to German civil society, especially in terms of offering comparative reference points for local government policy makers in his hometown of Hamburg.\textsuperscript{102}

In the lengthy 1795 letter, Ebeling complimented Jefferson on \textit{Notes on the State of Virginia}, notifying him of his ongoing research on American history and geography.\textsuperscript{103}

After apprising Jefferson of the source materials to which he already had access, he invited him to share his views on the reliability of the sources he had already used while further inquiring after alternatives or new source material in moving forward. Jefferson drafted a response to Ebeling that was never sent. The response focused on Morse and Noah Webster directly, from whom Ebeling derived much of his own material:

[\textit{Jedidiah Morse and Noah Webster were]} good authorities for whatever relates to the Eastern states, and perhaps as far South as the Delaware. But South of that, their information is worse than none at all; except as far as they quote good authorities. They both I believe took a single journey through the Southern parts, merely to acquire the right of being considered as eye-witnesses. But to pass once along a public road thro’ a country, and in one direction only, to put up at it’s [sic] taverns, and get into conversation with the idle, drunken individuals who pass their time lounging in these taverns, is not the way to know a country, it’s inhabitants or manners. To generalise a whole nation from these specimens is not


the sort of information which Professor Ebeling would wish to compose his work from.\textsuperscript{104}

It is highly unlikely that Morse would have spent time talking to drunkards in a pub during his earlier travels, given his strict commitment to Calvinist doctrine.

Nevertheless, Jefferson was critical of the limited time that Morse had traveled outside of his home region. Despite these reservations, Jefferson included Morse geographies on the suggested reading lists for aspiring scholars who wrote him for advice on self-improvement and learning.\textsuperscript{105}

Ebeling corresponded with Morse for years; both writers voraciously searched for source materials through extensive public and private correspondence. Ebeling’s interest in U.S. history and geography stemmed from his optimism for the potential of a republican experiment that might flourish outside of the structures of European political and social paradigms. Similar to Morse, Ebeling traveled very little; his health (he was mute) did not permit him to travel to the country to which he devoted his life in study. The correspondence between Ebeling and Morse reveals something of the amorphous nature of the method adopted by the two writers. In the wake of James


Freeman’s criticism of *The American Universal Geography*, Morse wrote Ebeling in a defeatist tone, offering a sense of having a fundamentally unattainable purpose for writing American geography:

> When I published my first Essay, I had not the most *remote ideas* of its growing to its present size. . . . But the necessity of such a work, rather than the ability of the author to execute it, must be considered as the cause of its rapid growth and extensive circulation. It was my good fortune to hit upon a popular subject, & that, rather than the merit of the Author, has brought the American Geography into public notice. My subject has insensibly and unexpectedly led me into a situation which subjects me to a burdensome responsibility.

Since the year 1784, when I published my first juvenile Essay, there have been printed in America twenty thousand six hundred copies of my Geography, including in this number the copies of several editions of the Abridgment of the larger work for the use of schools. . . . I am sensible as any person of the defects of my work. I have had every thing to collect anew. My sources of information have not always been accurate. Many have failed and much remains to be done. The field before me is extensive, and I sometimes contemplate it with a misgiving heart. I have but a slender constitution, a large and growing parish, many interruptions inseparable from my situation, and, as you know from the nature of geographical labor, an extensive correspondence. In such forbidding circumstances, to undertake the description of an unexplored, or but partially explored country, rising into importance with unexampled rapidity; and to attempt, in successive editions of an Universal Geography, to keep pace with the progress of this age of discoveries, of changes, and of revolutions, are objects from which I shrink when I think of their difficulty and magnitude.¹⁰⁶

Ebeling offered palliatives: “Candid judges and true connoisseurs of geographical works will allow that no geography can be equally perfect and complete in all its parts, even if it was at the moment of writing it; the continual fluctuation of its object will

¹⁰⁶ Morse to Ebeling, 27 May 1794. [emphasis in original]
antiquate it before time exercises its power. They will know how exceedingly difficult it is to define the town wherein we live.”

The books were compilations that depended on the collection and discernment of source material from other writers, published and amateur alike, and travelers. Despite inevitable errors, Morse geographies were submitted to the public as an authoritative textual repository of useful national and global information. Inherent errors of fact and misrepresentation became nothing more than means to an end; this was built into its method. This strategy was, at its core, participative: he personally invited his readers to send continuous corrections and revisions. This process, one of publication, revision, repeat, would continue throughout the geography writer’s publishing life.

Until 1795 Morse enjoyed an essential monopoly on domestic geography publishing, but rival volumes began to appear in the market: Nathaniel Dwight’s, Short but Comprehensive System of the Geography of the World; by Way of Question and Answer (1795); Caleb Bingham’s Astronomical and Geographical Catechism (1795); and Benjamin Workman’s Elements of Geography: Designed for Young Students in that Science (1795) brought other authors into the domestic marketplace for geography publishing. These

\footnote{107 Ebeling to Morse, 16 August 1794.}
were mimetic, which is a testament to the commercial demand for geography literacy in America since several of these volumes enjoyed lengthy, multiple-edition print runs.\textsuperscript{108}

With rival editions appearing, Morse diversified, quickly releasing \textit{Elements of Geography} (1795), the revised and corrected sixth edition of which (1825) came with the subtitle: \textit{Exhibited Historically, from the Creation to the End of the World on a New Plan, Adapted to Children in Schools and Private Families}.\textsuperscript{109} Following this geographical catechism for juveniles, Morse released a geographical dictionary known as \textit{The American Gazetteer}, (1797) which listed all American geographical features from A-Z in about seven thousand discrete entries. Editions of the \textit{Gazetteer} were published just a year later with print runs in Boston and London, with a third American edition appearing in 1810. The series was rebranded years later and appeared as \textit{The Traveller’s Guide: or Pocket Gazetteer of the United States} (1823), which was a veritable pocket-reference (smaller-size) guide meant for mobile travelers who needed up-to-date geographical data at their fingertips.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{108} Martin Brückner, \textit{The Geographic Revolution in Early America}, 147–48.

\textsuperscript{109} Jedidiah Morse, \textit{Elements of Geography}, (New Haven, CT: H. Howe, 1825).

\textsuperscript{110} Jedidiah Morse and Richard C. Morse, \textit{The Traveller’s Guide, or Pocket Gazetteer of the United States, Extracted from the Latest Edition of Morse’s Universal Gazetteer} (New Haven, CT: Nathan Whiting, 1823). The title page boasts of an “appendix containing tables of distances, longitude and latitude of important towns; and of the population, commerce, revenue, debt, and various institutions of the United States, illustrated by a map.”
From the present perspective, the publication history of Morse geography appears to have proceeded at a continuous, seldom-interrupted pace, and at times at a frequency that could be described as frenetic. As time went by and as the publication output increased, Morse adopted a collaborative method for collecting and compiling material, enlisting the help of his sons as well as other writers. For instance, while pursuing with Elijah Parish the geographical dictionary *A Gazetteer of the Eastern Continent* (1802), Parish wrote Morse, “I must tell you the Gazetteer is finished unless I receive Books to me unknown. I have procured, read, & abstracted [sic] from about 40 volumes besides those you sent me. I have nearly exhausted my resources. Can you obtain Moore’s collection of voyages and travels?”

Also in collaboration with Parish, he began a push toward diversifying the textual morphology of historical geography while rearranging the structural headings and content. In 1804 Morse drifted over to publishing in the genre of history with the release of *Compendious History of New England*, which remained a popular text in New England for decades, revised in subsequent editions in 1809 and 1820. The work was a carefully crafted narrative of New England’s cultural heritage, described by one scholar as “unabashed filiopietism.” This brought Morse into further competition with

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authors who had begun publishing under similar textual forms. One particular accident had a damaging impact on Mores’s reputation.\textsuperscript{113} In publishing an abridgment to his history of New England with Parish, he entered into direct competition with Hannah Adams, who had published a similarly abridged history of New England that had been selling quite well commercially and was held in critical esteem. Because of the obvious similarity between the content matter and source material, Adams pursued copyright litigation over the \textit{Compendious History}. This dispute became very public, with Unitarian presses who opposed Morse’s strict orthodoxy leveling charges of plagiarism against him. After years of a drawn-out legal dispute, the judge ruled in favor of Morse while simultaneously admonishing him for intruding on Adams’s commercial audience unnecessarily.\textsuperscript{114} Nevertheless, despite various controversies—political, religious, authorial, local—Morse-branded geographies continued to sell throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, as late as 1844 Sidney Morse contracted for 100,000 copies of an illustrated Morse school geography.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} Sidney Morse, \textit{Memorabilia}, 13–14.


\textsuperscript{115} Sidney E. Morse, \textit{A System of Geography for the Use of Schools: Illustrated with more than Fifty Cerographic Maps and Numerous Wood-Cut Engravings} (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844).
What all the different iterations shared in common was a commitment to a cycle of republishing. The prefaces of these various editions warrant close scrutiny since methodological discussions and justifications for further volumes are discussed therein at length. For instance, in the 1802 edition of the *American Universal Geography*, Morse penned the following in his preface:

> The Science of geography, like so many other Sciences, is not stationary. So rapid are the improvements made in it by travellers and navigators—so fast do alterations and revolutions succeed each other, that it is not an easy matter for a Geographer to keep with them. What is this year a geographical truth, may next year be a geographical error, and require correction. The astonishing progress of things in the United States since the year 1789, will readily suggest to the reader that the reason of many alterations and additions in this Edition of the American Universal Geography.

Equally revealing is the preface of the first volume of the fifth edition of *American Universal Geography* (1805), which explains in a mundane tone an almost-spectacular sense of the series as indefinitely expansionist and interminable:

> The first edition of this work was published in 1789, in an octavo volume of 534 pages. It was chiefly confined to a description of America, and called the *American Geography*. In 1793, this work was enlarged to 1250 pages, and published in two volumes 8vo. under the title *The American Universal Geography*, as it professedly embraced a description of the whole world. The years after it received a new and large impression, with very considerable improvements, and was increased in size to 1500 pages. A fourth edition appeared in 1801 and 1802, which, though but little enlarged, was enriched with much new information, inserted in place of obsolete or less important

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116 Jedidiah Morse, preface to *The American Universal Geography* (Boston, MA: Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrew, 1802).
matter, omitted or abridged. In these successive editions there was a gradual increase in the number of maps. Though much pains were taken and great expense incurred to render this department of the work acceptable . . . owing to the imperfection of American maps, and the want of experienced artists in that branch of business, the author was never able to succeed in a degree equal to his wishes. In the present edition, however, this defect is remedied. It would be accompanied with a “New and elegant General Atlas,” comprising all the new discoveries to the present time, containing sixty-three maps. And this Atlas will make a third volume, and enhance the expense, as well as the value of the work, perhaps beyond the abilities of the less wealthy class of readers; for their accommodation, a few general maps are still inserted in the work, in the usual manner, probably sufficient to satisfy their wishes, and some copies will be sold without the Atlas.117

The foregoing shows a remarkable strategic commitment to growing the geography series collection ad infinitum, which by 1805 had been made available in different price ranges. Each edition spurred an impulse to pursue another edition or volume, which in turn necessitated either abridgments or still-further addendum for enlargement.

Finally, it is illuminating to make a direct comparison between the earliest and latest prefaces of Morse’s geography publications. One of the last books published during his lifetime offers a sense of resignation. The author seems to lament the lack of accurate geographical information in the world despite having spent the better part of his life in pursuit of it:

Geography, as a science, is yet in its infancy. The enterprise of modern travellers and modern commerce has indeed furnished us with a vast store of materials, but we look in vain, in the best treatises of General Geography, for that beautiful order and lucid arrangement, which so much delight us in other sciences. The geometrician makes use of no term till he has defined it, and in his demonstrations, avails himself of no truth till he has proved it; but the geographer commonly begins his book with introductory views, which it is impossible for any man to understand, till he is minutely acquainted with the details of Geography. It is true, that from the imperfect state of our knowledge, and from the nature of the subject, there cannot be the same precision in Geography as in Geometry; yet geographical facts may be around, a lucid order may be adopted, and classifications may be formed to assist the memory, as in other sciences.¹¹⁸

Through decades of writing dozens of prefaces, Morse concluded his geographical authorship with the remark that as a science it was in its infancy. The preface reads almost as an apology: the method has become obsolete. Morse could never catch up with the world he was trying to itemize. Since the facts and figures of location and country were not stable, the geographies had to be corrected and rewritten. The creation of *American Universal Geography* and its variations was fraught with methodological anxiety.

To conclude, students of American print culture and literature should recognize the importance of printed geographies in early American history. Print consumers evinced clear demand for geographical dictionaries, essential reference books of

¹¹⁸ Jedidiah Morse and Sidney Edwards Morse, *A New System of Geography, Ancient and Modern, for the Use of Schools, Accompanied with an Atlas . . .* (Boston, MA: Richardson and Lord, 1824).
geographical literacy, that purported to offer access to a national storehouse of facts, names, and information. This interpretation suggests that the relentless pursuit of a culture of reprinting offers a clear example of an instantly successful national text in the early U.S. print market. Local and fragmented though the print culture may have been, local institutions, schools, families, and individuals valued a national geography. The notion of geographical unity offered a prerequisite for participation in the national culture and marketplace that had begun to coalesce around its purported fundamental core: a veritable geobody that gave essential meaning to the vocabulary of the local.

From the first to the last edition, the author never stopped worrying about the outdated nature of past and future geographies. The unreliable and unverifiable nature of the secondhand accounts confounded the geography conceptually. Rather than admit to an inability to offer secure knowledge on cultural and human geography in distant parts of the world, these subjects were itemized as provisionally final entries in bounded textual authority. Meanwhile, the reality of the work’s image of national existence was reinforced by the visibility of burgeoning federal and state governments, justifying the common-sense commercial viability of a cultural commodity, the form of which can be called a Morse geography.

American geography was recognized as the subject of a legitimate scientific pursuit; deductively, there was no coherent methodology, outside of a culture of
reprinting, on which the author built a culturally viable product. With this in mind, it seems logical to suggest that the commercial popularity of Morse-authored geographies lends weight, or seems to exemplify, Benedict Anderson’s claim that in a “rather special sense, the book was the first modern-style mass-produced industrial commodity.” Moreover, a connection can be made with print capitalism and Morse geographies as a link for “creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.” Morse geographies are a firm exception to the conclusions reached recently by leading historians of print culture and literature, namely Robert Gross, Trish Loughran, Meredith McGill, and Patrick Spero. Instead, Morse’s texts mirror the continental expansion of its nationstate’s borders, ostensibly concerned with correcting errors of an advancing nation while moving toward a horizon of endless reprinting. To a significant extent, the imprecision of the method contributed to its commercial success, clearly suggesting its hegemonic function in early U.S. print culture. Morse simultaneously created and seemed to capitalize on a clear market-based need for the production of a fundamentally unique American geography—as the nation was seen as having been born, its geographical features thereby needed to be documented, bound, named, and renamed through a series of scientific publications. Unknown and unfixed physical features needed to be identified, classified, 

and itemized under a national framework for local people to access reliable information, knowledge of which offered a chance for common participation in the discursive setting of national information. The upshot of the finished product was an authoritative text that cohered around the notion of having fixed the United States as a geobody, placing it on a discursive footing equal to those nations whose historical geographics and sovereignty had already been confirmed. Hence a continental nation, the United States of America and its constituent parts, were exhibited authoritatively in a clearly structured scientific manner, giving a sense of imagined finality to its audience at the very moment of its genesis. Basic geographical literacy became a prerequisite for social participation on national matters, which subsumed locality within its general orbit.
Chapter 2. Thomas Jefferson, Political Geography, and Print Culture

Association between geography and Thomas Jefferson did not surface in the public’s imagination during his lifetime. It seems the first recorded reference connecting the two comes from a short piece, “Jefferson as a Geographer,” in an 1896 issue of *National Geographic Magazine*. Its author, an explorer of the Arctic named Adolphus Washington Greely, invited students of history to recognize “one of the greatest of American geographers.” Greely construed accomplishments in the name of geography:

In the days of travail for this nation, when to Europe America was a land of savages, then it was that Jefferson did his first geographical work, writing “Notes on Virginia” to make known to the statesmen of France the resources and possibilities of a struggling colony. . . . His greatest geographical measure was his extra-constitutional act of annexation by purchase of the great territory of Louisiana. . . . Louisiana acquired, Jefferson, like a good geographer, initiated a survey of its immense and unknown areas, sending Lewis and Clarke [sic] to the west, and Pike first to the north and then to the southwest. . . . Without Jefferson’s original action, we might have well been without a foothold in the Pacific today. . . . While we pay tribute to

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Jefferson . . . let us not forget his special claim to recognition as one of the greatest of American geographers.³

Brief remarks next appeared in 1909 when a professor of geography from Yale, George Surface, compared Jefferson to Morse. He claimed (erroneously) that the former was “an acute observer in the field before Morse had reached the age of ten years” and that *Notes on the State of Virginia* was “an elaborate and accurate (for the time) geography of Virginia [published] five years before Morse’s first publication.”⁴ Surface noted the dearth of research on Jefferson as a scientist and pointed to the need of further study. His strongest claim was that “in the economic interpretation of geography, Jefferson, as a student, was in advance of any American contemporary.” Scholars have


⁴ George Thomas Surface, “Thomas Jefferson: A Pioneer Student of American Geography,” *Bulletin of the American Geographical Society* 41, no. 12 (1909): 743–50. It must be noted parenthetically that in addition to making several factual mistakes with regard to date, Surface chastised Morse for the 1789 geography: “Of the forty pages of space devoted to the geography of Virginia, more than thirty pages are quoted directly from Jefferson’s ‘Notes.’ This may have been an oversight on the part of Mr. Morse, but he fails to give due credit to at least one American author whose publication had been of material assistance to him.” (744)
made up ground since Surface’s remarks. They devote considerable attention to
Jefferson’s role in the development of U.S. science of which geography is a major part.⁵
Outside the national framework historians recognize Jefferson’s participation in the
science of Enlightenment.⁶

Of course in American historiography more generally Jefferson radiates
mystique in the political narrative. Joseph Ellis’s biography *American Sphinx* reflects a
common approach that treats his life as a riddle. The historian *qua* archaeologist of
primary sources attempts to reconcile the various intellectual strands of contradiction.
This interpretation considers the subject’s place in the pantheon of American statesmen:
“Unlike Washington he was never a legend in his own time. . . . [He] combined great
depth with great shallowness, massive learning with extraordinary naïveté, piercing

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insights . . . with daunting powers of self-deception. His flaws . . . should be just as interesting as his strengths.”

Another biographer Merrill Peterson has voiced resignation in coming to terms with an intellectual and literary life full of “bewildering conflicts and contradictions . . . not easy to resolve in the flow of experience. He was a prodigy of talents. The tributaries of his mind ran in all directions. To trace their channels into the main stream [is a problem] for the terrain itself belongs to a different intellectual world. . . . Of all his contemporaries Jefferson is perhaps the least self-revealing and the hardest to sound to the depths of being. It is a mortifying confession but he remains for me, finally, an impenetrable man.”

Inscrutability aside, historians have come to a consensus on Jefferson’s far-reaching impact. Daniel Boorstin characterizes in the strongest of terms “the years of Jefferson’s life, from 1743 to 1826, [that] were decisive for the American political, economic and intellectual destiny of the succeeding century and a half. . . . Jefferson and his circle unwittingly accomplished for American civilization something like what St. Augustine did for Medieval

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Christendom.” 9 Conflated analogies are hardly unusual. William Peden, whose scholarship focused on Jefferson as a book collector, wrote that “a study of his libraries not only adds to our knowledge of the age in which Jefferson lived, but throws further light on the man who, more aptly than any other American, can be called the Leonardo of the New World.” 10

At any rate the sweeping and abstract conclusions of Boorstin and Peden are attempts to come to terms with Jefferson’s impact on something as colossal and serious as “American civilization,” vocabulary that did not exist in mid-18th century colonial Britain, the civil society into which the subject was born. Yet grand conclusions can lead to important revisions that problematize and clarify the original claims. Jefferson’s concrete impact as a statesman, that is to say as a political and cultural leader, is abundantly clear. 11 Nevertheless the context in which such impact is conceptualized or measured often neglects the pronounced geographical inflection of Jefferson’s worldview.

Intellectual or cultural historians who seek to understand Jefferson’s discursive expressions of geography are led to the larger context of Enlightenment science in

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which he was firmly embedded. Yet it is tricky for these researchers whose focus lies outside the history of political ideas more properly to confront the disparate interests that one curator has referred to as a “kaleidoscopic range of intellectual curiosity.” Students of archeology, agriculture, paleontology, and even historical biology have devoted serious attention to Jefferson’s intellectual pursuits. Biographers tend to treat these interests as aspects of curiosity rather than as constitutive of a coherent worldview.

In this chapter I suggest the significant degree to which Jefferson relied on discursive geography to define and implement national expansion. As a leader he turned the focus of the state towards gathering geographical knowledge of the continental west. What emerges is an intelligible program the effect of which enhanced the sovereignty of the federal government in its capacity as nationstate. This in turn provided a basic structural scaffolding for a weakly centralized state to pursue western expansion beyond the Mississippi. The long-term effect was the acceleration of an


imperial geographical hegemony that was able to absorb the parallel expansionist processes of sectionalism.

As a writer Jefferson’s impact was cosmopolitan and far-reaching. But as a public author, he was quite coy. He was a writer of world-famous documents of state that were author-less. On the other hand it is fascinating to remember that *Notes on the State of Virginia* is the only commercial text in Jefferson’s prolific literary life on which his name appeared willingly as author. Jefferson’s influential early biographer Dumas Malone treated it as a trifle. I would argue that it should be considered a foundational text in American history and in the emergence of the modern nationstate. Nevertheless scholarly focus on Jefferson’s political writings and literary correspondence often neglects their grounding both in conceptual geography and geodetic writing, which perhaps obscures the overwhelming significance of the latter and its inseparability from the former.

It has taken time for historians to track down the precise timeline that saw the eventual publication of *Notes*. While several errors crept into published accounts the
following facts seem secure. In 1780 a representative from a French delegation in Philadelphia, François Marquis de Barbé-Marbois, circulated a query to the members of the assembled Continental Congress. The inquiry was broadly framed and sought various information pertaining to geography, commerce, and history (natural and human) of the separate states. The eventual commercial editions in 1787 were framed as a response to this original query.

Figure 4. Comparing Marbois’ original query (1780) with the chapters of Notes on the State of Virginia (1787)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marbois’ query (1780)</th>
<th>Notes on the State of Virginia (1787)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Charters of your State</td>
<td>i. An exact description of the limits and boundaries of the state of Virginia? (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Present Constitution</td>
<td>ii. A notice of its rivers, rivulets, and how far they are navigable? (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. An exact Description of its limits and boundaries</td>
<td>iii. A notice of the best sea-ports of the state, and how big are the vessels they can receive? (Having no ports but our rivers and creeks, this Query has been answered under the preceding one)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. The Memoirs of the state, the memorials published in its name in the time of its being in a Colony, and the pamphlets relating to its interior or exterior affairs present and ancient</th>
<th>iv. A notice of its mountains? (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. The History of the State</td>
<td>v. Its cascades and caverns? (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A notice of the Counties, Cities, Townships, Villages, Rivers, Rivulets and how far they are navigable - Cascades, Caverns, Mountains, Trees, Plants, Fruits and other natural Riches</td>
<td>vi. A notice of the mines and other subterraneous riches; its trees, plants, fruits, &amp;c.? (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The number of its Inhabitants</td>
<td>vii. A notice of all what can increase the progress of human knowledge? [climate] (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The different Religions received in that State</td>
<td>viii. The number of its inhabitants? (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The Colleges and public establishments - The Roads, Buildings &amp;c</td>
<td>ix. The number and condition of the Militia and regular troops, and their pay? (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. The Administration of Justice and description of the Laws</td>
<td>x. The marine? [navy] (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The particular Customs and manners that may happen to be received in that State</td>
<td>xi. A description of the Indians established in that State? (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The present state of Manufactures, Commerce, interior and exterior trade</td>
<td>xii. A notice of the counties, cities, townships, and villages? (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. A notice of the best Sea Ports, and how big are the vessels they can receive</td>
<td>xiii. The constitution of the state and its several charters? (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. A notice of the commercial productions particular to that State, and of those objects which the inhabitants are obliged to get from Europe and from other parts of the World</td>
<td>xiv. The administration of justice and description of the laws? (19)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. The weights, measures, and the currency of the hard money. Some details relating to the exchange with Europe</td>
<td>xv. The colleges and public establishments, the roads, buildings, &amp;c? (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. The public income and expenses</td>
<td>xvi. The measures taken with regard of the Estates and possessions of the rebels, commonly called Tories? (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The measures taken with regard to the estates and possession of the Rebels commonly called Tories</td>
<td>xvii. The different religions received into that state? (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The condition of the Regular Troops and the Militia and Pay</td>
<td>xviii. The particular customs and manners that may happen to be received into that state? (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. The marine and navigation [navy]</td>
<td>xix. The present state of manufactures, commerce, interior, and exterior trade? (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. A Notice of the Mines and other subterranean riches</td>
<td>xx. A notice of the commercial productions particular to the state, and of those objects which the inhabitants are obliged to get from Europe and from other parts of the world? (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Some Samples of these Mines and of the [illegible] Stones in which a notice of all what can increase the progress of human Knowledge</td>
<td>xxi. The weights, measures, and the currency of the hard money? Some details relating to the exchange with Europe? (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Virginia representative to the Continental Congress, Joseph Jones, relayed the questionnaire to Jefferson who at the time was serving as Governor. To answer he
composed a manuscript and sent it privately to Marbois in December 1781. Addressing another Frenchman in 1780 Jefferson wrote of being “busily employed for Monsr. Marbois without his knowing it; and have to acknowledge [sic] to him the mysterious obligation for making me much better acquainted with my own country than I was ever before. His queries as to this country put into my hands by Mr. Jones I take every occasion which presents itself of procuring answers to. Some of them however can never be answered till I shall leisure to go to Monticello where alone the materials exist which can enable any one to answer them.”

That Jefferson defines his motivation to write as a “mysterious obligation” suggests he may not have fully understood his enthusiasm. Work on the manuscript continued intermittently for a period of nearly seven years before it was published in Paris and London. The author vacillated over how and whether it should circulate publicly. The ensuing length of literary gestation and the ultimate decision to publish in


16 Gisela Tauber, “‘Notes on the State of Virginia’: Thomas Jefferson’s Unintentional Self Portrait,” Eighteenth Century Studies 26, no. 4 (summer 1993): 635–48; Marie Kimball, Jefferson: War and Peace, 1776–1884 (New York: Coward-McCann, 1947). Notably the start of this literary endeavor coincided with a difficult domestic period for Jefferson whose wife was in her final days after being nearly envisered following the birth of their fifth child. In addition, it was perhaps Jefferson’s most ignominious period of public service; as a war-time Governor the legislature publicly censured him.
this genre can be attributed to several important factors apart from the characteristic taciturn personality to which biographers refer.

The origins and long-term development of the Notes manuscript can be linked to latent and immediate causes. In the immediate sense Jefferson used the intervening time to engage neighbors whom he considered particularly well-informed on the geography and natural history of Virginia. A vivid example of this is the exchange with George Rogers Clark. Jefferson considered Clark an expert land surveyor—and has been described by a historian as a “frontier republican.” The correspondence with Clark shows fervor for geographical exploration and natural history and sheds light on Jefferson’s emerging authorship:

I received here about a week ago your obliging letter of Oct. 12. 1783. with the shells and seeds . . . . You are also so kind as to keep alive the hope of getting for me as many of the different species of bones, teeth and tusks of the Mammoth as can now be found . . . . Pittsburg and Philadelphia or Winchester will be the surest channel of conveyance. I find they have subscribed a very large sum of money in England for exploring the country from the Mississippi [sic] to California. They pretend it is only to promote knolege. I am afraid they have thoughts of colonising into that quarter. Some of us have been talking here in a feeble way of making the attempt to search that country. But I doubt whether we have enough of that kind of spirit to raise the money. How would you like to lead such a party? Tho I am afraid our prospect is not worth asking the question. The definitive treaty of peace is at length arrived. It is not altered from the preliminaries. The cession of the territory West of Ohio to the United states has been at length accepted by Congress with some small alterations of

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the conditions. We are in daily expectation of receiving it with the final approbation of Virginia. Congress have been lately agitated by questions where they should fix their residence. They first resolved on Trentown. The Southern states however contrived to get a vote that they would give half their time to Georgetown at the Falls of Patowmac. Still we consider the matter as undecided between the Delaware and Patowmac. We urge the latter as the only point of union which can cement us to our Western friends when they shall be formed into separate states.¹⁸

This suggests the inseparability of geography and natural history from the more obvious political concerns of state. Remarkably the writer transitions breathlessly away from paleontology to matters of empire and nationstate formation, two subjects that cannot be disentangled in Jefferson’s worldview. Jefferson floats a proposal to the expert woodsman and Revolutionary war general of leading an expedition beyond the Mississippi to the west coast for the purpose of keeping up with British colonial agents in their rumored ambition for the acquisition of geographical knowledge linked inextricably to the likelihood of colonization. Knowing the great difficulty in securing state or private funding from loosely confederated provisional governments or from fledgling institutions devoted to science, Jefferson seemed resigned to the fact that the

expedition would not materialize. Yet this exchange foreshadows precisely the state expedition that Jefferson authorized twenty years later, a cultural event that had a profound impact on the hegemony of the nationstate and its ability to achieve geographical expansion.

Furthermore the focus on mammoth bones indicates ongoing correspondence with Clark in an effort to develop the Marbois manuscript. Although the Treaty of Paris had been signed merely three months prior Jefferson prioritized natural history in this letter to the military commander whose abilities as land surveyor and frontiersman he coveted. Jefferson’s interest in paleontology was hardly a passing whim for he had previously discussed it with Clark at length:

I received in August your favour wherein you give me hopes of your being able to procure for me some of the big bones. I should be unfaithful to my own feelings were I not to express to you how much I am obliged by your attention to the request . . . . A specimen of each of the several species of bones now to be found is to me the most desireable object in Natural history, and there is no expence of package or of safe transportation which I will not gladly reimburse to procure them safely. Elkhorns of very extraordinary size, petrifactions, or any thing else uncommon would be very acceptable. New London in Bedford, Staunton in Augusta, or Fredericksburg are places from whence I can surely get them. Mr. Steptoe in the first place, Colo. Matthews in the second, Mr. Dick in the third will take care of them for me. You will perhaps hear of

19 “The framers of the Constitution certainly did not envisage that the federal government would become the primary source of financial support for scientific research. This position would have implied assigning to the federal government a far greater power than the framers were willing to assign.” I. Bernard Cohen, *Science and the Founding Fathers*, 281. Jefferson’s policies are clearly antithetical to Cohen’s interpretation.
my being gone to Europe, but my trip there will be short. I mention this lest you should hesitate in forwarding any curiosities for me. Any observations of your own on the subject of the big bones or their history, or on any thing else in the Western country, will come acceptably to me, because I know you see the works of nature in the great, and not merely in detail. Descriptions of animals, vegetables, minerals, or other curious things, notes as to the Indians, information of the country between the Mississippi [sic] and waters of the South sea &c. &c. will strike your mind as worthy being communicated. I wish you had more time to pay attention to them.²⁰

The letter demonstrates remarkable intellectual and financial devotion to the disparate practices of natural history, which includes paleontology and the excavation of bones throughout the continent. “The most desirable object” is that of animal classification: to curate reliable empirical knowledge of the continent’s zoology, specifically the comparative anatomy of North American mammals.

This thoroughgoing interest in bones must be tied into the practical and theoretical activity of Enlightenment science. While intimately involved with the management of his plantation Jefferson embraced the practical study of agricultural and horticulture.²¹ In due course this led to the study of the botanical classification system developed by Linnaeus, which in turn led to the larger conversations

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happening in the eighteenth century transatlantic world. Jefferson became a peer of his generation’s scientific luminaries that included Buffon and Humboldt. Scholars trace a latent motivation behind *Notes on the State of Virginia* to Jefferson’s objection to Buffon’s thesis on the climate of North America. Known as the degeneracy thesis, Buffon’s widely-circulated theory (amplified by Cornelius De Pauw and Guillaume Thomas Raynal) posited the geographical and climactic and inferiority of continental North and South America compared to that of Europe: including its wildlife, botany, and historical anthropology of indigenous peoples. Jefferson was remarkably fascinated with climate science throughout his life and objected vociferously to Buffon’s thesis—to both its biological and civilizational implications. Much of *Notes* refutes Buffon directly: a concerted attempt to offer concrete evidence that the plants and animals of North America were in no way empirically dwarfed or sickly compared to European counterparts. To this end and at great expense he shipped the

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23 During a trip undertaken with James Madison after resigning from the cabinet of President Washington from May-June 1791, Jefferson wrote to his daughter from Lake George, New York: “Here they are locked up in ice and snow for 6. months. Spring and autumn which make a paradise of our country are rigorous winter with them, and a tropical summer breaks on them all at once. When we consider how much climate contributes to the happiness of our condition . . . we have reason to value highly the accident of birth in such a one as that of Virginia.” Thomas Jefferson to Maria Jefferson, 30 May 1791, Library of Congress. This view, far from sentimental, captures the importance Jefferson attached to connection between climate and civil society / civilization and the formation of human culture.
physical remnants of a large North American moose, along with other preserved
mammal specimens, to Buffon in France in order to present the scientist with
incontrovertible proof of scientific error.24

Before narrating the immediate circumstances that led to the publication of Notes
it should be understood that Jefferson’s authorship sits somewhere among several
overlapping models. In a simple and preliminary sense Jefferson the lawyer and
statesman may have found it exciting to take part in larger scientific conversations not
so obviously related to weighty political matters of war and peace, constitutional law,
and state formation. Instead he delighted in the bourgeoning fields of geography,
zoology, climate. He suggested as much later in life and lamented how being
“constantly engaged in public affairs” led him away from his natural intellectual
proclivities: “the truth is that I have been drawn by the history of the times from

24 Howard C. Rice Jr., “Jefferson’s Gift to the Museum of Natural History in Paris”
Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 95, no. 6 (Dec. 1951): 597–627; Donald Jackson,
Alan Dugatkin, Mr. Jefferson and the Giant Moose: Natural History in Early America (Chicago:
University of Chicago, 2009). Dugatkin suggests that Jefferson “went to extraordinary lengths
[to] hunt for this moose, and the attempt to get it shipped to Jefferson, and then Buffon in Paris,
is the stuff of movies.” (xi)
Physical and mathematical sciences, which were my passion, to those of the policies & government towards which I had naturally no inclination.”

As a political writer Jefferson embraced anonymity and avoided the publicity associated with authorship. This conception of authorship, as an ideal, pointed to reason as the sole basis of credibility and corresponding variations of individual authorship immaterial. This notion is tied into the efflorescence of Whig ideology in late seventeenth century Britain as well as to the paradigm of classical republicanism. Yet the literary practice of anonymity typical of British political writing was often less applicable in the cultural expressions of art and fine art. Moreover by the mid-eighteenth century natural history practitioners had developed a clear set of discursive and visual rhetorical patterns within which authorship was in no way discouraged.

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Additionally, the gradual definition of the professional scientist as a publishing writer was intensified through the practices of international societies such as the Royal Society, the function and processes of which reinforced and helped to formalize connections among empire, state building, and professional science.\textsuperscript{30}

Meanwhile public authorship in the mid-eighteenth century colonial world was taking on important new meanings. The Revolution, and the subsequent appearance of the nationstate, brought acute changes to the parameters in which authorship and public writing functioned as social and intellectual expressions. This transformation became particularly dynamic as boundaries between public and private selves dissipated significantly in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{31}

In reference to Habermas cultural historians have argued persuasively that the American Revolution “institutionalized the public sphere.”\textsuperscript{32} At the same time it is


\textsuperscript{31} Richard Sennett, \textit{The Fall of Public Man} (New York: Penguin, 2002).

important to remember that the development of the public sphere in the periphery of colonial Britain somewhat trailed that of London. Literary critic Michael Warner reminds us that “expressly political publications were unknown in the print discourse of the colonies before 1720;” as such: “for early colonists being public did not entail such a communicative context such as publication, and publishing did not have the meaning of making things public.”

Operating outside of strictly political matters, the discursive practices of natural history in eighteenth century British America were characterized mostly by informal literary exchange until well into the second half of the eighteenth century. Benjamin Franklin’s embrace of natural philosophy and natural history marks the emergence of institutional presence dedicated to the pursuit of science and public knowledge in the colonial periphery—yet even the American Philosophical Society that he founded in 1743 remained mostly dormant until 1767 when it merged with The American Society for Promoting Useful Knowledge.

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With this larger context in mind we can look to the latter stages of the literary
gestation period of *Notes* with its author at the epicenter of French Enlightenment. It is
highly significant that Jefferson’s first and only true commercial publication was in
French translation. Four years in Paris shaped his willingness to accept public
authorship as a legitimate social expression. Cultural historian Dena Goodman
emphasizes the extent to which sociability was a hallmark of French literature in the
context of the rise of the public sphere in the *ancien régime*: “The search for knowledge
was now subordinated to the higher good of society, even of humanity as a whole . . . .
The service of humanity replaced the service of truth as the ultimate goal of the
Republic of Letters [which] . . . looked outward to the world of human society rather
than upward to absolute truth.”36 That is to say, publicity itself extended the smaller
networks of literary exchange:

The philosophes increasingly and creatively used letters to bridge the gap
between the private circles in which they gathered and the public arena
they sought to shape and conquer . . . . The philosophes did not simply
write letters. Instead, they employed and deployed an epistolary genre in
the public sphere; they transformed letters . . . into a variety of public
media, which, because they were extensions of epistolary commerce,
retained the crucial reciprocity that made their readers members of a
community. Throughout the circulation . . . philosophes established a
network of exchange which was the first circle of expansion beyond the
walls of the salons. As letters and correspondences became the bases and
models for print media of broader circulation, this network expanded to

(Ithaca: Cornell University, 1996), 33.
become fully public. The letter was transformed into the newsletters and then into the journal. . . . The epistolary genre became the dominant medium for creating an active and interactive reading public.\textsuperscript{37}

With context in mind the basic arc of Jefferson’s decision to publish Notes will seem clear. Marbois expressed delight when he learned of Jefferson’s involvement.\textsuperscript{38} Yet the initial response was decidedly provisional, which the author described as “very imperfect and not worth offering but as a proof of my respect for your wishes.”\textsuperscript{39} Almost immediately Jefferson contemplated printing the manuscript but balked. Publication would not move beyond the stage of contemplation for quite some time. Meanwhile he pondered distributing some form of the manuscript on a non-commercial basis to students at the College of William and Mary or as a contribution to the American Philadelphia Society to which he and Marbois had been elected members the

\textsuperscript{37} Dena Goodman, \textit{The Republic of Letters}, 137.

\textsuperscript{38} The happenstance of this relationship can hardly be dismissed as a historical footnote. More than twenty years after establishing literary correspondence with the then-governor of Virginia, Marbois managed to survive imprisonment and emerge physically intact from the Jacobin phase of the French Revolution. Astonishingly he was appointed a key minister for the government of the French Consulate and delegated by Napoleon to negotiate for Louisiana with James Monroe and Robert Livingston during the Jefferson presidency.

previous year.\textsuperscript{40} Instead he continued to develop the manuscript.\textsuperscript{41} Finally in May 1785 at his own expense he had 200 English language copies printed in Paris meant for private circulation explicitly not intended for general public consumption. Jefferson expressed much consternation when learning of a printer who had begun inquiring after a commercially translated French edition. Indeed the original non-commercial print run of 200 attracted admiration in the city. Jefferson’s willingness to circulate the manuscript within a private literary circle seemed to generate curiosity for the coveted privilege of access. After all it was a seen as a direct response to Buffon’s \textit{Histoire Naturelle}, one of the most popular books in France during the second half of the eighteenth century whose author rejected anonymity as authorial practice.\textsuperscript{42} The reluctant Jefferson did not pass up the chance to publicize what was being received as an original contribution to science. The positive feedback may have reassured him of having written something important and original. It is partly owing to this enthusiastic


reception that Jefferson ultimately agreed to terms for a translated commercial edition in 1787 under the title *Observations sur la Virginie*. The same year he arranged to print a commercial English language edition in London known as the Stockdale edition the format of which became the standard for subsequent printing in America.

In the interim, Jefferson worked assiduously to improve the manuscript. In correspondence he consistently downplayed the effort and devotion that went into the project as one historian notes “in the disingenuous language of excessive modesty and self-deprecation.” Instead (in the words of another) we know he took “enormous pains” to improve and supplement the work with reliable empirical evidence to justify the tentative conclusions offered to the reader. He cared deeply for the topics addressed, kept his own copy of the 1787 Stockdale edition, and annotated it heavily with new information over the remaining course of his life.

In the United States *Notes* issued from several printers and went through at least eighteen print-runs by 1826. Discursively the text remained the same aside from the

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44 Robert A. Ferguson, “Mysterious Obligation,” 382.
publishers inserting various illustrations to accompany the text.\textsuperscript{45} It was well received on both sides of the Atlantic although it is challenging to track down the precise social composition of its popular reception especially among ordinary readers. It is clear that public intellectuals celebrated the book as a landmark essay and considered it an important contribution to the natural history discourse of the Atlantic world. The most vivid example of this might be Humboldt’s letter of introduction to Jefferson who at the time was completely unacquainted with the Prussian scientist. Writing to the President in French Humboldt celebrated \textit{Notes} in glowing terms:

I feel it my pleasant duty to present my respects and express my high admiration for your writings . . . which have inspired me from my earliest youth. I wish it were possible for me to present my personal respects and admiration to you and to know a magistrate and philosopher whose cares embrace two continents! Forgive. Mr. President, the confidential tone and length of this letter. I am quite unaware whether you know me already through my work on galvanism and my publications in the memoirs of the Institut National in Paris. As a friend of science, you will excuse the indulgence of my admiration. I would love to talk to you about a subject that you have treated so ingeniously in your work on Virginia, the teeth of

\textsuperscript{45} Frank Shuffelton, “Introduction,” \textit{Notes on the State of Virginia}, xxxi. A fourth appendix was added in 1800 while various maps and illustrations were added to the various edition depending on cost considerations; Coolie Verner, “The Maps and Plates Appearing with the Several Editions of Mr. Jefferson’s ‘Notes on the State of Virginia,’” \textit{Virginia Magazine of History and Biography} 59, no. 1 (Jan. 1951): 21–33.
mammoth which we discovered in the Andes of the southern hemisphere.\textsuperscript{46}

One upshot of writing for a global audience in the genre of natural history was that it conferred on Jefferson an ethos of cosmopolitan, scientific authority. The Humboldt exchange is perhaps the most vivid literary example of how \textit{Notes} resonated with the European scientific community.\textsuperscript{47}

That it also resonated with publishers in America can be seen from two brief examples. In 1809, a publisher from New York, Isaac Riley, wrote to Jefferson of

> Experiencing daily, in the course of my business, the constant and increasing demand there is in the Country for your Work, the \textit{Notes on Virginia} [sic], and of which the copies are becoming increasingly scarce, I am satisfied that a new Edition is wanting. Deeming it very probable that in the period which has elapsed since the Original publication of the work, you have collected some manuscript additions, with which you would not be unwilling to favour the public, and presuming upon the supposition that you have no other arrangement in view, I take the liberty of submitting, that should you condescend to intrust me with Said additions,


The response was contrarian:

I have long intended to prepare an enlarged edition of that work, with such additions & corrections wch information & experience might enable me to make: and I have been [illegible] materials from time to time, as they occurred for the purpose, but it will be long yet before other occupations will permit me to digest them; & observations & enquiries are still to be made, which will be more correct in proportion to the length of time they are continued and this may probably be through my life. it is mostly likely therefore that it may be left to be posthumously published. in the mean time I should not be willing to propose any partial execution of the design.

Such of the American editions as I have seen have been very incorrect, & some of them so much so as to be libels on them—devastating the author. the private edition printed in Paris under my own inspection is the most correct. there were I think one or two typographical errors in it. but this edition was never sold. there were but 200 copies printed, which I gave as presents to my friends. The London edition by Stockdale in 1787 is tolerably correct. should you execute your purpose of reprinting the work. I have two copies of the Paris edition remaining of which I will send you
one, supposing you might not be otherwise to procure either a copy of that or of the London edition, which is also correct enough.49

A similar request from another publisher several years later for a new edition prompted Jefferson to confirm the determination not to engage the public further:

You propose to me the preparation of a new edition of the Notes on Virginia. I formerly entertained the idea and from time to time added some new [illegible], which I thought I would arrange at leisure for a posthumous edition. [I] begin to see that it is impracticable for me. nearly forty years of additional experience in the affairs of mankind would lead me into dilations ending I know not where. that experience has not altered a single principle. but it has furnished matter of abundant development. . . . now the act of writing itself is becoming slow, laborious, and irksome. I consider . . . the idea of a new copy of that work as no more to be entertained. the work itself is nothing more than the measure of a shadow, never stationary, but lengthening itself as the sun advances, and to be taken anew from hour to hour. it must remain therefore for some other hand to sketch it’s [sic] appearance at another epoch.50

Perhaps feeling overburdened by affairs of state, Jefferson retreated from the position of scientist and public writer. Incidentally the case of Humboldt demonstrates the rapidly emerging professionalization of science, whose practitioners expended laborious energy

49 Thomas Jefferson to John Riley, October 7. -10-07, 1809. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib020094/. Jefferson seems to have miscatalogued his recipient as John Riley. The original letter was signed I. Riley, which may account for the confusion. Retrieved from the Library of Congress

raising their credibility as fact-gathering scientists in the field—labor to which Jefferson was unable to devote himself.

Finally, and similarly, Jefferson’s involvement in science attracted the attention of Harvard President Joseph Willard who in 1788 wrote the statesman in Paris to award him an honorary doctorate: “As your Excellency, at present, resides in a quarter of the world where the Sciences flourish, I should esteem it a favor, if you would inform me, what works of merit have appeared, within these last two or three years, in Europe, and particularly in France.”

Jefferson’s response to Willard the following year is an appraisal of the nation and a definition of its progress as corresponding scientific advancement:

The return of la Peyrouse (whenever that shall happen) will probably add to our [sic] knowledge in Geography, botany and natural history. What a field [sic] have we at our doors to signalize ourselves in! The botany of America is far from being exhausted: it’s Mineralogy is untouched, and it’s Natural history or Zoology totally mistaken and misrepresented. As far as I have seen there is not one single species of terrestrial birds common to Europe and America, and I question if there be a single species of quadrupeds . . . . It is the work to which the young men, whom you are forming, should lay their hands. We have spent the prime of our lives in procuring them the precious blessing of liberty. Let them spend theirs in shewing that it is the

great parent of science and virtue; and that a nation will be great in both always in proportion as it is free.⁵²

Activity in the genre of natural history lent Jefferson vast credibility as a cosmopolitan scientist. He was recognized for merit beyond that of constitutional lawyer and political theorist. Yet the warm reception from enlightenment scientists and various publishers could not convince him to enlarge the original work. He was content to allow others to take up the burdens of empirical scientific research and instead turned his attention to building a legible and practicable political geography into the culture of the nationstate.

Apart from its reception several important points can be made with respect to the structure and literary significance of Notes.⁵³ In the first place, Jefferson devoted the most attention to geographical and natural history items. The longest section (vi)

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is steeped in the miscellaneous subjects of natural history, discursive descriptions with charts and figures on the comparative sizes of North American and European animals. Moreover although Marbois made no mention of climate in the original query—Jefferson devoted twelve pages to describing Virginia’s, which allowed him to include metrics of temperature readings that he had recorded over the years. Hence query vii devotes nine pages under a heading of “A notice of what can increase the progress of human knowledge” to empirical observations on the climate of Virginia:

I have taken five years observations . . . from 1772-1777, made in Williamsburgh and its neighbourhood, have reduced them to an average for every month in the years, and stated those averages in the following table, adding an analytical view of the winds during the same period. . . . by this table it appears we have on average 47 inches of rain annually, which is considerably more than usually falls in Europe, yet from the information I have collected, I supposed we have a much greater proportion of sunshine here than there. Perhaps it will be found there are twice as many cloudy days in the middle parts of Europe, as in the United States of America. I mention the middle parts of Europe, because my information does not extend to its northern or southern parts.\textsuperscript{54}

Jefferson’s thinking is thoroughly continental and metageographical. Even the locales Monticello and Williamsburg are reified to continental dimensions. He then proceeds to offer two tables: the aforementioned seven years average of rainfall, temperature, and wind strength at Williamsburg; and a second which compares only the wind strength strictly between Williamsburg and Monticello. Here when he writes of a “remarkable

\textsuperscript{54} Thomas Jefferson, \textit{Notes on the State of Virginia}, 80–1.
difference . . . in the winds which prevail in the different parts of the country” it is unclear if he refers to Virginia or the United States. The two referents are at times used interchangeably and their meanings collapse in the verbiage.

These examples show an interest in data collection and categorization of facts from which to derive general conclusion—the systematic cataloguing of nature that formed a methodological base for Linnaeus and Buffon. Yet the reference points are constantly shifting and unstable. Monticello can function as a reference to a locale, or stand in for the commonwealth of Virginia, the United States, or continental North America as a fixed data point in a scientific comparison with Europe.

Thomas Jefferson’s geographical gaze takes for granted continued relevance of natural philosophy: ethical, aesthetic, political matters, all of which seem to be intellectually inseparable from the primary geographical considerations. In a latent sense this interest in geography—defined simply as the physical science of landscape—can be traced to an early childhood in which text, image, and the very physical landscape of the unknown continental west (terra incognita) loomed large in the affairs

55 Thomas Jefferson, Notes on the State of Virginia, 83.


of his family. Jefferson saw that the geophysical frontier offered stunning opportunities for geographers. He grew up in Albermale County in the piedmont of Virginia and was bequeathed extensive property on the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains at age fourteen following the death of his father in 1757. The elder Jefferson was a land surveyor/cartographer and large landowner in colonial Virginia; along with Joshua Fry he coauthored its official first map in 1751 from a commission authorized by the Royal Board of Trade, titled *Map of the Most Inhabited Part of Virginia Containing the Whole Province of Maryland.* Moreover as a member of the Loyal Land Company the Crown authorized Peter Jefferson as an agent in the colonial administration of an 800,000 acre grant.


59 John Allen has suggested that geographical knowledge and exploration were parallel expressions in the early nineteenth century: “geographical knowledge is linked not only with the results of exploration but with the nature of the exploratory process [itself]. . . . Geographical knowledge is not necessarily ‘accurate.’ That is, from it may be developed images of, or patterns of belief about, the nature of land that are not fully consistent either with geographical reality or with what consensual opinion considers to be geographical reality. In many cases, the accuracy of the images may be affected more by esthetic, emotional, economic, and environmental biases than by the actual quantity or quality of geographical information. John L. Allen, “An Analysis of the Exploratory Process: The Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804–1806,” *Geographical Review* 62, no. 1 (Jan. 1972): 13–39, (13–14).


Jefferson’s childhood exposure to discursive and imaginative geography of colonial Virginia had a huge impact on an emerging intellectual orientation.\textsuperscript{62} The narrative shows a clear connection between the physical geography of landscape and the social practices of geographers. As a young lad he would have heard stories from his father’s social circle made up of powerful agents professionally active as cartographers, land surveyors, agriculturists, and delegates of colonial territorial administration.\textsuperscript{63} The various textual devices of written geography offered opportunity for social, economic, legal, and cultural advancement. The examples of exposure to such professionals are numerous. In the first place, we can point to the teacher with whom Jefferson boarded from January 1758 to January 1760, James Maury. In 1753 Loyal Land Company appointed Maury the leader of an expedition to search for the fabled

\textsuperscript{62} Donald Jackson, \textit{Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains}, 3–85.

\textsuperscript{63} Martin Bruckner, \textit{The Social Lives of Maps}; Martin Bruckner, \textit{The Geographical Revolution in Early America}. 
Northwest Passage west of the Mississippi, an unsuccessful expedition cut short by the Seven Years’ War. Maury enthusiastically introduced his student to geographical lore through textual, technical, and cultural devices. Jefferson came to know mathematically as a land surveyor the vaguely and partially defined landscapes that lay just out of sight beyond the mountainous frontier at his doorstep, which he internalized aesthetically as home.

For Virginians like Peter Jefferson and James Maury the Blue Ridge mountains functioned almost concretely as a geographical frontier or barrier at which land claims and jurisdiction of colonial sovereignty ended. Colossal opportunity—whether professional, commercial, or scientific—seemed to lay just beyond these imposing mountain ranges, especially in the context of land speculation and prospects of large scale agricultural expansion and its concomitant state formation. When this context is brought to bear on the fact that Jefferson’s home was on the threshold (in a literal geophysical sense) of a profound legal, social, geographical, and cultural barrier, the effect becomes clear. That is, the intellectual curiosity engendered in a young child through the immersive exposure to a social milieu of powerful agrarians who took excursions into provisional borderlands seems to have been pronounced. Peter Jefferson

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and his peers exercised claims of legal power over the distribution and settlement of millions of acres of continental landscapes and property.

Thomas Walker, Peter Jefferson’s immediate neighbor and estate executor further illustrates the formative impression of physical geography and the social agents who determined its fate. Similar to Maury and Peter Jefferson, Thomas Walker was a leader of colonial-sponsored expeditions. This accomplished cartographer was recognized as the first to map the Cumberland Gap, an opening through the Blue Ridge mountains that greatly facilitated ease of travel and stimulated westward migration patterns beyond the established legal boundaries of western Virginia into Kentucky.\(^{65}\) Thomas Walker, like other Euroamerican land surveyors, cartographers, and administrators in similar social positions, established important geographical knowledge to facilitate the administration of the colonial state.\(^{66}\)

Colonial Virginians living along the frontier inhabited borderlands beyond which sovereignty was provisional and constantly in flux. Hence geography as a writing practice offered immense opportunity to exercise political and literary power.


Professional success for agents like Peter Jefferson, James Maury, and Thomas Walker amounted to facilitating ease of travel, stimulating westward migration, and stabilizing and diffusing geographical knowledge for the state and for the public who accepted its legal jurisdiction.

Yet the attention of cartographers might easily stray from the technical and mathematical expressions of topography over to the diverse and vivid topics highlighted in Notes such as botanical and climatic variety and precious minerals. Colonial geographers speculated on various subjects such as the existence of continental rivers reaching all the way from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean, radically different cultural anthropologies, and the bones of mammoths and other exotic animals that may still inhabit the vast continent. For mid-eighteenth colonial Virginians, especially those for whom geography writing constituted the basis of a social position, that which lay beyond the mountains seemed alluring and almost magnetic—scientifically, aesthetically, politically, and commercially.

Nevertheless explorers mostly lacked sentimentality and saw themselves as participating in clearly defined programs of geographical exploration of frontier borderlands. The ubiquitous threat of mortality meant that explorers, cartographers or otherwise, often thought of themselves not as adventurers or tourists but rather as

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professionals who had concrete goals to achieve for themselves and their financial sponsors. Exploration was costly. As such it necessitated efficiency, competence, and the coordination of resources. Thus abstractness of psychological, emotional, and aesthetic appreciation of landscape existed alongside concreteness of exploratory venture that was rigorous but also afforded immense socioeconomic and political opportunity. This admixture of conceptual geography as part sublimation and part concrete social activity formed an important cultural backdrop for young Jefferson.

Cultural meanings inscribed on physical landscape hold immense importance.68 Jefferson designed his future home Monticello at the foothills of a mountain range beyond which lay continental-sized risk and opportunity. His subsequent deep emotional attachment to the physical geography of Virginia and to his own plantation is not disputed by historians. In a sense Jefferson composed a definition of civilization out of the landscapes of his childhood and grafted it onto the yeoman ideal drawn from

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physiocratic / enlightenment ideals and classical republicanism. Denis Cosgrove has noted “the sublime romantic landscape as an ideology . . . for its appeal to something common in all human experience, particularly in childhood. The sense of both insignificance and fear in the face of nature’s scale, particularly when displayed in full fury: in mountain masses, or whipped up in violent seas, tossed in a storm or hidden in the darkness of the night, is real indeed. . . . In childhood these experiences are unalienated and unreflexive.”

Jefferson evinces spatial feeling or spatial identification with Virginia and Monticello throughout his literary life, which is punctuated with effusive descriptions of native landscape. While in Paris he wrote to family physician George Gilmer of nostalgia for home landscape: “affection in every bud that opens. Too many scenes of happiness mingle themselves with all the recollections of my native woods and feilds

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70 Denis Cosgrove, Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape, 232.

71 Hsuan L. Hsu, Geography and the Production of Space, 8–9
[sic], to suffer them to be supplanted in my affection by any other.’’

In another letter to companion Maria Cosway he pondered poetically of “our own dear Monticello, where has Nature spread so rich a mantle under the eye? mountains, forests, rocks, rivers. With what majesty do we there ride above the storms! How sublime to look down into the workhouse of nature, to see her clouds, hail, snow, rain, thunder, all fabricated at our feet! And the glorious Sun, when rising as if out of a distant water, just gliding the tops of the mountains, and giving life to all nature.”

In the same key Jefferson observed remarkably while in Paris that he was “savage enough to prefer the woods, the wilds and the independence of Monticello to all the brilliant pleasures of this gay capital . . . for tho’ there is less wealth there, there is more freedom, more ease and less misery.”

Visitors to Monticello were treated to horseback tours of the extensive property the highlight of which was a view offered from a geophysical land bridge.

Christened Natural Bridge Jefferson included a literary description in Notes on the State of Virginia in the fifth section:

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72 Thomas Jefferson to George Gilmer, August 12, 1787; Library of Congress digitized manuscript: https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib002904/

73 Thomas Jefferson to Maria Hadfield Cosway, October 12, 1786, Letterpress Copy of "Head and Heart" Letter, Library of Congress digitized manuscript: https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib002293/

74 Thomas Jefferson to Baron de Geismar September 6, 1785, Library of Congress digitized manuscript: https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib001272/

75 Merrill D. Peterson, Visitors To Monticello (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989).
the most sublime of Nature’s works . . . the sides of this bridge are provided in some parts with a parapet of fixed rocks, yet few men have resolution to walk to them and look over into the abyss. You involuntarily fall off your hands and feet, creep to the parapet and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a minute, gave me a violent head ache. If the view from the top be painful and intolerable, that from below is delightful in an equal extreme. It is impossible for the emotions arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing as it were up to heaven, the rapture of the spectator is really indescribable!76

Describing another vantage point Jefferson celebrated a scene alone . . . worth a voyage across the Atlantic. The passage of the Patowmac through the Blue ridge is perhaps one of the most stupendous scenes in nature. You stand on a very high point of land. On your right comes up the Shenandoah, having ranged along the foot of the mountain an hundred miles to seek a vent. On your left approaches the Patowmac, in quest of a passage also. In the moment of their junction they rush together against the mountain, rend it asunder, and pass off to the sea. The first glance of this scene hurries our senses into the opinion, that this earth has been created in time, that the mountains were formed first, that the rivers began to flow afterwards, that in this place particularly they have been damned up by the Blue ridge of mountains, and have formed an ocean which filled the whole valley; that continuing to rise they have at length broken over at this spot and have torn the mountain down from its summit to its base. The piles of rock on each hand, but particularly on the Shenandoah, the evident marks of their disrupture and avulsion from their beds by the most powerful agents of nature, corroborate the impression. But the distant finishing which nature has given to the picture is of a very different character. It is a true contrast to the fore-ground. It is placid and delightful, as that is wild and tremendous. For the mountain being cloven asunder, she presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small catch of smooth blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass

through the breach and participate of the calm below. Here the eye ultimately composes itself.77

Historians who consider Jefferson’s emotional attachment to, and literary representations of, Virginia’s landscapes and immersion in natural history practices might be forgiven for viewing the enthusiasm for geography, botany, climate, landscaping, agricultural science, and gardening—as at least equal to that of politics.78 Hence in addition to viewing Notes as rooted in Enlightenment science historians can see it as the logical expression of its author’s childhood experiences of witnessing the dynamic interplay among geodetic practices, state formation, and the physical representation of familiar and unfamiliar landscapes. Geography was the primary technical and textual vehicle used for integrating frontier regions into a framework of colonial knowledge; this process is congruent with subsequent state policies to acquire geographical information of North America. Similarly Notes shows that Jefferson’s geographical thinking cannot be divorced from political concerns. Although Notes was a stand-alone contribution to natural history Jefferson leveraged his credibility as a celebrated public author in other leadership roles as he continued to pursue the


acquisition of geographical knowledge through state-based policies. Despite the institutional weakness of the federal government the effect of these policies in connection to nationstate formation cannot be overstated; they facilitated the expansion of U.S sovereignty.

Similarly the formative childhood milieu gave Jefferson a keen sense of the fleeting impermanence of sovereign land claims and the importance of geographical knowledge in securing the permanence of the nationstate. Jefferson saw that European colonial sovereignty was often provisional. The Treaty of Paris (1763) that ended the Seven Years’ War saw a spectacular realignment of international territorial claims. Moreover the Treaty that ended the Revolution meant that the federal government needed to decide on how to proceed with state land claims that were thrown into uncertainty. Richard Berkhofer has referred to Jefferson’s “ideological geography” as the basis of the U.S. territorial system. The Land Ordinances of 1784 and 1787 authored by Jefferson formed the political mechanism whereby the U.S. federal government


accommodated territorial admission of new states and clarified existing boundaries that were thrown into greater flux and uncertainty at the end of the military conflict.\textsuperscript{81}

Jefferson’s saw that geographical exploration might turn the attention of the fragmented American public towards the continental landscape of the west and facilitate the expansion and permanence of the nationstate. He seemed to understand this intuitively in the letter above to George Rogers Clark when confronting the lack of funding and institutional weaknesses that stood in the way of geographical reconnaissance. Nevertheless Jefferson continued to reach out to others in an effort to spearhead exploration into the interior of the continent. In this regard historian James Ronda has referred to Jefferson as an “exploration patron and planner.”\textsuperscript{82} It is instructive to view exploration as the mechanism by which Jefferson projected U.S. national expansion.

Another example of Jefferson’s geographical gaze is traced to his coming into possession of published narratives of James Cook’s fatal voyage of 1779—and in particular of an account written by one of Cook’s crewmen. The latter, \textit{A Journal of Captain Cook’s Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean}, was penned by the Connecticut-born John


Ledyard with whom Jefferson became friends while the two resided in Paris. Ledyard was a zealous global traveler relative to any era: living briefly among the Six Nations; encountering both Hawaiians and First Nation tribes in present-day Alaska; being arrested and expelled by Empress Catherine II during a campaign across Siberia; and eventually dying in Egypt in 1789 prior to commencing a privately (partially) funded expedition into the interior parts of Africa. The heavily-tattooed Ledyard spoke of the Pacific coast and access to the navigation of its interior in a detached and expertly way that seemed to affect Jefferson profoundly. Ledyard and Jefferson shared optimism on the existence of a navigable river that stretched deep into the continental interior from the Columbia River perhaps as far as Missouri. Jefferson lent Ledyard money on several occasions as the latter attempted to find traction for a continental land expedition across North America to confirm a technical record of the river’s course. While in Paris the two bonded in harmonious alarm as Louis XVI commissioned an expedition to be led by Jean François Lapérouse for the purpose of searching for this centuries-fabled Northwest Passage. As the mid-eighteenth century progressed travel accounts similar to

83 John Ledyard, *A Journal of Captain Cook’s Last Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, and in Quest of a North-West Passage* (Hartford, CT: Nathaniel Ba[xt]er?, 1783.


that of Cook and Ledyard circulated as popular print material. Writers spoke of astonishing commercial potential of trade in fur, a prospect that attracted widespread global interest and stimulated a spike in Euroamerican activity in the vast coastal region that stretches from present-day California to Alaska.\textsuperscript{86}

The priority that Jefferson placed on the collection of geographical information of North America, and on keeping abreast of news of global exploration is seen from his zealous search for textual material on the geography of North America.\textsuperscript{87} It is easy to dismiss book collecting as passionate curiosity or genteel hobby. Jefferson certainly did not view it in such terms. Book production is a form of cultural power. In some sense this activity can be seen as a fundamental building block of the nationstate. In fact at the conclusion of the War of 1812 Jefferson arranged to sell his library to Congress following the destruction of the capital at the hands of British troops. In another instance in his capacity as President of American Philosophical Society Jefferson attempted to spearhead continental geographical reconnaissance. In 1793 he wrote to Andre Michaux,


a fellow member of APS and prominent French botanist. The instructions to Michaux show continuous enthusiasm for the familiar objects of geography and zoology:

The chief objects of your journey are to find the shortest and most convenient route of communication between the US. and the Pacific ocean, within the temperate latitudes, and to learn such particulars as can be obtained of the country through which it passes, it’s [sic] productions, inhabitants and other interesting circumstances.

As a channel of communication between these states and the Pacific ocean, the Missouri, so far as it extends, presents itself under circumstances of unquestioned preference. It has therefore been declared as a fundamental object of the subscription, (not to be dispensed with) that this river shall be considered and explored . . .

When, pursuing these streams, you shall find yourself at the point from whence you may get by the shortest and most convenient route to some principal river of the Pacific ocean, you are to proceed to such river, and pursue it’s course to the ocean . . .

You will, in the course of your journey, take notice of the country you pass through, it’s general face, soil, rivers, mountains, it’s productions animal, vegetable, and mineral so far as they may be new to us and may also be useful or very curious; the latitude of places or materials for calculating it by such simple methods as your situation may admit you to practice, the names, numbers, and dwellings of the inhabitants, and such particularities as you can learn of their history, connection with each other, languages, manners, state of society and of the arts and commerce among them.

Under the head of Animal history, that of the Mammoth is particularly recommended to your enquiries. As it is also to learn whether the Lama, or Paca of Peru is found in those parts of this continent, or how far North they come.

When you shall have reached the Pacific ocean, if you find yourself within convenient distance of any settlement of Europeans, go to them, commit to writing a narrative of your journey and observations and take the best measures you can for conveying it by duplicates or triplicates thence to the society by sea . . .

It is strongly recommended to you to expose yourself in no case to unnecessary dangers, whether such as might affect your health or your personal safety: and to consider this not merely as your personal concern, but as the injunction of Science in general which expects it’s enlargement from your enquiries, and of the inhabitants of the US. in particular, to whom your Report will open new fields [sic] and subjects of Commerce, Intercourse, and Observation . . . 89

Although the Michaux expedition quickly fell apart these instructions shine a bright light on the importance of continental geography at the earliest moments of national history. That Jefferson should be simultaneously transfixed by mammoth bones and seek knowledge of a continental river with the potential of greatly enriching U.S. commerce need not surprise us. In Jefferson’s worldview imperial knowledge of both were seen as the means to stabilize the integrity of the nation and to express its essential cultural activity.

Jefferson’s next proposal for geographical reconnaissance turned out to be successful. As President he finally had the wherewithal to realize the dream of securing

geographical knowledge of the distant continental west. The immediate origins of what became the iconic cultural event known as the Lewis and Clark Expedition (referred to in state documents as Corps of Discovery) is traced to Jefferson’s alarm of reading the travel narrative of British explorer Alexander Mackenzie in 1802. Writing for a British audience Mackenzie gave policy recommendations and sketched a blueprint for a permanent settlement of the Columbia River basin, which he had reconnoitered from the Pacific coast. Speaking of the “discovery of a passage by sea, North-East or North-West from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean” Mackenzie (falsely) averred on:

The existence of a practical passage . . . through the continent . . . clearly proved [which] requires only the countenance and support of the British Government, to increase in a very ample proportion this national advantage and secure the trade of that country to its subjects. Experience, however, has proved that this trade, from its very nature, cannot be carried on by individuals. A very large capital, or credit, or indeed both, is necessary, and consequently an association of men of wealth to direct, with men of enterprise to act, in one common interest, must be formed on such principles. The Columbia is the line of communication from the Pacific Ocean, pointed out by nature, as the only navigable river in the whole extent . . . and . . . consequently, the most fit for colonization, and suitable to the residence of a civilized people. . . . By opening this intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and forming regular establishments through the interior, and at both extremes . . . the entire command of the fur trade of North America might be obtained, from latitude 48. North to the pole . . . To this may be added the fishing in both seas, and the markets of the four quarters of the globe.90

Mackenzie triggered an alarm in Jefferson similar in tone to that which bonded him with John Ledyard in Paris. Michaux, a botanist funded by the French republic, was a fellow member of the APS whom Jefferson trusted. Mackenzie, on the other hand funded by the Northwest Company, was seen as international rival for continental resources. Jefferson confronted the key tension between science as disinterested transnational ideal and as a tool of explicit economic gain for the nationstate. Functionally the subjects of geography and the economy become almost inseparable as technical and discursive instruments for the hegemonic projection of state power.

The Corps of Discovery is bound intimately to the Louisiana Purchase. Although proximately unconnected events they happened almost simultaneously and share political and cultural significance. In both cases the President needed the approval and financial support of Congress. In what was framed as a secret address to Congress Jefferson presented a case for the constitutionality of the state to act in an expansive capacity in the name of commerce and geography:

While other civilized nations have encountered great expense to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge, by undertaking voyages of discovery, and for other literary purposes, in various parts and directions, our nation seems to owe to the same object, as well as to its own interest, to export this, the only line of easy communications across the continent, and so directly traversing our own part of it. The interests of commerce place the

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principle object within the constitutional powers and care of Congress, and that it should incidentally advance the geographical of our own continent can not [sic] but be an additional gratification.92

While simultaneously trying to secure support from the legislature the President angled to convince the Spanish colonial state to issue a legal travel permit for the Corps, which was flatly rejected. Instead the Spanish issued a warrant for their arrest and sent out an unsuccessful military complement to apprehend the illegal trespassers. Meanwhile Congress consented to the President’s request for funding and voted to appropriate a sum of $2,500. As this was happening diplomatic negotiations in Paris between Jefferson’s delegation Marbois (yes, the very same) culminated in Napoleon’s decision to cede Louisiana—one of the most momentous business transactions in modern history. It seems almost bewildering that Jefferson used the same means to win a $2,500 Congressional stipend for scientific research that he used to gain their assent to transfer $15 million to the French state in return for their surrender of claims to sovereignty. Congress waffled on both—but ultimately a majority assented. Hence a decision was made that affected close to one million square miles of continental

92 Thomas Jefferson to Congress, 18 January 1803, Library of Congress digitized manuscript: http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtbib012083
topography that was already inhabited with nations and alternative visions of human
geographies.93

Despite local dissent Jefferson succeeded in providing strong textual and
technical methods for the state to project its power. In the process he articulated a subtly
hegemonic cultural notion of continental geography. Jefferson exercised leadership over
a federal state that was institutionally weak yet he articulated a clear definition of
geographical reconnaissance that outweighed dissent to territorial expansion of the
state apparatus. Samuel Latham Mitchill a congressman from New York and steadfast
political ally of the President expressed sentiments of romantic nationalism and cultural
assent to state power.94 As editor of Medical Repository Latham cast as irresistible
Louisiana’s “masses or virgin silver and gold that glitter in the veins of the rocks.”
Similarly on the floor of Congress he defended the Corps of Discovery in global and
statist terms: “A expedition of discovery up these prodigious streams and their branches
might redound as much to the honor, and more to the interest of our Government, than
the voyages by sea round the terraqueous globe have done for the polished nations of

93 D.W. Meinig, The Shaping of America Volume 2, 3–77; James E. Lewis Jr., The American
Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire,
1783–1829 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998); excellent scholarship on dissent is
found in: Peter J. Kastor, “Motives of Peculiar Urgency”; Peter J. Kastor, The Nation’s Crucible;
and Peter J. Kastor, “What are the Advantages of the Acquisition?”

94 Alan David Aberbach, In Search of an American Identity: Samuel Latham Mitchell,
Jeffersonian Nationalist (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).
Europe who authorized them.” The Louisiana territory contained “bisons, tigers, wolves, deer, . . . turkeys, geese, swans, ducks, . . . indigenous fruit trees and grape vines” that would enrich commerce and scientific knowledge of the United States beyond imagination. Mitchill insisted that Americans—and their central government—could never be “confined to their present limits . . . an assertion directly contrary to the powers inherent in independent nations and contradictory to the frequent and allowed exercise of that power in our own nation.”

As a legislator Mitchill voiced unbridled romantic nationalism and supported the state expansion of American culture.

Moreover the enormous cultural impact of Louisiana can be seen in popular historical imagination. It forms a significant aspect of how the state expressed hegemonic nationalism in its earliest form. Initially, newspapers throughout the transatlantic world commented on the expedition about which much was speculated but little known. Jefferson’s instructions to Meriwether Lewis reflect a great concern for the production and documentation of official state literature expected to follow. The

95 As cited in David Aberbach, In Search of an American Identity, 65–69.

96 As a representative and senator he launched a campaign to change the name of America to Fredon, claiming that “we cannot be national in feeling and in fact until we have a national name.” As cited in David Aberbach, In Search of an American Identity, 156; Christian Quendler, “(Bawl-) Fredonia: Renaming, Remapping and Retelling the United States in the Early Republic,” Amerikastudien / American Studies 61, no. 3 (2016): 291–314.

instructions are highly detailed. Remarkably Jefferson saddled the 33 members with trunks full of books—a traveling library—for cross reference guides to aid in documentation.

Upon completion of the 29 month continental trek the President turned his attention to meticulous collection of the objects, scientific literature, and material specimens that had been collected. He intended to disseminate the findings in an official textual publication. Yet this proved an exceedingly difficult undertaking. Problems included lack of funding, scale of difficulty in centrally gathering scattered materials and records, Jefferson’s exacting standards, and finally the project’s scope and massive ambition. Yet ultimately the official edition became almost irrelevant to the public. In the interim a host of unauthorized (from the perspective of the state) literary accounts appeared in the marketplace, the first of which was the edited diary of Corps member Patrick Gass. Scores and scores of narratives followed. Evidence suggests that

98 Thomas Jefferson to Meriwether Lewis, June 20, 1803; Letter press copy of manuscript letter, Library of Congress digitized manuscript: http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/lewisandclark/lewis-landc.html#57


accounts of the Lewis and Clark expedition for a time became a veritable sub-genre as
dubious accounts continued to multiply. The nationstate and a fragmented print
culture cohered as they promoted a shared narrative of national identification. Lewis
and Clark literature fixed continental space into a point of national allegiance. Despite
lack of centralized coordination, American landscape became coterminous with the
Pacific Ocean boundaries in popular literature thereby producing a powerful, enlarged
sense of spatial belonging at a national scale for readers.

Popular historians of the Corps of Discovery exhibit a romantic nationalism
similar in tone to that of Samual Latham Mitchill. The bicentennial of the expedition
stimulated a surge of interest. Leading documentarian Ken Burns demonstrates
romanticism in an abstract treatment of this as a great national moment:

They were beginning the most important expedition in American history; the United States’ first official exploration into unknown spaces; and a
glimpse into the future of their young nation; they would become the first United States citizens to experience the Great Plains; the immensity of its skies; the rich splendor of its wildlife; the harsh rigors of its winters; they would be the first American citizens to see the daunting peaks of the Rocky Mountains; the first to struggle over them; the first to cross the Continental Divide, to where the rivers flow west. And after encountering


cold, hunger, danger, and wonders beyond belief, they would become the first of their nation to reach the Pacific ocean by land.\textsuperscript{104}

In an even more vivid account, \textit{Scenes of Visionary Enchantment}, Dayton Duncan retraces the original route. In the book the writer pursues reenactment while reading the original journals by firelight as he treks back and forth between Saint Louis and Fort Clatsop, the terminus points of the original 29 month journey.\textsuperscript{105} Popular historians continue to express variations of romantic nationalism that can be traced back to the event itself.

In reference to the acquisition of geographical knowledge: it was part of a much larger historical process. The piecemeal and incomplete process of Euroamerican mapping was continuing as it always had. It is telling that in 1816 the Commonwealth of Virginia passed legislation “to provide an accurate chart of each county and a general map of the Territory of this Commonwealth.”\textsuperscript{106} Fifty-five years after Jefferson’s father had produced a map of Virginia the mapping process was not considered complete from the perspective of local governments. Yet relating to the matter of projecting state

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\textsuperscript{106} As cited in Donald Jackson, \textit{Thomas Jefferson and the Stony Mountains}, 293.
power: actual concrete knowledge mattered much less than the fact that the process of its making was never-ending. Of this the Corps of Discovery provides fine examples.

Here as members were searching for a tributary branch of the Columbia that emptied into the Pacific they interacted extensively with members of the Shoshone tribe in present day Montana:

The means I had of communicating with these people was by way of Drewyer who understood perfectly the common language of jesticulation or signs which seems to be universally understood by all Nations we have yet seen. it is true that this language is imperfect and liable to error but is much less so than would be expected. the strong parts of the ideas are seldom mistaken. I now prevailed on the Chief [Cameahwait] to instruct me with respect to the geography of this country. this he understood very cheerfully, by delineating the rivers on the ground. but I soon found that his information fell far short of my expectation or wishes. he drew the river on which we now are [sic] to which he placed two branches just above us, which he shewed me from the openings of the mountains were in view; he next made it discharge itself into a large river which flowed from the S.W. about ten miles below us, then continued this joint stream in the same direction of this valley or N.W. for one days march and then enclined it to the West for 2 more days march, here he placed a number of heels of sand on each side which he informed me represented the vast mountains of rock eternally covered with snow through which the river passed. that the perpendicular and even juting rocks closely hemned in the river that there was no possibilyte of passing along the shore; that the bed of the river was obstructed by sharp pointed rocks and the rapidity of the stream such that the whole surface of the river was beat into perfect foam as far as the eye could reach. that the mountains were all inaccessible to man or horse. he said that this being the state of the country in that direction that himself nor none of his nation had ever been further down the river than these mountains. I then inquired the state of the country on either side of the river but he could not inform me. he said there was an old man of his nation a days march below who could probably give me some information . . . . I next commenced my enquiries of the old man to
whom I had been refered for information . . . this he depicted with horrors and obstructions scarcely inferior to that just mentioned. . . . I now told Cameahwait that I wished him to speak to his people and engage them to go with me tomorrow to the forks of Jeffersons river.¹⁰⁷

Corps leaders ignored Shoshone advice. As self-identified Americans they relied on the Shoeshone as local agents and traded for information and vitals. Yet local geographical knowledge was for immediate survival only; it was displaced by imperial geography at the moment of contact. A local river had already been renamed; the local area had already been subordinated to a larger aim—that of being integrated into a larger continental framework that depended for its expression on the technical apparatus of the nationstate.

Yet the inherent contradictions of national belonging and of viable social alternative to national power was immediately apparent in the above scene: alternative notions of sovereignty, identity, and human geography were directly threatened by the project of American expansionism. Continental America was already successfully imagined; all that was needed was the presence of a state agency to enforce the sovereignty of the claim.

Although I have focused in this chapter on physical geography, Jefferson was unable to avoid talking about the subhuman communities that he viewed as widely scattered across both continental and local landscapes. Discussions of physical landscape blend into explications of race and civilization. Of course from the perspective of the present day, the perspective of human geography is anachronistic and was not part of the Enlightenment historiographical tradition in which Jefferson was embedded. Instead he very clearly imagined a nationstate that was racially homogenous. By banishing native inhabitants from their cultural geographical practices Jefferson bifurcates, or cuts them off from, their land. Physical geography is thus primarily abstract, thereby concealing its political character. Enslaved persons of African descent, whom Jefferson pondered as a separate biological species, were denied the opportunity to inhabit the same geographical, republican space. When freed from human bondage (at an unspecified point in the future) they would need to be recolonized in Africa, which was deemed a more appropriate physical and political climate for the race. First nations peoples, similarly, needed to surrender their cultural practices and assimilate to a system of agricultural and technological development or

face oblivion from the totalizing republican vision Jefferson projected onto the vast and indefinite continental landscape. He famously communicated that the continental landscape offered “room enough for our descendants to the thousandth and thousandth generation.” ¹⁰⁹ This theme found similar expression in nearly all of the popular geographies of nineteenth century America, which will be illustrated more clearly in chapter four.

In conclusion Jefferson’s geographical worldview can be sketched through concrete reference to three inter-related features: 1. a social and cultural context of Piedmont Virginia where exposure to conceptual geography exercised a formative influence over intellectual development; 2. production of and lifelong interest in geographical sciences; 3. the Corps of Discovery expedition and the Louisiana Purchase as successful attempt to implement and project state power.

As Jefferson grew older it becomes clear that real and perceived competition with less powerful nations and nation states radicalized his commitment to the expansion of the American state and its territory. ¹¹⁰ Steadfast optimism in the ideals of farming and science gave Jefferson the confidence to celebrate indefinite expansion of United States geographical activity across the continent. Natural objects such as rivers,


¹¹⁰ James E. Lewis Jr., The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood, 12–95.
mammoth bones, or the commercial fur trade of the Pacific Northwest were claimed as the legitimate items of the state’s domain. Hence Jefferson pursued a vision of imperial geography that greatly enhanced the cultural hegemony of the state in spite of its institutional and infrastructural weaknesses.\footnote{Thomas Jefferson, “First Inaugural Address,” National Archives: \url{https://jeffersonpapers.princeton.edu/selected-documents/first-inaugural-address-0}. Original Source: \emph{The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 33: 17 February to 30 April 1801 ed. Barbara B. Oberg (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2006), 148–52.}}

Jefferson projected a strong state and simultaneously disavowed its coercive potential based on theoretical grounding in republican and laissez faire principles. Yet in the reference to political unity he left out much more than he claimed: the vast majority of peoples on the continent who belonged to neither political party; those who neither understood nor had legal access to representation in the U.S. political system or its geographical definitions. The state here is supreme and the political parties vying for its reins are rhetorically collapsed in the idealism of national union. For Jefferson the state is the centripetal force to safeguard federal political union and territorial expansion. Thus Jefferson’s geographical ideology expresses what Mary Louise Pratt has referred to as the logic of “anti-conquest.”\footnote{Mary Louise Pratt, \emph{Imperial Eyes}, 13–84.}

Writing his old friend Marbois in 1817 Jefferson projected the size and strength of the state and its spatial dimensions:
when you witnessed our first struggles in the war of independance, [sic]
you little calculated, more than we did, on the rapid growth and
prosperity of this country; on the practical demonstration it was about to
exhibit, of the happy truth that Man is capable of self-government . . .

I have much confidence that we shall proceed successfully for ages to
come; and that, contrary to the principle of Montesquieu, it will be seen
that the larger the extent of country, the more firm it’ [sic] republican
structure, if founded, not on conquest, but in principles of compact &
equality. my hope of it’s duration is built much on the enlargement of the
resources of life going hand in hand with the enlargement of territory, and
the belief men are disposed to live honestly, if the means of doing so are
open.113

Thus continental size becomes the surest geographical safeguard for a “firm republican
structure;” simultaneously, this is a blueprint for a plan of action in which local
geographies are absorbed by a leviathan state in the name of nationalist imperial
geography.

113 Thomas Jefferson to Barbé Marbois, 14 June 1817, National Archives: http://
founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/03-11-02-0363. Original source: The Papers of
Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, vol. 11, 19 January to 31 August 1817, ed. J. Jefferson Looney
Chapter 3. “Things capable of sensible representation”: The Illustrated Geographies of Samuel Griswold Goodrich

The connection between Samuel Griswold Goodrich (1793–1860) and geography writing is not immediately obvious. All the same, when looking in the mirror for self-definition Goodrich pointed to geography as constituting one of the essential fibers of his life. This can be seen in some of the opening lines of his autobiography:

> It is said that geography and chronology are the two eyes of history: hence, I suppose that in any narrative which pretends to be in some degree historical, the when and where, as well as the how, should be distinctly presented. I am aware that a large part of mankind are wholly deficient in the bump of locality, and march through the world in utter indifference as to whether they are going north or south, east or west. With these, the sun may rise and set as it pleases, at any point of the compass; but for myself, I could never be happy, even in my bedroom or study, without knowing which way was north. . . . If, indeed, throughout my narrative, I habitually regard geography and chronology as essential elements of a story, you will at least understand that it is done by design.1

While the writer orients readers toward a conventional narrative approach, the convention entangles with a curious contrast made between a personal happiness that depends on knowledge of which way is north, and the masses who are accused of and pitied for “utter indifference” of a compass and the direction of the sun.

At the same time, Goodrich found satisfaction in having tutored millions in the “bump of locality” deemed so urgently lacking. A sentimental attachment to geography becomes clear when looking at his vast literary output. These considerations form the

basis of this chapter in which I connect Goodrich’s geographical writings to American nationalism. Goodrich was one of the most influential writers of the early national period. Near the end of his life, he calculated to have sold seven million books and still to be printing 300,000 annually. Overall he proudly claimed authorship over 170 discrete books, the bulk of which (116) carried the title *Peter Parley*. Moreover, his lone biographer notes that in the first decades of the twentieth century *Peter Parleys* were still being issued and estimates that twelve million copies were circulated. Caution is necessary for historians wishing to put such numbers into perspective and reading practices must be considered carefully. On the surface, the figures suggest astonishing appeal for children, schools, libraries, and aspiring middle class families more generally. Considering the total human population of the United States in 1790 is estimated at 3.9 million, it seems natural to point to the ubiquity and power of such texts. Goodrich’s innovative and highly marketable pedagogy became embedded in the national print culture of nineteenth century America.

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Geographies appear preponderately in a Goodrich bibliography. They exist alongside a sea of miscellaneous literature, both juvenile and adult, and notably a serialized magazine, *The Token and Atlantic Souvenir*, which along with several other literary annuals began to achieve national distribution in the 1820s—an unprecedented accomplishment in the history of American print. Clearly, Goodrich was an intensely active writer and publisher. Despite vast output historians have only begun to consider his importance in antebellum print culture.

The son of a Congregationalist minister, Goodrich was born in Connecticut amid an extended family containing “more than a dozen ministers of the Gospel.” Of his childhood landscapes he vividly recalled running through the hills and valleys of Ridgefield and early spelling lessons at the local schoolhouse. The memories of youth were layered with ghosts and legends of the American Revolution, the informal and formal monuments of which were scattered all around him. On the colonial Britain of

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his near-ancestors he concluded that “the love of England is not largely infused into our national character.”

After a brief experience as a soldier in the War of 1812, Goodrich’s search for a viable occupation led him to publishing in 1819, which coincided with membership in a literary society in Connecticut. He immediately gravitated toward children’s literature. He also took to reprinting and repackaging popular European writers. Although his publications sold, he struggled to turn a profit and suffered financial losses initially. In one particular blunder he failed to gain subscriptions, or buyers, for a collection of poetry penned by the famous nationalist painter John Trumbull. Early experience in publishing taught him of the public’s fickle literary tastes: “the market was overstocked, and the general appetite began to pall with a surfeit, when one of those sudden changes took place in the public taste, which resemble the convulsions of nature.” Nevertheless, Goodrich soon developed business acumen and talent for anticipating literary taste. He emerged at the vanguard of an

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10 William Charvat, *The Profession of Authorship in America, 1800–1870* (New York: Columbia University, 1992). Charvat has shown that public writing, when looked at through the lens of professionalization, was generally (if not notoriously) unprofitable for American writers in the first half of the nineteenth century.


intelligible cultural nationalism that appeared especially in schoolbooks and juvenile literature, part of what John C. Crandall called an “impressive campaign of information indoctrination of young Americans by their solicitous elders.”

Goodrich worked toward the construction of an intelligible nationalist pedagogy.

This leads to a corresponding question of how to measure the impact and power of public writing and individual writers. Literary critic Lawerence Buell has identified three focal points: “the socioeconomic level of literary publishing, the ideological level of literary values, and the aesthetic level of the literary artifacts themselves.”

Nevertheless, public writing and printing intersect messily at socioeconomics. Without question, in antebellum America book publishing was a checkered economic undertaking. Writers and publishers were often in financial straits even when their work sold well. All the same, we must be careful not to reduce literary success merely to the receipt of hard currency. The general unprofitability of public writing should not lead historians to the mistaken conclusion that it lacked power to transmit ideological

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14 Robert Darnton, “What is the History of Books?”


and cultural values to a national reading public. The power of the fragment can be overstated. National assertions appear over and over in domestically produced literature.\(^\text{17}\)

Distribution patterns might help to gauge the impact of writing—but even this is tricky. James Green has studied the “reckless overproduction of popular books” in the early national period and suggested deliberate oversupply as a primary cause of the checkered profitability that characterized the industry.\(^\text{18}\) Therefore, books printed are neither equivalent to books sold nor to books read. Overprinted books are nevertheless significant since printers consistently targeted and confidently projected a national audience into an expansionist future. Besides, the explosion of book production in the postcolonial period is indisputable, true of both rural and urban locations.\(^\text{19}\)

Luckily, historians have quantified print as a process of production. An empirical scale gives some indication of fragmented print culture but also of the print agents who, in the aggregate, were able to circulate texts to mass society. In 1790, for instance, New


\(^{18}\) James N. Green, “The Rise of Book Publishing,” 75; printing itself was the least expensive aspect of bookmaking; whereas binding, engraving, illustration, and paper costs accounted for dearer expenses.

York had four towns or cities with printing offices in operation; this can be contrasted with 94 towns or cities by 1840. In total, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, and Carolina, had fifteen towns with operating printers in 1790, which can be compared to the figure of 165 in 1840. Additionally, owing to the general pattern of western expansion, Illinois, a jurisdiction that did not legally exist in the eyes of the federal government in 1790, had no known printers in operation as late as 1810; whereas by 1840 there were 27 communities in Illinois with printing offices.20

The proliferation of localized, small-scale operations seems to lead to the dominant interpretation that weighs the fragment as a countervailing force to a coherent national print culture. Similarly, corresponding claims deemphasize print nationalism and point instead to the potential of economic and social reform as the basis for national cohesion.21 In the case of schoolbooks and children’s literature there is a clear ideological imperative of social control; but this exists alongside the rhetoric and prominent motifs of reform and emancipation. Does it necessarily follow that the fragment tends toward social democracy and avoids the trappings of consolidated national power structures?

20 All figures come from: Jack Larkin, “‘Printing is something every village has in it,’” 147.

21 The reform thesis is perhaps most elegantly expressed in Daniel Walker Howe, What Hath God Wrought.
Before addressing this question I would like to note the research of Katherine Pandora, which places Goodrich and other scientific literature in the context of an emerging “republic of science.” Pandora is focused on democratic and reformist motifs, which she argues formed the basis of a campaign of mass cultural education:

Scientific education was . . . not premised on inculcating deference to learned authorities but was instead informed by a republican ethos that presumed the intellectual capacity of self-motivated learners to work independently toward goals of their own choosing. This cultural latitudinarianism on scientific topics is one that would find increasing disfavor among professionalizing scientific elites in the latter half of the nineteenth century. They would argue that popular approaches to science needed to be brought into closer alignment with the values and priorities that they identified as primary, particularly a more restrictive vision of intellectual authority compatible with the hierarchical norms of elite science current in Britain and Europe.

Pandora’s interpretation aligns with recent scholarship. She is correct in pointing out the emergence of professional, orthodox science, which slowly began to replace the amateur practices that characterized natural history. Nevertheless, she overlooks the prescriptive ideological mandates within the knowledge structures of the scientific literature, which developed into a powerful form of cultural authority. The possession of such knowledge was increasingly marketed and propagated to the widening middle

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22 Katherine Pandora, “The Children’s Republic of Science in the Antebellum Literature of Samuel Griswold Goodrich and Jacob Abbott.”


classes to purchase and a progressive aspiration for marginalized groups to access. With this in mind, Pandora’s thesis is fundamentally Whiggish, since reform is seen as laying the groundwork for the future alleviation of social inequality.25

Perhaps more importantly, Pandora’s interpretation runs parallel to that of distinguished Harvard professor Philip Fisher, whose confusing thesis finds similarly populist tendencies at the heart of American literary romanticism and its flowering print culture.26 Fisher argues that American nationalism differed from European versions in important ways since Americans had no Volk, lacked common identity, geography, language, and even a “culture-state.”27 Yet Fisher offers no empirical evidence—and makes slight and impressionistic references to European history and its nationalisms. Not surprisingly, Fisher dismisses cultural nationalism. Instead he offers a strange admixture of anti-Marxism and economic determinism. I will quote Fisher’s terms of reference in some length since his argument relates directly to the dialectic of my introduction. To begin, he gives a bewildering definition of social space—here numbered to match the author’s rendering:

1. “Social space is atomistic and cellular and therefore [sic] makes possible representation in both the political and aesthetic sense because it permits sampling.

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2. It is unbounded. Open to immigration and equally to expatriation or internal mobility—that continuation of immigration into later generations—it has no natural or final size.

3. The social space is transparent and intelligible. First of all this is true because of its uniformity. . . . This is one meaning of what many European travelers noticed as ‘democratic manners.’

4. Another way to say [what has been said in the first three] is that all social acts are part of a code. They are not given in nature. But where there is only one code there is the feeling not of codes but of life itself. . . . such a Cartesian space provides for no observers, for no oppositional positions. There are no outsiders. Everyone present is already a member. . . . No one is able to reflect from an external point of view on society itself. There cannot, then, in the modern period, be a strong and effective Marxist reflection of the society, challenging it in the name of an as yet unrealized alternative to itself.”

There is troubling ideological concealment in Fisher’s spatial ontology, which lacks a critically engaged political perspective.28 As space is imagined purely at an abstract or philosophical level, the approach does not appear to be empirical. Anti-Marxism persists as we are told that American common identity was forged from “a homogenous cellular . . . free-enterprise capitalism . . . obsessed with production rather than accumulation.”29 Thus social inequality and slavery are understood not as ideological negation but cast as “damaged space” that must be repaired through efforts

28 Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man.

of reform, a theme developed in reference to American literary romanticism and its print culture.

The state is nowhere to be found in Fisher’s thesis, which puts national reform at the forefront of American literature. Actually, such a perspective ignores social geography. National space, although purely imaginative, reached the level of scientific validity due in large part to the success of discursive geographies, Thomas Jefferson’s extension of state power, and the various pedagogical strategies associated with national literacy. Moreover, the state enforced this geographical vision through the creation of a coherent and highly functional legal superstructure. Hence, the nationstate’s claim to unbroken sovereignty resides in the clear and simple expression of its geographical territory. Physical landscapes are lent both stability and transcendence as they are coordinated and integrated into a fixed visual iconography and brought into popular consciousness through print capitalism. The space to which Fisher refers is not a democratic space, but a nationalized space that finds its fullest

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expression in the explosion of geographical discourse and in the exploration of geographical belonging and geographies of scale.\textsuperscript{32}

Goodrich’s literature is a strong and clear example of how geographical nationalism masqueraded as disembodied scientific knowledge. It is easy to overlook the effects that mass consumption of this type of literature had on basic practices of national literacy; it is also easy to lose track of their ideological concealment when the presentation of knowledge seems so simple and incontrovertible. This may seem very abstract, but reading practices, which are concrete, suggest the texts seriously contributed to the day-to-day knowledge formation of millions of children readers.

Often when literary scholars refer to Goodrich it is to make a connection to his employment of Nathaniel Hawthorne as a ghostwriter—the former a parenthesis in a larger discussion on the latter’s commentary on the profession of writing and authorship.\textsuperscript{33} In fact, Hawthorne and his sister were the primary authors of \textit{Peter Parley’s}

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\begin{itemize}
\item Hsuan Hsu, \textit{Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth Century American Literature} (New York: Cambridge University, 2010).
\end{itemize}
Universal History on the Basis of Geography (1837–38), which was reprinted widely for half a century.

Figure 5. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Universal History (1838)

Figure 6. Unauthorized version of Goodrich’s Parley that appeared in London c. 1830s
Hawthorne complained of the paltry wage he received for what amounted to a best seller but this complaint was a larger part of his ongoing exploration of professional authorship and the art of writing. At the same time, strained relationships between publishers and poorly compensated writers were not uncommon, and perhaps even quite ordinary. Such a dynamic characterized a growingly competitive print culture in which the diversity of creative content was simultaneously expanding into pockets of economic integration and also competition. Goodrich’s view on the relationship between publisher and writer was that of a banal misanthropy: “The relation of author to publisher is generally regarded as that of the cat and the dog, both greedy of the bone, and inherently jealous of each other. The authors have hitherto written the accounts of the wrangles between these two parties, and the publishers have been traditionally gibeted as a set of mean, mercenary wretches, coining the heart’s blood of genius for their own selfish profits.” Nevertheless, we are told that if the truth were to surface, “it would appear that while there were claws on one side there were teeth on the other.” This is the view of an experienced writer, editor, and serious investor of book publishing.

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Goodrich’s success reflects growing middle class consumerism. The print industry saw a spike in available print material for middle class readers and a growing availability of books. By 1840, 90% of adult whites (gender inclusive) in the United States were literate. These numbers differed by region and by race—the north having higher rates than the south; and blacks, both enslaved and free, having much lower rates than that of whites. Illiteracy, and its surrounding social inequality, was a major impediment to participation in civil society. Beyond the inherent social inequality that existed surrounding reading practices, Goodrich was at the crest of a huge rise in the sheer quantity of books mass marketed to national readers, of which schoolbooks were foremost. Consequently, the rise in population, and the corresponding demand for new schools saw the emergence of a robust industry of American books aimed at elementary education.

Goodrich described a transformation over the course of his life from book paucity to book surfeit: “it is difficult now, in this era of literary affluence, almost amounting to surfeit, to conceive of the poverty of books suited to children in the days


of which I write.” Goodrich’s recollection is of course singular. Highly active in the print industry, he viewed the relative paucity of books from his childhood through the lens of mass commercial publication. Nonetheless, the conclusion is reasonable and empirical, especially when viewed as a transition from colonial to national. It is surfeit, or hyper oversupply of books, that historians of the fragment have not explained adequately. In other words, we should be careful not to set up a false binary between a fragmented print industry and its aggregate power to mobilize, manufacture, and even imagine proliferating “scales of identification” at the national level. It is in this context of prolific production that Goodrich employed a stable of ghost writers to keep up with the demand for Peter Parley, which were released at a steady pace for more than half a century. At this point, I would like to illustrate and also explore possible reasons for the immense popularity of Peter Parley.

To begin, these volumes were at once innovative and at once rooted in longstanding traditions. The most immediate comparison is to Jedidiah Morse. Unlike Morse who targeted both juvenile and mature audiences, Goodrich’s Parley texts were aimed squarely at juveniles. They also depart significantly from Morse especially with respect to the use of an innovative narrative strategy that features the narrator’s world

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travels as a device to unveil miscellaneous curiosities and objects to readers. Another key difference is that Goodrich’s literature is overflowing with illustrations. Indeed text and image are simultaneous and often of equal importance as they function as transmission vehicles for geographical literacy and for alphabetization of various general categories of national knowledge. In terms of similarity, the national purpose is clear in both Morse’s geographies and Goodrich’s. So while both are dedicated to a process of alphabetization, the immaturity of the audience led to a much more frivolous and playful tone in the latter’s work.41

As mentioned, geography tropes are featured extensively and preponderately in Goodrich’s catalogue. At the same time, we should note that geography functioned as a baseline from which to explore a variety of related themes and knowledge structures. A short list of non-pirated editions will offer some sense of what Goodrich was up to in this regard as they fall under the umbrella of children’s scientific education more generally: Peter Parley’s Method of Telling About Geography to Children (1830); Peter Parley’s Book of Curiosities: Natural and Artificial (1832); The Child’s Book of American Geography (1837); Peter Parley’s Book of the United States: Geographical, Political and Historical with Comparative Views of Other Countries (1837); A Pictorial Geography of the World (1840); Peter

41 Patricia Crain, The Story of A.
Parley’s Illustrations of Commerce (1849); Peter Parley’s Geography for Beginners (1850). We also find a literary campaign known as Parley’s Cabinet, a series consisting of such titles as Peter Parley’s Wonders of the Earth, Air, and Sky; Peter Parley’s Illustrations of the Animal Kingdom: Beasts, Birds, Fishes, Reptiles and Insects; and Wonders of Geology. Thus were geology, zoology, geography wedded together with a narrative sense of adventure and travel and a visual sense of sensation.

Figure 7. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Illustrations of the Animal Kingdom (1844)
Concurrently, Goodrich published juvenile adventure novels, of which perhaps *The Adventures of Dick Boldhero* (1845) and *The Truth-Finder; or, the Story of Inquisitive Jack* (1850) seem fairly representative.\(^{44}\)

\(^{44}\) Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *Dick Boldhero; Or, A Tale of Adventures in South America by the Author of Peter Parley’s Tales* (Philadelphia: Sorin and Ball, 1845); Samuel Griswold Goodrich, *The Truth-Finder; or the Story of Inquisitive Jack* (Hartford: H.H. Hawley & Co., 1850).
Figure 8. Samuel Goodrich’s *The Truth Finder* (1850)
In the former, the penniless young protagonist from Connecticut finds himself in the Caribbean searching for information on this disappearance of his uncle, who readers come to find was a victim of unscrupulous financiers. Following a series of clues, young Boldhero finds himself trekking through the exotic landscapes of South America—encountering earthquakes, volcanoes, strange peoples and other-worldly animals. After a string of amazing coincidences and near-death experiences, Boldhero locates his uncle whose name he is able to clear from the opprobrium of illicit piracy. Dick Boldhero gives some indication of the versatility of geography as a pedagogical tool.

More generally, a challenge that arises from tracking Goodrich’s juvenile literature comes from the extent to which Peter Parley was pirated in the transatlantic world. This led to rampant piracy on the periphery where copyright justice was less likely to be invoked. While aesthetics of book production on the frontier may have paled when compared to that of Boston, Philadelphia, or New York, just the same, copyright laws often failed to deter unauthorized printings. This menaced Goodrich a

45 Meredith McGill, American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting. McGill explores the common practices of reprinting and piracy. It is worth noting however that she avoids the word itself: “I use the term reprinting not piracy in order to emphasize the fact that the republication of foreign works and particular kinds of domestic texts was perfectly legal; it was not a violation of law or custom, but a cultural norm. Indeed, the proliferation of . . . affordable editions . . . was considered by many to be proof of democratic institutions’ remarkable powers of enlightenment. Although there was substantial domestic opposition to the culture of reprinting, particularly as the literary nationalist movement gained strength . . . American defenders of the reprint trade wielded considerable political power, holding off an international copyright agreement until the late nineteenth century.” 3–4.
great deal and a substantial part of his autobiography is devoted to recounting legal battles in pursuit of copyright justice. Thus we see pirated copies of *Dick Boldhero* and *Inquisitive Jack*. Similarly we see pirated copies of *Parley* published in London in which the narrator witnesses the crowning of Queen Victoria and lavishly praises the royal family.

Figure 9. *Parley* unauthorized and re-appropriated: *Peter Parley’s Visit to London, during the Coronation of Queen Victoria* (1839)

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47 *Peter Parley’s Visit to London During the Coronation of Queen Victoria* (London: Charles Tilt, 1839).
In one such case, Goodrich pursued copyright justice in London, but failed to receive personal satisfaction. He recounted a face-to-face conversation with bookseller John Darton, whose perfidy he threatened to expose publicly to an acquaintance at the London Times: “I will give you fifty pounds to do it,” said Darton. “How so?” said I. “Because you will sell my books without the trouble of my advertising them.” “But it will ruin your character.” “Poh! London is too big for that!”

Such an exchange indicates significant differences in the print cultures of metropolitan London and regional New England, a point which will be developed below. Meanwhile, we also find unauthorized *Parleys* appearing in Germany.


Figure 10. Parley Parley’s Erzählungen (1845)
Widespread mimesis, if not piracy, suggests a strong popular appeal among general readers for the innovative narrative structure. In London editions, Parley is still the roving American amusing children with witty anecdotes. In these volumes, Parley maintained his American identity, thus acting as a traveling mirror for various national audiences.

In an important sense Goodrich’s books are rooted in longstanding print traditions—yet at the same time it is reasonable to see both continuity and divergence. In a basic sense, printed knowledge of the physical world and of God are inseparable in the print culture of early modern Europe. For centuries spiritual literacy ran parallel to basic educational literacy, which together formed the bedrock of children’s pedagogy. Similarly, Christianity undergirded the acquisition of literacy throughout the colonial period. In New England, the primary vehicle of transmission was *New England Primer*, which historians consider a marvelously successful, and very seriously minded, literacy campaign.50 David Watters puts *Primer* reading practices into perspective:

The reader is encouraged to enter into a ‘dialogue’ with the text. In a catechism’s system of question and response, the knowledge of the answer is presupposed by the questioner, and the respondent’s answer validates the expectations of the questioner; each member of the dialogue internalizes the whole discourse . . . ‘The child is repeatedly told to place these texts in the heart where they may be

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read by God. In a sense, the parental speaker is internalized by the child who encloses an authoritative text in the heart and then “publishes” it in prayers and holy behavior.\textsuperscript{51}

The Primer has antecedents in Reformation politics.\textsuperscript{52} Reformation print culture marked an important shift away from the supernatural iconography associated with the pedagogy of the Catholic Church. Specifically, historians credit John Amos Comenius with spearheading an important shift in the reading practices of educational print. Comenius, who was widely followed, viewed the alphabet as a fundamental ordering tool, used to instruct basic literacy in the dual knowledge structures of God and of nature. That is, schoolbooks treated God and nature under the umbrella of science and as fundamentally parallel. The inseparability of God and the natural world held steadfast throughout nineteenth century American schoolbooks.\textsuperscript{53}

At the same time, there is frivolity in Goodrich’s content relative to the perspective of predestination Calvinism. Parley articulates a markedly softer, less severe Protestant ethic than that which dominated New England’s children’s literature throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The tone resembles more the practical logic and whimsy of Benjamin Franklin than it does the earnestness and

\textsuperscript{51} David Watters, “‘I spake as a child,’” 197, 203.

\textsuperscript{52} Patricia Crain, \textit{The Story of A}, 19–39.

\textsuperscript{53} Ruth Miller Elson, \textit{Guardians of Tradition}, 15–62.
spiritual agony and exultation of Jonathan Edwards.\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Parley} often voices a sense of wonder and curiosity for exotic landscapes and histories. The narrator’s world journeys allow the audience to follow a circuitous traveller who wears many different hats.

Exploring global geography is paramount, and moral exhortation subordinate; \textit{Parley} is cast as a neutral observer of the whole wide world; nothing is excluded. At times he preaches a soft Christian doctrine but immersion in the literature proves Goodrich and his staff wanted to entertain and excite the readers. Parley is primarily a nationalist historical geographer who explores the curiosities of distant continents. The upshot is a national definition: American storybook historical geography for children.

I consider narration the foremost reason for the literary heights and fame of the quasi-cartoonish Parley, which surpassed that of its creator as a cultural icon. The innovative narrative structure centered on the voice of Parley. Goodrich was proud of Parley’s prominence. He recalled visiting a small schoolhouse:

I found a girl, some eighteen years old, keeping a ma’am school for about twenty scholars, some of whom were studying Parley’s Geography . . . . None of them, not even the school-mistress, had ever heard of me. . . . As to Peter Parley, whose geography they were learning—they supposed him some decrepit old gentleman hobbling about on a crutch, a long way off, for whom, nevertheless, they had a certain affection, inasmuch as he had made geography into a story-book. The frontispiece-picture of the old fellow, with his gouty foot in a chair, threatening the boys that if they touched his tender toe, he would tell them no more stories—

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secured their respect, and placed him among the saints in the calendar of their young hearts. Well, thought I, if this goes on I may yet rival Mother Goose!\textsuperscript{55}

There is ample evidence that Goodrich considered the narrative device his greatest achievement. Although entirely fictional, ingenuous children may have mistaken Parley for an actual man.\textsuperscript{56} He was often depicted as a gout-stricken, white-haired Bostonian who nevertheless led children on excursions. He exists textually as a sort of intrusive tour guide; his lessons mix with pithy stories of his world travels that are liberally represented with global spaces, places, peoples, and objects of culture and nature.

As seen in figures 11–14 the narrator is shown instructing the children who have gathered around him. In figure 11 children are seen in Parley’s drawing room as he sternly warns them to be mindful of his gouty leg, a condition resulting from the strain of lifelong travel. Figure 12 is a separate text released in the same year that shows a dapper Parley, cane in hand, with an idyllic, presumably, New England landscape in the background. Figure 13, from several years later, shows Parley in a horse and carriage with a small cadre of children whom he is leading about the environs of Boston while regaling them anecdotes of its history and the features of its landscape. Finally Figure 14


\textsuperscript{56} Daniel Roselle, \textit{Samuel Griswold Goodrich}, 40–41.
shows Parley leading a small group of children in a hot-air balloon, which affords the small class a bird’s eye view of the surrounding countryside.

Figure 11. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Method of Telling about Geography to Children (1830)
Figure 12. Samuel Goodrich’s *The Tales of Peter Parley about America* (1830)
Figure 13. Samuel Goodrich’s *The Child’s Book of American Geography* (1837)
Parley seems to have rapidly ascended to the status of cultural icon. By 1837 the popularity was evident as Goodrich found it feasible to adopt a tone of old familiarity:

I suppose all my little readers have heard of Peter Parley. He lives in Boston, and though he is old, gray and lame, yet he is very cheerful, and very fond of children; he loves to have them come see him, and takes great delight in telling them stories. He has been about the world a great deal; sometimes he has travelled by foot, and sometimes he has sailed in a ship over the sea to distant countries. . . . He is very fond of telling about towns and cities, and rivers and islands, and mountains and lakes, and the blue seas upon which ships sail. . . . He will sometimes, lead the children about Boston, lame as he is, and explain to them everything they see. Sometimes he gets into a wagon, with two horses and four or five children, and goes all around the country of Boston. When he gets upon a hill, he shows the children the rivers, towns, bays, and all the other things which are to be seen, he tells them the names of all these objects; this, Mr. Parley calls teaching Geography.57

The narrator drew his ethos from the extensive nature of his imaginary world travels. He notified children that he had visited every corner of the world and was full of first-hand observations of its physical landscapes, peoples, cultures, histories, and animals. Parley played the role of an expert, avuncular figure. The pieces of knowledge were at once encyclopedic but also unorthodox. Fact and fiction mix to such an extent that they become indistinguishable from each another. In many cases physical landscapes are defined for the children. Here a volcano is taught to the reader: “The eruption of a volcano is a most frightful and majestic phenomenon. The first signs which announce that the invisible combat of the elements has already commenced, are violent movements; which shake the earth afar off, prolonged bellowings and subterranean thunders, which roll in the sides of the agitated mountain.”

The child’s excitement—whether fear or curiosity, would be aroused by such a description. The excitement in the description and the beauty and considerable intricacy of the accompanied image are outstanding features of the text. In another lesson, readers are taught about geographical distribution of the world’s animals. Take for instance the cases of the lion and of the tiger. Readers are shown a lion and told it is only found in Africa:

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LESSON FIFTH.

HOW THE ANIMALS AND VEGETABLES OF COUNTRIES DIFER.

1. Not only do the people differ in different countries, but the animals also are very various.

2. Horses, dogs, cats, mice, and some other animals, are found in almost all parts of the world. But here! is a picture of the Lion, which is found only in Africa.

Figure 15. Samuel Goodrich’s *Peter Parley’s Method of Telling about Geography to Children* (1830)
16. Africa is the country which negroes came from, originally, and where the leopard and ostrich are found. Here is a picture of a leopard, that came from Africa.
One might see this as a harmless half-truth. It hardly seems worth pointing out that lions were in addition to Africa loosely scattered across South Asia and Eurasia. But the ideological concealment is profound. In fact, it exists alongside other claims like the following: The seeming randomness of the questions (“Where did negroes come from,
originally? Where are the leopard and ostrich found?”) disappears in the context of nationalism and state building. Ostensibly harmless knowledge about the relative distribution of animal species across a continent distracts the reader from anthropological diversity and how it was spread across different environments.

In fact, geography is obliterated. Instead we find dangerous knowledge structures resulting from the collapsing of categories like zoology, geography, and race. In fact race became fixed in American textbooks beginning in the 1820s, a highly simplified, but logical extension, of the transatlantic natural history discussions of Buffon, Jefferson, and Humboldt referred to in the previous chapter.59

Parley’s description of European cultures now might seem laughable but was likely considered authoritative as elementary knowledge:

France is a fine country and has many vineyards, which produce great quantities of grapes, of which wine is made. The French are a very gay and polite people. Holland, or the Netherlands, is a very flat country, and was a great part of it once covered by the sea. The people are called Dutch. They are great smokers. . . Portugal is a small kingdom, but produces grapes, oranges, lemons, and other fine fruit. . . . The people are cheerful and fond of dancing. Spain is a fine country, but the people are not happy on account of their bad government . . . The people of Spain are said to be revengeful; but I believe this is the character only of some who live in the large cities. . . . Italy is a delightful country, but the people are poor and weak. . . . Turkey is inhabited by a very singular people, called Turks. They wear turbans instead of hats,

and loose robes instead of coats. They do not believe in the bible . . . They do not generally use knives and forks, but take their meat in their fingers.  

In rapid and convenient succession nations are reduced to simple geographics; cultural traits are simplified and children are able to consume them through simple rote memorization. Zoology, racial biology, and nationalized historical geography blend together as simple blocks of juvenile knowledge. The knowledge is facile, but unlikely to be questioned as unsuitable for children. In another volume we are told: “In some countries people are white, in some yellow, and in some brown. In some the people are wild and savage, in some they are kind and gentle.”

The aesthetics and illustrations of Goodrich’s work compared to those of the popular Morse geographies is qualitatively marked. In fact, compared to Morse, the illustrations included in Goodrich’s work are significantly more beautiful and intricate. Visual verisimilitude became an ideal for American, and transatlantic natural history writing, which shows the overlap of artistic, scientific, and state building practices. Charles Wilson Peale and James John Audubon were at the forefront of the illustration of nature in America. Both were fundamentally Linnaean, and the natural history


62 Barbara Maria Stafford, *Voyage Into Substance*; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*. 
images produced in Audubon’s texts are exquisitely beautiful. At the same time, they were prohibitively expensive and sold horribly commercially, suggesting that the success of such a project be seen in terms of its cultural hegemony. Goodrich’s success, on the other hand, reflects the introduction of technical improvements that made the printing of images more affordable in terms of technology, equipment, and material production.

Goodrich’s autobiography is a revealing source since he elaborates extensively on editorial and authorial practices. Visual representation figured prominently in his conception of education: “I sought to teach history and biography and geography . . . by a large use of the senses, and especially by the eye. . . . I selected as subjects for my books things capable of sensible representation, such as familiar animals, birds, trees, and of these gave pictures as a starting point. Before I began to talk of a lion, I gave a picture of a lion—my object being to have the child start with a distinct image.” The term sensible has more than one possible meaning. It may refer to any image which is

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practical to display; but, it may also refer to the ways in which mental images and impressions become fixed in a child’s mind, a primary concern of Western educational psychology since at least the late seventeenth century. Goodrich’s selection criteria for content was extremely broad. Hence, any object might be reduced to that which is sensible and appear in a highly simplified way. For instance children were told that: “The world, you know, is round like a ball, or like the moon, and people go over its surface and pass round it, just as flies creep round an apple or a pumpkin.” Thus the whole globe is impressed upon the child to be grasped in its entirety. The literal planet is neatly abstracted as a physical object; it is stripped of its complexity as it is reduced to a mere apple. This conflated metaphor is powerful for what it lacks and for what it claims.

Goodrich elaborated further on the educational philosophy undergirding Parley:

I first formed the conception of the Parley Tales—the general idea of which was to make nursery books reasonable and truthful, and thus to feed the young mind upon things wholesome and pure, instead of things monstrous, false, and pestilent: that we should use the same prudence in giving aliment [sic] to the mind and soul, as to the body; and as we would not give blood and poison as food for the latter we should not administer cruelty and violence, terror and impurity, to the other. In short, that the elements of


67 Samuel Griswold Goodrich, Peter Parley’s Method of Telling About Geography to Children (Boston: Carter & Hendee, 1830), 54.
nursery books should consist of beauty instead of deformity, goodness instead of wickedness, decency instead of vulgarity." 68

Thus Goodrich cast the purpose of writing Parley in a familiar Christian tone—setting his work up in contradistinction to the “nursery books,” or basic books of literacy that began to appear in seventeenth century London. 69 However, there is a disjuncture in the content itself for it does not resemble the apocalyptic severity of his Puritan ancestors. Adventure, excitement, curiosity (at times innocent, at times morbid) abound in Parley. Goodrich as editor in chief seemed less than concerned about the increasing frequency of such tropes. The moral exhortations are almost like background noise in the larger exploration of the wide world of curiosities. On one hand, this reflects a shift in the print culture of New England more generally, which by 1820 was experiencing an increasing liberalization of its strict Calvinist orthodoxy. 70 Similarly this is clearly a period of historical transition and one where cultural authority came to be located in a diverging range of texts. Goodrich seized on and serialized adventure as a narrative device and was able to turn it into a highly marketable commodity while retaining the overarching framework of a familiar Calvinist worldview. Calvinism began to accommodate entertainment, spectacle, and exoticism.


70 Lawrence Buell, New England Literary Culture, 44–55.
Goodrich developed the idea that the British writer Hannah More was his primary inspiration and “one of the most remarkable women that had ever lived.” He refers to her *Moral Repository* as the first book that he read “with real enthusiasm” as a child, which later “awakened [his] mind to some comprehension of the amazing scope and power of books.” More’s inexpensive and widely circulated literature was meant to reform the literate poor; her marvelous success lent her celebrity status in the Atlantic world. Susan Pedersen has aptly referred to More’s anti-Jacobin literature as “a broad evangelical assault on late-eighteenth century popular culture,” which also provided “a model for the construction of a new universal Christian culture.” What made More unique, however, was that she adopted many of the same “forms, writing styles, and even distribution channels of popular literature.” More’s tales also involve a highly active narrative presence, similar to those of Goodrich; although, More’s narrators are multiple and nonrecurring.

Goodrich’s attachment to More was so pronounced that he made it a point to visit her when he traveled abroad for the first time in 1823. More gave Goodrich a sense

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of the “vast field that was open” in America in the realm of children’s literature. He considered her a bulwark against the spread of godless Jacobinism: “she was one of the chief instruments by which the torrent of vice and licentiousness, emanating from the French Revolution and inundating the British Islands, was checked and driven back: she was even, to a great extent, the permanent reformer of British morals and manners.” More’s genius, we are told, was her discovery that

truth could be made attractive to simple minds. Fiction was . . . her vehicle, but it was not her end. The great charm of these works that captivated the million was their verisimilitude. Was there not, then, a natural relish for truth in all minds, or at least was there not a way of presenting it, which made it even more interesting than romance? Did not children love truth? If so, was it necessary to feed them on fiction? Could not history, natural history, geography, biography, become the elements of juvenile works . . .?

From here, Goodrich developed a writing structure whereby reading and travel form the basis of a system designed to compartmentalize basic global knowledge. Goodrich imagines and addresses a national audience—nationalism is at the forefront of his geographical taxonomy. Continents, heavily filtered through ideology, are reduced to their simplest expressions, illustrated by the following example that views the economic resources of South America in starkly commercial terms: “South America is a

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very extensive country, with very rich mines of gold and silver, but it is an unsettled state. The people, for many years, have been involved in war, and they are very far from being as happy as the people of the United States. . . . The inhabitants are principally Spanish and Portuguese . . . . There are, beside, many native Indians in South America . . . . South America produces a great deal of silver and gold; also diamonds and other precious stones. Diamonds are washed from the sand that comes down from the mountains.” Accompanying this text, which reduces in several paragraphs an entire continent to a few simple features, is the image “Negro Slaves Washing for Diamonds.”

Figure 18. Samuel Goodrich’s Peter Parley’s Method of Telling about Geography to Children (1830)
Parleys enjoyed such success that they grew to annoy at least one reviewer from Debow's Review, a prominent southern, proslavery scientific periodical of the antebellum period:

Our school books . . . should be written, prepared and published by southern men. Who more capable of moulding the opinions and instilling proper principles into the minds of youth than such as recognize the same interests and feelings with their fathers and brothers . . . Yet, where do we procure almost every school book that has ever been in use since the days when our grand-parents took their first lessons in spelling? From the north. Whence do these numerous officious and sociable peddlers of Peter Parley’s Pictorial Histories of the United States and the inexpressible horrors of slavery and slave holders hail? From New York and Boston, or perchance a little further down east! 78

According to the writer, New York, Boston, and Washington D.C., are exerting unwanted influence on his region. He points a finger at Peter Parley for its unwanted and obtrusive cultural activism. Hence the iconography of Parley existed even where it was unwelcome. The southern reviewer both detected and resented the ideology in Parley and similar works, which at their core, were nationalist and in opposition to the extension and perpetuation of slavery. There is also a sense of these schoolbooks as insidious commercial objects. Nevertheless, the frustration of the writer comes primarily from the ubiquity of the juvenile literature from the north. The popularity and voluminous production of such texts were at such levels that they saturated the national print culture of the antebellum United States. The reviewer resented the ideological 

concealment—in this case, the anti-slavery platform from the northern publication. He resented the encroachment of the nation and the spread of its ideology; but the texts propagating such views were clearly unavoidable.

In conclusion, Goodrich was an innovative and highly influential nationalist. The success of Peter Parley—its vast circulation and readership—was the result of Goodrich’s clear intention to promote and stabilize orthodox geographical nationalism in the minds of American children. As a pedagogy it served to children integrated and nationalized knowledge structures of the natural world under the framework of the nationstate. Considering reading practices, it is likely that the sense of travel gave child readers (and maybe even their guardians) a sense of excitement. Without leaving their home they pondered the unknown landscapes of the past and present. This also reflects the inherent value attached to travel by the emerging middle class. Additionally, Goodrich embraces visual spectacle, which should be considered a primary factor in the text’s appeal. The innovative presentation of knowledge led to the elision of the terms of reference while all manner of physical and cultural objects were reduced to aesthetically pleasing, fundamentally simple images. It is entirely reasonable for historians to consider Goodrich as a key architect, and Parley as a key rhetorical device, in the construction of national identity among American children. This was a nationalism
transmitted primarily through the practices surrounding the acquisition of geographical literacy.

Besides, it is especially true that in the literary domain of children’s schoolbooks print entrepreneurs served orthodox, nationalist ideological structures to an imagined national audience. As I pointed out in the first chapter, geographies existed alongside evangelical print as the two most prevalent mass-produced print commodities of the early national period. In turn, the advance of nineteenth century is marked by the explosion of national juvenile literature which was neither contained regionally nor locally.
Chapter 4. ‘We shall hold the world’s granary, the world’s treasury, the world’s highway’: Towards a National Geographic, 1845–1888

William Gilpin’s geographical imagination was an exemplar of Gilded Age America. Geography and gold became synonymous. The Central Gold Region: The Grain, Pastoral, and Gold Regions of North America with some New Views of its Physical Geography; and Observations on the Pacific Railroad offers a tantalizing prospect of a gold region waiting to be settled, a vision which captured the attention of migrants during the middle nineteenth century. Outrageous speculation, as a financial practice and as a literary motif, constituted the “frenetic boosterism” that prevailed in the print culture of the period. Gilpin was a force behind popular discourse that framed the west as a region of Great Plains (instead of a Great Desert) and generally urged a national

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audience to claim its sovereign destiny, and its fortune, in the western portion of the continent.\textsuperscript{4}

Gilpin attained political and cultural capital.\textsuperscript{5} His experience fighting in the Mexican-American War led him to forceful advocacy for manifest destiny.\textsuperscript{6} He speculated in gold and railroad investment and mobilized scientific surveys of the region’s terrain. A key event in this narrative was the Pacific Railway Surveys, which the United States War Department conducted for several years starting in 1853 during a time when national print culture turned to the construction of a transcontinental railroad network. Abraham Lincoln directly appointed and removed Gilpin from his executive position in the provisional Colorado territory, with the removal due to alleged improprieties and reckless fiscal spending.\textsuperscript{7} His boosterism nonetheless continued beyond the role of government executive. He also produced popular literature. \textit{The Central Gold Region} was republished and rebranded several times. It appeared in 1873 as

\begin{itemize}
  \item Thomas L. Karnes, \textit{William Gilpin: Western Nationalist} (Austin: University of Texas, 1970).
  \item Donald Worster, \textit{A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell} (New York: Oxford University, 2002), 109–11.
\end{itemize}
The Mission of the North American People and again in 1890 as The Cosmopolitan Railway.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite writing The Central Gold Region on the eve of military hostility, Gilpin ignored many of the questions burning in national consciousness. Instead, he focused on integrating seamlessly the vocabulary of railroad production, geography, and nationalism. Peppered with unclear and wild references to Humboldt, the work offers a blueprint of a North American continent along the basis of its suitability for American civilization and railroad, both of which are grafted onto the physical landscape.

Superlatives abound as Gilpin attempts to construct a region. The continent’s geography is perfect for the development of a superior civilization:

Human society is upon . . . the brink of a new order of arrangement inspired by the universal instincts of peace, and is about to assume the grandest of dimensions. Fascinated by this vision, which I have seen appear and assume the solid of a reality in less than half a generation, I discern in it a new power, the People occupied in the wilderness, engaged at once in extracting from its recesses the omnipotent element of gold coin, and disbursing it immediately for the industrial conquest of the world.\textsuperscript{9}

This vision looks well beyond immediate political concerns. The writer turns a blind eye to the obvious fracture that threatened the integrity of federal power on the eve of the Civil War. He tried to see beyond the violence at the heart of American national life.

Instead, the purpose of the work is to fix otherwise random and unclassified

\textsuperscript{8} William Gilpin, Mission of the North American People, Geographical, Political, Social (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1873); William Gilpin, The Cosmopolitan Railway: Compacting and Fusing Together All the World’s Continents (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890).

\textsuperscript{9} William Gilpin, The Central Gold Region, vi.
geographical features into a single continental view: “to draw into one view the
multitudinous facts of geography, commerce, politics, and progress under which
American people are so rapidly erecting a supreme democratic republican empire, and
fitting it to the surface of the northern American continent and islands.”

Gilpin fixates on North American topography, or “geographical delineation” and
refers readers to a “symmetrical and sublime geographical plan” of the North American
continent “reducible to an exact system, easily understood and eternal.”

He compares the geography of North America to the continental topographies of Europe, Asia, and
Africa declaring the latter relatively deficient, except for a zone of western Europe. The
topographical fragmentation of the other continents lent to political fragmentation;
whereas Gilpin describes the geological slopes and rims of “Northern America [which
open] towards heaven in an expanded bowl to receive and fuse harmoniously whatever
enters its rim; so each of the other continents presenting a bowl reversed, scatters
everything from a central apex into radiant distraction.”

This topographical bowl is construed along geological terms:

The whole of the Atlantic side of the continent is one calcareous plain of
many fronts, each front having a mighty system of arteries, demonstrating
its gradual slope, and carrying its surplus waters to the sea; and yet by the

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rising of the eastern halves of the basins against the Atlantic carriers it is also a sublime bowl, into which the waters have first a concentric direction, as they accumulate into troughs that conduct them to the sea. The superlative wonder of this is . . . that North America is rolled out in one uniform expanse of 2,300,000 square miles, an area of arable land equivalent in surface to the aggregate of the valleys of the other continents, which are small, single, and isolated . . . . To master the geographical portrait of our continent thus in its unity of system is necessary to every American citizen.13

Gilpin imagines the continental landscape in its capacity for unlimited wealth and abundant resources. The express purpose is to demonstrate the perfect suitability of American geography and topography—its climate, terrain, the slopes of its mountain ranges and rock formations, riverbeds, and so on—for the development of what by 1890 he was calling a globalized railroad system. The language is a mix of speculative yet simplistic geography and geology; geological and geographical ephemera puzzle pieces are fit together into a portrait of the landscape as a continental whole, from Mexico to Siberia. The language is couched in scientific jargon and conclusions reached often do not seem to follow from any logical premises.

13 William Gilpin, The Central Gold Region, 18. (emphasis in original)
cloudy spring and hot summer are followed by a severe winter. The vegetation consists of low, scrubby trees and bushes, with grasses, mosses, and lichens. Potatoes and other garden vegetables are grown successfully, and in places the hardier descriptions of grain.

The trend of mountains in Alaska is northwest and southeast, the direction a traveller starting from civilization would wish to take in going to and coming from the sea and strait of Bering. It is the frozen
Most of all, Gilpin worshipped the railroad. Features of landscape and topography were read and linked to a framework of global railway construction. American geography occupies a central position in an “isothermal zodiac” that is, an imagined climate pattern, which is exclusively suitable for “the production of gold and silver, the construction of habitats and cities, and of states . . . under a propitious climate, salubrious seasons, and perennial pastures.” He predicted that with investment in public works soon “citizens of Asia and Europe will traverse familiarly the central region of our country, in the interchanges of commerce, and passing to and fro to their homes.” Gilpin was at once a nationalist and a globalist. Gold, railroads, and physical terrain are fused into an iconographic continental landscape that is bountiful enough to service and dominate the global economy.

Thirty years after The Gold Region was published, Gilpin’s enthusiasm grew more ecstatic. By 1890 his confidence in the unlimited bounty of North American geography soared: “North America is a sublime amphitheatre, of gorgeous fertility and transcendent proportions. The vast surface of concentric basis is uniformly calcareous; it is scarcely less in expanse of area, or more undulating than the oceans. This comprehensive area, mellow and salubrious, is fattened everywhere and refreshed by the soils abraded from the mountains. It may receive and sustain without surfeit the

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14 William Gilpin, The Central Gold Region, 143.
existing populations of the globe.”

Gilpin was a mouthpiece for a common motif of the Gilded age: wherever the plough went, rain, agricultural and material abundance followed. Above all else, it is the scale of resources—of wealth, and of natural bounty—that are cast as inexhaustible and overflowing in the landscape of North America itself. The continent was geologically and geographically wonderful because its topography was easily capable of supplying food and wealth for a global civilization.

The humanist might scoff at Gilpin’s materialism. But the state of California alone currently operates as the world’s fifth largest economy. Gilpin’s vision was right strictly in that it gauged objective potential for the region to produce vast global wealth. His faith in gold and industrial technology constituted a national and globalist vision that from the 1840s onward became the dominant ideological tenet of popular geography. In this chapter I survey the work of several popular geography writers. I begin in 1845 because it marks a key point in the development of modern science in America. I end in 1888 because it marks the founding of National Geographic, which represents a fundamental discursive (especially visual) departure from the geography

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writing of the late eighteenth century. Nevertheless, despite the profound discursive and literary innovations employed in a publication organ like *National Geographic*, all the texts over this time evince fundamental continuity in their shared, unwavering commitment to national sovereignty. The key difference is that by the end of the nineteenth century, America’s national geographers were bent toward global frontiers. This chapter shows that it is difficult to distinguish between the projection of state power in its nationalist and globalist dimensions.

In an important study, Neil Smith has looked at globalism in America at the turn of the century. More specifically, he charts the relationship between state power and the visions and practices of geography knowledge that involved the exporting of American power abroad. Smith offers an extended and nuanced definition of globalization, which includes a contradiction, namely the simultaneity of successful “American globalism built . . . upon powerful geographical intelligence [and] the eclipse of geography as a discourse of global power; [between] a spaceless and a spatially constituted American globalism.” To be clear, the argument is that American Empire was already in operation by the beginning of the twentieth century. I suggest reaching back even further to see geography discourse as an essential precursor of

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United States global hegemony. Geographers from the 1840s onward attempted to project American state interests onto widening spaces of transcontinental scale. An important illustration of this comes from Karen Morin’s *Civic Discipline*, which offers an institutional history of the American Geographical Society (AGS), which was founded in 1851 and grew into a powerful institution.\footnote{Karen Morin, *Civic Discipline: Geography in America, 1860–1890* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001).} Under the leadership of Charles Patrick Daly AGS promoted geographical exploration into the Arctic and the Congo. It was also extensively involved in mobilizing research for the construction of western railroads, not to mention it failed in its concerted attempt to construct a canal through Nicaragua. Morin describes Daly’s expansionist mission as one part nationalism, one part commercialism. Moreover, Daly popularized geography in America by moving the AGS away from statistical data collection and into exploratory field geography: “Daly functioned in a number of diplomatic capacities at a national level while simultaneously serving as AGS president, thus embodying a central node of communication between public geographical knowledge and the work of various departments of the federal government.”\footnote{Karen Morin, *Civic Discipline*, 94–95.}

Although American civil society was being ripped apart politically by major social and racial problems, the production of nationalist geographies did not wane in
the years leading up to Civil War. On the contrary, we see a clear process of intensification. Centralized imperial geography became cemented as the institutional domain of the nationstate. Nevertheless it is unwise to pinpoint the erosion of localism to a specific year or decade, as it is a process best understood from a long-term, structuralist perspective. To an undeniable extent the metropolis and periphery are always in a process of negotiation and renegotiation. With a vision too narrow, historians run the risk of losing sight of how the nationstate and nationalism became embedded in the lives of Americans. In other words, a process as subtle as the erosion

22 In a landmark thesis, historian Robert Wiebe locates the creation of a strong bureaucratic orientation in the American body politic. From the 1870s onward, Wiebe saw in the United States the gradual alignment of wealth, manufacturing, corporate management, national financing, and effective national administration. These factors coalesced so that by the early 20th century a bureaucratic orientation formed the base for a discourse of national social order. This discourse defined “the values of continuity regularity, functionality and rationality, administration and management; [it] set the form of [national] problems and outlined their alternative solutions. (295) Backed by presidential power in the early 20th century that both reinforced and relied on such discourse, this bureaucratic orientation came to supersede local identity as the main basis for a collective social order. As a political historian Wiebe tracks the flow of ideas and business practices, which he describes thematically as a growing consensus around the imperative for collective social and economic organization. The upshot is a clear shift from local to national scale in the context of legal and political developments. Robert Wiebe, The Search for Order, 1877–1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).


24 Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (New York, Oxford University, 1975).
of locality cannot be limited to a specific historical moment. It involves the full force of nationalization and its emerging predicate: globalization.\textsuperscript{25}

As mentioned in the introduction, there are historiographical pitfalls in research focused on state centralization and nationalism. To be clear, I believe that centralization is a gradual process that involves the full force of the nationstate of which the production of nationalist print is a natural ally. In specific reference to the sources covered in this chapter, geography as a knowledge structure became increasingly centralized, professionalized, and nationalized. In this sense we can say that nationalism remained the dominant motif of geography writing throughout the nineteenth century. Hence, although a bureaucratically centralized state power did not fully blossom until the post war period, we can trace its origins from much earlier. I suggest that a line can be drawn from the earliest writings of Morse and Jefferson to those surveyed in the current chapter. There is important continuity in the years leading up to and following the war as popular geography writing continued to serve and legitimate the power of the nationstate in more formalized ways. The changes that we see in the discursive expressions of the post Civil War period are based primarily on 1: the striking visual realism of the photography that was introduced into popular print

culture; and 2: The emergence of “centers of calculation” at which the production of knowledge occurred.26

Geographical exploration, and the production of knowledge resulting from it, reinforced the growth of the state. Until the 1840s, state sponsored exploration was sporadic but nevertheless left a significant imprint on national print culture. Periodic government sponsored western expeditions were conducted by the military and included the famous narratives of Wilkes, Frémont, and Commodore Perry.27 Western expeditions existed in popular print alongside major national events like the Mexican War.28 Military activities and narratives attracted literary attention particularly in the context of emerging technologies of mass communication.29 Geographical awareness and literacy were prerequisites, or cultural imperatives, for participation in middle class society; knowledge of geography suggested “cultural competence” as reading about the


west in particular became clearly embedded (even aspirational) in the everyday reading practices of privileged and underprivileged alike. At the same time, these geography writers were also political actors and cultural leaders who pondered global eminence and power for the United States. Moreover while nineteenth century American civil society was riddled with social and ethical problems, geographers continued to promote nationalism. Indeed, over the course of the nineteenth century in general we see consistent attempts to transmit the physical continent of the North American landscape into popular imagination. Geography writers attempted to articulate a nationalist iconography based on data collection of the physical landscape.

The focus of this chapter roughly spans 1845–1888. The dates connect with two different events: one, the appointment of Louis Agassiz at Harvard. Agassiz was a cynosure of American science in the mid-nineteenth century; he and his colleagues set a dominant tone for the conversations that were taking place in writing practices, research, and general diffusion of education in the professionalizing fields of biology (which included anatomy and medicine), geology, racial anthropology, as well as

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It is important to remember that these were all loose terms. In fact, despite the emerging professionalism surrounding these practices, American science at mid-century was characterized by its interdisciplinary associations.\textsuperscript{33} On the other hand, the terminal date marks the inaugural publication of the popular magazine *National Geographic*, which over the past 130 years has operated as a powerful media force. Here we see continuity and also important changes, which will be teased out. For now we can simply state that by 1880, the discourse and practices of geography served the powerful enterprise of exploratory field work, which was clearly tied in with and subordinated to commercial interests of the federal government and its imperial policies. In other words, by the 1880s the federal government and its agents used geography as an instrument for promoting overseas commercial imperialism and domestic settlement alike.

In this chapter I survey a group of writers whose work achieved widespread circulation and appeared to impact America’s intellectual history profoundly. Yet at this point, the gendered nature of geography authorship becomes quite apparent. As geography began to rely on a methodology of field-work and exploration, it almost


universally excluded women. Women engaged geography only at the schoolbook level, which was the case for Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote two editions of geography texts, *Primary Geography for Children* (1833) and *First Geography for Children* (1855). The former, is an obscure, rare book. The latter closely resembles the presentation of knowledge in the texts of Goodrich. Stowe, like Goodrich and Jefferson before her, engaged the geopolitics of race. As an abolitionist who opposed U.S. expansion but also supported recolonization of blacks, Stowe’s novels avoid discussion of western landscapes, as she considered the territory beyond the Mississippi as a haven for the extension of slavery. In a larger sense, the lack of women participating in textual geography productions is at once typical and at once very pronounced. We know that gender is in a state of “constant contradiction, change, and negotiation.” The important economic and technological changes occurring at mid-century also affected the practice of geography writing. These changes are simultaneous with the

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emergence of a middle class society.\textsuperscript{39} Developments in the nation’s infrastructure combined with the rise of middle class consumer culture engendered a shift in the register of geography as a discourse of power as it became more obviously punctuated by assertions of manhood and masculinity. Geographical exploration, as a literal practice and as a discourse of power, whether it was cast in nationalist or globalist vocabulary, was a way for middle class men to imagine the experience of vitality and to reinforce their social position; exploration offered a way to experience physical intensity and subsequent social recognition.\textsuperscript{40} Hence, discourse of national geographical expansion often paralleled expressions of masculine assertion.

Looking back to William Gilpin, his contemporaries pointed out that his conclusions, especially with respect to climate and water management, lacked empirical basis. While the discourse presents itself as scientific jargon, it is in fact woefully deficient of methodological rigor, even in the context of its time. For these reasons, peers of Gilpin questioned his science and environmental comprehension. Environmental writer Wallace Stegner highlights the competing visions of Gilpin and John Wesley T.J. Jackson Lears, \textit{No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).


Powell in *Beyond the Hundredth Meridian*. Powell, we are told, resisted Gilpin’s science and his material acquisitiveness and instead attempted to institutionalize policies of use value economics, sustainability, and resource deficit management at the federal level. Environmental historians tend to treat him with great reverence as he was among the first to institutionalize principles of conservation into federal policy. He fought against the grain of popular literature on the west, which was often characterized either as an inhospitable desert or as a gilded Arcadia.

In the years following the Civil War Powell and his writing captured the public’s imagination. He followed Clarence King, another important writer of the period, to become in 1881 the second Director of United States Geological Survey, the creation of which was a watershed moment in the government’s (now firmly Washington D.C.) commitment to fund permanently centralized scientific institutions. Notably, this was the first national survey to be conducted by a non-military, civilian bureaucracy. Powell also became a founding member of National Geographic Society. His rise in fame owes

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something to sheer physical energy. Losing his arm in the Battle of Shiloh did nothing to hamper the determination of this “self-taught rural savant” to “conduct all-purpose scientific reconnoissance” over rough and dangerous terrain.45

Powell’s environmental legacy and emergent fame intersect at the Colorado River basin. For context, it is necessary to understand that Denver became an important frontier outpost following Pike’s Peak Gold Rush of 1858.46 Following the conclusion of the Civil War, hosts of journalists came to Denver to speculate about the future of the unsettled West. Media attention came to focus on the Colorado River basin, owing to the simple reason that no western power had yet succeeded in charting or mapping the course of the river nor for that matter the indigenous communities who were scattered throughout these dangerous, ancient, and visually spectacular canyons. In particular, Samuel Bowles the editor of the influential newspaper *Springfield Republican* became intrigued with the mystery of the Colorado River, which had exercised some hold on the western imagination for hundreds of years.47 Powell, Bowles, Gilpin, and King mingled in the same social and literary circles in the provisionally organized Colorado


territory, which was fast becoming a local yet global outpost. Bowles prodded the nation to commit the river basin to the national storehouse of knowledge: “The mocking ignorance and fascinating reports of the course and country of the Colorado ought to hasten [scientific reconnoissance]. The maps from Washington that put down only what is absolutely, scientifically known, leave a great black space here of three hundred to five hundred miles long and one hundred to two hundred miles broad. Is any other nation so ignorant of itself? . . . The whole field of observation and inquiry . . . is more interesting and important than any which lies before our men of science.”

Bowles published *Across the Continent: A Summer’s Journey to the Rocky Mountains* in 1865 and *The Switzerland of America* in 1869. His work is perhaps understudied and therefore largely unknown in literary history. We can call this hybrid literary expression a mix of travel narrative, journalism, and marketing; volumes like this appeared throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Another example comes from Albert Richardson whose journalism and popular writing reflected a similar fascination with western geography. His *Beyond The Mississippi* (1867) expresses a vivid nationalism, which is simultaneously globalism:

“Twenty years ago half our continent was an unknown land, and the Rocky mountains

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were our Pillars of Hercules. Five years hence, the Orient will be our next-door neighbor. We shall hold the world’s granary, the world’s treasury, the world’s highway. But we shall have no Far West, no Civilization, in line with battle, pressing back hostile savages, and conquering hostile Nature.”

Richardson, who also wrote for Horace Greely’s *New-York Tribune*, lamented the passing of the frontier in American history. He bespoke nostalgia for the pioneers of previous generations who “made a new geography for the American union.” In fact this sentiment existed alongside its exact opposite. While Richardson pined for lost frontiers, Samuel Bowles, John Wesley Powell, and William Gilpin searched for meaning in the Colorado River basin, the last unmapped portion of the continental United States. Here is an important central paradox: popular writers simultaneously emphasized the unknown status of U.S. continental geography while at the same time they emphasized its finality. Yet both sentiments are part of the same nationalist, globalist ideology. The west

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50 Albert Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi: From the Great River to the Great Ocean* (Hartford: American Publishing, 1869), i.

51 Albert Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, i.
Figure 20. Albert Richardson’s *Beyond the Mississippi* (1869)
must be known minutely; its wealth must also be tapped for nationalist greatness and for igniting industrial, global supply chains.

Long before historian Frederick Jackson Turner handed down his frontier thesis in the 1890s, Albert Richardson had settled the question about the frontier for himself: it was already closed. The parts of North America that were less intimately known in official discourse and cartography (such as present-day Montana, Arizona, and Colorado for instance) had already become objects of federal management. It was only up to geography discourse, the authority of national geography, to bring these peripheral areas into national orbit and into national imagination. The way that Powell’s story came to capture the public’s attention shows both the triumph and supremacy of nationalism and its connection to geography as a powerful domain of state power.

Powell’s career intersects with a larger historical process, that is, the centralization of scientific institutions in U.S. history. The fame he acquired came mostly from the effective intensity which which he was able to mobilize the state in the name of research science. The power and influence he acquired as a professional scientist reflects the far-reaching power of the federal government over the western territories. Powell’s

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scientific expeditions garnered national attention. After a brief tenure teaching science at universities in Illinois, Powell was able to secure a lifetime’s worth of federal funding for what became a decades-long geological survey. He earned a permanent place in Washington D.C. as a bureaucrat and became a leading national voice on the environmental policies of the West.

Scott Kirsch has shown that Powell and his colleagues saw themselves as bringing cartographic legibility to the region. Railroad agents appealed to Washington authorities as they attempted to actualize both massive human settlement and productivity for the area. The surveys collected facts of both indigenous human communities and of the geology and geography of the physical landscape. As for the former, Powell created a robust program of research activities at the Smithsonian. He was the founder its Bureau of Ethnology (1879), which he set on a course for classifying in the minutest detail the languages and customs of the native tribes who still populated the area. Powell’s understanding of the natives did not differ fundamentally from that of Thomas Jefferson in Notes on the State of Virginia. On one

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hand, Powell admired the artisanal skill, beauty, and adaptability of the tribes to their environment and landscape. Powell shows both awe, and even reverence for the cultural practices that he encounters. He is also sensitive to their linguistic heritage. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Powell sees the tribes as thoroughly anachronistic and in need of assimilation and regulation. Like Jefferson, Powell treats these human cultures as existing outside of history, or at a different stage of historical development. They must be relocated onto reservations—taught, assimilated, and integrated into a modern economic mode of existence. In other words, despite their cultural achievements—despite their relative harmony and cultural progress—the tribes were seen as existing outside of the flow of time, outside of progressive civilization.

Anthropology and geology were fused together and subordinated to larger historical and economic purposes undergirding a program of centralized federal management.

His findings were published as official state documents and were also adapted into narratives (published long after the conclusion of the expedition) that appeared in popular print. The Exploration of the Colorado appeared serially in Scribner’s Magazine and fragments of it appeared elsewhere. The narrative (or discursive) structure of the text is quite variable. Powell shifts among different registers: the explorer, the geologist, the mapmaker, the anthropologist, the humanist, and perhaps above all else, the descriptive

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writer. Importantly, the Penguin edition carries 246 visual images: a dazzling and often exquisitely beautiful array of photographs, sketches, and various artistic renderings. In a larger sense, representations of natural landscape were a major part of America’s national cultural and artistic identity. Powell tapped into this larger tradition in a spectacular way. He developed relationships with the leading painters and photographers, whom accompanied him during surveys. As Elizabeth Childs puts it, Powell “collaborated with draftsmen, photographers, engravers, and a professional painter,” in an effort to share the visual landscapes of the American West with his audience. In particular, Powell’s relationship with Thomas Moran, perhaps the most successful landscape artist of the Gilded Age, resulted in production of the iconic landscape portraiture of nineteenth century America.

Making the region legible meant communicating it visually and textually to a national audience. This was done through data collection, visual presentation,

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discursive description, and narrative device. Powell published his material as official state documents and also in popular periodicals. Note the following scene on the Green River:

During the afternoon we run down to a point where the river sweeps the foot of an overhanging cliff, and here we camp for the night. The sun is yet two hours high, so I climb the cliffs and walk back among the strangely carved rocks of the Green River band lands. These are sandstones and shales, gray and buff, red and brown, blue and black strut in many alternations, lying nearly horizontal and almost without soil and vegetation. They are very friable and the rain and streams have carved them into quaint shapes. Barren desolation is stretched before me; and yet there is beauty in the scene. The fantastic carvings, imitating architectural forms and suggesting rude but weird statuary, with the bright and varied colors of the rocks, conspire to make a scene such as the dweller in verdure-clad hills can scarcely appreciate. Standing on a high point, I can look off in every direction over a vast landscape, with salient rocks and cliffs glittering in the evening sun . . . heights and clouds and mountains and snowfields and forests and rocklands are blended into one grand view. Now the sun goes down and I return to camp.60

There was an eager market for descriptions and depictions of western landscapes. For example William Cullen Bryant’s *Picturesque America* and later the writings and sketches of John Muir were widely popular.61 Some of the photographs contained in these books


became iconic and were also circulated as stereoviews and glass window transparencies.\textsuperscript{62}

I would like to suggest—in fact it is my central position—that Powell’s perspective on the landscape (physical and human) closely resembles that of Thomas Jefferson’s \textit{Notes on the State of Virginia}. The dissimilarities in textual presentation exist visually and narratively. But a shared geographical imagination is held together by tight logical assertions of national power. Both Jefferson and Powell were able to claim and exclude so much with the stroke of a scientific pen; and both bifurcate the human and physical geography so that the landscape is easily managed and dominated by the state. Here, the primary sources are unequivocal statements of national power. Look for instance at Clarence King, Powell’s predecessor as the Director of the United States Geological Survey whose writing carried significant weight. Among King’s widely published works were \textit{Statistics of the Production of the Precious Metals in the United States}, which shows painstaking scientific itemization of environmental resources; and \textit{Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada}, which is part geology lesson part exploration narrative.\textsuperscript{63} King’s writing also appeared serially in the \textit{Atlantic Monthly}:

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From the summit of one of those grand towers which leap upward from the thin crest of the granite Sierras one looks northward and over a region of lofty needles; thick, blade-like ridges separated from each other by profound gulls, amphitheatres, flanked by splintered walls of stone which opened downward into deeper and broader gorges until they connect with the immense system of lateral canyons which traverses the Sierra from east to west, carrying its entire drainage. . . . The same set of phenomena may be observed in the heights of the Rocky Mountains, on a less grand scale, but with a certain added force. . . . Over the entire elevated portion of the West the same phenomena may be observed, and the magnitude and extent of the ancient glacier system was directly proportioned to the height and mass of the mountain chain. It is true that forests of great magnitude grow everywhere in the glacier courses, but the life of a forest is of course momentary, in a geological sense.64

The discovery of geological time seemed especially to lend itself to the concept of nationalism and nationalist production in the domains of science, art, and popular print culture.65 Artists and photographers joined scientists in pondering and representing the creation of continental landmasses over geological time; both identified new nationalist monuments from the physical geography of western landscapes. Geological theory permeated mainstream national print culture in large part through the artistic renderings of landscape portraits and photography.


Although it makes sense on the surface to place Powell and King firmly in the post-Civil War period, in fact, their emergent power as a federal bureaucrats can be traced to political developments from the 1840s. The gradual professionalization of academic knowledge is intimately bound up with Louis Agassiz, the Swiss jack-of-all-trades scientist who spearheaded the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard and whose research and writings carried immense authority in mid-nineteenth century America. Agassiz’s significance, especially his role in legitimizing pseudo-biological science based on faulty racial categories, has been explained eloquently elsewhere. What is particularly relevant in the context of this research, however, is Agassiz’s simultaneous interest in other physical sciences. Much like Jefferson before him, Agassiz treated racial biology in parallel chapters on geography and geology—therefore casting them as under the same umbrella. Indeed, Agassiz was also important for institutionalizing research into the physical geography and geology of North America. His close friend, colleague, and fellow Swiss emigre Arnold Guyot joined him in Ivy League circles and was appointed the first Chair of Physical Geography and Geology at Yale in 1854. Guyot (on whom scant research has been conducted) became a leading voice on the science of geography in mid-nineteenth century transatlantic circles. When he first arrived he

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spoke to eager crowds over several evenings at sold out auditoriums at the Lowell Institute in Boston—this being the case in spite of the fact that he delivered the content in French. Quickly translated into English, these lectures appeared to stimulate considerable popular discussion in American print culture, while also inaugurating the domain of professional geology. Guyot remained a force in the post-Darwin print culture and was intensely devoted to reconciling creationism with modern theories in geology and evolutionary biology. In the post War years Guyot devoted himself to the productions of children’s geographics. In this case he resembles Goodrich and Morse who came before him as he committed himself to long print runs of various editions.

The nationalization and institutionalization of American science certainly predates the Civil War. The creation of the Smithsonian is an important watershed in the long development of centralized geography science in the United States. James Smithson’s endowment was bequeathed to the United States in 1835, which in the words of its benefactor was intended to “increase the diffusion of knowledge,” an expression so often encountered in 18th and 19th century documents that it seems an


extreme underestimation to call it exceedingly commonplace. But the Smithsonian came into existence slowly and unevenly, and faced much opposition in Congress over its very nature. Congress struggled over how to integrate it into the federal machinery. From its original endowment in 1835 it finally was Incorporated by an Act of Congress in 1846. Under energetic congressional leadership the Smithsonian was developed into an institution that supported robust research and publication programs. One of the foremost Congressional supporters of the Smithsonian was George Perkins Marsh, who was the author of the influential *Man and Nature*. As David Lowenthal explains, the Vermont-born Congressman judged the transformative impact of humans on their environment as producing seriously degrading effects. Others, too, had noticed such environmental destruction, but it had almost always been understood as a byproduct of economically beneficent activity—bringing civilizational order out of the chaos of nature: “most inquiries. . . had trusted earth’s plentitude, assumed resources

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inexhaustible, and never doubted that they could and should master nature . . . the
more nature was manipulated, the more fertile it would become.” 72 On the other hand,
Marsh, a polymath who also conducted intensive research into Scandinavian linguistics,
attempted to understand the thoroughgoing effect of human activity on the
environment as an uneven, and even dangerous process. Marsh knew that his ancestors
had considered trees an encumbrance, because of their sheer abundance. In a relatively
short amount of time, trees in Vermont had become a scarce and expensive commodity.
Marsh’s judgement was unequivocal and at times apocalyptical: “Man is everywhere a
disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to
discords.” 73 Marsh’s work shows that discussion of climate change was robust by mid-
nineteenth century:

There are parts of Asia Minor, of Northern Africa, of Greece, and even of Alpine Europe, where the operation of causes set in action by man has brought the face of the earth to a desolation almost as complete as that of the moon…. The earth is fast becoming an unfit home for its noblest inhabitant, and another era of equal human crime and human improvidence … would reduce it to such a condition of impoverished productiveness, of shattered surface, of climatic excess, as to threaten the depravation, barbarism, and perhaps even extinction of the species. 74

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74 George Perkins Marsh, Man and Nature, 43.
To combat wanton environmental destruction, Marsh advocated strong, federally funded research institutions to effect and frame better land-use policies. As T. Gregory Garvey puts it, Marsh both rejected the prevalent view in Jacksonian America that nature has “infinitive self-restorative capacities” and also the Romantic view that “nature is a reflection of the soul.” Instead, Marsh pushed to expand human control over the environment through the creation of robust, state-sponsored science. Although the work was written during the Civil War while Marsh was abroad serving as ambassador in the Ottoman Empire and Italy respectively, Marsh ignores commenting on it.

One final point about a common feature of these texts: all writers share a degree of intellectual engagement with Alexander Humboldt. With good reason, Aaron Sachs has argued that Humboldt was one of the single greatest influences on the intellectual culture of nineteenth century America. Similarly to the way in which Jefferson’s Notes was a response to Buffon’s theorizing on the climate of North and South America, so Humboldt provided an intellectual current into which American writers and scientists dove as they attempted to gain scientific mastery of the physical continent over which they claimed national dominion. Yet, Humboldt’s global ecology was appropriated in

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different ways and toward different ends; his effect on environmental thinking is unable to be disentangled from the ways in which he was appropriated among those advocating aggressive imperialism. As such, from the perspective of intellectual history, nationalist geography writers found Humboldt’s ecological perspective agreeable. His ecological approach lent itself to nationalist thinking.

The appearance of *National Geographic* marks a clear break in print technologies of distribution. By the time of *National Geographic*, the imperialism of U.S. qua nationstate surpassed mere continental imperialism; that is to say the exploratory capability of the nationstate had become global in its spatial dimensions and in its geographical claims. Global exploration was in the purview of its very existence. Geography of the unknown is something exotic discursively and visually. The elements of national idolatry are also present; it is also a universalist perspective. In these texts the continent itself was bound up with geological time and national timelessness. In photographs and in literary descriptions the continental landscape was glorified. It is placed firmly outside history and exists under the banner a powerful nationstate, managed by a strengthening and sweeping bureaucracy. The physical landscape was both known and unknown, its abundance and its deficiencies were highlighted. Much was known, and much was still be learned. But above all, the physical continent was managed at a federal level; the entire continent was included under the legal domain of
the nationstate. In the aggregate these texts can be seen as espousing a powerful nationalism. There is some abstract thinking involved. Tracing the impact of the geography writers depends on the impact of national print culture more generally. What is clear however is that national print culture and the nationstate ran parallel in the production of geography knowledge, which by 1850 in American had assumed highly organized and widespread proportions. As a pedagogical tool geography facilitated the spontaneous mass consent to the sovereignty of federal power over an expansive continent.
Conclusion

Historians have not interpreted *per se* popular geography writing particularly over the time frame suggested. The interpretation offered suggests that despite minor shifts in register and vocabulary, and a significant shift in the visual component of geography texts in the post Civil-War period there is strong nationalist component over the hundred years surveyed. Hence historians and researchers in related disciplines might look upon their significance in light of print culture and nationalism. Strong definitions of America’s social and physical geography were captured and propagated in these widely circulated texts. I hope that the previous chapters show that it does us little good to dismiss the power of print nationalism in the long nineteenth century. It is easy to lose track of the power of the state because there is a natural tendency to view its power its capacity to exert direct control. Yet there is evidence that points to nationalism as a leviathan motif in popular geography. In conclusion, the success of the United States as a nationstate in large part is derived from the stability of its representation in popular discourse. The United States was rapidly, thoroughly, and successfully transmitted to millions of literate citizens through the reading practices of popular geography.

I therefore suggest that Jedidiah Morse’s nationalism essentially resonates in tone with that of the men involved in the geographical reconnaissance from the 1860s onwards. Indeed, I believe these sources show how nationalism and geography
effectively constitute the sovereignty of the nationstate. Morse’s universal geographies
took the global stage as the framework into which the nation fit; this is contiguous with
the notion of the cosmopolitan railroad that inspired William Gilpin so intensely.
American national geography was to be celebrated because it was supreme in its global
dimensions.

Moreover, the enduring force of nationalism its ebb, flow, and even its resurgence in
many parts of the world, justify continued scholarly scrutiny across the various
disciplines; of course, the language of nationalism and of nationstate formation invites
comparative frameworks.
Epilogue

In a wide-ranging, enigmatic interview from 1984 that Rolling Stone titled “Bob Dylan, Recovering Christian,” the Nobel laureate spoke of genuine belief in the coming of Armageddon and wondered about the United States’ role in the historical unfolding of this event.\(^7\) Dylan casts the process of globalization as a great harbinger of evil, a precursor to the End Days (about 200 years left, he reckons). Moreover, Dylan trenchantly and provokingly contrasts globalist and humanist values with the decline of local and national autonomy. In resoundingly clear terms he rejects the logic behind the notion of global peace. I include Dylan’s answers to a series of questions:

**So you don’t care who’s president? You don’t think there’s any difference between, say, a Kennedy and a Nixon? It doesn’t matter at all?**

I don’t know. It’s very popular nowadays to think of yourself as a ‘liberal humanist.’ That’s such a bullshit term. It means less than nothing . . . .

**Do you still hope for peace?**

There is not going to be any peace.

**You don’t think it’s worth working for?**

No. It’s just gonna be a false peace. You can reload your rifle, and that moment you’re reloading it, that’s peace. It may last for a few years.

**Isn’t it worth fighting for that?**

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Nah, none of that matters. I heard somebody on the radio talkin’ about what’s happenin’ in Haiti, you know? ‘We must be concerned about what’s happening in Haiti. We’re global people now.’ And they’re gettin’ everybody in that frame of mind—like, we’re not just the United States anymore, we’re global. We’re thinkin’ in terms of the whole world because communications come right into your house. Well, that’s what the Book of Revelation is all about. And you can just about know that anybody who comes out for peace is not for peace.

**But what if someone genuinely is for peace?**
Well, you can’t be for peace and be global.

**Isn’t man supposed to progress, to forge ahead?**
. . . Everything is computerized now, it’s all computers. I see that as the beginning of the end. You can see everything going global. There’s no nationality anymore, no I’m this or I’m that: ‘We’re all the same, all workin’ for one peaceful world, blah, blah, blah.’
Right now, it seems like in the States, and most other countries, too, there’s a big push on to make a big global country—*one big country*—where you can get all the materials from one place and assemble them someplace else and sell ’em in another place, and the whole world is just all one, controlled by the same people, you know? And if it’s not there already, that’s the point it’s tryin’ to get to.

Dylan’s view of globalization goes far beyond criticism, or negation. For him, globalization is man’s fallen nature. Of course, Dylan speaks as a poet, not a historian. As a historian, I find it uncomfortable to hear someone suggest that offering charity to disaster victims in Haiti, for instance, might be counterproductive to peace, counter to liberal humanism. But it must be pointed out that Dylan hits on a key issue covered in my dissertation: the modern nationstate itself is concomitant to global geography, to a frame of mind that takes for granted the scientific validity of a nationalist geopolitical
condition. It is also worth remembering that the term globalization itself was preceded by the term Americanization, of long-established patterns of American empire, the intellectual heritage of which has been called a “mixture of the military imperialism of Theodore Roosevelt and the ideological imperialism of Woodrow Wilson.”

Whatever the origins, it is strange to consider the ways in which nationalism and globalization have become blurred in popular discourse and imagination. It is naive, especially for historians, to be blind of its past manifestations, or to expect that the rest of the world will cooperate indefinitely into the future. American empire is real; American nationalism is real; both are tantamount to globalization. Indeed, resistance to globalization around the world has become strong and multifarious. When groups as diverse and ideologically at odds as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, anarchists, fascists, cultural Marxists, (and those from myriad other political hues) reject the United Nations as an interventionist global force, it is perhaps time for liberal historians to rethink what’s happening in the world and revisit the blind faith in neoliberalism that is common in Whig historiography.

The boundary between globalization and nationalism has blurred so much that popular discourse is purely illogical. Illustrative are two examples: from former

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Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, and former President George W. Bush. For her part, Ms. Clinton speaks frighteningly of dissent: “I think Europe needs to get a handle on migration because that is what lit the flame. . . . I admire the very generous and compassionate approaches that were taken particularly by leaders like Angela Merkel, but I think it is fair to say Europe has done its part, and must send a very clear message—‘we are not going to be able to continue [sic] provide refuge and support’—because if we don’t deal with the migration issue it will continue to roil the body politic.79

Is Ms. Clinton a regionalist, nationalist, globalist, or a mere opportunist, playing Realpolitik? The policies that do not “roil the body politic” are those which she is likely to favor. Meanwhile, former President Bush has recently spoken of “nationalism distorted into nativism . . . a fading confidence in the value of free markets and international trade, forgetting that conflict, instability, and poverty follow in the wake of protectionism.”80 While I certainly agree with President Bush on the dangers posed by


rabid, virulent nativism, it’s strange to think that until quite recently he was the mouthpiece for a banal but powerful and predatory nationalism.\textsuperscript{81}

The point is that definitions of nationalism and globalization in mainstream media have become one-dimensional to such an extent that they have lost coherence and intelligibility. Look for instance at the recent coverage of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, which includes a bewildering patchwork of statements from executives worried over a “trade war” between the U.S. and China.\textsuperscript{82} We are told that an Austrian textile company withdrew its plan to invest $322 million in a factory in Alabama because of U.S. tariffs on Chinese textile imports; they opted instead to build it in Thailand; we are told that Volkswagen has announced its plans for an $800 million electric car plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee; we are told of Apple’s disappointing quarterly revenues; we are told that Huawei, the Chinese telecommunications giant “is probably suffering the most right now.” Moreover, the economic forecasters say that the horizon is grey and cloudy in the United States due to recent measures mandating greater scrutiny and regulation of foreign investment, which incidentally fell by 18%

\textsuperscript{81} Gerald R. Webster, “American Nationalism, the Flag, and the Invasion of Iraq,” Geographical Review 101, no. 1 (Jan 2011): 1–18; In the 18 months following September, 2001, Mr. Bush spoke the sentence “Either you’re either with us or with the terrorists” a total of 99 times. Todd Gitlin, The Intellectuals and the Flag (New York: Columbia University, 2006), 117.

\textsuperscript{82} Jessica DiNapoli and Soyoung Kim “CEOs Sour on Trump Policies, Warn They Hurt Business, Investment,” Reuters, January 23, 2019.
compared to that of 2017. Finally, we are left with a sense of confusion from a humanized corporation:

Chinese state-owned Sinochem Group, which has been in merger talks with ChemChina to create the world’s biggest industrial chemicals firm, said that it did not think it could clinch a U.S. acquisition in the current environment.

‘You know what’s happening today, so I think you will see there will be less investment going abroad,’ Sinochem Chairman Ning Gaoning said. ‘The Chinese are getting quite confused. They thought they were welcome to invest. Now they realize that they are not being welcomed all the time.

Here, the local is absolutely obliterated. One man is able to speak on behalf of 1.3 billion others without being challenged. All of this stems in part from facile notions of nationalist geography. Amid such practically, and legally effective vocabularies, it is difficult for historians, whether professional or amateur, to keep track of proportion and scale. I imagine that professional economists might provide some concrete insight into the specific problems mentioned above. All the same, it is reasonable to challenge, in the abstract or concretely, whether economic leaders meeting in the Swiss Alps should have the sovereign authority to make global decisions that affect the cultural and existential reality of, say, politically disenfranchised human communities in Flint Michigan, Laos, or Bangladesh? Who is measuring growth, progress, or humanity of local communities?

There are other economic forecasts that go beyond mere gloomy skies ahead. Elsewhere it has been predicted that in the next 15 years 40% of the current workforce will be
replaced by automation. The human costs of such a transformation are hard to fathom.

Indeed, the emergence of a digital era, its effects on nationalism, globalization, and democracy, are hard to fathom. According to Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari:

> Time is accelerating . . . We’re now living with the collapse of the last story of inevitability . . . The 1990s were flush with ideas that history was over, that the great ideological battle of the 20th century was won by liberal democracy and free-market capitalism . . . This now seems extremely naïve . . . The moment we are in now is a moment of extreme disillusionment and bewilderment because we have no idea where things will go from here. It’s very important to be aware of the downside, of the dangerous scenarios of new technologies. The corporations, the engineers, the people in labs naturally focus on the enormous benefits that these technologies might bring us, and it falls to historians, to philosophers and social scientists who think about all of the ways that things could go wrong.

As historians, we must consider the very serious threat posed to human survival from the incredibly destructive technologies commanded by nationstates whose capacity to destroy on global scales continues to grow exponentially. As Bob Dylan prophesied, war itself has become computerized, inequality lost in the comforting but misleading mystique that civilization has entered a new era of global peace. Francis

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Fukuyama was comforting, Samuel Huntington frightening.\textsuperscript{85} Sadly, a critical political observer of 2019 may wonder whose interpretation is further from the mark. Historians of the United States in general, as I have seen, are excellent at understanding and teaching context; on the other hand, they often lose track of scale, of monumental and almost geological shifts of culture and space in the \textit{longue durée}. This is where literature, geography, anthropology, and psychology, among others can enrich the historical profession. This is true for the period under discussion in which the internalization of geography writing in America gradually but definitively became tied to what Bruno Latour famously coined the “centers of calculation.”\textsuperscript{86} The familiar narrative in American history suggests that the Civil War was a breaking point for the nation, a clear test of national power. However, a circumspect survey of popular geography writing suggests more continuity for national power than disjunctive in the period under discussion.

As mentioned in the introduction, leading historians of print culture deny the hegemony and the power of print-based nationalism in early U.S. history. In a memorable statement, Trish Loughran spoke of her attempt to “dismantle the text-based model of U.S. nation-building,” which she labelled an “ahistorical, postindustrial


fantasy of preindustrial print’s efficacy.” She includes a photograph of Abraham Lincoln’s inauguration from 1861. The photograph shows a very sparsely attended ceremony, with a faintly visible stage. In the background is the giant U.S. Capitol building, but the structure is not yet complete. A partially obscured crane projects angularly from the top of the unfinished rotunda. The metaphor is clear: a work in progress. That is to say, the scaffolding of the nationstate was in place, but its very construction was contested, resisted, and still lacking effective power to bind dissenting fragments. Loughran thus presents a case of enduring localism and ineffective nationalism. Without question there is great value in Loughran’s research, which highlights dissent, local fragments, and cultural practices that give political, cultural, and anthropological insight into the diversity of human experience. Nevertheless this dissertation has pushed backed against this view. I hope the previous four chapters show that Loughran and other recent scholarship underestimate the power and endurance of the state and the text based constellation of nationalism brought on from geographical representation and discourse. It does us no good to ignore the powerful print nationalism that formed the essential heart of America’s national geography. The alignment between geography writing and federal power was present from Jedidiah Morse’s inaugural Geography Made Easy and only intensified throughout the nineteenth

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87 Trish Loughran, The Republic in Print, xix.
century, by the close of which America’s geographical imperialism was firmly in place in the print culture of the United States.

My hope is that by better understanding the popularity and importance of geography writing it will help to shed light on the unbroken power of the nationstate in America from its founding years. Indeed, the power of nationalism and sovereignty seems generally under-appreciated in the historiography of the United States. The federal state lacked power in its first hundred years only if power is considered in terms of direct coercive capability. On the contrary, it is reasonable to see a preponderance of text-based nationalism circulating from American printers and publishers in a climate of rapid industrialization. Geography writing should be seen historically as forming the basis for a process of literacy acquisition. It exercised great sway over popular imagination, thereby strengthening the claim of American power, which was fundamentally a geographical representation.


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Vita

Shane Patrick Avery, a native of New York, earned a bachelor’s degree at The State University of New York at Potsdam in 2006 and enrolled in a Ph.D. program in history at Syracuse University in 2006 where he also earned a master’s degree in history in 2009. He has taught history and writing at Syracuse University and Chulalongkorn University and he currently lives in Bangkok, Thailand.